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Public Relations in a More Transparent Age

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Wal-Mart, using three *experienced* coders. Results indicate that coding for the metrics of standards of traditional media analysis is reliable. Ten of the thirteen media items had moderate to high *alphas*, indicating that the three coders were in agreement the majority of time. The paper documents additional best practices and includes updates and improvements to the coding guidebook gleaned from working with the experienced coders.

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Arthur W. Page Center Benchmarking Award

Finn Frandsen and **Winni Johansen**, Aarhus University, Denmark

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Lina M. Gomez, Universidad del Este, Puerto Rico, **Lucely Vargas-Preciado**,
 Johanness Kepler Universitat, Austria, **Ramiro Cea-Moure**, Universidad de Burgos,
 Spain, and **Ismail Adelopo**, University of the West of England, UK

This paper aims to discover who the most important "CSR actors" are and what they are discussing about CSR on Twitter. Our research conducted a content analysis of 1623 public tweets from different twitter users. Cross collaboration between actors is needed in order to enrich the practice of CSR communication.

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Institute for Public Relations Top Three Papers of Practical Significance Award
Jeanine Guidry, **Marcus Messner**, **Yan Jin**, and **Vivian Medina-Messner**,
 Virginia Commonwealth University

More than 700 Instagram posts about the 10 largest fast food companies were evaluated for post tonalities, topics and origins. The results are a call-to-action for public relations professionals to engage with their publics on Instagram and actively use the app as a pre-crisis issue monitoring and during-crisis response tool.

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Institute for Public Relations Top Three Papers of Practical Significance Award

Simone Mariconda and **Francesco Lurati**, Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland

In this paper we introduce cross-impact analysis (CIA) as a methodology that can be applied to understand how stakeholders influence one another. CIA can be used by public relations practitioners together with traditional segmentation techniques and represents a useful and novel way of understanding the complexity of organizations' environment.

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Linjuan Rita Men, Southern Methodist University, and **Wanhsiu Sunny Tsai**, University of Miami

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Laura A. Mitchell, Regent University, and **Denise P. Ferguson**, Pepperdine University

This paper examines the crisis communications tactics surrounding the national and international public reactions to a controversial Russian legislation banning homosexual propaganda, through the lens of Excellence Theory and research on activism best practices, focusing on the cultural, political and social values and trends that influence strategic communication in Russia.

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International ABERJE Award

Nathaly Aya Pastrana, Adinas Group S.A.S., Colombia, and **Krishnamurthy Sriramesh** Purdue University

This study examines the activities, motivations, stakeholders, decision-making processes, communication processes, resource allocation, evaluation, and the benefits of CSR among Colombian SMEs. Additionally the study addresses CSR champions.

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Anli Xiao, University of Missouri

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Koichi Yamamura International Strategic Communication Award
Ansgar Zerfass, University of Leipzig, Germany and **Muschda Sherzada**, ARD/SWR, Germany

This study explores the perceptions and expectations of CEOs and executive board members concerning a) the relevance of public opinion and the contribution of communication performance to organizational success, b) the communicative role of top executives themselves and their interaction with professional communicators, c) the objectives and values of corporate communications, and d) the importance of various disciplines and instruments. It is based on a quantitative survey of 602 CEOs and board members in the largest European country, Germany.

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Weiwu Zhang and **Alan Abitbol**, Texas Tech University

This study examines how public relations efforts contribute to civic engagement using a secondary survey data. Overall, the analyses suggest that organizations' face-to-face meetings foster interpersonal trust and civic engagement, and that organizations' strategic communication via social media boosts civic engagement, whereas strategic communication via Web 1.0 decreases social engagement

Green Social Movements and Government Public Relations Efforts in Turkey

Gülşah Aydın
Duygu Aydın Aslaner
Yeditepe University

Abstract

Theories and opinions have been put forward regarding old and new social movements. In line with these opinions, a clear distinction is drawn between “old and new social movements”. In this context, social movement concept should be defined at first. Anthony Giddens (2006) defined social movements with their most basic meaning as a collective action for safeguarding common interests with collective actions beyond settled areas or ensuring the attainment of a common cause (p.867).

Social movements started with movements that are referred to as “old social movements” (such as labor movements) formed against mainstream, existing power and political structure in 19th century. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, some changes and transformations in social movements led to new social movements. Studies on the distinctive characteristics of new movements that separate them from old movements have been carried out by different theorists (Touraine, 1981; Melucci, 1988; Offe, 1985). Alberto Melucci (1988) defined the reason of old social movements as economic distress and highlights that “new social movements” involve identity-related cultural and symbolic issues. New social movements are addressed as anti-nuclear movements, feminist movements, international migration-related social movements, peace movements and environmental movements.

This study discusses Green Social Movements in Turkey and PR efforts developed by the government. It is scrutinized in the scope of media relations, crisis communication and reputation. In the research part of the study, semi-structured face-to-face/online in-depth interviews concerning the movements are conducted.

This study aims to contribute to the field and serve as a guide for other studies to be carried out in this field while academic studies about public relations of the government are very limited in this area.

Literature Review

Social Movements

It is theoretically being proposed that social movements are proceeding through specific phases, such as protests, conflicts, and attitudes of rejection. Defining social movements as the most common means to get ordinary people participate in public policies emphasize that these movements involve diverse stratum in the society including “labor, women, students, peasants, and youth” or social groups uniting with a specific cause and gather different interest groups in the society around a complaint (Tilly, 2004). On the other hand, Heywood (1997) defines a social movement as: “A collective body distinguished by a high level of commitment and political activism, but often lacking a clear organization”.

Social movements set out in the 19th century with movements against the sovereign power, existing ruling political group and structure (such as labor movements). These movements are defined as old social movements (Doyle and McEachern, 2008, p.85). Social movements entered into a transition and transformation process in the end of 1960’s beginning of 1970’s. The main reason for calling new social movements as “new” are their aims, which are different from the old social movements as well as handling incidents differently. Anti-nuclear movements, feminist movements, peace movements, environmental movements occur within the context of new social movements (Nuclear Power, 1984, p. 227). Harvey, Horne and Safai (2009) and Harvey et. al. (2014) have noted the diversified and differentiated, improved forms of old and new social movements within their historical perspective as in the following chart:

Table 1
A Periodization of Social Movements.

Historicity	Period	Forms		
		Emergent	Dominant Residual	
Industrial	Nineteenth century to 1960s	Workers	Suffrage (e.g. First wave feminism)	Peace
Post-industrial	1960s-late 1990s	New social movements (NSMs)	Workers	Human rights
Global	Mid-1990s-to date	Global	NSMs	Environmental health, ecology human rights

According to Alain Touraine (1985), new social movements were formed out of the paradigm of the post-industrial society and the post*industrial era. Touraine emphasizes that new social movement “arise from the struggle of new social actors on the structure of the civil society”. According to Claus Offe (1987) the most characteristic and distinctive feature of new social movements is that they struggle not only through the dominant class but they strive to the benefit of all individuals in the society as mentioned in the Marxist paradigm. New social movements illustrated by women’s rights, gay rights, anti-war peaceful movements and environmental movements have a cross-class structure that embraces different classes. In another words, new social movements have come into existence through the new middle class while the old social movements were based on the working class. Environmental/green movements within

the new social movements have become even more important today as environmental issues are increasingly reaching to a global dimension and individuals are becoming more sensitive to the environment. The formation and progress in the processes of environmental movements has to be examined in this context.

Environmental/Green Social Movements

The environmental/green movement is a very diverse social movement characterized by relatively loose organizations of activists involving people in *local* activity around *global* environmental and natural issues, and it emphasizes preservation of nature and restraint on economic development (www.marxists.org/glossary/events/g/r.htm).

Environmental/green movements rises from concerns related to the pollution of the nature, global warming, soil erosion, deforestation and depletion of sources (*Parker, Fournier and Reedy, 2007*). Mankind has an influence on the nature by means of interfering through various ways and diverse reasons. As a result of these interferences with the process of industrialization, the stability of nature degenerated (*Erdoğan and Ejder 1997, p.33*). Various groups and individuals within the capitalist order struggle to prevent the destruction made to the nature and minimize their consequences through their protests (*Somersan, 1993, pp.67-169*).

The most important reason of environmental/green movements finding place in the societal arena is that they overlap with the individuals' problems of everyday life. *Kılıç (2002)* summarizes this situation as "Individuals realizing that there is a close relation between environmental issues and their own future has led to individual concerns transforming into social concerns and hence individual concerns have become the generator of today's environmental/green movements (p.97). Climate changes and global warming in recent years has increased the responsibilities of individuals concerning the environment. The concerns for the environment are increasing day after day in Turkey as well.

Environmental/Green Social Movements in Turkey

When examining the relationship between environment and society in Turkey, an environmental awareness to a substantial extent and recent emergence of an Environmental/green movement is seen in the societal structure. These movements in Turkey have emerged in the second half of 1970's. The process towards creation of a social "dissident wave" in this regard is seen to be effective especially in the 1990's.

The initial reactions against environmental destruction in Turkey have emerged after the 1970's when factories were opened on the Prairie of Çarşamba and Etibank Copper Enterprises started operations in Murgul in 1975 and thus the inhabitants sued for compensation against the damage caused to the vegetation and agricultural land of the region. Seven German citizens who favor the environmental/green movement in the 1980's have carried out the first environmental action in Turkey. This protest was against the oppressive government and the existing human rights violations in Turkey and they have made their protests by getting chained to each other. Although the desired goals could not been realized through this protest, it is shown as a significant first step of a green movement in Turkey (*Özbek, 1986, p.13 as cited in Duru, 1995, pp.56-58*).

Looking at Turkey overall, paper, textile, petrochemical in the industry sector, improper use of pesticides and fertilizers in the sector of agriculture, thermal power plants in the energy sector should be considered as a major source of pollution (*Demirer, 1992, p.76*). Significant struggles of decisive importance are witnessed throughout the past forty-years in Turkey. The

important movements can be stated as; against the Thermal Reactors in Gökova and Yatağan, protests against a hotel construction in Dalyan İztuzu Beach, the Akkuyu Nuclear Reactor, and movements against Mersin, Bergama Ovacık Gold Mines (Şahin, 2010, p.9).

In this sense it is contradictory that Turkey is one of the first countries in the world that has drafted environmental issues in its constitution. Article 56 of the 1982 Constitution proclaims, “Everyone possesses the right to live in a healthy and balanced environment. Developing the environmental circumstances, protecting the health of environment and preventing environmental pollution are the duties of the state and its citizens. Article 43 of the Constitution proclaims, “The coasts are under the sovereignty and disposal of the state. In the utilization of sea coasts, lake shores or river banks, and of the coastal strip along the sea and lakes, public interest shall be taken into consideration with priority”. Article 44 of the Constitution proclaims “The state shall take the necessary measures to maintain and develop efficient land cultivation, to prevent its loss through erosion, and to provide land to farmers with insufficient land of their own, or no land.” Article 53 declares, “The State shall ensure the conservation of the historical, cultural and natural assets and wealth, and shall take supportive measures towards that end” (The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, 1982). These articles are directly or indirectly related to the environment. Somersan states that private sector cannot be held liable from environment in article 56, which is directly related to environment (1993, p.29).

Nowadays, the number of locally organized environmentalist non-governmental organization are gradually increasing apart from some the other political based ecologist organizations, that perceive environmental issues, related to socio-economic problems. Some professional organizations such as the Turkish Medical Association, Chamber of Environmental Engineers, Chamber of Electrical Engineers and Bar Associations are becoming sensitive towards environmental/green movements. Despite the new formation and the very fragmented nature of these movements in Turkey, they have emerged as major effective actions by the contribution of unions and professional organizations (Ünlütürk, 2006:46).

Like in most countries new social movements are becoming the significant dynamic of green politics. At this point, the period of the politicization of environmental/green movement in Turkey should be addressed. The Greens Party (Yeşiller Partisi) was founded in 1988 to serve this mission. Throughout the years when the Greens Party had been active it has expanded the area of green policy with armament and anti-war actions and together with democracy campaigns (www.yesiller.org).

Within the process towards formation of the green movements in Turkey, another factor that should be addressed is the voluntary environmental organizations. The common concerns of environmental organizations in Turkey are issues such as environmental degradation, pollution, and protection of wildlife. The struggle area of green movements is not limited to local and national issues but is expanding to the global issues with the support of international voluntary organizations. The main reason for that is the effect of environmental issues on all societies. Mine Kışlalıoğlu and Fikret Berkes (1994) summarize this situation as; “The world is getting much smaller; mankind’s increase of its technological power expands his impact to the environment. Emergence of environmental destruction is the common acquisition of the world”.

Although small and medium scale movements occur in Turkey as mentioned above, the repercussions of the Gezi Park Protests which took place between May 27- June 30 2013 have spread out all over the world as a significant green movement in our history.

The protests of Gezi Park at Taksim Square was initiated on 27 May 2013 with the demolition of a wall and dismantling of several trees in the park under the Taksim

Pedestrianization Project of the 61st Government of the Republic of Turkey. A group of about 50 environmental activists who advocated that Gezi Park is not included in the Taksim Pedestrianization Project, set up and guard their tents in the park standing guard until morning (Turhan ve Şener, 2013, p.18). The next day, the number of Gezi Park activists has increased. Protests continued under the slogan “Stand up Istanbul” when the construction machinery entered into the park. On the 30th of May, the police in Istanbul intervened a minor protest held by only some several hundreds of activists using pepper spray (Amnesty International, 2013, p.5). The protests of Gezi Park spread to other provinces in Turkey including major cities such as, Ankara and İzmir. The slogan “Everywhere Taksim, Resistance Everywhere” has started to be heard all over the country from different cities. Since news regarding these mass demonstrations has not been sufficiently broadcasted in detail in a major portion of the media, volunteer lawyers and physicians began to organize mass actions in the social media, which had been supported by businessmen and some journalists.

According to a research made by Somemto a total number of 98,334,370 tweets concerning Gezi Park has been sent between May 29 - June 4 2013 on Twitter (Social Media Management Tool, 2013). Debates in Twitter going predominantly around #direngaziparki and #geziparki hashtags led the incidents spread quickly across the country (İve , 2013).

Two major rallies were organized under the name “Respect to National Will” in Ankara and İstanbul respectively on Saturday June 15 and Sunday June 16 by the Prime Minister and Leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

It has been determined that around 2.5 million activists attended the process of Gezi Park protests. It has been discovered that nearly 4 thousand 900 activists were detained as “suspects”, almost four thousand activists and more than 600 police were injured, six civilians and one police officer lost their lives in these movements (Şardan, 2013). This 30 days long movement carried out during May 27 – June 30 is marked in history as the most comprehensive green movement in Turkey. The Gezi Park Protest participated by diverse social groups is one of the most serious crises, which the government has encountered. Identification of crisis management and the stages within the process of the crisis have to be explained within this context.

Crisis Management and Public Relations

Crisis management is the strategic and planned management of all establishments primarily against threatening conditions and at the same time it is the whole efforts that transform the experienced crisis into an opportunity through planned actions. When considered as a phenomenon of management according to Okay and Okay (2002) “crises are a special situation which threatens the high-level goals of an organization, and endangers the existence of an organization against which the organization must show prompt response (p.418)”. In other words, “Many crises are generated by an emergency- a sudden condition or state of affairs that calls for immediate action (Klann, 2003, p.4)”. Otto Lerbinger (1997) explained types of sudden emergencies as; natural disasters, technical disasters, confrontation, malevolence, misplaced management values, deception and management misconduct. “A crisis is a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, industry as well as its public’s product, services or good names (Fearn Banks, 2011, p.2)”. Not every negative situation that an institution or an organization faces is meant to be a crisis. Hermann (1963) states that the three features of a crisis, which discerns it from negative situations, are surprise, threat and short response time.

According to Pepper et. al. (2010) crises are divided as external-internal or predictable-unpredictable. A crisis is a case that has to be responded planning some scenarios before its occurrence, yet it is rather difficult to make a plan or prepare a scenario in unpredictable crises. In times of crisis, the institutions' and organizations' standard decision-making and prevention mechanisms remain inadequate.

The main objective of crisis management is to prevent it at the initial stages before the crisis occurs (Mitroff and Pearson, 1993, p. 55). Developing models to solve the problems at the initial phase and thus preventing the incidents to expand can avoid the problems move away from a chronic situation and eventually become a crisis. Crises can be described in terms of stages, or relatively identifiable sequences of events and reactions. Stages enable planners to monitor risks, progress, target stakeholders, and take strategic action appropriate to the stage. There are many models; below are four prominent ones (Caponigro , 2000; Mitroff , 1994; Fink, 1986; Coombs, 2007):

Caponigro's Seven Stage	Mitroff's Five Stage	Fink's Four Stage	Coomb's Three Stege
Identifying and assessing vulnerabilities Identify the vulnerabilities or weak spots /damage caused by each	Signal detection Advance warnings	Prodromal a crisis begin to emerge	Pre-crisis Signal detection, prevention, and crisis preparation;
Preventing a crisis from occurring decisions are made decisively	Probing / prevention Formation of crisis teams plan for responding crisis. Reducing harm	Crisis breakout Triggering event with Attendant damage	Crisis phase crisis recognition and crisis containment
Planning for a crisis, the crisis itself Consider potential worst-case scenarios/planning and prevention	Containment /Damage limitations Mitigate the event and minimum damage	Chronic Efforts to clean-up the crisis progress	Post-crisis Evaluating crisis management, learning from the crisis, and other post-crisis actions
The crisis itself the problem needs to be fixed first/ effective communications	Recovery Resume activities normal-short term recovery long term recovery	Resolution clear signal that the crisis is over	

<p>Communicating during and after a crisis Communications need to be open, honest and credible.</p>	<p>Learning Lessons learned from crisis/change policies and procedures when necessary Improve future plans</p>
<p>Monitoring, evaluating and making adjustments. Monitoring the opinions and behavior of its key publics during and after crisis.</p>	
<p>Insulating the business To enhance your organization's reputation and credibility</p>	

Institutions or organizations can apply proactive or reactive approaches during the crisis management process. As it is known, the proactive approach of crisis management is set up towards preventing an anticipated crisis due to foreseen threat signals whereas the reactive approach of crisis management is interested in minimizing the damages and focusing on the recovery phase. In the approach of Fink (1986) and Coombs (2007) only the first stages point at the proactive approach whereas Copanigro (2000) and Mitroff (1994) place proactive crisis management in the first two stages.

The process of communication has critical importance in crisis management and PR activities, which create a mutual understanding between the target audience and the organization are prominent practices which play a role in successfully resolving the crisis. Sharing all details and progresses of the crisis with the target audience has great importance in resolving the crisis.

Crisis management of the government should handle PR efforts in depth and more strategically as the public is a huge audience and government functions as the central administration. The stakeholders of the government are divided into two groups, which are external public and internal public. These stakeholders are workers, professional groups and various specialized public groups. C.V. Narasimha Reddi describes Government PR as follows (2009, p.207):

“Government PR is the management of a two way communication between the government organizations and their employees and the general public to create a well informed citizenry and make the partners in democratic and development process”. As the two way communication process, public relations supports the government's efforts in promoting its goals, policies, programs, services and achievement”.

In order to reach out to masses, a two-way-communication has to be set up towards the mass and social media which play a key role in transmitting the impact of the crisis to the public

and forming opinions about the crisis. Focusing on a single media outlet in times of crisis and not acting equal in transferring the necessary information to the others while performing the communication and sharing, leads to an emergence of a media crisis. Balta Peltekoğlu (2012) has mentioned the three points that has to be noted in media relations and crisis communication plan; ‘determination of a corporate spokesperson for the organization and being prepared for media relations, not to give any concessions from a reliable source of information, and continuously updating the press lists which are formed in the context of scenarios.

Using media in times of crisis is the proper way to create public opinion and having a positive impression on the public as well as forming a mutual understanding, which is the most important factor in public relations, constitutes to be one of the most important tools. Therefore, spokespersons of the government and crisis PR team should be sensitive in using media channels and applying the three basic principles stated above.

Caponigro (2000) emphasizes that ineffective management of crises significantly damages the reputation of the organization and destroy its credibility and trust, give harm to stakeholders of the organization and negatively impact and have a negative effect on the internal communication within the organization. (p.11-13). Examining in detail and eliminating the factors which cause the crisis, taking actions towards recovering the reputation of the establishment of the organization, and determining positive/negative outcomes of the crisis are the leading post-crisis activities that should be performed.

The most important consequence of ineffective management of crisis is reputational damage. According to Fink ‘a crisis is a non-routine event that risks undesired visibility that intern threatens significant reputational damage’ (Cited in Doorley and Garcia, p.310). The striking point in this definition is that the negative outcomes of the crisis are endangering the reputation of the institution or organization because crises can negatively affect the perspective of the internal and external stakeholders towards the institution. But, on the other hand successful management of crises return as a reputation to the organization where threats in the crisis are transformed into an opportunity. Reputation is a highly sensitive and serious issue for governments. Governments must be organized to take necessary measures to that end and transform the crisis into opportunities.

In this context, PR activities scrutinize by Justice and Development Party (AKP) to manage this crisis is analyzed within the process of Gezi Park protests in Turkey.

Methodology

This study discusses Gezi Park Protests, which has started as an environmental then transformed into a wider new social movement. Gezi Park Protests occurred between May 27–June 30 2013 in Turkey is one of the new social movement.

PR efforts developed by the ruling party (AKP) against Gezi Park Protests that is the most comprehensive collective social movement realized in Turkey in the recent years is scrutinized in the scope of crisis management and reputation. In the research part of the study, semi-structured face-to-face/online in-depth interviews, which are the most, controlled of all qualitative research is conducted (Stacks, 2011, p.179). In-depth interviews, concerning the movement will be made with The Governments Spokesman and Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç; TBMM Member of Province Public Relations Department and AKP Member of Parliament Selçuk Özdağ and AKP Member of Parliament, Hüseyin Tanrıverdi. 17 open-ended questions asked during the interviews. The research questions are:

Do you determine crisis scenarios related to environmental movements as a government policy?

What is the reason for determining crisis scenarios?

Which department or who determines it, if it is determined?

Have you anticipated that the Gezi Park Protests could transform into a crisis?

The Gezi Park Protests was one of the environmental movements that has turned out to a crisis. What are the does and don'ts in the process of communication during these incidents in your opinion?

In Gezi Park Protests;

Which PR elements did the Government use during the crisis?

What types of activities were applied within these public relations elements?

Were different PR strategies developed for different target groups?

Have opinion leaders been utilized to reach out to different target groups?

Concerning the media relations of the government which tactics were used during the crisis in terms of media relations? (Newsletters, informative publications on the subject... etc).

How did you manage government relationship with the media? Did the government make a research about reputation after the Gezi Park Protests?

Has AKP's reputation been positively or negatively influenced after the process of Gezi Park Protest?

What activities had been carried out regarding AKP's reputation?

Was there a crisis team during this process? (core team, crisis control team and crisis communication team)

On Saturday, *June 15* in Ankara, on Sunday, *June 16* in İstanbul the Prime Minister of Turkey and the AKP Leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan organized two major *meetings* under the title Meeting for Respect to the National Will. Were these meetings able to reach the desired goals in terms of public relations?

Successful management of crisis return as a reputation to the institution, In this context how do you evaluate your public relations policies developed during the Gezi Park Protests on behalf of AKP (in the sense of forming reputation)?

Findings

It is critical to analyze government public relations efforts carried out by Turkish government during this crisis because the protests of the Gezi Park which expanded dramatically within nearly three days have posed a risk to the reputation of the AKP Government and at the same time led the government to make statements to the public through the press facing a situation to act with the principle of openness forming the basic philosophy of its public information model (Arınç, 2014, communication).

The stages of crisis management as indicated in the literature review have been expressed through developing similar approaches by different authors. This study is based on a three-stage pre-crisis, crisis phase and post crisis model developed by Coombs.

Pre-Crisis Phase

In the beginning of the crisis, AKP Government has perceived Gezi Park Protests as a movement of three to five environmentally friendly activists and could not anticipate that the issue would extend to these dimensions. When this situation turned out to become a crisis and

expanded within a few days, the government has initiated various efforts of crisis communication. This crisis was unpredictable for AKP and was caused by external factors (B. Arınç, personal communication, Jan 31, 2014,).

As a result, it has been observed that AKP had applied reactive crisis management approach throughout the process of the crisis in Gezi Park. In other words, they had focused on solution through minimizing the damages for AKP.

Crisis Phase

In the crisis phase, public relations activities developed by the government are discussed within the scope of; the process of communication and media relations

According to the Deputy Prime Minister and government spokesman Bülent Arınç it has been of major importance for the AKP Government to set up a two-way mutual communication and paying attention to the stakeholders during the process of crisis at Gezi Park. Throughout the process starting with the activities towards pedestrianization, they had understood the protests against building a shopping center at Gezi Park in Taksim and have not denied the demands of environmentally conscious people in this regard; and he said that they have accepted the idea towards reasonable discussion of sensitivities of the public opinion which underlines the importance of a two-way communication for AKP (B. Arınç, personal communication, Jan 31, 2014 and H. Tanrıverdi, personal communication March 2, 2014). Arınç, pointed out that they can do more or less and can also mismanage while governing the country, and he continued ‘We might have some shortcomings in our duty but the two conditions of democracy which try to stand up through public inspection are pluralism and participation.’ Arınç offered the apologies to injured protesters “with environmental concerns” and added that the government did not support groups who cause harm at Gezi Park in a press conference (B. Arınç, personal communication, Jan 31, 2014)

Another activity conducted for crisis communication has been the instant monitoring of the daily developments by the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and making statements in order to raise public awareness. Both the police headquarters and the governor set up a crisis desk to ensure the security of citizens at Taksim. (Tanrıverdi and Özdağ, 2014, personal communication).

During the communication process with external stakeholders, AKP government has arranged daily press conferences. On the other hand, Arınç met with the original protest group platform, Taksim Solidarity, which delivered the public's demands (B. Arınç, personal communication, Jan 31, 2014). Also Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had arranged meetings with celebrities and ensured that celebrities invite the public to common sense and tranquility through the press. Furthermore, two major rallies were organized under the title “Respect to National Will” in Ankara and İstanbul receptively on Saturday June 15 and Sunday June.16 These are given as examples of the Government’s PR efforts.

During the communication process with internal stakeholders, Özdağ reported that they performed public relations activities together with the Metropolitan Municipality and Civil Society Organizations through national and local media. (S. Özdağ, personal communication, March 1, 2014).

Another issue that will be discussed within the process of crisis management is the relationship between AKP Government and the media. Throughout the crisis of Gezi Park, broadcasters targeting the government and municipality led to an abuse of information with untrue and distorted news (S. Özdağ, personal communication, March 1, 2014). Arınç asserted

that the protests in Gezi have started as a peaceful environmental movement but later extremist groups in favor of violence had seized the demands of this movement and the international media, which disregarded the violence, had reflected them as pro-democratic groups. On the other hand, some marginal groups published hoaxes and photographs in the social media to expand the conflict (personal communication, Jan 31, 2014). Disinformation in the social media was one of the most important factors, which has fuelled the Taksim Gezi Park Protests (H. Tanrıverdi, personal communication March 2, 2014). Arınç pointed out that they had become aware of the power of social media through protests of Gezi Park and Tanrıverdi also mentioned that, ‘we will not remain offline to the demands of the young people’ and Arınç emphasized that the importance of social media has been well understood on behalf of the government with the Gezi Park Protests. During the protests the government used the traditional media while the Governor’s Office and the municipality used both the traditional and the social media. (B. Arınç, personal communication, Jan 31, 2014 and H. Tanrıverdi, personal communication, March 2, 2014). It has become evident, especially through the digitalization process, that in terms of government PR it is necessary to use the social media in an accurate way just as the traditional media.

Post Crisis Phase

In the post crisis phase, AKP has made surveys regarding its reputation and it is stated that there has not been any changes in the votes of AKP after Gezi Park Protests (S. Özdağ, personal communication, March 1, 2014).

Results

Based on the pre-crisis phase in the crisis management it is obvious that AKP failed to envisage the Gezi Park crisis, thus effective crisis management could not be implemented in a strategic and planned way against threatening conditions. During the crisis they adopted a reactive crisis approach and aimed to terminate the resulting protests to minimize the damages. After the crisis spreaded, AKP held meetings with all relevant internal and external stakeholders, to develop mutual understanding and reveal the main reasons of the crisis.

In terms of media relations more than one authority being responsible for the current situation and thus lack of a single spokesperson led to different statements given by different authorities. AKP using the traditional media and not paying enough attention to social media, predominantly used by young people, has led to the formation of diverse agendas in these channels. However, one of the significant outcomes of this crisis is the importance of using social media during the crisis was initially understood by the government. As a result of the post crisis surveys, the government officers indicated that there is a positive correlation between the reputation and the number of votes of AKP. The dictionary meaning of reputation comes up as the state of being respected, valued, reliable, dignity and prestige. It is evident that the AKP has to make surveys concerning the changes in the ideas and attitudes of all stakeholders about government instead of making surveys that just measures votes. As a conclusion, government has to take actions in the scope of public relations in order to prevent for the potential future crises.

Limitations

This study aims at serving as a guide for other studies to be carried out in this field and contributing to this field since researches in the academic literature about public relations of the

government are very limited in Turkey. This study should be taken from a wider perspective for the future researches and should measure how all stakeholders perceive these public relations efforts developed by the government.

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Community Building and Relationship Maintenance Strategies: A Case Study of the Downtown Revitalization of Goshen, Indiana

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Abstract

This case study has presented a comprehensive overview of the context and significance of relationship management/maintenance strategies in downtown Goshen, IN. At a time when most downtowns are dying downtown Goshen continues to thrive. While there are many strategies being researched and discussed in the public relations discipline, there has been little or no empirical effort to examine public relations strategies in the downtown development context. While most public relations theories and strategies apply across multiple industries, many challenges facing downtowns (i.e. urban sprawl, large retail chains, crumbling façades) are quite different than those in the corporate world. The findings from this study would be beneficial to regional development offices by identifying unique strategies that led to the success of the revitalization efforts by Downtown Goshen, Inc. (DGI). Specifically, this case study examined the relationship management and maintenance strategies of DGI from three theoretical perspectives: community coalition-building and relationship management/maintenance, place making/destination branding, and creative capital theory.

To understand how DGI influenced the community between 2006 and 2011, the researchers conducted an online survey with downtown business owners (N=21, response rate 19%) and one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders (N=11). Also, secondary data from 2009 downtown event surveys were analyzed. The results revealed that DGI has engaged the community through its diverse board of directors and volunteer core and keeping members involved in the process. Key quality relationship indicators were present between DGI and its stakeholders as well as several relationship maintenance strategies.

Introduction

At a time when most downtowns are dying and the recession in the late 2000s has taken its toll on small businesses, downtown Goshen, IN, continues to thrive. With a two percent vacancy rate and new businesses starting up monthly, the downtown has found a way to survive one of the worst economic storms. What is it doing right? Through a case study of Goshen, this study explored what happened from 2006 to 2011 that helped Goshen experience this revitalization despite the recent economic downturn nationwide with a record-high unemployment rate since The Great Depression. To this end, this study examined relationship maintenance strategies that were employed by these key leadership figures that led the revival, and, if any, these strategies' positive influence in downtown Goshen. Further, the study aimed to identify key elements that might have contributed to the revitalization of downtown Goshen during that period.

Recent Background of Downtown Goshen

Prior to the recession, the City of Goshen determined that a strategic enhancement plan was needed to further revitalize downtown Goshen. "The Goshen Downtown Action Agenda was defined with involvement from city government, the local business sector, representatives of non-profit organizations and members of the community" (Hyett & Palma, 2005, p. 6). The main item that was implemented from the plan was the revitalization of two historic buildings, by local community development corporation, LaCasa, Inc., into affordable housing units.

In 2007, the Face of the City downtown group, Chamber of Commerce retail committee, and downtown's Economic Improvement District (EID) came together to form Downtown Goshen, Inc. (DGI), a non-profit organization whose mission is to "ensure the long-term vitality and growth of Goshen's commercial core" ("New group formed to promote downtown Goshen," 2007). DGI's two main programs are "First Fridays" and the façade program, both which began in 2007. A body of literature suggests that investment in arts, culture, and entertainment initiatives can produce significant economic benefits for cities of all sizes. Literature supports the important role of local stakeholders in the evolution of a genuine place brand when coupled with arts and culture initiatives (Zoughaneli, Trihas, Antonaki, & Kladou, 2012, p. 739).

While there are many strategies being researched and discussed in the public relations discipline, there has been no empirical effort to examine public relations strategies in the downtown development context. While most public relations theories and strategies apply across multiple industries and locations, many challenges facing downtowns (i.e. urban sprawl, large retail chains, crumbling façades) are quite different than those in the corporate world. The findings from this study would be beneficial to many regional development offices by identifying successful and unique strategies that led to the success of the revitalization efforts by DGI. Specifically, this case study of downtown Goshen, IN, and its economic development organization, DGI, examined the relationship management and maintenance strategies with key stakeholders and regional revitalization efforts of DGI from three theoretical perspectives: community coalition-building and relationship management/maintenance, place making/destination branding, and creative capital theory.

Literature Review

Community Coalition-Building and Relationship Building

A community coalition is a group that includes various sectors of the community, and comes together to tackle community needs and solve community problems (Berkowitz & Wolff,

2000). The criteria for a community coalition, according to Wolff (2001), include the coalition to (a) be composed of community members; (b) focus mainly on local issues rather than national issues; (c) address community needs, building on community assets; (d) help resolve community problems through collaboration; (e) be community-wide and represented from multiple sectors; (f) work on multiple issues; (g) be citizen-influenced if not necessarily citizen-driven; (h) be a long term, not ad hoc, coalition.

According to Wilson (1994), five characteristics of excellent coalition-building in public and community relations are (a) long-range vision (pathfinders, implementers, consensus-builders, action-oriented); (b) commitment to community (not just profit); (c) strong corporate values that emphasize the importance of people (socially progressive); (d) cooperative approach to management and problem solving (relationship-oriented and connected to the community, high value on networks, approach problems to “work them out”); (e) relationship building with all its publics based on respect, trust, and human dignity (not on profit or personal gain). The study of public relations continues to look at the many benefits accumulated when organizations implement a relational approach to public relations.

Relationship Management

Since Ferguson (1984) suggested the shift of focus of public relations scholarship to relationship, relationship perspective has dominated the public relations research led by J. Grunig and his students. L. Grunig, J. Grunig, and Ehling (1992) further suggested that reciprocity, trust, credibility, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction, and mutual understanding were the key elements of an organization-public relationship (OPR).

Huang (1997) and J. Grunig and Huang (2000) identified the four key indicators of high-quality OPR as (a) trust; (b) control mutuality (the degree to which parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence one another); (c) satisfaction; (d) commitment. Hon and J. Grunig (1999) later added two types of relationships—i.e., exchange relationships and communal relationships. Hung (2002, 2005) further explored six additional types of relationships to the aforementioned list—i.e., (a) mutual communal (which is less one sided than a pure communal relationship); (b) covenantal (where both parties benefit); (c) contractual; (d) symbiotic (where each gains something different); (e) manipulative; (f) exploitive relationships.

Ki and Hon (2006) examined the following relationship maintenance strategies of organizations (a) positivity; (b) openness; (c) access; (d) sharing of tasks; (e) networking. Their study employed several of Stafford and Canary’s (1991) dimensions of interpersonal relationship maintenance strategies to help understand OPR (a) positivity (attempts to make the relationship enjoyable); (b) openness (disclosure of thoughts and feelings); (c) assurances (of legitimacy of concerns); (d) networking (having common friends); (e) shared tasks (taking joint responsibility).

Based on this review of literature on relationship maintenance/management, the following research questions are proposed.

R1.1: What relationship management/maintenance strategies did Downtown Goshen, Inc. employ from 2006 to 2011?

R1.2: How has Downtown Goshen, Inc. influenced the Goshen community from 2006 to 2011?

Destination or Place Branding

In today’s extremely competitive marketplace, many destinations are adopting branding strategies in an effort to differentiate their identities and to emphasize the uniqueness of their

product (Morgan, Prichard, & Pride, 2004). The notion of “place branding” refers to the broad set of efforts by country, regional or city governments, and industry groups aimed at marketing the places and sectors they represent (Papadopoulos, 2004). The intent of these efforts is to achieve one or more of four main objectives: (a) enhance the place’s exports; (b) protect its domestic business from “foreign” competition (this could include from other regions in the same country); (c) attract or retain factors of development; (d) position the place for competitive advantage, economically, politically, or socially (Papadopoulos, 2004).

Another aspect of place branding has been tourism destination image. Tourism destination image (TDI) has been a major research field for decades (e.g. Walmsley & Young, 1998; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000). In order for these TDIs and place branding efforts to be successful, scholars have noted that community members must be involved in the process.

Creative Class and Creative Capital Theory

The creative capital theory says that regional economic growth is driven by the location choices of creative people – the holders of creative capital – who prefer places that are diverse, tolerant, and open to new ideas (Florida, 2002). Florida created an overall “Creativity Index” to describe a new social class named the “Creative Class.” His overall “Creativity Index” is based on four factors (a) the “Creative Class” share of the workforce, based largely on occupational characteristics; (b) innovation, as measured by patent activity; (c) the high technology share of the economic base; (d) diversity, based on indexes related to sexual orientation, bohemianism (counter culture or cutting edge arts and culture), and diversity/foreign born population.

According to the human capital theory, economic growth will occur in places with highly educated people. Glendon (1998) found that places with greater numbers of highly educated people grew quicker and were better able to draw more talent. Similarly, Beeson and Montgomery (1993) explored how investments in various sorts of infrastructure had been affecting city and regional growth since the mid-19th century.

Oldenburg (1989) argued the importance of the “third places” of modern society to attract highly educated and creative groups of people. Third places are neither home nor work – the “first two” places – but venues like bookstores or coffee shops where there are less formal acquaintances than the average gathering place. These places function as “the heart of a community’s social vitality” where people “hang out simply for the pleasures of good company and lively conversation” (Oldenburg, 1989, p. 32).

This study proposes the second research question to identify elements that led to the success of downtown Goshen during the years DGI was actively working towards revitalization.

R2: What elements were present from 2006 to 2011 that might have contributed to the revitalization of downtown Goshen?

Methods

Case

Goshen, IN, was settled in 1828 and quickly became a manufacturing town. In 1868, a hydraulic canal was built along the canal that led to the Elkhart River. Linseed-oil, grist, woolen, saw and flour mills were also established along with several furniture factories. From its earliest days, Goshen was a manufacturing town. The recreational vehicle industry became a large part of the county’s economy in the ‘70s, ‘80s and ‘90s, until the recession in the late 2000s. Farming has also remained a constant throughout the years, with 15 percent of the population identifying with the Amish and Mennonite heritage. Through the vision of a handful of people, downtown

Goshen began a revival during the recession in the late 2000s, which is the purpose of this case study – to find out exactly what happened from 2006 to 2011 that helped Goshen beat the economic storm.

Starting in 1985, local developers Dave Pottinger and Faye Peterson Pottinger took on their first revitalization project with a local restaurant located on South Main Street. Many of the historic buildings were in substantial decay, and Pottinger and Peterson Pottinger had a passion for seeing them restored. When the large retail establishments began opening in the county in the late '80s and early '90s, downtown retailers began to feel the negative effects. However, with the help of local visionaries and developers, downtown Goshen managed to stay vibrant and continue to grow.

This study sought to explain the unique creative culture of downtown Goshen, IN, and how some efforts to foster the creative culture have affected the community. To understand how the relationship maintenance/management strategies, place branding efforts, and creative class leadership of Downtown Goshen, Inc. (DGI) influenced the community between 2006 to 2011, the researchers conducted an online survey with downtown business owners and one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders in the community. Also, secondary data from surveys from First Fridays events conducted by Goshen College students in 2009 were used.

Research Procedures

Online survey. Online surveys were conducted with downtown business owners to determine the impact of DGI's relationship maintenance/management strategies, place branding efforts, and creative class leadership. The researchers set up an online survey, using Qualtrics, for downtown business owners. DGI sent an email invitation to participate in the online survey to their database of businesses owners located in downtown Goshen, which accounts for 106 of the approximate 260 businesses located downtown. Business owners were given eight days to complete the survey. There was a 19 percent response rate (N=21). Types of questions ranged from yes/no, five-point Likert scale, categorical, and open-ended.

One-on-one interviews. The researchers conducted in-depth one-on-one phone interviews with key stakeholders in the community to determine the impact of DGI's strategies. The researchers sent an email invitation to these 19 identified individuals and then set up interviews with those who agreed to be interviewed (N=11). The average length of interview was 40 minutes. These participants represented the DGI board, First Fridays task force, façade task force, downtown business owners, downtown developers, Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau staff, Goshen Historical Society staff, Goshen College faculty, and City of Goshen staff. The cumulative total of years living or working in Goshen for the participants was 279 years. The interviews were recorded for accuracy and later transcription. The researchers took detailed notes throughout the interview, and once completed, coded the data using nVivo software. The researchers also calculated word frequencies to discover reoccurring themes. Using the codes, themes, and word frequency data, the researchers uncovered specific, simplified categories to draw conclusions from.

Secondary research analysis. The researchers conducted a secondary research analysis of completed event surveys (N=109) from March 2009 and April 2009, gathered by Goshen College students during downtown Goshen's First Fridays events. This helped determine the influence of DGI's place branding and relationship maintenance/management efforts on the local community. Event-goers were randomly selected and invited to participate in the sidewalk study

and were offered coupons in return for their time. There is an estimated response rate of 1.36 percent (estimating 8,000 people were in attendance in March and April, 2009).

Reliability and Validity

The researchers used two methods from Maykut and Morehouse (1994) to emphasize reliability and validity: 1) multiple methods of data collection and 2) audit trail.

Data Analysis

The researchers used the constant comparative technique by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to analyze the qualitative data. This grounded theory analytic process uses language and iterations to gradually advance from coding to conceptual categories, and thence to theory development (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005). For the online survey and secondary research analysis, the researchers coded the data and completed a statistical testing using descriptive statistics, Pearson Correlation Coefficient to determine how well the variables related, and simple linear regression to determine variables that were predictive of one another. Results of the study may not be generalized to other cities, but the case study's purpose was to explore what downtown Goshen was experiencing at the time.

Results

The purpose of the case study was to explore what relationship management/maintenance strategies Downtown Goshen, Inc. (DGI) employed and how it has influenced the Goshen community from 2006 to 2011. It also sought to find out what elements were present from 2006 to 2011 that might have contributed to the revitalization of downtown Goshen.

R1.1: What relationship management/maintenance strategies did Downtown Goshen, Inc. employ and how has it influenced the Goshen community from 2006 to 2011?

This case study revealed that DGI used community coalition-building and relationship building efforts to manage and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with its stakeholders. The study was also able to look at DGI's key quality indicators of organizational public relationships such as trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment, and communal/covenantal relationships. The study also discovered the relationship maintenance strategies of positivity, openness, assurances, networking, and shared tasks. These efforts have influenced the community through increased quality of life and business development, along with a positive economic impact on the city.

Coalition-building through collaboration. DGI has engaged the community through its diverse board of directors and volunteer core and keeping members involved in the process. The interviews revealed that the First Fridays task force is made up of creative class, visionary leaders who are committed to DGI's vision. Members are either recruited, or approach DGI directly to ask how they can get involved. Relationships with business owners, corporate sponsors, city government, local schools, and the media have also been established, and continue to be maintained.

Word of mouth/social media. One way DGI builds relationships with its stakeholders is through engagement of social media. First Fridays does not spend money on paid advertising, but rather relies on its public relations staff to get the word out about events and downtown development. The most common way (n=70) event-goers had heard about First Fridays was through word-of-mouth and/or social media.

Key quality indicators of organization public relationships

High level of trust. Interviews with stakeholders revealed a high level of trust in DGI. Respondents noted that the positive track record of the organization helped them not only believe in the organization, but trust them. Trust of DGI is shown through donation of time, money, and creative exchange of information. From the interviews, the researchers found that many board members have served for four or more years, with little turn over.

Control mutuality. The control mutuality between DGI and the businesses was inconsistent. Interviews revealed DGI seeks to give equal power to business members through one-on-one engagement and round table discussions. Yet, some businesses expressed that their thoughts were not being heard. The control mutuality with city government has been stable. Interview data revealed that the City of Goshen has helped fund and support DGI, but they have also recognized the power DGI has at creating resident quality of life, along with a proven economic development track record.

High level of satisfaction. Another key indicator of organizational public relationships is the level of satisfaction between two or more groups. The study revealed high levels of satisfaction between DGI and its publics. While 68 percent of those surveyed (n=14) were satisfied or extremely satisfied with DGI's customer service, 32 percent (n=6) say it is fair to very poor. Seventy percent of business survey respondents (n=15) said DGI's customer service was good or very good. Seventy-eight percent (n=85) responded that the First Fridays program has had a positive impact in the community, and 99 percent of respondents (n=107) said they would recommend First Fridays. From the secondary data analysis of First Fridays surveys, the researchers found that 94 percent of respondents (n=102) were satisfied or very satisfied with the First Fridays program. From the secondary data analysis of First Fridays event-goer surveys, the researchers found that 94 percent of respondents (n=102) were satisfied or very satisfied with the First Fridays program. Seventy-eight percent (n=85) believe the First Fridays program has had a positive impact in the community, and 99 percent of respondents (n=107) would recommend First Fridays.

Faltering commitment. Seven of the interview respondents noted that DGI has hit a plateau in growth, especially in terms of financial growth. Two respondents note that while they were able to devote one-on-one time with stakeholders in the beginning, as the programs grew, a substantial amount of strain was put on DGI's resources, causing their relationship management techniques to begin to falter. The business surveys revealed commitment ratings higher than satisfaction ratings.

Communal/covenantal relationships. The relationships built with downtown businesses have been covenantal. The businesses benefit with increased revenues and a larger base of employees to draw upon, and DGI benefits by being able to live out its mission. The business survey revealed clear benefits to downtown business owners. On average, businesses surveyed had one-to-seven employees (n=15), with 80 percent of respondents (n=17) agreeing that First Fridays has had a positive impact on their business. Forty-five percent (n=9) had seen an increase in sales during First Fridays events compared to other Fridays with an approximate increase of sales by 49 percent.

Dimensions of Interpersonal Relationship Maintenance Strategies

Positivity. DGI has attempted to make the relationship with key stakeholders enjoyable for everyone involved. Interviews with task force members revealed the relaxed, fun settings of brainstorming meetings, and the continued words of affirmation received from staff and business

owners. “It makes it a fun atmosphere to be a part of,” said one interview respondent. Six business survey respondents mentioned their appreciation of the upbeat volunteers and staff who put in countless hours.

Openness. DGI’s primary method of disclosure of thoughts and feelings comes through one-on-one interaction with stakeholders, along with round table meetings. One business said, “We appreciate the quarterly business meetings, and restaurant association meetings that DGI organizes. Information shared at these meetings help us feel a part of the process.” An interview with a City of Goshen employee revealed appreciation for the continued dialogue between the city and DGI. They acknowledged that this open communication has led to a successful partnership between the two groups.

Assurances. DGI has done a fair job at making sure everyone’s thoughts and concerns are heard. However, legitimacy of concerns was discovered to be a problem in the business survey. Interviews with key stakeholders revealed their understanding of the lack of staff and financial resources to do be able to keep up with relationship maintenance/management. “DGI has done a fabulous job implementing successful programs, and with success comes concerns to keep it sustainable.”

Networking. Regular networking meetings are planned by DGI in order to manage stakeholder relationships. Interviews revealed they plan quarterly downtown business meetings, an annual dinner, monthly task force brainstorm sessions, and regular presentations at local service organizations. These events help DGI maintain relationships with its publics, but also help promote the organization to new groups in order to secure a diversified base of supporters. Internal networking meetings have proven to be meaningful to volunteers, “I volunteer my time with DGI because I feel valued and appreciated. The annual dinner they just held for us was one of the best parties I’ve been to this year.”

Shared tasks. With limited financial resources, DGI has learned to be selective and frugal with where their time and money is spent. DGI has set a collaborative workspace in order to share tasks in an efficient manner. Interviews with stakeholders revealed that DGI’s staff consists of freelance workers who focus on specialty areas such as photography, graphic design, web development, media relations, event planning, sponsor relations, fundraising, integrated communications, strategic planning, and program development. DGI board members are also delegated duties and often volunteer their time at First Fridays events, as well as taking on the duties necessary to run the façade program.

R1.2: How has Downtown Goshen, Inc. influenced the Goshen community from 2006 to 2011?

Improved quality of life. DGI’s public relations efforts have influenced the Goshen community by improving the quality of life for residents. Quality of life defined is “one’s personal satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the cultural or intellectual conditions under which one lives (“quality of life,” n.d.). When asked about the current state of downtown, all respondents gave positive answers, acknowledging the change in the quality of life, presence of the creative class, and hard work of dedicated individuals.

Economic impact. DGI’s public relations efforts have influenced the Goshen community by increasing economic development in the downtown. The average amount of money one person spent at a First Fridays event was \$24. With an estimated average of 4,000 people attending a First Fridays event each month, that is a monthly boost of \$96,000 into the local economy, and an annual economic impact of \$1.15 million on consumer spending alone. The secondary data analysis of First Fridays surveys revealed that 51 percent (n=55) had spent more

than \$20 that evening, with another 45 percent (n=49) having spent up to \$20. A cross tabulation of the data revealed that the 26 – 35 year olds spent the most money, which is the age of creative class young professionals.

R2: What elements were present from 2006 to 2011 that might have contributed to the revitalization of downtown Goshen?

This case study revealed there were a number of elements present from 2006 to 2011 that contributed to the revitalization of the downtown. Creative class individuals, highly educated people, diversity, investment in infrastructure, third places, tourism destination image, and an active/healthy lifestyle have all contributed to the revitalization of downtown Goshen.

Emergence of creative class. From the in-depth one-on-one interviews (N=11), the category of creative class people emerged. When participants were asked what have been the most successful initiatives to bring creativity to downtown Goshen, 100 percent (N=11) of the respondents said, “First Fridays.” Yet, at the same time, they all acknowledged that there was crucial foundational work that happened in order for the environment to sustain the First Fridays program.

Highly educated people and commitment to volunteerism. The influence of Goshen College and the Mennonite Church repeatedly came up in the interview sessions. Several respondents attended Goshen College and then stayed because they found jobs in the community. Several mentioned that the “spirit of volunteerism” so often displayed in the Mennonite faith seems to have had a direct affect on the work happening in the downtown. Also discussed in the interviews was the abundance of churches in Goshen, beyond the Mennonite faith. These churches are committed to giving back to their communities.

Diversity. Several interview respondents noted that the “cultural diversity” of the community has allowed for a “small town feel with big city attributes.” Hispanic and Latino businesses have expanded over the last five years, including restaurants, grocery stores, and specialty clothing shops. Also noted was the appreciation of the LGBTQ community, and the work being done to pass ordinances to protect this minority group. Again, the value of cultural diversity is an attribute of the creative class.

Investment in infrastructure. Many interview respondents mentioned the work of local developers Dave Pottinger, Faye Peterson Pottinger, Jeremy Stutsman, and Maija Walters Stutsman did with the Mill Race Farmer’s Market, along with organizing artist guilds. The city’s Downtown Action Plan, followed by the Hyett Palma study assisted in the downtown façade improvements. The establishment of the Economic Investment District (EID) was another step where through self-imposed tax dollars, businesses have reaped the reward of infrastructure improvements.

DGI’s façade grant program offers matching grants to businesses to help with business signage or building improvements. Ninety percent of the business owners surveyed (N=18) were aware of the façade program, and 44 percent (n=8) had taken advantage of it, and two more said they planned to utilize the program in the future. Ninety percent of the online business survey respondents (n= 19) said they specifically chose downtown as their business location. Sixty-nine percent (n=13) said they chose downtown because of DGI/First Fridays.

From the secondary data analysis, the researchers found significant correlation ($r=.204$, $p=.037$) between the number of stores visited and the amount of money spent at First Fridays. We can account for 4.1 percent of variance of the number of stores visited and the amount of money spent with a .669 error on each number of reported stores visited. The regression equation

is as follows: *predicted amount of money spent* = $2.000 + .180$ (*number of stores visited*). This shows the importance of the pedestrian friendly, accessibility/walkability of the downtown corridor, along with a welcoming atmosphere.

A category that emerged from the in-depth one-on-one interviews was “economic development/historic revitalization.” The interviews made clear that the downtown has changed dramatically in the last ten years. The City of Goshen is putting resources into diversifying the economic base in hopes of securing a stronger economic future. They have partnered with the Chamber of Commerce to create “The LaunchPad” for entrepreneurs to share a workspace in the Chamber’s building on Main Street. The city is also partnering with DGI and a local community development corporation, LaCasa, Inc., to develop the Mill Race and historic Hawk’s Furniture Company. DGI is spearheading the redevelopment of the Goshen Theater in hopes to create space for arts and culture year round.

Third places. DGI has assisted in creating third places through business support and development, along with creating arts and entertainment events for community members to attend. “Third places” such as bookstores and coffee shops were a continued theme throughout the in-depth interviews (N=11). When respondents were asked of their memories of downtown, it almost always included a specific business. Along with the interviews, 59 percent of the event survey respondents (n=64) visited 3 to 6 stores during First Fridays, and 33 percent (n=36) of them shop downtown at least every two weeks.

Tourism destination image/destination branding. The First Fridays program, started and maintained by creative class people was noted as a primary reason businesses chose to locate their business downtown, with a 37 percent (n=7) response rate. Music was a reoccurring memory for many interview participants. When asked what their earliest memory of downtown was, several stated attending a concert at the Electric Brew coffeehouse or Goshen Theater. Listening to music was a common thread, and entertainment has been used to promote downtown Goshen’s brand since DGI’s inception. This audio identity is an important element of destination branding, as well as attracting the creative class.

Active/health-oriented lifestyle. As discussed earlier, a category that emerged out of the in-depth one-on-one interviews was “action/health orientation.” Action words such as attract, work, make, talk, develop, force, fun, invest, impact, and walk were all reoccurring words in the interviews. Quality of life, walkable downtown, pedestrian paths, bicycle community, and nature trails were repeatedly discussed. Following this theme, DGI is an action-based organization. They pride themselves on structured brainstorming sessions that lead to action items.

Discussion

The results of this case study have provided a step toward answering the proposed research questions for downtown public relations practitioners and developers. The research sought to expand the knowledge base of downtown public relations strategies utilizing relationship management/maintenance strategies, place making/destination branding methods, and the involvement of creative class people. The results revealed coalition-building through collaboration, relationship management/maintenance strategies by creative class leaders, and place making/destination branding, have positively influenced the community.

Coalition-Building through Collaboration

DGI has effectively built a community coalition that includes various sectors of the community that come together to address community needs and solve community problems. DGI

has board representatives from the City of Goshen, Chamber of Commerce, Goshen College, Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Elkhart County Community Foundation, and downtown business owners, to name a few. The issues they work with deal solely with the downtown.

Relationship Management/Maintenance Strategies

This case study used qualitative and quantitative methods to assess DGI's relationship management techniques. The researchers found DGI has developed a communal relationship with business owners, volunteers, media outlets, sponsors, city government, and local organizations where both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other. Stafford and Canary's (1991) strategies of positivity, openness, assurances, networking, and shared tasks were present in the examination of DGI's efforts to build a positive relationship with key stakeholders. As Ki and Hon's (2006) research found, DGI has then been able to see outcomes such as control mutuality, liking, commitment, and relational satisfaction.

Creative Class Leadership

From the one-on-one interviews the category of "creative class people" emerged. The idea that downtown Goshen could not and would not be where it is today without the commitment of a small, but mighty group of people was uncovered. DGI has abandoned the rational approach to management in favor of a more people-oriented, relational approach. Just as noted by Florida (2002), creative class people may not have financial wealth, but their creative wealth more than makes up for it. Goshen College has also played a crucial role in contributing to this human capital. As Glendon (1998) discovered, places with highly educated people grow quicker and are able to draw more talent.

Place Making/Destination Branding

Music continues to play a key role in developing an environment that creative people want to reside in. Goshen College's Globe Radio has consistently won national awards, First Fridays has brought monthly entertainment to the city, Goshen Theater has expanded its cultural programs, local bars bring in regular acts and a new live music center opened its doors downtown in 2012. These authentic locations have assisted in Goshen's place branding efforts, as well as begun creating an "audio identity" for the city. Control mutuality has played a role in the partnership between Goshen College's radio station and DGI, as 91.1 The Globe was recently named the "Best College Radio Station in the Nation," from Intercollegiate Broadcasting System (Barbazon, 2013).

Discussion

Implications of the Study

The researchers set out to answer whether or not the combination of relationship management/maintenance strategies, place making/destination branding techniques, and the leadership of creative class people, as implemented by Downtown Goshen, Inc. (DGI), has had an influence on the local community from 2006 to 2011. It also sought to explore what elements were present in the downtown between 2006 and 2011 that helped with the revitalization of the downtown. The results revealed coalition-building through collaboration, relationship maintenance strategies of openness, networking, and shared tasks, along with creative class leadership and investment in infrastructure to have positively influenced the community.

While attracting the creative class was not a specific goal of DGI in 2006, it instead occurred organically through the people who were, and still are, working and volunteering with DGI. The place branding methods were more obviously followed by local developers and DGI, creating spaces for businesses to put down roots, and improving the downtown quality of life. DGI's relationship management techniques were exceptional in its early years, 2006 to 2008, but was discovered through interviews with local stakeholders and surveys with downtown businesses, that there are areas DGI could improve upon.

The combination of relationship management/maintenance strategies and place branding efforts, along with the involvement of creative class people allowed for a "perfect storm" in downtown Goshen from 2006 to 2011. While implementing these three techniques simultaneously has worked successfully for downtown Goshen, it is likely that the nature of the people and their "action" mentality along with the revitalized historic infrastructure that has made this case so unique.

Limitations

Because the researchers has relationships with many of the downtown business owners, the researcher chose the online survey method, along with multiple methods of data collection, triangulation, and an audit trail. Another limitation of the study was the relatively small sample size, especially in terms of the 1.36 percent response rate for the event surveys completed. The small sampling size and low response rate may have caused selection bias and could have resulted in skewed data. For this reason, these findings may not be generalized to the broader community based on this study alone. However, the researcher believes there is external usefulness to this case study as an exploratory case study and could be used in the future to develop a public relations theory.

Future Research

The most logical next step for future research is to replicate this study in other downtowns throughout the Midwest or possibly even nationwide. This could help lead to a more thorough understanding of downtown public relations strategies. The current study had similar findings on how improving infrastructure has direct benefit to destination branding as Beeson and Montgomery's study (1993). The study also had similar findings to Ki and Hon's (2006) and Stafford and Canary's (1991) relationship maintenance strategies, in that when implementing openness, networking, assurances, and shared tasks, relational benefits are received in regards to control mutuality, liking, satisfaction, and commitment. If future research showed similar results in other states, the body of knowledge on downtown public relations strategies would be expanded.

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Public Diplomacy Relationship-Building Efforts with Diaspora Communities in the United States: Perceptions of Latino Diaspora Community Members

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Abstract

Governments in Central America and Mexico have established, with different intensities and levels of success, international public relations / public diplomacy programs to engage and build relationships with their diaspora communities in host countries such as the United States. From these governments' perspectives, the public relations programs targeted at migrants are allowing these governments to better communicate with their diaspora communities, permitting them to keep the diaspora members' national identity alive and the flow of remittances coming back to the home country's economy. But, how are the intended audiences of these international public relations/ public diplomacy programs perceiving these efforts? In this qualitative study, 20 immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Costa Rica are interviewed about their level of knowledge of and their level of satisfaction with their governments' international public relations efforts. Three distinct perspectives are found among the participants, with certain linkages among levels of knowledge and levels of satisfaction.

Governments in Central America and Mexico have established, with different intensities and levels of success, international public relations / public diplomacy programs to engage and build relationships with their diaspora communities in host countries such as the United States. From these governments' perspectives, the public relations programs targeted at migrants and the structural changes in bureaucracy undertaken to better serve the migrants' needs are allowing the governments to better communicate with and engage their diaspora communities, permitting these governments to keep the diaspora members' national identity alive and the flow of remittances coming back to the home country's economy. But, how are the intended audiences of these international public relations/ public diplomacy programs perceiving these efforts?

In this qualitative study, 20 migrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Costa Rica were interviewed, through semi-structured conversations that lasted 75 minutes in average, to explore, among other topics, their level of knowledge about their government's international public relations efforts and their level of satisfaction with these efforts. Three distinct perspectives were found among these 20 participants, with certain linkages among levels of knowledge and levels of satisfaction.

Literature Review

Mexico (in North America), and El Salvador and Costa Rica (in Central America) have undertaken, with different levels of intensity and success, policy reforms and public relations/public diplomacy initiatives to communicate and interact with their citizens living in the United States, in order to establish long-term relationships to keep the diaspora members connected, at different levels, with the home country through remittances, investments, and political participation, among others.

Mexico, for example, is considered an exemplary case in Latin America regarding transnational relationship-building strategies and tactics targeted at its diaspora members (Levitt & De la Dehesa, 2003; Délano, 2010; Smith, 2005; Massey, Durand & Malone, 2002; Goldring, 2002; Martínez-Saldaña, 2003; Félix, 2010), and El Salvador has also been proactive in trying to build connections with its diaspora community in the United States (Nosthas, 2006; Ministerio, 2011; Landolt et al., 2003; PNUD, 2007; Bravo, 2011; Bravo, 2012). Costa Rica has been more timid in its efforts, concentrating mainly on informing its citizens about a new transnational political right (the absentee vote that started with the elections of February 2, 2014), and providing basic consular services (Bravo, 2011; Bravo, 2013).

A detailed account of the policies adopted and the services offered by each of these countries for the benefit of their migrants in the United States can be found in the studies cited previously, but a summary of these initiatives is also offered in Table 1, which follows the typology developed by Levitt and de la Dehesa (2003, pp. 589-590) (see Table 1).

Mexico started cultivating long-term relations with its U.S.-based diaspora community since the 1970s (González Gutiérrez, 1999, 2006), and it has taken many steps to fortify it ever since (see Table 1). Mexico is considered an example of relationship-building best practices in Latin America.

El Salvador has tried to imitate the Mexican example, and it has steadily changed, in the last 20 years, the manner in which it establishes relations and communicates with its diaspora, especially with its migrants living in the United States. Besides offering consular services, there is an emphasis on offering protection of the migrants' human rights while in transit and in the host country, on including the migrants' perspective in political decisions at home, and on

promoting diaspora investments in the local economy (Ministerio, 2011; Nosthas, 2006; PNUD, 2007; Bravo, 2011, 2013).

The U.S.-based diaspora from El Salvador has become visible in the official discourses and policies as well (Bravo, 2013). This visibility has been accompanied by the expansion of some consular services, by the development of innovative financial mechanisms to attract traditional remittances and community remittances, by the surge of flexible State-diaspora alliances, and, most of all, by the vision of migrants as “active subjects” in the development of El Salvador’s economy, political destiny, and social life (see Table 1).

Costa Rica has been the weakest, among these three countries, in terms of the strength of the relationship-building process with its diaspora community in the United States. The diaspora community is almost absent in official discourses and policies, in sectorial strategic plans, and in national plans of development (Bravo, 2011). Nonetheless, there are a few innovative traits in the government-diaspora relations in Costa Rica: for example, while in other Latin American countries this political right required strong pressure from the diaspora and has not been achieved yet in some cases even after decades of activism, in Costa Rica absentee vote in the national elections was granted for the first time on February 2, 2014. This political achievement stemmed not from diaspora activism but from an initiative of the Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones (Electoral Supreme Court, TSE Spanish acronym) to keep up with international norms and trends (Bravo, 2013).

The transnational efforts undertaken by the home governments in Mexico, El Salvador and Costa Rica to connect with their diaspora communities exist, as indicated previously, with different levels of intensity and success. Two of the three nation-states mentioned before regard these efforts as essential to keep the national identity alive, to attract remittances, to defend their nationals’ human rights while in transit and at their host country, and to encourage political participation at home. But, what are the potential recipients of these efforts thinking? Are the diaspora members aware, at all, of these initiatives? If so, are the migrants satisfied with these initiatives?

The literature, in this area of state-led transnationalism initiatives, has not addressed these questions yet. This exploratory paper, then, tries to start closing the gap by answering the following research questions:

R.Q.1: Are migrants from Mexico, El Salvador, and Costa Rica aware of the efforts undertaken by their home-country governments to build long-term relationships with the diaspora community in the United States?

R.Q. 2: If so, what is the level of satisfaction, among the migrants interviewed for this study, with these relationship-building efforts?

Methodology

In this qualitative study, 20 migrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Costa Rica were interviewed, through semi-structured conversations that lasted 75 minutes in average, to explore, among other topics, their level of knowledge about their governments’ international public relations efforts and their level of satisfaction with these efforts. The interviews with the 20 participants, half of them documented and half of them undocumented migrants, were conducted between May and August of 2013 in the Triad area of North Carolina, a state that constitutes a new and increasingly strong borderland for migrants from Mexico and Central America (Brown & Lopez, 2013).

The participants were approached using passive snowball sampling and were interviewed after agreeing to sign the informed consent. All but two of the interviews were conducted face to face in the migrant's home or in coffee shops. Two interviews were conducted over the phone. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. As some of the participants have an undocumented status in the United States, no specific identifying facts were included in this study, and pseudonyms were used in some cases, in lieu of real names.

The data collected through the in-depth interviews was coded and analyzed, using each interview as a case and each paragraph as the unit of analysis. The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was followed to look for thematic regularities, patterns and peculiarities in the paragraphs, to determine core themes that describe and explain the levels of knowledge and satisfaction of these migrants with their home government-led diaspora communication efforts. These core themes were grouped into categories.

Findings

Among the 20 participants interviewed for this study, there were three main trends regarding the knowledge about the efforts undertaken by their home governments to build relationships with the migrants:

Complete unawareness about these efforts, in a few cases,

Basic knowledge about traditional consular services offered by their countries (such as the expedition of passports and national IDs in their consulates), but low knowledge about other transnational opportunities (such as favorable loans to invest in the home country or government matching funds to develop productive or community initiatives at home), in most of the cases, and Criticism of the government efforts—or lack thereof—: in a few cases, without being prompted, some Costa Rican migrants described having bad experiences with their home country's consulate in the United States, regarding customer service. For that reason, their view about the relationship with the home country's government was portrayed as negative. None of the Mexican or Salvadoran participants described negative experiences regarding customer service in their consulates.

The following section offers some exemplary quotes for each of the three trends.

Unawareness

The coming quotes illustrate how a few of the Costa Rican and Salvadoran migrants had no idea, even after many years of living in the United States, of the opportunities or services that their home governments offer to keep the connections to the home country alive. In contrast, all the Mexican participants had, at least, a basic awareness of the relationship-building efforts undertaken by the Mexican government to keep the Mexican identity alive and to maintain positive relationships with the homeland.

For instance, Catalina, a 31-year-old Costa Rican who has lived in North Carolina for seven years and who has a temporary work visa in the United States, said:

I am not aware if the Costa Rican government provides any service to its migrants in the United States. I doubt it a lot. In fact, I believe that the relationship between the migrants and the Costa Rican government is quite distant. Once a person decides to leave [Costa Rica], each person is on its own. Maybe the situation is different in bigger cities such as Washington D.C. or New York, but it is that way here [in the N.C. Triad area] (Catalina, personal communication, July 3, 2013).

Marta, a 39-year-old migrant from El Salvador, has lived in the United States for 18 years, always undocumented. Asked to describe any services that El Salvador offers to its migrants in the United States, she answered:

As far as I know, there is nothing going on. The government does nothing to stop the person from leaving El Salvador, and once the person is in the United States, El Salvador does nothing to help the person in any way, either. The government should give jobs in El Salvador, but all there is in El Salvador is crime, and the government does nothing to improve the situation. El Salvador does not help you (Marta, personal communication, July 25, 2013).

Basic Knowledge

The majority of the participants were able to identify their country's consulates and embassies as places where migrants can receive services from the home country. Most of the interviewees mentioned services such as the emission of passports, national IDs, and marriage certificates as services provided by their consulates. Some of them also acknowledged having visited their consulates in the past and having received some of these services. Nonetheless, almost none of the participants was aware of other "non-traditional" services offered by their governments, such as favorable loans to invest in the home country, matching funds to develop productive or community initiatives at home, or the possibility to actively participate in politics in the home country.

Just a couple of the participants mentioned these "advanced" services spontaneously, and almost none of them said they knew about these services when the author of this paper mentioned these services to them. In the case of the Costa Rican participants, not mentioning "non-traditional" services was expected because Costa Rica does not offer these "non-traditional" services, except the right to absentee vote.

There were some differences in the awareness levels among the participants in this study, depending, apparently, on the country of origin. For that reason, the exemplary quotes are presented in segments, also divided by the participant's country of origin.

Costa Ricans

The following are some exemplary quotes, from Costa Rican participants, describing being aware of several basic consular services, but not of more advanced opportunities, such as the right to vote to elect national president during the absentee vote process that started in the national elections of February 2014.

The interviews for this study were conducted about six months before the Costa Rican national elections of February 2014 (when absentee vote was offered as an option for the first time). The informational campaign undertaken by the Electoral Supreme Court in Costa Rica started in February of 2012 (Bravo, 2013). So, when these interviews were conducted, the informational campaign had been active for about one year and a half, but the national elections of February 2, 2014, were still six months ahead.

Kryssia, 38, Costa Rican, in the United States for 10 years, undocumented:

I have visited the consulate in Atlanta to renew my Costa Rican ID. The service was very good. I became friends with the consul, who now is in Chicago. I also went to the Costa Rican embassy in Washington D.C. to request a passport, and I am aware that we will have absentee vote starting in 2014, but I am not sure exactly how this will work. If it involves casting the vote at a consulate, I guess I will only go to the Atlanta consulate if somebody drives me there, because it is quite far (Kryssia, personal communication, August 1, 2013).

Sylvia, 43, Costa Rican, in the United States for 15 years with a work visa for high-skilled workers:

I know that there are several consulates, and we have an embassy in D.C. Besides that, I don't know of any other services. The contact of Costa Ricans living in the United States with the Costa Rican government is nonexistent. The proof is that it will not be until now that people will be able to have absentee vote. I am not sure if this absentee vote already happened or not. In any case, probably the government thinks that the number of migrants is not significant enough to offer absentee vote, at least, not until now. Maybe it is because Costa Rica is not that dependent on migrants' remittances, compared to other countries, but the contact so far has been minimal. Also, Costa Rica does not offer matching funds or other things that are offered by El Salvador or Mexico. The reason is that those countries are heavily dependent on remittances, so they need to offer those types of benefits to keep the migrants happy, and Costa Rica has a different situation (Sylvia, personal communication, May 28, 2013).

Only two Costa Ricans mentioned the existence of mobile consulates that visit the migrants' communities to offer services such as emission of passports and national IDs, when there are no consulates close to those communities. These two mentions, nonetheless, happened because these Costa Ricans work at a tax-services office that helped organize two of these visits to their small community in North Carolina, in 2008 and 2009 (Annie, 34, Costa Rican, 14 years in the United States, U.S. citizen, personal communication, August 1, 2013; and Rebecca, 32, Costa Rican, 12 years in the United States, undocumented, personal communication, July 30, 2013).

Mexicans

As indicated before, the Mexican participants seemed to be better informed that the Costa Ricans about their government's services offered in the United States, but still at a basic level, for the most part. These are some examples:

Aracely, 39, Mexican, 16 years in the United States, undocumented:

I am not aware of these services, although I know that there is a consulate in Raleigh that provides some services such as passports and the Matrícula Consular [a Mexican ID]. I don't know if the consulate provides the ID that allows you to vote [in Mexico. This is called DUI, or Documento Único de Identidad], but, in any case, why would I want it for? That ID would be helpful to vote, but I can't, because I am far away from home [This quote shows that Aracely is not aware that Mexico offers absentee vote since 2006] (Aracely, personal communication, June 5, 2013).

Elvira, 61, Mexican, 40 years in the United States, U.S. citizen:

I don't know much about Mexican services for migrants in the United States. I have heard that when there is an injustice against a Mexican migrant our government intervenes or tries to act to stop it, but I don't really know how they do that. I am not even sure of where our consulate is located (Elvira, personal communication, June 4, 2013).

Aydee, 43, Mexican, 8 years in the United States, undocumented:

Our consulate is located in Raleigh. That's where we go. There is counseling, and lawyers, and we can ask for our children born in the United States to have double nationality, American and Mexican, and it is a free service. It is free in Raleigh, because in Los Angeles it is pretty expensive, but we are lucky that we have it for free in North Carolina (Aydee, personal communication, June 19, 2013).

Luz Maria, 40, Mexican, 12 years in the United States, undocumented:

I have heard that the Mexican government sometimes gives money to migrants to invest in their hometowns, but we don't have something like that in my hometown in Mexico. We don't have associations to manage those types of funds. Besides that, I know that we have consulates. In the past, I obtained my Mexican ID, my Matrícula Consular, and my passport there. I also requested the double nationality for my children in the consulate, because things are so difficult in the United States now that if we are stopped—because we cannot get a driver's license—, and and we get deported, at least our children will be protected, both here and there. If we are sent back to Mexico, then my children will be able to register in the school system there (Luz Maria, personal communication, June 3, 2013).

Maria, 39, Mexican, 21 years in the United States, undocumented:

I was not aware of these services at all, because I was focused on working and taking care of my family, but I met [she names a Latino community leader in her hometown] and, since then, I have become much better informed. Now I know that the consulate supports our people. I also know that when Mexicans go back and open a business, the Mexican government offers a matching amount of money. I just did not know these things before. If you had asked me before I met [the Latino community leader], I would have said that there were no services. But it seems that yes, there are many services for our people. There is also support to send money back home. In the past, the fees to send remittances were very high, and there was a lot of red tape, but now it is very cheap and efficient to send money home. Sending money to our relatives is much easier now (Maria, personal communication, June 5, 2013).

Rosa, 37, Mexican, living in the United States for 15 years, undocumented:

I am not very sure about which services exist or not. There is a consulate in Raleigh, I know that, and I have been there to obtain my Matrícula Consular and my passport, and to register my children to become Mexican, because now they have the double nationality (Rosa, personal communication, July 8, 2013).

Salvadorans

The participants from El Salvador were halfway between the Costa Ricans and the Mexicans: They did not have the complaints that Costa Ricans had, but they were not as informed as the Mexican participants. These are some exemplary quotes:

Lorena, 44, from El Salvador, 23 years in the United States, U.S. citizen:

The only thing I know is that you can request a passport at the consulate. It is the only errand I have done there. I have not heard about anything else (Lorena, personal communication, July 25, 2013).

Marina, 46, Salvadoran, 22 years in the United States, documented (holder of a special work permit that allows her to work in the United States, but it does not allow her to apply for a Green Card):

I know that El Salvador helps us with our TPS [temporary protected status]. When Salvadorans have to renew their TPS, the Salvadoran government negotiates with the United States to extend this benefit. We had politicians coming all the way to Washington D.C. to negotiate to extend this permit for Salvadorans, because El Salvador is not prepared to receive back all the migrants who live in the United States. El Salvador also sends bulletins and informational materials, encouraging people to renew their TPS. That is a good support we receive from El Salvador. I have also used the consulate to renew my passport, to obtain a

passport for my son, and then the passport for my youngest sister, because I am her tutor in this country (Marina, personal communication, July 26, 2013). [Note: Asked directly if she knew about favorable loans and matching funds given by the Salvadoran government, or about the possibility of having absentee vote in 2014, Marina responded that she had no information about any of these opportunities]

Pati, 28, from El Salvador, 10 years in the United States, undocumented:

I know that in the consulates you can ask for a birth certificate, for a passport, for the DUI [Documento Unico de Identidad, or national ID], and for marriage and divorce certificates. Even more, if a Salvadoran dies in the United States, the consulate processes the documents to be able to send the body back to El Salvador. Besides, if you have land or any property in El Salvador, they help you to register that property under your name in El Salvador, even if you are physically living in the United States. That is all I know. They also talk a lot about the migrants, calling them brothers and sisters, that's how they call us, but those are just words (Pati, personal communication, June 21, 2013).

Negative experiences

A few of the participants among the Costa Rican interviewees, in particular, have had negative experiences with their consulates. For that reason, they have a critical perspective of the way their home government handles the relationship-building strategies and tactics with the migrants. The following quotes are a few examples of this

Clara, from Costa Rica, is 37 years old. She has lived in the United States for nine years, and she has a temporary work permit. She said:

The Costa Rican government has no direct services for its migrants. Nothing. Even worse, the few times I have had to call the Costa Rican embassy in Washington D.C. to make an appointment, it has been terrible. The working hours there are ridiculous. They open at about 10 a.m. or so, and they close at 2 p.m.! Can you imagine? I mean... (And she laughs). Once, through my own initiative, I used the consulate's website and filled a form called *Registry of National Citizens in the United States*, but that happened because it was my initiative, I found the form in the website, nobody contacted me. That was about seven years ago. I have heard nothing from them ever since. I did not receive any information, I never knew if they received my information, nothing, absolutely nothing (Clara, personal communication, June 20, 2013).

Nancy, also Costa Rican, is 48. She has been an undocumented migrant in the United States for 18 years now. She said,

The consulates are supposed to exist to help the Costa Rican citizens in the United States. In reality, if there is something that benefits the consulate itself, they will be nice to you. If not, they treat you "a la patada" (*with a kick in the butt*). We have lived very ugly experiences in our consulates, both in Washington D.C. and in Atlanta. It is not until recently, that there is this new girl in charge, that things have changed a lot. Now it is nice to go to the Atlanta consulate, but in the past, it was barbaric. The secretaries treated you like trash. It was terrible (Nancy, personal communication, July 20, 2013).

Zoila, from Costa Rica as well, is 63 years old. She has lived in the United States for 11 years, and she is a U.S. citizen because she is married to a U.S. citizen. About the relationship between the Costa Rican government and its migrants in the United States, she said,

We have a very bad situation regarding our consulates. Compared to what I see in consulates from other countries, what happens with the Costa Rican consulates in the United States is sad. There is no real customer service. Look, a Mexican citizen, just to give you an

example, has a problem with the law in this country and goes to jail, and the Mexican government immediately gets in touch with the person to see what happened and what can be done to help him or her. Here, a Costa Rican goes to jail, and he or she can die there, forgotten, because nobody in Costa Rica will care about this citizen. Or, when you have to renew your documents, for example, your passport or your national ID, here in North Carolina we have to go to the consulate in Atlanta, and it is terrible: customer service there has always been horrible. In Washington D.C. it is a little better, but in Atlanta there are no resources, and nobody knows a thing. Where does the budget from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs go? I don't know how they are going to handle the absentee vote, if the consulates work so badly. Here in (name of the town where she lives), or in Charlotte, I have seen mobile consulates from many other countries coming to visit to provide services to its citizens: from Honduras, from El Salvador, from Nicaragua. Those mobile consulates come here and help their citizens; they care about their citizens. Not Costa Rica. What about the Costa Rican consulate? It almost never comes. It never has money to come. Long time ago they came here, once, and they created more problems than the ones that existed to start with (Zoila, personal communication, July 31, 2013).

Discussion

As described in the Literature Review, the government of Mexico, in particular, and of El Salvador, to a certain extent, have been proactive in establishing public relations strategies and tactics to connect with their diaspora communities in the United States. The goal is to build long-term relationships with the diaspora community that keep the migrants' national identity alive, that promote the sending of remittances to the home economy, and that foster political participation of the migrants at home. Costa Rica, in contrast, has limited its efforts to inform its citizens about the absentee vote that started happening in the national elections of February 2014, while other relationship-building efforts have been weak or nonexistent, except for the basic services offered in its consulates and embassy in the United States.

As a qualitative study, the results of this research cannot be generalized to other populations or to other geographical locations. Nonetheless, among the 20 participants in this study, there seems to be some consistency between the frequency and quality of the transnational communication efforts led by the home-governments and the level of awareness and satisfaction of the migrants with those efforts. The Mexican participants in this study seem to be the best informed about the services offered by their government in the United States. The Salvadoran participants seem to be less informed than the Mexican participants but more aware than the Costa Rican participants. And the Costa Rican participants, definitely, are the most critical of the performance of their government regarding state-diaspora relations.

Several of the Costa Rican participants pointed out the lack of connection between the Costa Rican government and themselves, and many were not aware of the absentee vote initiative about to start in February 2014. Most of the Salvadoran and Mexican participants in this study were aware of and had used basic consular services such as the emission of passports, national IDs and certificates of different kinds, and a few of the Mexican participants were also aware of some of the more advanced services that their government offers to migrants, such as favorable loans to build houses in the home country, or matching funds to develop productive or community projects in the migrant's hometown in Mexico.

The Costa Rican participants were not aware of more advanced services for a simple reason: advanced services for these migrants do not exist in Costa Rica. The only advanced opportunity is the right to absentee vote in national elections, which started in February 2014, but

only some of the Costa Rican participants were aware of this new political right, and almost none said they were planning to vote in these February 2014 national elections while abroad. Also, the Costa Rican participants were the only ones who openly criticized the customer service in their consulates, even without being prompted to talk about this topic.

The Salvadoran participants were in between the Costa Ricans and the Mexicans: They knew, in general, about the basic consular services offered by their home country in the United States, and a few of them were able to mention more advanced services such as the sending of bodies back home when a migrant dies in the United States.

Without pretending to generalize these results, and without trying to establish any cause-effect inference, it was interesting to observe that, for this limited number of participants, there seemed to be a correlation or linkage between the number and quality of services offered by the home governments and the level of awareness and satisfaction with those services, as expressed by these migrants during the in-depth interviews. Still, in general, the participants seemed to be less aware than what the governments would have probably expected, given the structural changes that have occurred in these three countries, mainly in Mexico and El Salvador, especially in the last 15 to 20 years.

In Mexico and El Salvador, those structural changes include the creation of new bureaucratic institutions, even at the levels of Vice-ministries or Directorates, more personnel assigned to consulates and embassies, favorable loans to invest in the home country, matching funds for productive and community projects at home, new consulates of protection, telephone hotlines, and more. For more details, please see Table 1). In all three countries, the strengthening of the state-diaspora relations also included granting the migrants the political right of absentee vote, which exists in Mexico since 2006 and started both in El Salvador and Costa Rica in the national elections of February 2014.

Categories

The participants in this qualitative study could be categorized in three segments: a few of them were unaware of the efforts undertaken by their home countries, the majority had a basic awareness about the consular services but not about more advanced services, and a few participants were somewhat knowledgeable about more advanced transnational services such as the government matching funds and the favorable loans to build houses in the homeland.

Segment 1, the unaware migrants, constitutes an obvious problem for home governments and a challenge in terms of communication processes, given that these home-government efforts go unnoticed, and these unaware migrants do not take advantage of them and do not give credit to their governments for the efforts undertaken and for the services provided. This unawareness could be explained by the lack of information or the scarcity of communication between the governments and their migrants, but it could also be explained because some of the government efforts are directed toward the more affluent migrants, through strategic communications and actions targeted at chambers of commerce and entrepreneurial groups. In many cases, migrants in new borderlands such as North Carolina have not reached that type of financial stability or social status yet and, thus, they are not the primary "target audience" for their home government communication efforts.

The majority of the participants in this study are aware of the consular services offered in their home-country's consulates in the United States, and most of them have visited their consulate at some point in time. This group, constituted by the basically aware migrants, is segment 2.

For this segment, the results of this study seem to indicate that home-governments need to take more advantage of these migrants' visits to their consulates to inform these migrants about the basic and advanced services they provide, no matter if the migrant just came to the consulate to renew his or her national ID. This communication process can be done through the distribution of simple communication materials such as flyers or bookmarks, for instance, when the migrant visits the consulate, or through more advanced initiatives, such as formal trainings offered in the consulates or in community organizations. What seems to be true is that the migrants' visits to their consulates are windows of opportunity that the home-governments are wasting, either because they are not collecting information or building relationships during those visits, or because they collect information to create databases, but then that information in the databases is not used strategically, or is not used at all.

Some of these consulates also need to improve their customer-service skills, because they are not only not informing the migrants about the transnational services available but, in some cases, they are damaging the relationship established between the migrant and his or her home-country through bad, traumatic experiences while in the consulates. This seems to be especially true in the case of some Costa Rican consulates.

Besides the information that could be distributed when the migrant visits his or her consulate, home-governments need to reach their migrants in their own environments. What this means is that home-governments need to better understand the ways in which migrants tend to acquire information in the host country (Bravo, 2014).

During the in-depth interviews conducted for this study, it became clear that migrants tend to obtain information through face-to-face interactions and offline social networks, more than any other means. In other words, they ask questions among family members, neighbors, and friends, in their communities in the host country, to find about job opportunities, educational options for their children, health services to use in case of emergency, and more (Bravo, 2014). All the participants in this study said they obtain useful information regarding the host country (about education, health services in the community, and job opportunities, for example) through face-to-face interactions with other migrants in their neighborhoods, churches, and community centers.

Thus, the relevance of this type of social networks should be high for home-government officials trying to engage the migrants, provide information, and obtain feedback. Those churches and community centers are, precisely, the places where the home-governments should have a presence. Building connections with community leaders seems to also be a key strategy to follow in this case, as the leaders in the community are the persons that other migrants look up to when they need information and when they need to organize themselves to advocate for an issue of interest. Besides, home country officials working in consulates and embassies need to participate in other social activities where migrants gather, such as local fairs and festivals.

Limitations and Further Research

This is an exploratory, qualitative study limited to 20 participants from three countries (Mexico, El Salvador, and Costa Rica), who reside in one particular state: North Carolina. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to larger populations, or to other geographical locations. To better understand the impact of the transnational relationship-building efforts between home-countries and diaspora communities, it would be relevant to study this topic in other areas of the United States where migrants have been established for more extended periods (such as

California, Texas, or Florida, for instance), or where migrants are even more recent arrivals than in North Carolina (such as in Maine or Montana, to name a few).

In this particular study, there is a balance between undocumented and documented migrants among the participants. Still, most of the migrants in this study, documented or not, tend to be middle, middle-low, and low class in the United States. It could be telling to conduct a study with migrants who have more stability and more resources available in the host country (for instance, entrepreneurs, members of Chambers of Commerce, highly educated migrants, etc.), to explore if these types of well-off migrants have been approached in different ways and at different levels by their home-governments, and if their levels of awareness and satisfaction with the state-diaspora relationship are different from the results found in this particular study.

Besides, it could be relevant to study migrants from other countries, to start building typologies or categories, and for comparative purposes. Probably, the situation of migrants from places such as Argentina or Chile (or other parts of the world besides Latin America, for that matter) is different regarding their connection and engagement with their home countries. The same could be true with second-generation migrants, given that all the participants in this study are first-generation migrants in the U.S.

Finally, quantitative studies could be undertaken using surveys rather than in-depth interviews, to collect data, although it could be argued that with a sensitive, at-risk population such as undocumented migrants, establishing trust and building the rapport that in-depth interviews allow could bring deeper, more meaningful information for the studies than a survey, where the rapport and trust are not established in advance.

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Table 1

State-Led Relationship-Building Efforts Targeted at the Diaspora Communities of Mexico, El Salvador, and Costa Rica in the United States, By Category and By Country.

Category	Mexico	El Salvador	Costa Rica
Ministerial or consular reforms	<p>1990: General Directorate for Mexican Communities Abroad (GDMCA) is created</p> <p>2001: Presidential Office of Mexicans Abroad is created, but it merges in 2002 with the GDMCA to form the National Council for Mexican Communities Abroad (NCMCA)</p>	<p>2003: Mobile consulates start</p> <p>2005: Direction for Salvadorans Abroad becomes Vice-Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad</p> <p>2009: 9 consulates added to the Foreign Service</p> <p>2009: Vice-Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad restructured to include 3 General Directions: Foreign Service, Migration & Development, and Human Rights</p> <p>2009: Direction for the Strengthening of Salvadoran Organizations Abroad is created</p>	<p>2006: Mobile consulates start</p>
Investment policies to attract or channel remittances and other investments	<p>The state negotiated with the money-transfer industry for low fees for migrants to send money back</p> <p>Consulates connect migrants to state and municipal offices to channel investments to start productive projects and to build public infrastructure</p>	<p>The state negotiated with the banking system for low fees for migrants to send money back</p> <p>FEDECACES, a group of 40+ cooperatives, gives “remittance-receiver loans,” using remittances as collateral</p>	None

	<p>Government offers matching funds such as the 3x1 program, where for each \$1 sent by migrants for public work projects, the state adds \$3 more: \$1 for federal projects, \$1 for state projects, and \$1 for municipal projects</p>	<p>Government promotes the Social Fund for Housing among migrants (loans with favorable rates)</p> <p>Consulates and embassies organize, since 2009, regular business meetings with Salvadoran investors, migrant associations, Chambers of Commerce, etc.</p> <p>Reto del Milenio Fund supports, since 2009, migrants' productive projects</p> <p>The state channels investments for local development projects, in alliance with municipalities of the migrants' communities of origin. Coordination by the General Direction of Migration and Development, with support of Migration and Development Committees as local structures. Matching funds such as Unidos por la Solidaridad (since 2009) exist for this</p> <p>Through the</p>	
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		<p>Direction of Investment and Business (General Direction of Migration and Development), the state partners with migrants to develop “mega-projects” such as industrial parks or dairy farms. Since 2009.</p> <p>In progress: Project by the Agency for the Promotion of Exports, to “use” Salvadoran entrepreneurs as links to U.S. investors</p> <p>In progress: Four new state funds to support micro, small, and medium enterprises, private and of mixed capital. Funds are for Salvadorans at home and migrants</p>	
Extension of political rights (i.e., dual citizenship or nationality, absentee vote, right to run for public office, etc.)	<p>Dual nationality is allowed</p> <p>Dual citizenship (which includes the right to vote and hold office in two different countries) is allowed since 2006 (the right to hold public office exists since 2001)</p>	<p>Dual nationality is allowed</p> <p>Absentee vote granted as a political right, for the first time, in the national elections of February 2, 2014</p>	<p>Dual nationality is allowed</p> <p>Absentee vote granted as a political right, for the first time, in the national elections of February 2, 2014</p>
State protections or	Consulates offer	The state has	None

<p>services, offered transnationally, beyond traditional consular services</p>	<p>legal counseling and business meetings</p> <p>Consulates offer literacy training, primary and secondary schooling for adults, campaigns to enroll repatriated children in Mexican schools, and campaigns to foster good health while in the U.S.</p> <p>The state sends books to elementary schools and public libraries in the United States</p> <p>The state sends advisers to train teachers in the U.S. so that Mexicans can obtain their high school equivalency</p> <p>In cooperation with the U.S., the state created the Document for Transference of the Emigrant Bi-national Student, to help students transfer from one country's system to the next without repeating grades</p> <p>The state offers migrants health insurance programs that cover their relatives in Mexico</p>	<p>lobbied for extensions of the TPS status in the United States since 1999 to date</p> <p>2005: Creation of the Direction for Humanitarian Management and Migrant Attention, as part of the new Vice-Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad</p> <p>2009: Creation of special "consulates of protection" in "in-transit" areas for Salvadoran migrants</p> <p>2009: General Direction of Human Rights is created</p> <p>2009 and 2011: Creation and redefinition of the phone hotlines La Línea Que Te Ayuda, in Mexico and the U.S.</p>	
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<p>Symbolic policies to reinforce the migrants' sense of enduring membership</p>	<p>Consulates organize events in the United States to keep the diasporic identity alive (for example, sports competitions, cultural events, and holiday festivities)</p> <p>The state organizes activities in Mexico to keep the diasporic identity alive: for example, visits of Mexican-American delegations to Mexico, business meetings with migrants in Mexico, transnational soccer tournaments, and youth encounters in Mexico for Mexican-Americans</p> <p>Extensive use of web-based and social media to inform and engage migrants: for instance, through the website of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad</p>	<p>Organization of social, sports, and religious events; support of migrant-led events, both abroad and at home</p> <p>Forums with Salvadorans abroad, in San Salvador, in 2004 and 2006</p> <p>Community relations at the Embassy through the Director of Community Issues, consulting groups, and thematic tables with the diaspora</p> <p>Database of Salvadoran migrant associations, Latin American migrant associations, community leaders, local authorities, churches and universities available online</p> <p>Frequent mention of the migrants' contributions to the homeland in El Salvador's National Strategic Plan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Strategic Plan and in official communications</p> <p>Reference to migrants' issues in</p>	<p>Personnel from the different consulates and embassies try to attend events organized by the Costa Rican diaspora, such as festivals and parades. There is no budget to attend these events; this personnel attends voluntarily</p> <p>The consulates organize a few, sporadic cultural events, but there is no budget to organize them</p> <p>2010: Ticotal network was created at http://ticotal.net to link the academic diaspora with the academic community at home</p> <p>Punctual mentions of the diaspora in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website (after the 2011 earthquake in Japan, for instance)</p> <p>Since 2012: Electoral Supreme Court's website to inform migrants about absentee vote</p>
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		Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website and in Salvadoreños en el Exterior website	
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Sources: González Gutiérrez (1999, 2006), Délano (2010), Smith (2005), Massey, Durand & Malone (2002), Goldring (2002), Martínez-Saldaña (2003), Félix (2010), Landolt et al. (2003), PNUD (2007), Nosthas (2006), Ministerio (2011), Bravo (2011), Bravo (2013).

Global Brands and Message Content: The Use of Images in Social Media

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Abstract

Successful social media posts have two characteristics in common; they are short and they are visual. An analysis of multi-media content posted on Facebook by the 100 Best Global Brands in 2013 shows the role text, images and video plays in helping successful brands engage with stakeholders.

Social media offers organizations a communications medium for engaging in two-way communication with stakeholders. More than ever before stakeholders can connect with organizations and organizations can connect with stakeholders by posting, liking, commenting, recommending, or receive messages. Not only can organizations provide information, insight, and ideas on a given topic, but they can listen and respond to stakeholders thereby creating a dialogic loop (Kent & Taylor, 2003). Research shows organizations that interact with stakeholders online positively influences perceptions of the organization's reputation or what researchers have deemed their organization-public relationship (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007; Haigh, Brubaker, & Whiteside, 2013; Park & Lee, 2007).

Organizations have embraced social media platforms, particularly Facebook, because of its accessibility, reach, usability, immediacy, and permanence (Ionescu, 2013). Although Facebook initially began as an interpersonal social networking tool, it has developed into a platform that allows organizations to create and establish pages and disseminate information to its stakeholders. Pages provide a way for organizations to post and share information about their brand and their products. In 2012 and 2013 Facebook was the social media platform of choice, having the most users (Duggan & Smith, 2013). As of March 2013 Facebook reported more than 15 million brands had a Facebook page (Koetsier, 2013). Mobile access to social content has also helped increase the popularity of image-based social platforms (Van Grove, 2013). In 2013, Facebook was the "most used smartphone app" (Nielsen, 2013).

The amount of information available for stakeholders to access and digest online can be overwhelming. In 2012 alone Facebook reported 2.5 billion content items were being shared and 300 million photos were being uploaded on a daily basis (Tam, 2012). As organizations compete for attention they must add value, draw attention and increase the overall attraction of their messages.

This research explores how well organizations are utilizing multimedia content in the form of text, images, and video to engage with its stakeholders through social media. More specifically, how are organizations with proven track-records in brand management disseminating media content through social networks? Additionally, what role is multi-media content playing in how successful brands are communicating with their publics and how can organizations engage their publics even more effectively?

Increasing Stakeholder Engagement with Facebook Posts

According to Facebook, successful posts have the following characteristics in common, they are short and they are visual (Facebook, 2013). In fact, industry research shows visual posts get more engagement than non-visual posts, with more people commenting about the post, sharing the post with others, and indicating they 'like' the post (Cormier, n.d.; Curalate, 2014). A Dockstock (2013) report indicated including images in organizational Facebook posts increases engagement by 37% and increases the number of views by 94%. HubSpot conducted a study of 8,800 Facebook posts made by organizations. Of the posts examined, photos received "53% more likes than the average post," "104% more comments than the average post," and "84% more link clicks than text and link posts" (Dorliss, 2012). News articles, political and sports content, and even press releases all benefit from the inclusion of relevant images and multi-media content as they receive more views (Docstock, 2013).

Edgerly and colleagues (2013) studied political expression on Facebook after each of the U.S. presidential debates in 2012. Of the 484 unique posts sampled (posts not reposted by others), 56% of the content contained only text, with 13.8% containing an image, 26%

containing a link to outside content, and 2.7% containing a video. However, these researchers found that among their sample of the 99 “popular” posts from the debate (posts reposted by multiple people) images (72.7%) and outside links (70.7%) were heavily utilized.

Research shows the appropriate use of hashtags can also play a role in increasing engagement on organizational social media posts (Frasco, 2013; Zeevi, 2013). Hashtags are a social media content identification device made up of a keyword preceded by the '#' symbol (e.g., #hashtag) and are a useful method for organizing information. They also help increase the visibility of a message and target a message toward the appropriate audience. Users can search for messages that contain hashtags relevant to their interests or that may lead toward a relevant organization (Dreamlocal, n.d.). Organizations often set up brand-specific hashtags to help them brand their business. Promotion-specific hashtags are also useful for staying up-to-date and tracking current promotions (Flitter, 2013). Organizations also find hashtags useful for tracking competitors and other relevant businesses in their industry (Frasco, 2013).

As organizations compete for grabbing stakeholders' attention on Facebook it is important to understand not only what organizations should be doing, but also what they are doing to engage stakeholders. Therefore, this research seeks to understand the best practices leading brands are implementing to engage with their stakeholders and how these practices are received.

RQ1. How are the leading brands utilizing multi-media content to a) disseminate information and b) engage with stakeholders through Facebook?

RQ2. Does the type of content (original or shared; image, video or text) organizations post on Facebook influence how stakeholders engage with posts?

Methodology

A content analysis of Facebook posts from 100 of the world's leading brands were examined during a one-week period. The world's top brands were selected from Interbrand's ranking of the 100 “Best Global Brands 2013”. Facebook posts on seventy of the organizations' Facebook pages were analyzed from Monday, Nov. 11 to Sunday, Nov. 17, 2013. Thirty of the companies' Facebook pages, with company rankings from #1-30, were analyzed for the time period of Monday, Dec. 9, to Sunday, Dec. 15, 2013. Of the top 100 global brands analyzed, 90 of the companies posted during the studied time period for a total of 772 posts.

Two students enrolled at a university in the western part of the United States conducted the content analysis using a coding instrument devised to examine Facebook posts on corporate Facebook pages. Coding norms were established during supervised training sessions. In order to determine inter-coder reliability, coders independently examined 78 posts uploaded by 10 of Interbrand's top 100 brands during the week of November 11 to 17, 2013. These posts constituted 10% of the total posts examined in this study and came from organizations ranking from 91 to 100 on Interbrand's list of Best Global Brands 2013. After calculating intercoder reliability coders examined the rest of the sample (brands ranking from 1 to 90) independently. Nominal-level data using Holsti's (1969) formula show reliability of 0.93 and Cohen's Kappa of 0.83.

Coding Categories – Variables Coded

Information dissemination. Facebook posts were coded according to the multi-media format in which the message was disseminated: text-only, image and video. Infographics were distinguished from other image posts as they are intended to provide a visual medium for

displaying data.

McNely (2012) identified an image coding scheme with six categories for classifying organizational posts on Instagram, an image and video-sharing social media platform now owned by Facebook. Three of these coding categories were used for identifying the information organizations were communicating on Facebook (orienting, showcasing, and humanizing). Two of the categories were used for measuring engagement (interacting, and crowdsourcing). Specifically, posts were coded as either “showcasing” the organization’s products or “orienting” the reader with the organization’s image (McNely, 2012). According to McNely (2012), orienting refers to images that include “landmarks and artifacts related to newsworthy items central to its organizational image.” Showcasing involves the direct display, focus or mention of product or service-related content.

Additional information dissemination categories were adopted from Waters and colleagues (2009) and Haigh, Brubaker, and Whiteside (2013). Specifically, this study examined how organizations communicated news by featuring company news, product announcements, customer success stories, and press releases. In addition, posts focusing on customer relations, employee relations, and events were identified. Corporate social responsibility messages (CSR) were also analyzed. CSR messages were categorized according to whether or not the organization discussed its involvement corporate giving, solicited stakeholders to get involved in some charitable endeavor, discussed an environmental issue or demonstrated its ability to be a socially responsible corporate citizen through some ‘other’ means.

Images were examined for how well they humanized the organization. McNely (2012) identified humanizing images as those that portray humans, human artifacts (food) or animals. However, for this study, humanizing images were considered only those that included people. Coders looked for visible and obscured faces in an effort to focus on images that attempted to humanize the organization or its product through a clearly identifiable human form.

Images were also analyzed for whether or not they explicitly communicated a message through text on the image or relied on visual components of the image to tell the story.

Research question 1b examined how the top brands are engaging with stakeholders. Brand engagement was measured by crowdsourcing efforts and interaction with stakeholders (McNely, 2012). Crowdsourcing was operationalized as an organization’s explicit attempt to solicit engagement from stakeholders by asking them to interact with them or the post (e.g., organizations could ask for comments, likes, shares, or some other kind of engagement.) Interaction, on the other hand, was measured by the organizations’ response to stakeholder comments found within the comment’s section of each post. The presence of hashtags and links to outside content were also identified for understanding the content companies are using for engaging with stakeholders.

The second research question examined whether or not the type of content organizations posted on Facebook influenced how stakeholders engaged with posts. Two separate types of content were examined: 1) multi-media content that came in the form of images videos or text and 2) original and shared posts uploaded by the organization. Coders treated any post with content previously posted by the organization (e.g., company website) and shared on Facebook as shared content. Facebook specifically identifies posts as shared content, therefore, coders used this label for identifying each post. The dependent variable, stakeholder engagement with Facebook posts, was measured by the number of times stakeholders made comments on the post, shared it with others, or specified that they liked the content.

Findings

Of the top 100 global brands analyzed, 90 of the companies posted content during the studied time period. There were three companies that did not have a corporate Facebook page and seven others that did not post during the time period. In total, 772 posts were identified and examined. On average, companies that communicated with stakeholders through Facebook uploaded more than eight posts per week ($M = 8.57$, $SD = 7.56$). Accenture (44), Ferrari (37), Amazon.com (35), and the Discovery Channel (26) posted more content than any other organizational Facebook page examined. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the top 10 organizations that posted the most.

Table 1
Top 10 Brands That Posted Most Frequently on Facebook

Company	Brand Rank	Original Posts				Shared				Total Posts
		Image	Text	Video	Total	Image	Text	Video	Total	
Accenture	41	2	1	0	3	20	20	1	41	44
Ferrari	98	14	0	1	15	15	0	7	22	37
Amazon	19	12	21	0	33	2	0	0	2	35
Discovery	70	20	2	0	22	4	0	0	4	26
Mercedes	11	22	0	0	22	1	0	0	1	23
eBay	28	19	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	19
Disney	14	12	0	0	12	5	0	2	7	19
Toyota	10	16	0	0	16	3	0	0	3	19
Harley	96	17	0	1	18	0	0	0	0	18
MTV	78	9	6	1	16	1	0	0	1	17

Note. Harley refers to Harley Davidson

Information Dissemination

The first research question explored how organizations utilize multi-media content to disseminate information through Facebook. Overwhelmingly, those organizations who posted content utilized images to communicate with their stakeholders. Eighty three percent (664) of the posts included an image, 8.9% ($n=69$) communicated through text, and the remaining 7.6% (59) contained video content. Table 2 shows the format differences between original and shared posts. Videos were more likely to come from shared content whereas text and images were more likely to be original posts. A chi-square test revealed a statistically significant difference in the use of text, image and video for original and shared posts, $\chi^2(2, N=772) = 110.71$, $p < .001$. (see Table 2 for frequencies).

Eight nine of the 90 organizations that posted information on Facebook during the week examined posted an image. Ferrari ($n=29$), Discovery ($n=24$), Mercedes-Benz ($n=23$), Accenture ($n=33$), and eBay ($n=19$) posted the most images during this time. This contrasts with videos where only a third of the organizations ($n=34$) posted one or more videos. Samsung ($n=8$), Ferrari ($n=8$), SAP ($n=4$) and Porsche ($n=3$) posted more videos than any other organization. Sixteen of the organizations uploaded text-only posts with Amazon ($n=21$), Philips ($n=21$), MTV ($n=6$), Pizza Hut ($n=3$) and JP Morgan ($n=3$) providing the majority of text-based posts.

Eighty percent of the posts showcased the companies' products (showcasing) and 13.2% reflected the brand (orienting). The remaining 7.5% of the posts featured infographics. Sixty-four percent of the infographics were product-oriented. Images showcasing the products or orienting stakeholders with the brand were more likely to appear as an image post (see Table 2). Both orienting and showcasing images were more likely to appear without words on them than with words on them (see Table 2).

Communicating news. Of the total posts 14.2% included links to news releases, 3.1% included company news and 8.7% included customer success stories. Posts addressing employee relations were included much less frequently (1.6% of the time), whereas content addressing customer relations were in 9.2% of the posts. Content about events appeared in 11.1% of the posts. Table 2 provides a complete breakdown according to how organizations communicated about these topics through images, videos and text-based posts.

Corporate social responsibility. Of the total posts 11.1% reflected on the organizations corporate social responsibility (CSR), with half of the CSR content (51.2%) addressing corporate giving, the environment or soliciting stakeholder engagement in some kind of charitable cause. The other half of the CSR content did not necessarily focus on the organization's own initiatives. Instead the messages focused outward on the contributions made by others. As Veterans Day and Nelson Mandela's death fell within the window of analysis organizations provided inspirational thoughts commemorating veterans and Mandela in many of the 'other' CSR posts.

Humanizing. Of the images used, 32% (n=206) contained people, with 70.9% including people with faces and the remaining 28.6% including people without faces. As Table 2 illustrates, people with faces were more than twice as likely to appear in brand and product images than people without faces. Not surprisingly, people were not likely to appear in infographics.

Brand Engagement

Research question 1b looks at how often organizations engaged with stakeholders by posting links to outside content, including hashtags, explicitly asking stakeholders to engage with the content through crowdsourcing, and interacting with stakeholders by commenting on their comments. A chi-square test revealed a statistically significant difference in the use of hashtags $\chi^2(2, N=772) = 6.97, p < .05$ and links to outside content, $\chi^2(2, N=772) = 13.99, p < .01$, among text, image and video posts (see Table 2). Findings show organizations include more links than hashtags within their posts. Of the posts, 68.4% (528 posts) contained links and 27.5% included hashtags. A greater percentage of video and text-only posts included links to outside content.

Posts were analyzed to determine how often organizations solicited engagement from their followers. Of the posts, 16.2% (n=125) crowdsourced whereas the remaining 83.8% did not. Image posts were the primary vehicle through which organizations participated in crowdsourcing, $\chi^2(2, N=772) = 5.45, p = .07$ (see Table 2)

Table 2

Use of Images, Videos, and Text in Organizational Facebook Posts

Content	Image (n=644)	Video (n=59)	Text (n=69)	Total (N=772)
Original Posts	547	17	45	609 (78.9)
Shared Posts	97	42	24	163 (21.1)
Orienting (Brand)	168(26)	31 (52.5)	12(17.4)	211 (27.3)

<i>People with faces</i>	60	---	---	---
<i>People without faces</i>	25	---	---	---
<i>Words on image</i>	66	---	---	---
<i>No words on image</i>	102	---	---	---
Showcasing (Product)	426 (66.1)	28 (47.5)	57 (82.6)	511 (66.2)
<i>People with faces</i>	85	---	---	---
<i>People without faces</i>	34	---	---	---
<i>Words on image</i>	101	---	---	---
<i>No words on image</i>	325	---	---	---
Infographic	50 (7.8)	---	---	50 (6.5)
<i>People with faces</i>	2	---	---	---
<i>People without faces</i>	0	---	---	---
<i>Orienting (Brand)</i>	18	---	---	---
<i>Showcasing (Product)</i>	32	---	---	---
Humanizing Images	206 (32)	---	---	206 (26.7)
<i>People with faces</i>	146	---	---	---
<i>People without faces</i>	59	---	---	---
Hashtags	189 (29.3)	11(18.6)	12 (17.4)	212 (27.4)
Links to Outside Content	424 (65.8)	44 (74.5)	60 (87)	528 (68.4)
Crowdsourcing	106 (16.5)	4 (6.8)	15 (21.7)	125 (16.2)
Interaction	134 (20.8)	9 (15.3)	20 (30)	163 (21.1)

Content	Image	Video	Text	Total
Link to News Release	86	6	18	110 (14.2)
Product Announcement	55	10	2	67 (8.7)
Company News	68	14	11	93 (12)
Customer Success Story	21	1	2	24 (3.1)
Customer Relations	62	5	4	71 (9.2)
Employee Relations	7	2	3	12 (1.6)
Event	69	11	6	86 (11.1)
CSR	70	7	9	86 (11.1)
<i>Corporate Giving</i>	13	1	3	17
<i>Soliciting Charitable</i>	10	2	4	16
<i>Engagement</i>				
<i>Environment</i>	11	0	0	11
<i>Other</i>	36	4	2	42

Note: Actual numbers are shown. Percentages are in parentheses and indicate percent of the column total.

More than half of the organizations (n=48) interacted with stakeholders by commenting to stakeholder responses. Twenty one percent (n=163) of the total posts including comments, but a chi-square test did not reveal a statistically significant difference in organization's commenting on a post and whether or not it was an image, video or text-only post, $\chi^2(2, N=772) = 3.82, p > .05$. Of these posts, 37.4% included one comment, 40.5% had 2-4 comments, 12.3% had 5-13 comments, and the remaining 9.8% had between 17 and 56 comments. Pizza Hut, Visa, Amazon, and Starbucks spent more time commenting on individual posts than any other organization.

Stakeholder Engagement

Research question two examined the type of content organizations post on Facebook and how stakeholders engage with it. RQ2a examined the use of multi-media content among posts with the most engagement. A descriptive analysis of stakeholder engagement is followed by an overview of posts with the most likes, shares and comments.

Comments per post ranged from 0 to 7,786, for an average of 125.98 comments per post. Sixty-eight posts did not have any comments (8.8%). Of all the posts with comments, 75.1% of the posts had 100 or less comments, 11.7% had between 100 and 200 comments, and 16.7% had between 101 and 300 comments. The remaining 8.2% of the organizational posts had more than 300 comments. Of these, 1.3% had more than 1,000 comments.

The number of likes on a post ranged from zero to 233,639, for an average of 6,394.06 likes per post. More than half (53.2%) of the posts had more than 1,000 likes, with another quarter (28.5%) having between 1,000 and 5,000 likes. Of the posts, 2.5% had more than 50,000 likes, with 0.6% having more than 100,000.

The number of individuals who shared posts with others ranged from zero to 57,051, with an average of 418.77 shares per post. Of the posts examined, 6.3% were not shared during the time period examined and 45.3% were shared by fewer than 50 individuals. A third of the posts (31.4%) were shared by 50 to 300 individuals. The remaining 19.6% posts were shared more than 500 times, with 8.3% these being shared more than 1,000 times.

The top 10 posts stakeholders engaged with were examined to better understand whether or not the posts receiving the most engagement used similar or different forms of multi-media content. As Table 3 shows, a majority of the top 10 posts came in the form of images. All but three of the top posts were images. Only one of the top posts came in the form of a video and the other two appeared as text-only posts. The post with the most engagement came from a Starbucks' post. This image post was product based and included people.

RQ2b examined how original and shared content influences engagement. Organizations posted 78.8% original content and 21.1% shared content. Original posts included content that didn't contain any identifiable indicators specifying it was being shared from another source. Eighty nine brands posted original content, with the average number of original posts being more than six ($M = 6.76$, $SD = 5.52$). Amazon ($n = 33$), Mercedes-Benz ($n = 22$) and Discovery Channel ($n = 22$) uploaded the greatest number of original posts during the time period examined. Shared posts included content pulled from other online sites, particularly corporate websites. Forty two of the 90 organizations shared content, making the average number of shared posts approximately two ($M = 1.81$, $SD = 5.08$). Accenture ($n = 41$) and Ferrari ($n = 22$) included more shared posts than any of the other organizations. Interestingly, Accenture and Ferrari posted more content during the week examined than any other organization (see Table 1); however, both organizations relied on shared posts to increase their communication with stakeholders. The remaining eight brands uploaded original posts.

Table 3

Top 10 Facebook Posts with the Most Stakeholder Engagement

Rank	Likes	Comments	Shares
	Company (# of Likes)	Company (# of Comments)	Company (# of Comments)
1	Starbucks (233,639) ^a	Nintendo (7,786)	Starbucks (57,051) ^a
2	eBay (219,856) ^b	Starbucks (6,372) ^a	eBay (12,977) ^b

3	Tiffany & Co. (165,709) ^c	Intel (2,510) ^g	Tiffany & Co. (10,492) ^c
4	Starbucks (128,307)	Starbucks (2,407) ^{text post}	Disney (7,149) ^e
5	Louis Vuitton (100,197) ^d	Tiffany & Co. (2,296) ^c	Louis Vuitton (5,729) ^d
6	Cartier (92,364)	Shell (2,242) ^{video post}	Intel (4,768) ^g
7	Disney (87,818) ^e	Amazon.com (2,169) ^{text post}	Visa (4,314) ^f
8	Visa (82,897) ^f	Facebook (1,981)	Disney (3,948)
9	Intel (82,318) ^g	eBay (1,882) ^b	Budweiser (3,803)
10	Starbucks (77,787)	Visa (1,193) ^f	Disney (3,536)

Note: 1) Companies with superscript letters in common come from the same post. 2) Of the top 10 companies with the most comments 1 post was a video (Shell) and two others were text only (Starbucks & Amazon). All other company posts that made the top 10 lists were image posts.

An independent-sample t-test was used to determine if stakeholders were more likely to engage with original or shared posts (those shared by the organization, not shared by stakeholders). The data did not reveal a significant difference in the number of comments original ($M=137.95$, $SD=376.62$) and shared ($M=81.34$, $SD=611.06$) posts received, $t(769)=1.47$, $p > .05$. However, original posts ($M=7,705.15$, $SD=19,859.82$) received more likes than shared ($M=1,546.64$, $SD=3,637.40$) posts, $t(725.8)=7.21$, $p < .001$. Additionally, stakeholders shared original posts ($M=513.75$, $SD=2,505.53$) more than shared ($M=67.05$, $SD=190.16$) posts, $t(632.27)=4.35$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

This study explored how organizations use multi-media content to engaging with stakeholders on Facebook. The findings show the most recognized global brands are leveraging the power of the image by employing a visual-based communications strategy. Among the organizations analyzed there were more companies posting images than video or text. All but one of the organizations that posted during the week examined utilized images. Only a small number of companies even used text-only posts ($n=16$). Additionally, image posts comprised 80% of the posts and dominated every type of content organizations used to disseminate information to stakeholders. Specifically, images were relied upon for showcasing the organizations products/services as well as orienting stakeholders with the brand's image. The same was true for news content as well as messages about corporate social responsibility.

When communicating with stakeholders on Facebook, brands are also more likely to disseminate information about the product or service it renders versus orienting stakeholders with the organization's image. When using images and text-based posts, organizations used product or service-based messages twice as much as brand messages. Of the video posts, approximately half promoted a product/item marketed by the organization and the other half promoted the organization's brand image or its industry.

When utilizing images, brands didn't over rely on people to tell their story. Of the image posts, a third of them helped humanized the organization by including people. When people were used, organizations were more likely to put a face on the message rather than hide or exclude the person's face. Although this research doesn't look at whether or not humanizing the organization will increase stakeholder engagement, these findings show an increasing trend favoring the use

of humans. However, future research should examine the impact humanizing an organization can have on stakeholders.

Organizations engaged with stakeholders using more links to outside content than any other method. This was particularly true for video and text-based posts as a greater percentage of these posts included links. Although the inclusion of links has the potential to make posts more interactive, these findings suggest organizations could ramp up their use of hashtags, crowdsourcing and commenting on stakeholder comments (interaction) to engage stakeholders more effectively.

The use of images was prevalent for posts stakeholders engaged with the most. Images comprised the top 10 most 'liked' and 'shared' posts. Only three of the 10 posts that received the most comments were not images, two were text and one was a video.

This research also shows merely reaching out to stakeholders utilizing multi-media content through Facebook is not enough to engage stakeholders. Stakeholders engage more with original content created and tailored for them rather than content 'shared' from other sites. However, it should be noted that when viewing original content, engagement is more likely to come in the form of stakeholders 'liking' the content and 'sharing' it with others, but not necessarily commenting on the content. Image and text-based posts were more likely to be original posts where as video posts were more likely to be shared. This makes sense as creating high-quality video requires more resources to produce than images and text. Organizations are likely to leverage videos created for other communication channels and share them on Facebook.

These findings underscore the need for organizations to use Facebook posts more effectively for communicating with their stakeholders. Crafting messages for specific key publics is a more effective method for engaging stakeholders and enhancing the overall organization-public relationship than posts that contain content that is not intended for Facebook or developed with specific target audiences in mind.

As social media sites continue to see higher rates of engagement offered by an image-based focus, and as organizations leverage the power of the image, Facebook itself has decided to become a more visual medium. The trend towards more visual content was reemphasized by changes made to the Facebook newsfeed in early 2014. Shortly after this study was conducted, in January 2014, Facebook announced changes to its news feed algorithm and visual changes to the way that image-based visual communication is displayed on user pages (Porterfield, 2014). The change resulted in an increase in the image and photo sizes displayed in the news feed (Lafferty, 2014). By March 2014, most Facebook accounts were changed to the new look, which was inspired by the mobile version of the Facebook news feed (Lafferty, 2014; Lunden, 2014; Porterfield, 2014).

Additionally, Facebook's algorithm changes affected organizational page owners, resulting in fewer of their text-only posts showing up in followers' news feeds and more link-share posts showing up in more followers' news feeds (Porterfield, 2014). These changes were part of an effort to encourage page owners to post more multimedia content within the body of the post rather than text-only posts as Facebook's metrics showed text-only posts were receiving less engagement. Based on these changes to this social media site, it is reasonable to understand why the best brands in the business are relying on images—Facebook is now rewarding organizations for utilizing images. Based on Facebook's changes, future researchers should examine organizational Facebook posts to see if after the announcement organizations decided to rely solely on images and videos. Additionally, it would be interesting to note how lesser-known

organizations, with more limited resources, are communicating with their stakeholders through Facebook.

In conclusion, this study shows how organizations are using images to engage with stakeholders. Organization should consider increasing their level of engagement by including more hashtags, interacting with stakeholders (commenting on stakeholders' comments), and crowdsourcing. As Facebook becomes more of an image-based platform organizations need to ensure they are catching stakeholder's attention by creating original and targeted content. Merely regurgitating content intended for the brand's company website and posting it on Facebook is not enough to capture attention. In sum, organizations need to do more than post images on Facebook, they need to create and post original content if they want to stakeholder's to engage with their content.

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**To Entertain or to Enlighten, that is the Question?
How Institutional Ideals Resonate with Stakeholders in the Social Sphere**

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Abstract

Television fans connect with their favorite characters and shows online by tweeting, blogging, and posting about the content. This study tracks social media conversations about two television programs aired on BYUtv to understand whether or not stakeholders associate the institutional ideals of the programs' parent organization with the television programming.

Engaging with Television Programming Online

Watching television has changed from an activity done in solitude or with a close group of family or friends into one that can be shared with a worldwide forum of fellow fans (Snider, 2013). Social media have given television viewers a new way to engage with television programs by giving them a shared social environment where they can discuss, comment and share their viewing experience with other people online before, during and after the programs they watch (McPherson, et al., 2012). This trend in television show engagement is often referred to as the “second screen” of TV. The second screen describes the presence of an additional screen or device used to engage with other users of the same media content, often in real-time, to enhance the television viewing experience (Winslow, 2012).

Second-screen interactions are transforming the television experience (McClelland, 2012). Viewers who use social media interaction to further engage with television shows report that their viewing is enhanced and that public self-expression typically leads to continued interactive social media behavior (McPherson, et al., 2012).

The recent proliferation of Internet-connected handheld devices like tablets and smartphones has accelerated the development and use of these second-screen applications (Winslow, 2012). Research from Nielson (2013) shows that during the latter half of 2013, 75% of those with a tablet or smart phone have used their devices to engage with television programs while they watch, with almost half of this group engaging daily.

Among the social media platforms second-screen viewers use to engage with the television programs, Twitter has proven to be a rich source of information about those shows. As a result, tweeting while watching is not uncommon (McPherson, et al., 2012). The hashtag organization functionality of Twitter makes it the ideal platform for engagement (Liebling, 2011). However, Twitter is not the only platform used to create second-screen content. Other platforms include Google+, Hangouts, Skype, Pinterest, Facebook, and YouTube (Liebling, 2011).

This study examines second screen conversations of a couple television programs aired on BYUtv, a broadcasting station located on a university campus in Provo, Utah. Second screen conversations are examined for what they reveal about expanding viewership from loyal to latent publics. In addition, how well the institutional ideals of the broadcast station and its sponsoring institution resonate with stakeholders is explored.

From Loyals to Latents: The Process of Spreading Viewership

As television audiences engage with the second screens of TV, it is critical to understand how communication messages spread from *loyal viewers* to *latent publics*. The constructs of loyalty and latency are both well established in communication scholarship, but each shows up in different domains. Examinations into loyal viewership evolved from 20th century studies on where to target advertising dollars to achieve maximum viewership. Research on latent publics came from the public relations domain. The authors of this paper believe that the two constructs can be combined to monitor viewer support for emerging programs in independent television.

In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins (2006) explained today’s dynamic media landscape. He cast aside the traditional wisdom of “impressions,” where the more viewers tune to a particular program, the more opportunities it gives advertisers to get their messages in front of those viewers. As Jenkins explained, with television as the dominant communication medium, “most of us simply wanted to sit back and watch television rather than interact with it” (p. 59) – a sort of dopamine-in-a box idea. This concept of impressions may have been relevant during the late

20th century, but in the Internet era it no longer reflects (and perhaps never did reflect) viewers' actual behaviors related to given shows. Now economic metrics are shifting away from artificial measurements of viewer numbers (after all, if a television set is on is anybody really even watching it?) to a more comprehensive understanding of viewer loyalty.

This social-mediated change in viewership becomes critical when analyzing to what extent a television program really gets into the consciousness of certain viewers. Successful programs have become catalysts for what Jenkins (2006) called *knowledge communities* (p. 59), where sharing of information among family, friends, and acquaintances with similar interests is much more important than just absorbing the information.

The old *impressions* worldview tended to track a whole lot of disinterested viewers instead of those who were really engaged in the program. For the advertisers who funded these programs and wanted return on their investments, this became increasingly problematic. As we moved into the 21st century, it was clear that a different metric was needed to lure and keep viewers. And that metric had to do with the knowledge communities described by Jenkins.

Jenkins (2006) distinguished between *zappers*, *casual*, and *loyal* viewers. *Zappers* love the remote control and flit from program to program without really tuning in to any of them. *Casuals* will leave a show on the screen perhaps through its duration, but often attend to something else while it is on and have no real emotional attachment to it. The *loyal* viewers, on the other hand, are the “fans,” those who now no longer just wait anxiously for next week's program to come along but who regularly share their love of the program by discussing it with other fans over meals, texting about it, joining the online fan club site and actively participating in it, buying the associated merchandise, and showing their fandom in many other ways. These loyal viewers, argued Jenkins, “are more apt to watch series faithfully, more apt to pay attention to advertising, and more apt to buy products” (p. 63). This energetic sharing of programs takes viewing out of the mass isolation realm of the late 1900s and into a “social viewing” (p. 64) context that in today's world is increasingly occurring within knowledge communities.

One of the main differences in Jenkins' (2006) distinction between casual and loyal viewing is *action*—in this case, viewers who don't merely watch a program but who care enough about it to act upon it in some way. This context can perhaps be better understood by introducing the concept of publics that is critical to public relations professionals. John Dewey (1938) defined a public as a group of people who recognize a particular problem or opportunity and organize to do something about it.

In the Grunig and Hunt (1984) textbook, James Grunig's *situational theory of publics* reinforced this principle of action. He argued that publics do not act upon something unless they feel the need or desire to do so. When this concept is combined with Jenkins' (2006) idea of loyal viewers, it indicates that those who first see a program and like it then want to act upon it in some way—tell family or friends about it, organize or find an online fan club to discuss it further, buy merchandise related to it, etc.

Certainly, it is no fun to act upon a good television program by sharing its virtues with others when there are only a few others who even know about the program; thus it becomes important to expand the number of people who similarly like the program. Here, the situational theory of publics once again is pertinent. In discussing the theory, Grunig identified the notion of *latent publics*—those people who have the predisposition or interest to readily act upon something, but they don't yet even know that particular something exists (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Therefore, the key to building a strong knowledge community around a good television program is for the loyal viewers to reach out and share the program with the latent publics as

quickly and widely as possible. As this happens, the television show itself gains greater notoriety (and resulting security or longevity), and those who are loyal to it can then continue to enjoy it and share it. In this way, the interaction between loyal viewers and latent publics becomes clear.

BYU Broadcasting

BYUtv is an acronym for the Brigham Young University television network, which was founded by BYU's Department of Communication in 2000. Immediately after its establishment, the network began airing nationally over Direct TV. Operating from the BYU campus in Provo, Utah, the network has since been included in numerous cable and satellite communication services around the nation and in various parts of the world. It also is available through internet streaming (BYUtv, 2014). The network is accessible to at least 60 million possible viewers ("Come join BYUtv's live", 2011).

BYUtv's communication efforts cannot really be explored without understanding the broader context of BYU's sponsoring institution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (often known as the Mormons or the LDS Church). According to its institutional website, BYUtv is "committed to providing uplifting and entertaining programming that enables its viewers to see the good in the world around them." Therefore, "the primary source of programming found on BYUtv comes from the activities and educational resources of Brigham Young University"; however, the programming is also intended to reflect the values and aspirations of the LDS Church (BYUtv, 2014).

Through its first decade of existence, BYUtv programming was targeted mostly to members of the LDS Church, and specifically to BYU alumni and friends. The network carried the slogan, "Keeping You Connected" (Woller, 2014). However, around 2000, the network underwent a distinct shift—certainly retaining its church membership base as viewers but also attempting to reach out to anyone outside the church and the BYU community who harbored the traditional values of family, service, and faith. A new slogan, "Seeing the Good in the World," was created to appeal to this much broader target audience. New programming was also created, with attempts to make it family-friendly and values based (Woller, 2014).

The new programming incorporates a wide range of genres: reality shows, family movies, dance and musical performance, devotionals and forums, religious meetings (almost exclusively on Sundays), documentaries, and BYU sporting events of all types (BYUtv, 2014). The purpose of this programming is to expand the viewership of BYUtv throughout the world and particularly to build "community" around the concept of traditional values and what the network calls "wholesome" programming (Thomson, 2013). As stated by its mission, "BYU Broadcasting is an integrated media organization that inspires people to see, do, and be the good in the world by providing uplifting content, magnifying the university, engaging like-minded communities, and elevating ideals into action" (BYUtv, 2014).

Purpose of this Study

Due to BYUtv's fairly unique independent stature among U.S. universities and in the broadcast industry, the content it produces serves as an intriguing research subject. Specifically, this study explores how the underlying values-based messages found within the content resonates with viewing audiences. Particularly in today's environment dominated by social media, the study looks at how entertainment and educational-based programming play out in TV's second screen. The research focuses on two shows produced by BYUtv, *American Ride* and *Studio C*.

American Ride is a half-hour program produced by BYU broadcasting that focuses on

United States history through the eyes of a stereotypical Harley Davison *aficionado*, Stanley Ellsworth. For each episode, Ellsworth rides from place to place around the U.S. and narrates the enactment of historical events and issues in the country. This Emmy award-winning show premiered in 2011 and began its fifth season in October 2013 (BYUtv, 2014).

Studio C, by contrast, is a comedic variety show that takes place in a studio at network headquarters. The show is comprised of pre-recorded and “live” studio audience segments. Thomson (2013) commented, if BYUtv is aimed at helping audiences “See the Good in the World,” then *Studio C* is meant to help people “See the Humor in the World.” This half-hour show is BYUtv’s most widely viewed original program, resonating particularly with teenagers and college-age adults (Thomson, 2013).

For an independent network trying to indirectly promote spiritual and moral values, then, it would be important to air programs that attract increasingly loyal viewership. It would likewise stand to reason that these new programs on a relatively small network would need to engender this spread of loyal viewers to a larger and larger number of latent publics.

By incorporating communication outreach through a far-reaching television network, BYU and, to a lesser degree, the LDS Church, are attempting to use *indirect communication* to reach potential stakeholders. By *indirect*, it is meant that BYUtv administrators desire that viewers will become interested in particular programs and then respond further in at least one of three directions: (1) begin to feel comfortable viewing more of the BYUtv programming; (2) perhaps become curious about the underlying messages behind the programs that are espoused by the sponsoring religion; and (3) begin to share their interest by encouraging family and friends to watch specific programs or the network in general. This latter objective moves into the realm of word-of-mouth, which can happen either through face-to-face interaction or through social media (what we may then refer to as *social word-of-mouth*).

Research Questions

One purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine what social media analytical tools can tell us about whether social media conversations are indeed spreading from loyal viewers to latent publics. Due to BYUtv’s origins and location, the authors of this study presumed that the majority of the programs’ viewers are members of the LDS Church; however, evidence that viewership might be expanding beyond the church’s membership base was explored. The study include the following research questions:

RQ1. Due to *American Ride*’s potential for a broader appeal among history buffs, is there evidence that more viewers of the program come from outside the loyal Mormon base than from *Studio C*?

RQ2. By appealing to a younger demographic, does *Studio C* show a larger second-screen following than *American Ride*?

RQ3. To what extent does the following for these two television programs spread from *loyal viewers to latent publics*?

RQ4. As word of BYU’s television programs spreads to non-LDS audiences, are there any indicators of how the show is perceived by these viewers?

RQ5. Do stakeholders associate the institutional ideals and messages espoused by the parent organization with that of the television programming they view?

Second screen conversations offer a great way to explore what viewers think about television programming as people express their thoughts about their viewing experience. Therefore, in this study conversations were tracked using a social media analytic application in

an effort to explore the above questions.

Methodology

During the first phase of the study social media analytics were used for tracking second screen conversations during the fifth season of *American Ride* and third season of *Studio C*, both of which aired in the fall of 2013. The researchers monitored these social conversations using NUVI, a social media monitoring and analytic software that allows organizations to track conversations about their brand or institution in real-time. Using keywords describing the show and its actors, as well as official social media channels of BYUtv and the social media feeds of the starring cast members, NUVI was able to identify online discussions that mention the shows and provide analytics around key trends in the conversations. NUVI's monitoring capabilities include the ability to see and understand the frequency, sentiment, reach, spread, location and influence of what people are saying on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. However, it should be noted that the typical Facebook user utilizes privacy settings that prevent analytic tracking software from capturing conversations.

A qualitative analysis of the conversations comprised the second phase of the research. In this phase messages that referred to the institution's mission or its ideals for the programs were identified (RQ3). Last, any evidence that interest in the program was spreading from loyal viewers to latent viewers (and particularly those unaffiliated with BYU or the sponsoring church; RQ4) was examined by looking at the geographic locations from which the conversations originated and by exploring the comments of people discussing the show. Textual cues were the primary means for identifying loyal and latent stakeholders. In some instances where textual cues pointed to this potential shift, public profiles of the individuals were explored to provide additional cues. However, this added exploration was only conducted in situations where the textual cues identified latent viewers' potential interest in the shows.

On October 7, 2013, *Studio C* began its third season and continued to play a new episode each Monday night for 10 weeks, through Monday, December 9, 2013. In all, season three consisted of 10 original episodes. Using NUVI, social media conversations about *Studio C* were tracked for 11 weeks, from October 1, 2013 until December 16, 2013, one week after the finale.

Season 5 of *American Ride* premiered on Monday, October 7, 2013, and 13 new episodes were aired on Monday evenings through January 13, 2014. NUVI analyzed conversations anticipating the return of the show on October 1, 2013, and continued its analyses until January 20, 2013, one week after the season-finale episode.

Findings

Given the exploratory nature of this research, many of the findings were less conclusive than the authors hoped. That said, certain findings related to each program proved interesting:

Studio C

NUVI identified 10,849 messages mentioning *Studio C* during the 11 weeks it was monitored. Of these conversations, a quarter of them (2,628) were considered shared mentions, suggesting they were either re-tweets or shared content from other social media applications. During this timeframe there were an average of five mentions per hour. Not surprisingly, a vast majority of conversations took place on Twitter (89.25%), with Facebook (5.86%), Google+ (2.16%), YouTube (1.59%), and other news sources (1.09%) containing considerably fewer mentions. In addition, Reddit and Vimeo had three mentions each.

Conversations about *Studio C* had the potential of reaching 3,041,250 people within the friend or follower circles of those discussing the show. In addition, the spread, or those who were potentially reached by re-tweets or shared mentions, included 1,496,722 people (spread). Many of the *Studio C* cast members actively used Facebook and Twitter accounts to promote the show. Twitter accounts for several of these stars of the show were identified as being the accounts with the largest spread (most individuals following them). Many of the mentions of *Studio C* were shared Twitter posts (re-tweets) from the cast members: Natalie Madsen, Matt Meese, Jason Gray, Jeremy Warner, Whitney Call, and Stacey Harkey, as well as the official BYUtv Twitter account, all made the top 10 list of users who mentioned *Studio C* and had the largest spread.

BYUtv actively promoted the third season of *Studio C* through bookstore appearances, DVD signings and other public appearances. In addition to creating more awareness about the show, these promotions resulted in increased social media traffic among loyal publics. Promotion of the show through social media did more than simply provide a mode of feedback for current watchers; it also added to new viewership. Some mentioned that they learned about *Studio C* from Twitter messages. Some of the core viewers gave celebrity status to the show's cast. Many of these viewers followed the cast members' social media feeds, watching for and commenting on communication from the show's stars. In addition, loyal publics were not shy about starting conversations themselves by providing information and viewpoints about the program.

The peak activity for the show occurred on Monday, October 28, during the Halloween special, between the hours of 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. During this time there were 1,204 mentions (11.1% of the total mentions for the entire duration of the study). Another notable spike in conversations occurred around the season finale on December 9, between the hours of 5 p.m. and 3 a.m. During this time there were 812 mentions (7.5% of the total mentions for the entire duration of the study).

Overall, the flow of conversations followed a few general patterns. Second screen conversations spiked every Monday night as viewers engaged with the episode's debut and when it was replayed later that night. The flow of conversations slowed throughout the week but remained present as BYUtv aired re-runs of older episodes at various times during the week.

NUVI's sentiment analysis identified 43% of the mentions as being positive, 10% of the mentions as being negative, and 47% of the mentions as being neutral. However, in reviewing the individual mentions, it was evident that for this show the sentiment tracker mislabeled sentiments based on keywords. This feature tracks individual words and sometimes is unable to decipher the sentiment of a statement as a whole. For example, in the vernacular of today's younger generation, the word "sick" can be seen as awesome or incredible; yet, NUVI might label that term as negative in context. Understandably, the comedic nature of the show also makes it increasingly difficult for software to characterize the inevitable jokes or sarcasm. Mislabeled sentiments included the following:

Oct. 28 at 8:14pm – "This is Wells Fargo. We own the dark side" @ThatMattMeese
That's funny, I thought Bank of America was the evil one #StudioC
[A fan who watched the show and remarked about one of the jokes]

Oct. 6 at 8:37pm – You unleashed a much greater evil on the world.... that was One Direction #StudioC. [Re-quoting a joke from the show]

Based on second screen discussions monitored by NUVI, loyal publics of *Studio C* were primarily composed of teenagers and BYU students, along with some parents. Those who engaged in second-screen discussions about *Studio C* were identifiable by frequent mentions of life events within their posts, tweets or comments. For example, it was not uncommon to see

conversations about loyal publics watching *Studio C* with friends, family, and student Family Home Evening groups (FHE; a church tradition among Mormons where one night per week, typically Monday, is set aside for family-oriented events and activities). Those who posted about *Studio C* often associated it with FHE, likely due to its Monday night air time. During the evening of each episode's premiere, posts were filled with mentions of watching it for FHE, wishing they could watch for FHE, or hoping that FHE would finish so they could watch the show afterward.

Oct. 7 at 10:15am – Maybe I'll convince my parents that watching #studioC is a great FHE activity?

Oct. 7 at 9:53am – @byu New Studio C? Now I know the activity for Family Home Evening Tonight. #studioC

Studio C's loyal publics were typically found applauding the program for being a source of humorous entertainment. However, among parents, it was just as common to see the show recognized as a source of clean, family-friendly content for their families.

Oct. 14 at 8:56am – Keep up the great work, Studio C, it is a real pleasure to have something our kids can watch without being exposed to sex, violence, and contempt for a civilized society. Also, anything that picks on “hipsters” is a winner for me.

Oct. 21 at 5:44pm – My 6yo is complaining that the only thing she likes on TV is #StudioC. Nothing else is any good.

Oct. 28 at 9:34am – #StudioC, you guys are amazing! Thanks for providing clean, amazing, HILARIOUS entertainment for our family! #Studi...”

Oct. 9 at 11:24am – We just recently discovered Studio C. We are completely hooked! My daughter wants to be Shoulder Angel for Halloween! Thank you for being clean humor and family friendly! Studio C ROCKS!! =)

Due to the program's sketch comedy format, some loyal viewers even compared *Studio C* to a cleaner-version of Saturday Night Live, devoid of vulgarity or adult humor.

Dec. 7 at 11:52pm – Studio C is just the LDS version of Saturday Night Live. @mormoninaz

Oct. 7 at 7:30pm – #studioc on #byutv is #familyfriendly... #SNL not so much!!!

Oct. 7 at 6:00pm – Realized today that #mollymormonmom's SNL is Studio C..

Some loyal publics included a *Studio C* reference in their Twitter name, and often tweeted about the depth of their love for the show. In such cases, the show made a tremendous impact on viewers' lives.

Dec. 8 at 12:01am – One of the reasons I like Studio C so much is because they cheered me up when I was at the lowest of lows.

Dec. 8 at 12:03am – Studio C got me to laugh when I didn't even want to smile. The show and cast pretty much changed my life. <3

Loyal publics who discussed the show commonly used hashtags and usernames that showed pride in their church beliefs. As a result, it was not uncommon to see usernames with LDS references or clear identifications as being “Mormon.” Hashtags also referenced various aspects of the LDS faith. However, unless the user explicitly referenced not being affiliated with Brigham Young University or its corresponding church sponsor, it was not as easy to identify the show's adoption among latent publics. Despite this limitation there is some evidence from the second screen conversations examined that the program is reaching latent publics, including those who are not devout BYU fans or members of the LDS Church.

Oct. 28 at 7:28pm – #StudioC We are from Wisconsin and discovered your show. We LOVE it and are not even Mormon's!!!:)

Oct. 21 at 7:38pm – As the only LDS kid in my school, I introduced Studio C to them. Nonmembers claim they watched it before anyone else at school. HAHAHA LIES.

As with any television program, reaction to *Studio C* was not unanimously favorable, as evidenced by several tweets that denigrated the show typically because of humor that was found to be obnoxious or unintelligent. Additionally, it was not uncommon for these tweets to reference the LDS faith yet only mention negative aspects of the show. The following four comments capture these such sentiments: 1) “Studio C is the stupidest thing ever.” 2) “How Mormons find Studio C entertaining is beyond me... #overrated.” 3) “Just because Studio C is made by Mormons doesn't mean it's funny,” and 4) “am I the only mormon who detests studio C?”

American Ride

NUVI yielded 1,062 total mentions of *American Ride*—more than ten times fewer mentions than for *Studio C*. Of these, 31% (331) were shared mentions (re-tweets or other shares), with the average flow of activity being less than one mention per hour. Similar to BYUtv, most of the discussions took place on Twitter (85.42%), followed by Facebook (11.47%), YouTube (1.69%), Google+ (0.75%), and news sources (0.66%). Likewise, Facebook privacy settings prohibited NUVI from accessing all of the conversations.

NUVI's sentiment analysis identified 34% of the mentions as being positive, 12% of the mentions as being negative, and 54% of the mentions as being neutral.

The reach of these mentions expanded to 2,116,585 people and the spread was 1,266,801. Reach measures how many individuals were within the friend or follower circles of those who mentioned *American Ride*. Despite the significantly lower volume of social media mentions, these mentions reached a very similar amount of followers as compared with *Studio C* (reach: 3,041,250; spread: 1,496,722).

BYUtv's Twitter account made up 43.6% (463) of the total mentions, showing that viewers and followers of the show were not the most active discussants of the program. Twitter users topped the charts as being the most active discussants, accounting for eight of the top 10 users alongside a YouTube account and *American Ride* main Facebook page.

The flow of mentions followed a few general patterns. As with *Studio C*, there was a spike in activity every Monday night as social media became the program's second screen during each new episode's premiere and late-night rerun. The flow of conversations slowed throughout the week but remained present as BYUtv aired re-runs of older episodes at various times during the week. The peak activity for this program occurred on December 9. On this night, there were 54 mentions (5.1% of the total mentions for the entire duration of the study). However, with the vast majority of mentions coming from BYUtv's promotional efforts online, peak conversations also occurred during the lead-up to the program each Monday.

An analysis of the conversations showed that *American Ride* is more popular among older viewers. This may be one of the potential reasons for the reduced social media promotion on the part of BYUtv. Pew Research Center's Internet Project (Smith, 2014) found that while many seniors and older adults are adopting Internet and social media use, the older demographic is still far less likely to go online and to use social media than younger viewers. The presence of older adopters of social media technologies is rising but continues to lag behind younger demographics (Smith, 2014).

Unfortunately, like with the social conversation around *Studio C*, the NUVI analysis of

American Ride conversation was not able to indicate with any reliable certainty whether it was generated by members of the LDS Church or others. Despite the general lack of solid indicators, there was some periodic evidence that conversation around *American Ride* could be beginning to move beyond LDS viewers. One example of this came from a pastor in Missouri, who tweeted:

November 5 @ 8:14 am – @AmericanRideTV I just found your show on BYUtv. It’s awesome! Keep doing what you do, brother! God bless!

Another example of potential movement came from a three-way interaction October 7. Judging from the discussion, one participant was probably a member of the LDS Church and the other two family members were not. It went like this:

Oct. 7 at 7:21pm – I’m watching American Ride on BYUtv.” – Dad. “Tim, you’re supporting the Mormons!!” – Mom. Wouldn’t wanna do that, now would we? @olivialuse Tell mom we’re not so bad. And #AmericanRide is meant for all history fans, even your dad!:)

As a result of these comments and other, similar comments surrounding *American Ride*, it is certainly possible to see that viewership of a television program can move from loyalists to latent publics. Much more research will be needed, however, to feel any confidence about the extent to which this movement is happening around this particular program.

Origins of Social Media Conversations

In addition to examining comments from social media, NUVI tracked the origin of *Studio C* and *American Ride* discussions. For both shows, a large portion of the conversations originated from Utah. This is not surprising as Utah is home to BYU Broadcasting as well as headquarters for the LDS Church. As shown in Table 1, however, states where large portions of church members reside are not necessarily states where people were more likely to discuss the show online. Other than Utah (69.2%), Nevada (6.5%) and Washington (4.1%) were the only states with relatively high LDS population densities. Within the United States, Nevada has the 4th largest LDS population and Washington has the 9th largest (“Facts and statistics,” 2014). Other states topping the list with considerable LDS populations, including Idaho, Wyoming, Arizona, Hawaii, Montana, Alaska, and Oregon (“Facts and statistics,” 2014), did not see a proportional number of mentions (see Table 1).

Table 1

Top 10 Locations where Social Media Conversations about BYUtv Programs Originated

Studio C		American Ride	
Top 10 Locations	LDS pop. (density)	Top 10 Locations	LDS pop. (density)
1. Utah (47%)	1,975,939 (69.2%)	1. Utah (80%)	1,975,939 (69.2%)
2. California	780,200 (2.1%)	2. Oklahoma	45,734 (1.2%)
3. Michigan	43,579 (0.4%)	3. California	780,200 (2.1%)
4. Minnesota	31,871 (0.6%)	4. Pennsylvania	51,527 (0.4%)
5. Indiana	42,856 (0.7%)	5. Massachusetts	26,423 (0.4%)
6. Colorado	149,876 (2.9%)	6. Florida	146,509 (0.8%)
7. New Hampshire	8,298 (0.6%)	7. Texas	325,946 (1.3%)
8. Texas	325,946 (1.3%)	8. Mauritius	442 (0.1%)
9. Washington	279,492 (4.1%)	9. Illinois	56,932 (0.4%)
10. Nevada	180,600 (6.5%)	10. Washington	279,492 (4.1%)

Note. LDS population data obtained from “Facts and Statistics [Newsroom Report]” April 10, 2014 in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Newsroom. LDS density data from “The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Membership Statistics” April 8, 2014, in Wikipedia.

For both television programs, conversations originated from Utah, California, Texas, and Washington. States that were exclusively on *Studio C*’s top 10 list were from the West and Midwestern U.S.: Michigan, Minnesota, Indiana, Colorado, and Nevada—but comments also came from as far away as New Hampshire. States that were exclusively on *American Ride*’s top 10 list typically came from the Midwest, too (Oklahoma and Illinois, for example), but comments also came from Eastern states such as Florida, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts.

Notably, filming locations during the fifth season of *American Ride* were generally in the Eastern region of the United States. Four episodes were filmed in New York, two were filmed in Pennsylvania, and individual episodes were filmed in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Louisiana, and Washington, D.C. Among the locations featured in these episodes, Pennsylvania was the only state to make the top 10 list for comments on the program.

Conclusions

It is natural to assume that *Studio C*’s audience of teenagers and families would far surpass the viewership of *American Ride*, which is most likely restricted to history buffs from older demographics. However, if the social media conversation monitored by NUVI is a reflection of actual viewership, our assumptions about the programs certainly held up: *Studio C* generated ten times more conversation than *American Ride*. The analysis did indicate, however, that specific events or activities to promote *American Ride*, such as Stan Ellsworth’s appearance on *Studio C* or key episodes on significant historical events that were filmed at specific locations around the country, sparked social media discussion about the show. For example, when an episode about Notre Dame University was aired, discussion about the program spiked somewhat in Indiana. Also, two consecutive episodes were filmed in Pennsylvania, and that state was ranked 4th in the nation for number of conversations generated among all states. Many of those conversations appeared around the time each of these episodes were shown on the network.

The analysis showed that 80% of the overall mentions of *American Ride* came from within Utah and almost 50% of *Studio C*’s mentions also originated from Utah, where a majority of the viewers are likely (but not necessarily) members of the LDS Church (the U.S. census shows that 60 percent of Utah residents identify as Mormon). Given the dispersion of Mormons across the U.S. and the widespread satellite and cable accessibility of BYUtv, it is again possible that many or most of the comments from outside of Utah came from members of the church. Most notably, however, those discussions that took place outside Utah were not necessarily in those states that have the greatest number of church members—suggesting that the reach of the programs may slowly be spreading a bit beyond the circles of church membership.

As indicated by the conversations about the two television programs, BYUtv’s efforts to provide “high quality entertainment” does not go unnoticed by second-screen viewers (Kaay, 2014). Viewers seem to be both entertained and enlightened by the network’s programs. Most notably, however, much of the conversation mentioning the shows did not center on the sponsoring institutions of BYUtv or their religious philosophies—rather, they seemed to focus on the programs themselves.

The researchers believed *American Ride* had a greater potential to spread from its loyal viewers to latent publics than *Studio C*. Because *Studio C*’s comedy is performed by BYU students or alumni, it invariably emanates from and perhaps resonates better within the Mormon culture. By contrast, *American Ride* can more naturally appeal to anyone interested in U.S.

history or attract interest from residents of areas where each episode was filmed, regardless of the viewers' religious or cultural background. The conversations identified suggest both shows are beginning to reach latent publics, but the extent to which this is happening was not clearly identifiable through the methods used in this research.

BYUtv has placed significantly more effort on promoting *Studio C* through its official channels and through the individual social networks of its cast members. This effort, combined with the show's appeal to younger audiences who are social-media savvy, has translated into a significantly higher volume of conversation among fans of the show and also has resulted in instances of new viewership. By choosing not to focus on similar social media promotion of *American Ride*, the network perhaps bypassed opportunities to extend viewership of this program despite the growing segment of older people who are now on social networking sites.

Future Research

This study is ongoing. Future research will include the monitoring of a drama series titled *Granite Flats*, which premiered in 2013 and entered its second season in April 2014. Where *American Ride* and *Studio C* are niche shows, *Granite Flats* is a character drama that appeals to a broader audience base. The show provides clean, family-friendly content one would expect from BYUtv but is notable in that there are no references to the LDS faith despite several characters who are religious (Pierce, 2014). In the spring of 2013, the series premiere surprised producers by luring 1.75 million viewers, more than 1.5 times the viewership of *Studio C* (Lawrence, 2013; Mann, 2014). Within the first month, the show's Facebook page had nearly 20,000 likes and was averaging an additional 400 new likes per day. Online streaming of the show was averaging more than 4,000 new online views per day and the show had attracted a million-plus hits to BYUtv's YouTube channel. The shows' producers even noted that *Granite Flats*-related conversations were springing up on Twitter during the new episodes (Lawrence, 2013). BYUtv managing director Derek Marquis expressed hope that the show's family-friendly emphasis will continue to attract viewers across a wide geographic and religious spectrum (Pierce, 2014).

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Embracing Advocates and Influencers: Practices of the Top Social Media Brands

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Abstract

Social media provide a powerful mechanism to quickly distribute positive messages generated by passionate brand advocates or influencers to a wide and established network of connections. This study examined campaigns by the top 50 social media brands to understand the type of campaign used, range of content creation, and transparency of sponsorship and the content generated by these campaigns.

Introduction

Approximately 500 billion word of mouth impressions about brands occur on the social web each year in the United States (Zuberance, 2011). The sheer volume of brand conversations on the Internet suggests that companies may possibly be driving some of this discussion, but at the very least, that consumers are interested in sharing brand experiences and soliciting brand feedback through their networks. This study seeks to explore how companies are increasing their share of voice in social media, the social media sites used, and how they are being transparent about their involvement in driving conversation.

Two popular public relations campaign tactics that take advantage of the power of word of mouth include influencer outreach and brand advocacy programs. Although both predate social media and the internet, today's online, networked environment makes these strategies both more effective and efficient. Social media provide a powerful mechanism to quickly distribute positive messages generated by passionate brand advocates or influencers to a wide and established network of connections. Both strategies are based on the concept of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which research has deemed effective because of its immediacy, credibility, accessibility, and wide reach (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). A McKinsey study found consumer-to-consumer word of mouth methods to be more effective than traditional advertising in driving sales (Bughin, Doogan, & Jørgen Vetvik, 2010).

In an example of influencer outreach, the women's fashion brand DKNY invited 30 influential fashion bloggers to their New York City and London stores to participate in the brand's Easter Twitter Scavenger Hunt. As "DKNY PR Girl" tweeted tips to the candy-filled Easter eggs, bloggers tweeted photos of the found eggs and their respective articles of clothing. In contrast, Chili's Grill & Bar energized its customers (aka Advocates) through a brand advocacy program to spread positive word-of-mouth messages. When users signed up to receive emails from Chili's, they were able to share a free queso offer with their online connections.

The concept of brand advocates differs from influencers in that online influencers tend to be bloggers, celebrities, or pundits with large followings while brand advocates are generally regular people who not only use and love a brand, but also have a desire to share their experiences with others. Ehrlich (2013) differentiates the two types by classifying brand advocates as being "high trust" and influencers as being "high reach."

Nielsen's 2013 Global Trust in Advertising and Brand Messages study provides a context for understanding how brand advocacy programs can succeed. The research showed that 84% of online users from the 58 countries surveyed said they consider a recommendation to be trustworthy when it comes from a friend or family member. In second place was advertising on branded websites trusted by 69% of respondents followed closely by consumer opinions posted online, trusted by 68% of respondents. Randall Beard, global head of Advertiser Solutions at Nielsen, had this to say about the results:

While TV remains the front-running format for the delivery of marketing messages based on ad spend, consumers globally are also looking to online media to get information about brands. On the flipside, earned advertising channels have empowered consumers to advocate for their favorite brands, something that shouldn't go unnoticed by brand advertisers.

In contrast, influencer campaigns may have fundamental problems in their ability to gain the trust of consumers. A study by Forrester found that only 18% of those surveyed trusted influencers defined as bloggers, pundits and celebrities (Newman, 2014).

Literature Review

Several studies have sought to categorize consumers on the basis of their ability to be brand advocates. A Wildfire by Google study of 10,000 Facebook campaigns identified social media participants as falling into one of three categories: joiners, sharers, and advocates. Joiners, who comprise about 83% of total participants in the 10,000 campaign sample, participate in the social media sites of a brand but do not spread the word outside of their individual interactions. The remaining 17% include sharers and advocates who comprise approximately 15.4% of participants and just 1.5% of participants respectively. Sharers are participants who will share information about a brand within their network while advocates “participate with a branded campaign, share about it, and have enough clout within their network to influence friends to convert into participants as well” (p. 3). Both sharers and advocates generate earned media, but the earned media created by advocates is considered more valuable. When the top 10% of performing campaigns were examined, the study found those brands had a much higher percentage of sharers and advocates among their fans and also acquired 264% more earned media impressions than the average campaign.

Clancy and Paquette (2012) defined brand advocates as “consumers who not only use a brand, but also love it and want to help others get to know it.” They classified approximately 5-10% of customers as brand advocates with loyalists representing about 15-20% of customers. They further estimated that Facebook fans are 1.5-2.5 times more likely to be brand advocates than non-Facebook fans. The researchers proposed that marketers determine the specific measures of passion that are most predictive of advocacy behaviors and then use these measures to identify advocates.

Sedereviciute and Valentini (2011) prioritized publics according to the two dimensions of connectivity (i.e., suggesting their influence over others) and content sharing. Unconcerned lurkers are low on both dimensions, unconcerned influencers are high in connectivity and low in content sharing, and concerned lurkers are low in connectivity and high in content sharing. The category most relevant to this study is that of concerned influencers, who are high in both connectivity and content sharing.

Despite the evidence that brand advocates can be particularly effective for marketers, research has generated some considerations for their use. For example, a study by Anghelcev (2013) has implications for advocacy programs that use incentives such as coupons, rewards, or discounts as the motivation to purchase or recommend a brand. This experimental study found that subjects who received a small monetary reward for a product recommendation were less intrinsically motivated to write the recommendation than those who did not receive a reward. In addition, the subjects who received the reward also wrote shorter recommendations than the other group. Applying motivation crowding theory to this study, Anghelcev argued that the extrinsic monetary reward crowded out intrinsic motivations, creating a situation where the subjects were less willing to engage in the behavior. The implications are that advocacy programs can backfire, making followers less likely to trust advocate recommendations (Anghelcev, 2013).

Other studies have compared the effectiveness of brand advocates to celebrity influencers. A Zuberance study from January 2012 found the primary reasons people recommend products are their positive experiences with the products and that they want to help others. Brand advocates elicit higher levels of trust than influencers and tend to create longer-lasting effects among followers (Baer, 2012). Advocates may be more effective than influencers because they often have a more personal relationship with their online connections.

A study by EngagedSciences of 400 brands found that only 4.7% of fans contributed to all social referrals (Heath, 2014). The company contends that too many marketers are trying to use celebrity influencers in their campaigns while overlooking this potentially valuable group of brand advocates who can offer much more reach than the typical engaged fan.

The power of brand advocates and influencers comes from source credibility, a widely-research variable in the study of the effectiveness of communication. After Hovland and Weiss first introduced this concept in 1951 with the dimensions of trustworthiness and expertise, subsequent studies have examined other dimensions, such as the impact of attractiveness on credibility (Ohanian, 1991). Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell (2000) later examined the relationship between corporate credibility and consumer reactions to brands. More recently, Eagar (2009) studied brand hero credibility and the impact on a brand community of this brand hero who is connected to both the brand and the community.

Another related concept is that of word of mouth communication. An early study of word of mouth was conducted by Dichter (1966), who first analyzed motivations to engage in this kind of conversation. More recently, Wallace, Bull, and de Chernatony (2012) found that consumers will offer positive word of mouth through social networks about self-expressive brands that reflect the consumer's inner or social self.

Although popular public relations strategies, influencer and advocacy programs have received little attention in the public relations literature and may even be limited to a 2011 study by Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, and Freberg that measured audience perceptions of social media influencers. Their study demonstrated that the California Q-sort could be applied to evaluate the quality and relevance of four social media influencers and also compare social media influencers to one another. The attributes that best described the influencers were verbal, smart, ambitious, productive, and poised. When compared to a previous study about CEOs (Freberg et al., 2010), the influencers were more like to be viewed as giving advice or being turned to for advice than CEOs.

The present study intends to expand knowledge of brand advocacy and influencer programs that can be applied to their future implementation. The following research questions will be addressed based on campaigns by the top 50 social media brands from the past two years:

1. What type of campaign—brand advocacy or influencer—is more common?
2. What is the range of content generated by each type of campaign?
3. How are brands transparent about their sponsorship of these campaigns and the content they generate?

Methodology

The sample of brands for this study was drawn from the SocialBakers list of the Top 50 Facebook brands from January 2014 (see Table 1). Online searches were conducted to locate information on brand advocacy and influencer campaigns for each of these brands for a slightly more than two-year period starting in January 2012 and ending in February 2014. Keywords included “influencer campaign” and “brand advocacy campaign” along with the brand name.

For the purposes of this study, brand advocacy campaigns were defined as those that provided a means for the advocates to both engage with the brand and then attempt to engage their followers with the brand through voting or other similar methods. Simple campaigns where advocates tweet using a hashtag or share photos on Instagram were not included. Influencer campaigns were limited to those that used a celebrity, popular blogger, or other influencer to engage with the brand and then generate branded content. Celebrity endorsement campaigns

were not included. A total of 31 influencer and brand advocacy campaigns were located, representing 25 different brands (indicated in bold in the table).

Campaigns were coded as either brand advocacy or influencer campaigns. Finally, the range of content created as a result of these campaigns and methods for increasing transparency were noted.

Table 1
SocialBakers Top 50 Facebook Brands

Ranking	Brand	Ranking	Brand
1	Coca-Cola	26	Kit Kat
2	Red Bull	27	Levi's
3	Converse	28	Dove
4	PlayStation	29	ZARA
5	Starbucks	30	Ferrero Rocher
6	Oreo	31	Mozilla Firefox
7	Walmart	32	Nutella
8	Samsung Mobile	33	H&M
9	Pepsi	34	Guarana Antarctica
10	iTunes	35	Burberry
11	McDonald's	36	Adidas Football
12	BlackBerry	37	Google Chrome
13	Skype	38	Heineken
14	Subway	39	Nike
15	Pringles	40	Louis Vuitton
16	Samsung Mobile USA	41	Sprite
17	Skittles	42	Dr Pepper
18	Victoria's Secret	43	Windows
19	Monster Energy	44	BMW
20	Intel	45	Adidas
21	Xbox	46	NESCAFE
22	Amazon.com	47	Macy's
23	Target	48	Victoria's Secret Pink
24	Adidas Originals	49	Tata Docomo
25	Nike Football	50	Fanta

<http://www.socialbakers.com/all-social-media-stats/facebook/>

Results

Campaign Type

After analyzing the 31 campaigns, it was determined that they fall into four classifications instead of two: 1) influencer campaigns, 2) brand advocacy campaigns, 3) campaigns that activate both influencers and brand advocates, and 4) campaigns that target influencers who are known or likely brand advocates. Approximately the same number of campaigns used influencer (n=11) and brand advocacy strategies (n=10) while fewer campaigns activated both influencers and advocates (n=3) and targeted influencers who are known or likely advocates (n=7). The following discussion provides examples of each type of campaign.

Converse's "My Canvas Journey" campaign is an example of an *influencer campaign*. The company provided 23 influential Instagram users, including photographers, stylists, and sound engineers, a Converse duffel bag and challenged them to photograph their customization of the bag and its journeys over a four-week period. The influencers posted the photos to Converse's Instagram account and also shared them on their own blogs.

A 2012 Skittles *brand advocacy campaign* from Canada motivated Skittles fans to share a video called "Get Skittles Rich." Participants earned one virtual Skittle for every view that resulted from a video share and posted standings on a leaderboard. The fan at the top of the leaderboard at the end of the contest was dubbed the Skittles Millionaire and received 1 million Skittles delivered to his home.

To promote the BOOST Energy running shoes by Adidas in Italy, the company used a campaign that targeted *both influencers and brand advocates*. First, they created a Facebook app to provide advocates with a way to create a personalized online "energy" card which they then shared on their own Facebook timelines. Participants also asked friends for their votes, and the top 10 entries received an exclusive invitation to the BOOST launch afterparty. Influencers were also invited to create an energy card and received a personalized outreach gift box that included a t-shirt with his or her Twitter handle on it, a USB stick with a personalized video, and an invitation to join the afterparty.

Although the clothing retailer Zara does not generally rely on public relations tactics, it used a campaign that *targeted influencers who were known and likely brand advocates* for its 2013 launch of Zara.com in Canada. The company identified 700 influencers, mostly highly social, fashion-aware, young professionals who were already Zara customers or strong prospective customers and sent all of them a \$150 gift card, encouraging them to visit the site before it had officially launched. The campaign generated social media content, mostly on Twitter.

Range of Content

Influencer and advocacy campaigns are particularly valuable for generating content and widespread distribution of that content, and a review of the campaigns in this study revealed no noted differences between the types of campaigns in terms of the content or social media sites used. Some campaigns analyzed in this study focused on creating content for one social media site, such as a YouTube video or a photo shared on Instagram, while others utilized a range of social media sites including Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and Tumblr. Despite being the largest social network, Facebook was mentioned much less frequently than other sites.

Transparency

The campaigns analyzed in this study exhibited a range of transparency, but most are designed to expose the relationship between the influencer/advocate and the brand. Although campaigns revealed their sponsors through the following four methods, complete transparency may still be a concern.

First, influencer-created content is often hosted on the social media sites of the sponsor and tagged with the campaign's hashtag. When viewers see this content, they should assume that its creation was motivated by a contractual arrangement with the brand. The more high-profile the influencer, the more likely consumers should be to make this assumption. Issues may arise, however, when influencers post content on their own social media sites and fail to be transparent about why they are plugging the brand within that space.

For example, Burberry, in a 2014 campaign for its women's fragrance Brit Rhythm, is utilizing global influencers to create content tagged with #THISISBRIT to build excitement for live musical performances in their cities. The content will be shared across Burberry's social media channels, including its Sound and Rhythm Tumblr page, as well as the social media sites of the influencers.

Second, influencers often create content as a result of an invitation to an exclusive event hosted by the sponsor. Within this context, consumers should assume that the event encouraged or required the influencer to create content. In some cases, influencers, especially non-celebrities, are not paid to participate but are happy to receive free entertainment, food, beverages, and swag. Although financial arrangements will often be necessary to work with certain celebrities, consumers may mistakenly believe that the celebrities attended for the purpose of enjoying the event.

In an example of this type of transparency, Converse opened a pop-up space in downtown San Francisco during the summer of 2013 for the purpose of promoting both the brand and the opening of a new store. The company targeted a network of local musicians, tastemakers, and influencers who would be able to promote the Converse brand, rewarding them with a pair of premium shoes.

Third, experienced bloggers are generally aware that they are required to disclose their relationships with sponsors and already have practices in place in order to do so (Burns, 2012). When a company targets influencers with free products or gift cards, it cannot be assumed that those consumers will provide full disclosure when, for example, they post about an event where they received freebies or share what they purchased with their gift cards.

The Walmart Moms panel, a strategy the company has been using since 2008, includes nine moms, all influential bloggers. They are transparent in their blog posts that they are part of the panel and are being compensated. The Walmart Moms webpage is also explicit in saying that participation is voluntary and that disclosure of compensation is required.

Finally, advocate campaigns are often designed around garnering votes from friends or sending branded messages to friends so in this context, the sponsor is obvious.

For example, in 2012, Ferrero, maker of Ferrero Rocher, launched the e-commerce site Ferrero China. To promote the site, visitors could personalize, share, and send a Christmas greeting when they purchased a box of chocolates. The message could also be shared on social media sites with a virtual gift. The participants who sent virtual gifts were then eligible to win a Ferrero Christmas box set delivered to their home by a Ferrero ambassador, who might be a celebrity or model.

The campaigns located for this study did not employ any methods that intentionally lacked transparency, with the exception of one. Through a campaign conducted by Machinima, a video entertainment network, Microsoft offered videogamers an opportunity to earn financial rewards by posting videos featuring the Xbox One on YouTube. To be paid, users had to include at least 30 seconds of gameplay or footage in their video, mention the specific game being played, and tag the video with XB1M13. The agreement between Machinima and Microsoft stated that all feedback must be positive and the terms of agreement must remain confidential in order for participants to be paid at the rate of \$3 per thousand views. When the invitation from Machinima to videogamers was exposed, the backlash from the community toward Microsoft was damaging.

Discussion

Influencer and brand advocacy campaigns take advantage of the power of social media, allowing influencers and advocates to easily share content within their networks. This study explores the execution of these types of campaigns as well as the ethical issues surrounding transparency. The present study found a range of advocacy and influencer campaigns among 25 of the Top 50 Facebook brands with some of the brands using more than one of these campaigns during the two-year time period studied. The content generated for these campaigns was either intended for one particular social media site, such as YouTube or Instagram, or for a variety of social media sites. Interestingly, Facebook was mentioned less frequently than other social media platforms for sharing content created through these types of campaigns. Finally, the execution of most of these campaigns made transparency practically unavoidable, but still raised some questions.

The present study was limited in that it only reviewed published accounts of campaigns from the top Facebook brands. Behind many of these brands are global corporations that run many different campaigns throughout the world managed by many different agencies. It is likely that many brand advocacy and influencer campaigns were overlooked because there was simply no information about them available on the web or they could not be located using the selected keywords.

Future research should explore variables that increase the effectiveness of brand advocacy and influencer campaigns. Suggestions include the compatibility of the influencer/advocate and the product as well as the variables of reach and trust as they relate to the influencer or advocate. Additional variables to explore include commitment or emotional connection to the brand, the role of incentives, and the ability of the influencer or advocate to communicate. Agencies are also still learning how to best locate and activate advocates and influencers and future research could add valuable understanding to this process. The success of influencer and advocacy campaigns are often guided by Key Performance Indicators, metrics that should be further explored. Common KPIs related to these types of campaigns include the number of brand advocates/influencers and brand advocacy scores, such as the Net Promoter Score (Gleanster, 2011). Social network analysis could also be particularly useful in understanding the dissemination of conversation that is triggered by influencers or brand advocates. In addition to focusing on the influencer or advocate, future research should also examine the effectiveness of this strategy on the consumers who are exposed to these messages.

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Public Relations Efforts in Social Media: An Examination of Corporate Partners' Social Media Responses to a Partnership Charity in Crisis

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Abstract

This study aims to advance crisis communication and relationship management application and theory by examining the crisis response strategies used by corporations during a time of crisis involving a nonprofit partner. A content analysis is performed on the Facebook pages of companies that were corporate partners of large nonprofits at a time the nonprofit organizations were seen as having been involved in a scandal.

In response to rising consumer awareness of a wide range of issues related to business practice, including the morality of profit, unfair labor standards, environmental concerns, domestic job creation, and more (Bussey, 2011; Rushkoff, 2011), businesses are increasingly emphasizing the importance of implementing corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs into their marketing strategies (Stengel, 2009). Research has shown that publics' perceptions of corporations engaging in CSR activities, such as cause-related marketing campaigns, where a portion of sales are donated to a charity, are generally more favorable than their view of companies that do not engage in such activities (Arendt & Brettel, 2010; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). In fact, a recent Time magazine poll (Stengel, 2009) found that nearly 40 percent of people surveyed had purchased a product because "they liked the social or political values of the company that produced it."

But what happens when a company suddenly finds itself supporting a nonprofit that is in crisis? While the idea of a charity becoming involved with a *corporation* in scandal may seem a more likely scenario (Herman, Head, Jackson & Fogarty, 2004), corporations also face risks in partnering with charities that are "associated with some value that is inconsistent with those of the consumer" (Kotler & Lee, 2005, p. 101). Though the intent of companies that engage in CSR programs is generally good (Waddock, 2008), this may be lost on consumers if the company supports a controversial cause or charity or one that acts in a way that offends the consumer.

This study aims to advance crisis communication application and theory by examining the crisis response strategies used by corporations on their social media pages during a time of crisis involving a nonprofit partner. This is accomplished by looking at a case that occurred in 2012 and involved Susan G. Komen and Planned Parenthood. Using situational crisis communication theory as a theoretical foundation, a qualitative content analysis was performed on the Facebook pages of 57 of Komen's corporate partners to identify the specific response strategies used by the companies during two distinct phases of the crisis. Relationship management theory and the contingency theory of strategic conflict management were also utilized in exploring the possible contingent factors of investment and business exposure on the companies' selected strategies.

The Susan G. Komen and Planned Parenthood Crisis

When the news broke in early 2012 that Susan G. Komen for the Cure would stop providing nearly \$700,000 a year in funding to Planned Parenthood, the breast cancer charity, lauded in the past for its contributions to women's health, found itself in the crosshairs of a politically-charged controversy that quickly escalated to a full-blown crisis for the organization (Belluck, 2012). Founded in 1982, Susan G. Komen for the Cure (Komen) has grown from a small, home-based charity founded to find a cure for breast cancer into one of the largest nonprofits in the United States, commanding more than \$350 million in revenue in the 2010-2011 fiscal year ("Guidestar quick view," 2012). Over the course of its 31-year history, Komen has expended close to \$2 billion on "ground-breaking research, community health outreach, advocacy and programs in more than 50 countries" ("Our work," 2012).

Komen said the cuts were made because Planned Parenthood was under investigation by a member of the U.S. Congress, citing its policy against supporting organizations under formal investigation by a government body (Goldberg, 2012). Critics cried foul, claiming that Komen had, instead, caved to conservative and religious groups and had created the investigations rule as "an excuse to cut off Planned Parenthood" because the organization provides abortions (Goldberg, 2012). Public outcry and hostility was not directed exclusively at Komen, however.

Amid the fallout of Komen's decision, angry consumers took to the social media pages of Komen's corporate sponsors to call for boycotts of sponsor products (Newell, 2012).

Facing mounting pressure to change course, Komen eventually backtracked and reversed its decision just four days after the furor began (Belluck, Preston & Harris, 2012). While Komen did not lose any of its corporate supporters as an immediate result of the controversy, it has experienced a downturn in public support since the controversy began and several partners have allowed their partnership agreements to expire.

Corporate Social Responsibility Defined

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), also referred to as corporate citizenship, corporate philanthropy, corporate social responsiveness, or corporate social performance (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2009; Kotler & Lee, 2005), has been broadly defined as "how businesses act to implement the broad societal responsibility of going beyond economic criteria, such as creating products, employment and profits, to meet broader social and environmental expectations" (Pomeroy & Johnson, 2009). Researchers and practitioners have long disagreed about what exactly those "broader social and environmental expectations" encompass and the requirements for achieving them.

Historically, an economic viewpoint of business proliferated, with most people in society expecting businesses to only be concerned with their own self-interest (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2009). Bowen (1953) is frequently cited as one of the first researchers to make solid recommendations about a business's role in society, proposing the use of "industry councils" to aid in the promotion of ethics through fair pay, use of sustainable materials, and labor standards. Scholars have since offered numerous models and theories for CSR, presenting a confusing landscape of often conflicting ideas (Garriga & Mele, 2004). In an effort to slice through the confusion, Garriga and Mele (2004) performed a content analysis on the various theories that have been presented and found that CSR theories can be categorized into four groups: "instrumental theories," in which profit is a business' only concern and socially responsible activities are seen as a means to an end; "political theories," which are concerned with the power of corporations in society and the "responsible use of this power in the political arena;" "integrative theories," where a company considers social demands and integrates society's values into its actions; and "ethical theories," which are based on various ethical approaches and concern themselves with the responsibilities of corporations to society (p. 63-64).

Types of CSR Programs

While corporate giving and community involvement are two types of CSR activities that have been extensively studied in the literature (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), Kotler and Lee (2005) identified a total of six mutually beneficial CSR initiatives that companies can use to support causes, along with key benefits and drawbacks to each approach:

Cause promotions: Focus on persuading *consumers* to "contribute to the cause or participate in activities to support the cause" (p. 50) through promotional efforts not tied to sales of a product.

Cause-related marketing: Involves the company making a contribution to a cause based on sales of products. Donation may be in the form of a specific dollar amount or percentage of revenues. Benefits to the company include identifying new customers and increasing sales.

Corporate social marketing: Support of a "behavior change campaign intended to change public health, safety, the environment, or community well-being" (p. 114). Examples include

smoking cessation or gun safety campaigns. Enhanced brand positioning is an intended benefit of such programs.

Corporate philanthropy: A direct contribution is made to a charity in the form of cash donations, grants, scholarships, or in-kind services or products. Creates goodwill for the company through affiliation with charitable brand.

Community volunteering: The corporation encourages and supports employees volunteering their time in the community. Efforts can vary from simple encouragement to volunteer to paid time off for employees to providing cash grants for employee charitable projects.

Finally, Kotler and Lee (2005) point to *socially responsible business practices* as the sixth CSR initiative a company may undertake. Socially responsible business practices involve changing “internal processes and procedures” to make an impact on issues of importance to employees, suppliers and other company partners, and the general public (pp. 208). However, Kotler and Lee (2005) propose socially responsible business practices as one of *many* options for businesses, unlike the perspectives advanced by other researchers (Waddock, 2008; Werhane, 2008), who argue that socially responsible business practices should be more than short-sighted, narrow programs focused on meeting company goals.

Criticisms and Drawbacks to CSR Partnerships

While promoting CSR activities cannot overcome a poor product offering or inadequacy of customer service, a growing body of research shows links between CSR and consumers’ product evaluations and purchase intent (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). These potential advantages – the premise of doing well by doing good – are an oft-cited explanation for why businesses engage in socially responsible activities (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001). Though a true causal link between “doing good” to doing well financially has been questioned (Vogel, 2005), scholars have argued that socially responsible companies enjoy benefits including greater sales, enhanced corporate image, and increased appeal to employees and investors (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

Framing Theory

Framing theory has been described as how news frames function “to suggest how audiences can interpret an issue or event” (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p. 19). Frames help to define problems, identify the sources of the problems, evaluate the causes and their effects from a moral standpoint, and offer suggestions on how the problems may be solved (Entman, 1993). Communicators make conscious decisions to make certain aspects of an issue more salient; then, through the deliberate use of images, words or phrases, they guide a receiver’s thinking (Entman, 1993). Framing theory has been applied to a wide range of issues in the literature, including politics (Scheufele, 1999; Scheufele, 2000), social and environmental issues (Lancaster, Hughes, Spicer, Matthew-Simmons, & Dillon, 2011; Newman, Howlett, Burton, Kozup, & Heintz Tangari, 2012), and even corporate social responsibility programs (Gert-Jan Steltenpool & Verhoeven, 2012; Tengblad & Ohlsson, 2010).

Framing in Crisis Communication

A majority of research related to framing has focused on its practice by the news media, yet framing’s role in how people make judgments about the world also makes it an important tool for public relations practitioners (Hallahan, 1999). Framing has been applied to public relations research primarily in looking at crisis response and in circumstances where public

perception of an issue is negative (Davis, 2010; Oyer, Saliba, & Yartey, 2010; Steltenpool & Verhoeven, 2012). Corporations can build frames to take credit for their positive behaviors (ie. CSR initiatives) or to avoid or shift blame for negative ones, like those involved during times of crisis (Hallahan, 1999).

Hallahan (1999) proposed seven models (or strategies) for framing's use in public relations. The models provide practitioners with a more-definitive structure to assist in the selection of appropriate and effective frames in corporate communication and are based on three overarching techniques that can be used to frame an issue – valence framing (portraying an issue as good or bad), semantic framing (use of alternative phrasing or language to describe an issue), and storytelling (selecting key themes and using narratives to support that frame). Most directly related to the present study are the framing of attributes, framing of risky choices, framing of issues, and framing of responsibility models (Hallahan, 1999).

Framing of attributes is used to persuade by bringing negative or positive attention to certain attributes of people, products or events. Though most commonly used in advertising and marketing products, companies can use this technique to emphasize their own good work, ie. their corporate social responsibility programming (Hallahan, 1999). *Framing of risky choices* is based on prospect theory, which argues that people are more likely to engage in behavior that minimizes losses, rather than that which may render equal gains (Hallahan, 1999). The *issues framing model* acknowledges that controversial issues “frequently result in extensive public discussion” among parties that are in dispute with one another. A public relations practitioner may create frames to define the issue and assist in resolving such disputes or to control the “prominence of the issue” in the media (Hallahan, 1999, p. 227). Finally, the *framing of responsibilities* technique involves attribution of the cause or responsibility of some event.

Framing Corporate Social Responsibility Programs

Scholars have examined the use of frames in corporate social responsibility communication. However, most of the research centers on using a corporate social responsibility program as a frame and examining its effects (Steltenpool & Verhoeven, 2012), rather than looking at the frames used to communicate about a CSR program. Steltenpool and Verhoeven (2012) used experimentation to measure how CSR messaging used as a frame influenced consumer purchase decisions about beverages. Similarly, Wang (2007) examined the use of CSR programs as a way to prime audiences before showing them a news report on a company framed in either a negative or positive manner, measuring the effect of CSR on the perception of the company. Research that has looked at the content of frames related to CSR programming has focused on the analysis of those frames in the news media, rather than in corporate communication vehicles (Lee & Kim, 2010). More directly related to the current study, Waller and Conaway (2011) discussed how Nike successfully used framing in its messages to counteract media frames that presented the company as socially irresponsible.

Crisis Communication Strategies

A corporation faces a crisis when it is accused of being responsible for an action that is deemed “offensive” (Benoit, 1997), which in turn poses a threat to the reputation of the organization under attack (Coombs, 2007). During times of crisis, even a well-regarded organization, like Komen, may find that prior favor with the public is not enough to prevent stakeholders from demanding answers, spreading negative information, and changing behaviors toward the organization (sales, donations, etc.). And while having a plan in place for handling

potential situations before crisis strikes may be helpful, organizations with crisis plans may not always handle crises better than those without them (Marra, 1998). Other factors, such as company culture and autonomy of the public relations department, have been found to be better predictors of crisis management success than crisis planning (Marra, 1998).

When a crisis occurs, plan in place or not, managers are tasked with acting quickly to assess the situation and identify the audiences that must be addressed (Benoit, 1997). Organizations need to communicate with those audiences first to provide information on “what to do to protect themselves from the crisis (instructing information)” and secondly, “to help them cope psychologically with the crisis (adjusting information)” (Coombs & Holladay, 2008, p. 252). Adjusting information provides information about what happened, what is being done to prevent similar crises in the future (“corrective actions”), and shows concern for the victims (Coombs, 2007, pg. 165).

Because of the high stakes involved, how to strategically respond to crisis has been the topic of numerous studies over the years. A quantitative analysis of literature published over an 18-year period found that most crisis literature focuses on two theories, both of which focus on reputational restoration following crisis: Benoit’s image repair theory and Coombs’ situational crisis communication theory (Avery, Lariscy, Kim, & Hocke, 2010). Coombs’ (2007) situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) offers some of the same strategies as image repair theory, but emphasizes a more contingent nature of crisis response.

Similar to the framing of responsibilities technique described by Hallahan (1999), Coombs suggests public relations practitioners use framing to shape how responsibility for the crisis is perceived since how publics perceive a crisis and attribute blame for negative outcomes impacts the “reputational threat” to the organization (Coombs, 2007). Responsibility for a crisis can be segmented using three categories: organization as victim, accidental situations, and preventable situations (Coombs, 2007). Perception of a crisis also hinges on “crisis stability” – ie., is there a pattern of similar behavior or crisis situations with the organization (Coombs, 2000). Viewing crisis response through the lens of stakeholder relational history – favorable, neutral, or negative – is also effective in predicting which crisis response strategies will be most successful (Coombs, 2000, pp. 87-89). Situational crisis communication theory holds that “an organization that treated stakeholders badly in the past is attributed greater crisis responsibility and suffers more direct and indirect reputational damage than an organization with a neutral or positive relationship reputation” (Coombs, 2007, p. 169).

With these contingent factors in mind, crisis response strategies are used to “establish a frame or to reinforce an existing frame once the crisis type has been identified by the organization” (Coombs, 2007, p. 171). Possible strategies fall into three main categories – deny, diminish, and rebuild (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). A secondary strategy of bolstering may be used to reinforce any of the other strategies, and includes emphasizing the organization’s status as a victim, emphasizing past good works, and praising publics (Coombs, 2007).

Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management

Public relations excellence theory delineates four distinct models of practicing public relations, based on the direction of communication and power of the communicators – the press agency/publicity model (one-way asymmetric), the public information model (one-way symmetric), the two-way asymmetrical, and the two-way symmetric model (Grunig, 1992; Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Researchers emphasizing a normative perspective of public relations have argued that the ideal public relations practice is the two-way symmetrical or “mutually

beneficial communication” model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Scholars calling for a less rigid explanation of how public relations is best practiced introduced the contingency theory of strategic conflict management, arguing that “any attempt to identify a single model of practice for public relations in an organization, much less a single ideal model of practice, is difficult at best” and that such models are “unrealistic” in every day practice (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997, p.37). Contingency theory asserts that public relations decision making actually takes place along a continuum, and involves adopting stances ranging from pure advocacy to pure accommodation (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001; Cancel et al., 1997).

Multiple variables could potentially influence the amount of accommodation taken by a practitioner (Cancel et al., 1997), and throughout the course of the theory’s development, 87 contingent variables influencing the relative stance of the organization have been identified (Cancel et al., 1999). The variables have been further quantified into 12 categories, designated as either internal or external variables. External categories were identified as industry environment, public relationships, political/social/cultural environment, external threats, and public power (Shin, Cameron, & Cropp, 2006). Those considered internal are the organization’s development, organization’s structure, PR department independence, PR department governance, management characteristics, individual capabilities, and individual characteristics (Shin, et al., 2006). The variables also fall into categories of predisposing variables and situational variables (Cancel et al., 1999). Predisposing variables include items like organization size, corporate culture, public relations access to the dominant coalition, and so on. Situational variables identified include such items as urgency of the situation, threats (negative publicity, etc.), general perception of the public on an issue, characteristics of threatening public (ie. size, ability to get media coverage), feasibility of accommodating, among others (Cancel et al., 1999).

Theory of Relationship Management

Many scholars have attempted to conceptualize public-organization relationships. In response to calls for further definition of the concept, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) defined organization-public relationship as 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 either entity” (p. 62). Organization-public relationships have also been described as “patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics” (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000, p. 18).

Relationships form when there is recognition of an interdependence that exists among various parties (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999). This realization could be related to the fact that the parties need something from the other, face mutual threats, or have some legal reason to associate with one another (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). Contingency theory scholars have shown that the quality of public relationships impacts the level of accommodation used in a public relations strategy (Shin et al., 2006). This principle is applied in the situational crisis communication theory literature, which holds that the history of public-organization relationships is a contingent factor impacting how crises are perceived by a public (Coombs, 2007). Likewise, relationships are essential to successful corporate social responsibility partnerships. Such partnerships involve at least two parties – a corporation that is supporting a charitable organization and the charitable organization itself.

Relationship Outcomes

Hon and Grunig (1999) have linked success in building relationships with effectiveness of public relations activities, asserting that the “value of public relations can be determined by measuring the quality of relationships with strategic publics.” Several scales have been developed to measure the quality of organization-public relationships. Huang’s (2001) scale, known as the Organization–Public Relationship Assessment (OPRA), includes the dimensions of trust, commitment, satisfaction, control mutuality, and a dimension related to strategies of managing social relationships in Chinese culture (Huang, 2001, p. 69). In a quantitative study looking at how relationships affect the consumer decision making process, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) likewise found support for the relational dimensions of trust and commitment in predicting consumer behavior, as well as three other factors: openness, involvement, and investment.

Relationships in CSR

Even though organizations can be considered a public, it should be noted that the literature described to this point describes relationships that an organization has with a public that is made up of individuals, rather than another organization. Grunig and Huang (2000) note this disparity by pointing out that prior research based on resource dependency theory and exchange theory was commonly used earlier for describing organization to organization relationships, but more current research on the subject has evolved to address environmental pressures from groups made of individuals like “publics and activist groups” (p. 35).

Within the context of organization to organization partnerships, determining whether the relationship is exchange or communal may be key to defining the quality of the relationship. Hon & Grunig (1999) define an exchange relationship as one where “a party is willing to give benefits to the other because it expects to receive benefits of comparable value to the other. In essence, a party that receives benefits incurs an obligation or debt to return the favor” (p. 20). In a communal relationship, “both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other—even when they get nothing in return” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 20). Hon and Grunig (1999) note that “communal relationships are important if organizations are to be socially responsible and to add value to society” (p. 21). Corporate social responsibility partnerships stress mutually beneficial outcomes, going beyond simple transactional or exchange relationships. However, by engaging in communal relationships there is *some* expectation of benefit in the long-run, as organizations expect that by “being concerned about communal relationships” they will “encounter less opposition and more support over the long term from their publics” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 21).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to advance crisis communication and relationship management application and theory by examining the crisis response strategies used by corporations during a time of crisis involving a nonprofit partner. Specifically, this task is approached from a contingency theory viewpoint, with the researcher striving to explore how Komen’s corporate sponsors’ level of investment in its charity partner, as well as its size and level of exposure, impacted its use of crisis communication strategies, such as those suggested by Coombs’ (2007) situational crisis communication theory.

Research Questions

Based on the literature review, the following questions for study emerged:

RQ 1a.: *How did Komen's corporate partners respond when news of the cuts to Planned Parenthood broke?*

RQ1b.: *How did Komen's corporate partners respond after funding was restored?*

RQ2: *How did the responses of Komen's corporate sponsors with more time or money invested in the partnership compare with those with less money or time invested?*

RQ3: *How did sponsors of different organization sizes and levels of business exposure/visibility respond to the crisis?*

Methodology

Given the research questions, a qualitative approach is used as it allows for the deeper exploration of issues or problems (Creswell, 2013). Content analysis is an appropriate method of research for this study as it can demonstrate how sources construct messages to influence receivers (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2008), with a focus on messages "actually produced in practice" (Stacks, 2002, p. 108). In this study, qualitative content analysis is used to look at actual frames, or crisis response strategies, used by corporations during crisis. Facebook was selected as the social media outlet because of its immense popularity (reaching 1 billion users in 2012; see Vance, 2012) and the ability to easily revisit posts made in past years through the "Facebook timeline"; Twitter only allows for review of posts made one year prior to a point in time. Since data was not collected until 2013, this proved important to gaining accessibility to posts made in 2012.

To provide context, and to assist in answering research questions two and three, the researcher studied the situation within which corporations framed their message – examining consumer viewpoints during the crisis period, information about the company's history with the charity, and financial and business information related to the company, along with numerous news articles and blog posts published about the crisis in 2012. Qualitative techniques were used to create categories for coding the data. A constant comparative method was used to examine individual posts as the unit of analysis for their use of Coombs' (2007) crisis response strategies and common themes.

Sample Selection

A multi-step sampling strategy was employed. The sampling process looked at Komen's current partner list and a list that circulated on social media during the crisis period (see www.facebook.com/pages/Boycott-Susan-G-Komen-Corporate-Partners; <http://www.democraticunderground.com/1002258543>; <http://pjfusco.com/?p=1332>).

Data Collection

Following the selection of the companies, the corporate Facebook pages were located. If more than one corporate page existed for a multinational company, the U.S. page was used.

The possible influence of the level of investment on corporation response during the crisis was explored. Investment has been found to be an important element of organization-public relationships, and refers to the time, energy, feelings, efforts and other resources given to build the relationship (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Therefore, question two was addressed by recording both the length of time each company has been in partnership with Komen and the amount of money donated by each company to the cause, as stated on the Susan G. Komen or

corporate sponsors' websites. In addition to noting the total amount of funds donated to the cause, the corporation's membership in a specific partnership "circle," a way that Komen recognizes the annual giving level of its partner organizations, was noted.

Coding Procedure

Interacting with the document being studied is a key element in conducting qualitative content analysis (Altheide, 2013). A constant comparison method was used in identifying frames and themes as the data was analyzed. Constant comparison involves a "back and forth process" of reading, making notes, re-reading, comparing items, making summaries of findings, and using inductive reasoning to build themes up from the data (Altheide, 2013; Creswell, 2014). Individual company posts were used as the unit of analysis.

Categories related to company and partnership information (such as size, revenue and giving history) were coded using corporation financial statements, Komen's and its corporate sponsors' websites, news articles about the controversy, and the Facebook pages of the companies, as well as Dun & Bradstreet's Million Dollar Company database, which reported 2012 revenues and employee information.

Results and Discussion

Number and Location of Posts

A review of the Facebook pages of the 57 companies chosen for analysis revealed that silence was the most frequently used communication technique employed by Komen's partners during and after news of the controversy broke. Thirty-eight companies chose not to respond to the crisis on Facebook, even though many posted on other topics during the time period observed. Nineteen companies did post information on their Facebook pages relevant to the controversy, however. In total, 344 posts were made by those companies during the time period studied – and 282 of these were made by Energizer. Many companies posted only in response to negative consumer comments made publicly on the company's Facebook page.

Consumer Reaction

Though consumer perception was not the focus of this study, the context it provides is relevant to understanding the situation within which Komen's corporate sponsors found themselves. Therefore, the comments on each page were reviewed, notable posts were recorded, and patterns observed across multiple pages were summarized.

Comments posted on all of the companies' pages during the time period observed were overwhelmingly negative in sentiment toward the companies' support of Komen. These posts were made directly to the companies' timelines as well as on unrelated posts the companies had posted. Many posts urged the companies to reconsider their partnership. A typical post of this type is seen in this comment to Energizer:

Alexandra (Feb. 2, 2012 to Energizer): I was very distressed to see that Energizer is listed on Komen for the Cure's webpage as a corporate sponsor. I have been your customer for a very long time and I urge you to withdraw your support for SGK.

In addition to voicing displeasure with the corporate partnership, many consumers stated their intent to "boycott" the company if the partnership remained intact, and naming alternative brands they would purchase instead:

Andy (Feb. 1, 2012 to Boar's Head): LOVE your products. Won't be buying them anymore because of your partnership with Susan G. Komen though. Bummer.

Politics was a frequent theme of conversation and this seemed to mirror offline debate found in news coverage about the issue. Consumers noted possible political motivation in Komen's decision, as well as their perception that Komen's partners are guilty of playing partisan politics by association:

Kathryn (Feb. 1, 2012): don't (sic) buy Evian if you support the great work of Planned Parenthood. Evian gives money to the Komen Foundation which just pulled its support for breast cancer screenings for poor women. This (sic) did this under pressure from right-wing extremists who want to limit (sic) women's access to quality healthcare. Go Poland Springs!

While negative posts comprised most of the activity on the companies' pages, a minority of consumers did voice their support of the companies for their partnership with Komen. On several pages, consumers argued with each other about the underlying issues influencing Komen's decision – topics included the legality and morality of abortion, political partisanship, and the charity's "worthiness." While the overall response was negative, companies were in fact tasked with responding to consumers holding multiple viewpoints and expectations.

A point worth mentioning is that many companies received no feedback on their Facebook pages about the issue. This was surprising because the lists of Komen's corporate partners circulating on the Web included all of the companies analyzed. It was found that several consumers had posted the same message on multiple pages, but they did not post on all pages. This indicates that some criteria was developed and used by consumers in determining which companies should hear their opinions.

Strategies Used During Phases of the Crisis

According to SCCT, Komen's corporate partners faced an "accident" crisis type (the exception being Pepperidge Farm, which faced an organization as victim crisis due to the rumor circulating when the crisis broke that it was still one of Komen's charitable partners). According to SCCT, with an accident crisis type, one of the diminish strategies should have been used by the companies assuming their relationship history was positive or neutral prior to the crisis and they had not faced similar crises (Coombs, 2007). This study found that most companies did in fact use an excuse or justification strategy but there were some exceptions. Differences were also observed in the different phases of the crisis that were studied.

No Response as a Strategy

Thirty-eight companies did not respond to the crisis on their Facebook timelines. Many of them did post about other topics, however. Product promotions were common – Dell pushed a virus protection software and OPI a line of nail polishes. Posts about timely events like Groundhog Day and the Super Bowl were also frequent topics of posts. Surprisingly, some companies even promoted their support of other charities in the days following the crisis. Walgreen's talked about a program to support the Make-a-Wish Foundation, while Mrs Baird's Bakeries posted a comment about the American Heart Association's "Go Red for Women" day.

If it was the intention of the companies to create a diversion by starting conversations about other topics, consumers found a way to bring the discussion back to what they felt was important. Company posts on the timeline, even those unrelated to the crisis, provided a prominent place for consumers to post their feedback.

Of the companies that did not post about the controversy, 17 were companies that received comments from consumers about the situation on their Facebook pages. While we cannot know if the company sent a private message to those consumers, the available information gives the impression that no response was made. Though these companies did not deny involvement outright, silence about the situation has been characterized as an advocative stance (Chang et al., 2012). Silence means companies may face criticism from those that perceive the company has something to hide; but with such a sensitive topic and with so many parties involved (pro-Komen consumers, pro-Planned Parenthood, and Komen itself), these companies may have felt that the greater risk lied in alienating any one public through a response that was not well-received. It is also possible they did not feel the probability of loss as a result of the crisis was great enough to warrant response (Seeger et al., 2003).

Among those that did not receive feedback about the issue on their Facebook pages, no response may certainly have been the best response. Perhaps their consumers provided feedback through other means (mail, email, phone calls, etc.), and Facebook was not the expected or preferred communication tool for their audiences. Or perhaps they did not receive negative feedback at all, meaning the perceived threat was low. Threat has been identified as a contingent variable impacting the amount of accommodation used in responding to a particular situation (Cancel et al., 1999). Without the perception of a high threat to the company, the company may have decided an advocative stance of silence was appropriate.

Finally, ethics may have also played a role in not responding. Cancel et al. (1999) discussed the notion that the accommodation of publics is not always the ethical choice, particularly if the public that is being accommodated is “morally repugnant” (p. 38) or not in line with a company’s values. Accommodating a public can mean “violating a practitioner’s moral convictions” as well countering business interests (Cameron, et al., 2000, p. 250). While some researchers have asserted that the safest and most ethical course of action is to respond in an honest manner, acknowledging the crisis and updating the public on what its position or course of action would be (Seeger et al., 2003), in some cases, limiting discussion may be the only choice to avoid being “combative” (Cameron, et al., 2000, p. 250).

However, it could be argued, particularly in the case of those companies that did receive questions and comments from consumers on their Facebook pages, that ignoring the issue gives the impression that consumers’ concerns are not important to the company. Companies that truly believed their position is the “right” one may have felt discussion would do little to improve the situation – but providing at least some basic information about the status of the situation would have helped publics learn about and process the situation (Sturges, 1994), as well as having shown a commitment to the company’s relationship with its consumers.

Crisis Breaking/Pre-Reversal

As the crisis broke, the most advocative stances were observed through the strategy of denial of crisis used by Georgia Pacific and Pepperidge Farm. The statements took different forms, but nonetheless conveyed the sense that there wasn’t a crisis afoot for the companies. Georgia Pacific reemphasized its commitment to the charity through its sponsorship. Pepperidge Farm on the other hand asserted that it was no longer involved with the charity, having “concluded its corporate sponsorship of Susan G. Komen for the Cure at the end of 2011 for business purposes,” despite consumer claims to the contrary on its Facebook page (the company was erroneously listed as a partner on Komen’s website at the time of the crisis).

The two examples show that the denial strategy was used by companies with opposite positions on the topic. Denial does little to address the concerns of victims (Coombs & Holladay, 2008), yet it is effective in situations where perceived responsibility is minimal, relationships with the public are positive prior to the crisis, and there is no history of similar crisis (Coombs, 2007). In Pepperidge Farm's case, claims that the company was still a Komen partner could be considered rumors, and according to the SCCT a denial strategy would be the best strategy to employ for that crisis type (Coombs, 2007).

Among those that acknowledged the crisis situation, Komen's role in the situation was a common theme. Given that some responsibility was attributed by consumers to the companies for their involvement in Komen's decision to de-fund Planned Parenthood, companies choosing a deny strategy of denial or scapegoating did not apply the principles of the SCCT to their response (except again for Pepperidge Farm, which used denial for dealing with a rumor). It is possible that they did not recognize a threat posed by the situation or that the companies. Threats have been found to be a contingent factor impacting the amount of accommodation used in responding to a crisis (Cancel et al., 1999). Another situational variable that has been noted as impacting the likelihood of using more accommodative techniques is balancing of interests (Cancel et al., 1999). In this case, the companies may have been weighing their responsibility to their consumers, the charity itself, and internal publics making decisions about the partnership.

Energizer, Boar's Head, and Otis Spunkmeyer used excuses to explain their involvement in the crisis. Each used the same excuse with the same terminology: that they were "unaware" that Komen was changing its grant policy.

Finally, the use of justification was observed in the days immediately following Komen's decision to de-fund Planned Parenthood. Holland America, Princess Cruises and Nuun each used the strategy in a similar way. The companies stressed that donations had gone to "women living with breast cancer" or "lifesaving breast cancer research," and not to grants to Planned Parenthood, underscoring the good the donations had done in an effort to minimize the controversy.

Post-Reversal

Researchers have noted the dynamic nature of crises and the need to "customize" crisis management strategies at each stage of a crisis to maximize the likelihood of positive public opinion following the crisis (Sturges, 1994). However, following Komen's apology and reversal of its decision, several companies that had previously responded to the controversy chose to let those responses be their last word on the topic (Georgia Pacific, Holland America, Princess Cruises, Nuun, Republic of Tea, Otis Spunkmeyer). Some who had previously replied responded again but did not change their strategy (Boar's Head, Pepperidge Farm).

Only two companies – Yoplait and Energizer – changed their response strategy following the reversal of Komen's decision. Both used more accommodating strategies. Early on Feb. 3, Yoplait continued to use adjusting information to express its understanding of consumers' frustrations, but after Komen had made its announcement, its posts used elements of excuse and adjusting information. Energizer's response shifted even more dramatically following the reversal of Komen's decision. While it had responded with an excuse strategy 280 times over the three days following the crisis breaking, on Feb. 3 it suddenly utilized a compensation strategy by announcing it would be making a donation to another charity:

Energizer (Feb. 3, 2012): We heard many comments from our consumers and what is clear is that promoting women's health, and finding a cure for breast cancer,

is a goal we share. To show you our appreciation for your passion and to further our commitment to this cause, Energizer is making a donation of \$50,000 to the Siteman Cancer Center, based in our hometown of St. Louis, MO, to fund even more mammograms specifically for those in need.

This strategy was the most accommodative strategy used by one of the companies analyzed for this study. It is possible that both Yoplait and Energizer may have initially misgauged the seriousness of the situation, moving to a more accommodative approach after they had time to assess the situation. Wording that makes it clear that the response is based only on the most current information would have likely made it easier for the companies to shift their strategies (Seeger et al., 2003).

Others who had *not* responded previously spoke up after Komen's decision had been reversed. Deluxe Checks, La Madaleine and LPGA simply used adjusting information in their responses to consumer comments posted on their Facebook pages. Chesapeake Bay Candle, a small candle and gift merchandiser, did not post about the crisis on its own timeline, but it did take time to respond to two consumers who expressed concern over the issue. Ford Motor Company mentioned the charity's role, saying they couldn't "speculate or comment on the motives behind Susan G. Komen for the Cure's decision."

The remaining companies used diminish strategies of excuse or justification. RE/MAX provided the only evidence of a coordinated crisis management strategy by linking from its Facebook page to a statement on its website. In that statement, the company shared its reasoning for partnering with Komen, stating that "because of the personal impact breast cancer has had on the RE/MAX family and the tremendous success Komen has experienced for 30 years, RE/MAX has been an energetic supporter of the breast cancer battle for many years." It also noted Komen's change of direction on the Planned Parenthood issue as reason to continue with its partnership.

Themes Observed Within Crisis Responses

Nineteen companies provided some response to the situation, and while various strategies were employed, several themes came to light across multiple posts.

The Cause vs. the Charity

Across the board, there was a tendency to note a commitment to "breast cancer research," "the fight against breast cancer," or "women's health initiatives," rather than a commitment specifically to Susan G. Komen. In fact, of the 19 companies that responded, just two (Georgia Pacific and Evian) iterated their continuing partnership with Komen specifically. This vagueness left some consumers puzzled. One replied to a company's post, "is this program in any way linked to the Susan G. Komen programs?" While it was clear that it was continuing its programs to support breast cancer research, the consumer who was not "in the know" about the issue would be left to do her own research about what transpired.

Seeger et al. (2003) noted the challenge during crises "to respond in ways that are specific enough to empower subsequent interpretation and action, yet flexible enough to accommodate what is obviously a dynamic and uncertain condition" (p. 132). It was clear when reading several of the company posts that they were attempting to show some response, while not overstating their position. The result: many responses that didn't really say anything. In the hours and days after the news broke of Komen's decision, dozens (or hundreds of consumers in Energizer's case) were left clamoring for answers, wondering what the "real" resolution would

Table 1.

*Company Responses During and After Komen's Crisis Breaking
Crisis breaking, Jan. 31, 2012 - Feb. 2, 2012*

Company	Primary Strategies	Bolstering Strategies
Georgia Pacific	Denial	None observed
Pepperidge Farms	Denial	None observed
Yoplait (General Mills)	Scapegoat Adjusting Information Providing Information	Reminder
Republic of Tea	Scapegoat Adjusting Information	None observed
Energizer	Excuse Adjusting Information	Victim实施, Reminder, Ingratiation
Otis Spunkmeyer	Excuse Adjusting Information	Victim实施, Reminder, Ingratiation
Boar's Head Provisions Co., Inc.	Excuse Providing Information	Reminder
Nuun	Justification	None observed
Holland America Line	Justification	Reminder
Princess Cruises	Justification	Reminder
<i>Post-Decision Reversal, Feb. 3, 2012 – Feb. 10, 2012</i>		
LPGA	Adjusting Information	None observed
Deluxe Checks	Adjusting Information	None observed
La Madeleine	Adjusting Information	Ingratiation Reminder
Pepperidge Farms	Denial	None observed
Chesapeake Bay Candle	Scapegoat Adjusting Information	Reminder
Ford Motor Company	Scapegoat Adjusting Information	None observed
Boar's Head Provisions Co., Inc.	Excuse	Victim实施, Reminder, Ingratiation
Evian	Excuse Justification	Reminder Ingratiation
Yoplait (General Mills)	Excuse Adjusting Information	Victim实施 Ingratiation
Jersey Mike's	Justification	Reminder Ingratiation
REMAX	Justification	Reminder
Candy Coburn	Justification	Reminder

Energizer	Compensation	Ingratiation
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be to the situation. In Energizer's case, the eventual response that it would be donating \$50,000 to another charity came with no explanation or context. It also didn't answer the question that was on everyone's minds at the time: *Will you continue to partner with Komen?*

When dealing with a highly contentious topic like that broached in this case, it is obvious that companies are resistant to positioning themselves solidly in one group's line of fire. However, an honest response may have gone a long way toward helping consumers process the situation.

Timing of Responses

Without the human victims or environmental consequences that violent crises involve, the companies had to deal with tempering a situation that consumers found "offensive" (Benoit, 1997). Some companies set about doing this almost immediately. Georgia, Pacific, Yoplait and Energizer responded on the same day the crisis broke, while Boar's Head and Otis Spunkmeyer posted the day after. Every other company waited to respond until Feb. 2 or after. This often meant that the responses came several days after consumers posted their comments. In the case of the LPGA, no response was made on its golf clinics page until Feb. 10 – a full 10 days after the crisis broke. It is interesting that a host of companies provided no response whatsoever until Komen had reversed its decision on its funding of Planned Parenthood. Many referred to the reversal in their posts, subtly indicating Komen's culpability in the situation. Yoplait and Energizer, having made posts on the topic immediately after the crisis broke, swung their subsequent posts to the opposite end of the accommodative continuum following Komen's reversal – perhaps having had time to meet with Komen executives, listen to consumers, and observe the reversal of the decision.

Detachment from "Decision Makers"

Victimage was a common strategy used to show that the companies could "relate" to their consumers feelings about the issue. However, it was observed that a few social media managers took relationship building with consumers a step further by disassociating themselves from the decision makers at the company and giving a more personal, less "PR" response.

In responding to a consumer, Deluxe Checks' social media manager made this explicit by saying she/he was "listening to your comments and sharing them with decision makers at Deluxe." Boar's Head likewise used this strategy in response to a consumer concern posted on its Facebook page: "Thank you for your comment, Catherine. Will certainly pass this along to the appropriate people."

This could be interpreted as a subtle use of victimage on the part of the social media manager. Separating themselves from the decision makers puts them at the level of the consumer who is making the complaint – essentially saying, *I'm just like you – I don't make the decisions around here.*

The "official" company statements were necessary to relate important information about the situation, but consumers may expect more personal, less formal communication on social media than elsewhere as social media provides ways to communicate in an almost instantaneous manner directly with companies and individuals.

Of course, some companies exhibited the opposite technique. Energizer, Evian, Otis Spunkmeyer, Pepperidge Farm, La Madeleine continuously posted the same responses or slightly

modified versions of the same responses as comments to consumers in the days following the crisis breaking. Yoplait did as well, though they interrupted the monotony from time to time with some personalized responses just as consumer frustration seemed to be simmering over. Given the fact that the companies were receiving input from consumers, it was appropriate that the companies responded in some manner, but one wonders whether these “copy and paste” responses were more harmful than they were helpful.

Contingent Factors Involved in the Crisis Response

Relationship with the Charity – The Impact of Investment

Within a qualitative study, it not possible to determine causation for the response choices made by the companies during the situation they encountered with the Komen controversy. However, qualitative analysis does provide an opportunity to discuss the possible underlying issues that may have been at play in greater detail, and some findings about the role of a company’s investment in a charity can be made as they relate specifically to this case.

Investment did seem to factor into whether the companies responded during and after the crisis. First and foremost, consumers recognized that the companies’ partnership with the charity indicates significant financial support. With that understanding, a certain level of responsibility for the charity’s actions is attributed to the corporation because of the funding they provide. This is evident in the multitude of comments calling for a boycott of the companies’ products, as customers understood that sales of company products are passed on to the charity and thus, support the charity’s activities that consumers have deemed inappropriate. A perception of joint decision making was also common to both sides of the issue, as this statement from a Komen supporter demonstrates (emphasis added): “I’m a woman and I am GLAD that *you guys* are withdrawing funds from Planned Parenthood grants ... *You and the Susan Foundation* did the right thing.”

Though most consumers referred to the companies as “corporate partners” in the general sense, several consumers demonstrated specific knowledge of the company’s giving history through their comments. These consumers seemed to attribute high levels of giving to greater expectations of responsibility and even a perception of control over the situation:

Kimberly T. (Feb. 2, 2012 to Energizer): Energizer, as a member of the Million Dollar Council please use your power to stand firm for women and advocate to SGK to restore their relationship with Planned Parenthood immediately ...

The Million Dollar Council was one of two partner recognition societies used by Komen at the time of the crisis. The Million Dollar Council recognized partners that had given \$1 million or more over the course of the partnership, while the other recognition society, the Million Dollar Council Elite, recognized companies that provided \$1 million or more to the charity annually.

Coombs (2007) has indicated that the perception of responsibility for a crisis is one of three variables that should be considered by the corporation when determining its crisis communication strategy. With a level of understanding about the financial commitment that corporate partners had made to Komen, consumers perceived the companies as having some responsibility for the crisis. It is this perception of financial investment as related to culpability then that may have affected the companies’ decision making process.

For the best example of this principle among the companies examined, we have to look no further than Energizer. By far, Energizer received the most comments on its Facebook page in the days following eruption of the controversy, the vast majority of which were negative in

nature. The heightened amount of criticism was due to the announcement of Energizer's inclusion in Komen's Million Dollar Council on the charity's own Facebook page just hours before the crisis broke. While many other companies were giving at this level at the time, Energizer was highlighted as a major supporter and this motivated consumers to speak out against the company. In Energizer's case, it seems likely that the choice to use compensation as its ultimate crisis response was driven by the overwhelming amount of attention the company received in the aftermath of Komen's decision, brought on by awareness of its magnitude of giving. Perception of the public on an issue has been identified as situational variable impacting the amount of accommodation a public relations practitioner will use in responding to a crisis situation (Cancel et al., 1999). It seems public perception of the level of responsibility of the company was impacted by awareness of the investment the company had made in the charity. This perception, along with the fact that this criticism was occurring online, in a public forum, may have contributed to Energizer's strategy.

Within the companies' posts, information about the history of philanthropic investments was a commonly used bolstering technique. Detailing the good that had been done by the companies – like the reminder from Jersey Mike's that “last year (it) supported hundreds of charities by raising more than \$2 million for great causes” – served to reinforce the companies' reputations as a good corporate citizens. Ingratiation largely centered around consumers' role in raising funds, ie. the idea that success had been achieved together.

Looking at longevity of the relationship, there did seem to be some patterns. It was observed that companies that had not been partners for more than a year or two did not have the same influx of consumer comments on their pages as those that had longer relationships. This was true for even larger, well-known brands, such as Walgreens. Perhaps there has simply not been enough time for awareness of the CSR partnership to develop. Studies have found that in general, consumer recall of specific company CSR programs is low (Pomeroy & Dolnicar, 2009). Consumers have been shown through experimental research to have favorable attitudes toward companies that engage in CSR activities – but this stance centers on actually knowing that the company is CSR-oriented (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). More than a third of the companies examined began their partnership in 2010 or later; of these, just four commented on the situation and only one (Jersey Mike's) made a response directly on its timeline.

The Role of Company Exposure

Along the same lines of what was observed with companies who had been in partnership with Komen for shorter amounts of time, size and exposure of the company seems to have played some role in whether a company was impacted by the crisis on its Facebook page. Ten out of the eleven companies who had less than 5,000 “likes” received no comments from consumers and did not provide any response to the situation through their Facebook pages. A company's “large size may cause them to be a target of interest or issue groups” (Cancel et al., 1999, p. 178). With so few participants engaging with the brand on this social media vehicle, and with no opposition to the situation expressed on the page, smaller companies may not feel it necessary to address the situation through this venue. In fact, the one company with fewer than 5,000 likes that did provide comment on the situation did so in response to criticism it received on the page.

As might be expected, well-known brand names and those that affiliated with retail goods or food and drink products received the bulk of the feedback from consumers. Brands versus stores/individual outlets seemed to get more attention, perhaps because of the wide-availability

and use of brands like Yoplait and Energizer, as opposed to a store like Sally Beauty that enjoys more of a niche market. All but two companies with Facebook followings larger than 200,000 received comments from consumers on the issue. Larger companies were less responsive to comments on their pages, with some obvious exceptions. Smaller companies may be able to give more personal service to their customers since their customer base is smaller; however, in studies on the topic, practitioners have stated their belief that the general public expects larger corporations to be more responsive to public demands than smaller businesses (Cancel et al., 1999, p. 177). From a practical perspective, this is especially important since during crisis the public's desire for a response is amplified, and stakeholders are not only seeking answers but expecting them in a timely fashion (Seeger et al., 2003).

Among those that responded, the use of certain frames did not seem to be associated with any specific industry or size of business. Some differences were observed in level of sophistication of the responses, however. The examples observed point to importance of factors related to the PR department and individual capabilities, which have been shown to impact response to conflict (Shin, et al., 2006).

Advancement of Contingency Theory

A rigorous review of actual responses used by corporations during the Komen/Planned Parenthood controversy shows that a range of strategies were used in responding to a common crisis. While many companies used a strategy recommended by the SCCT for the crisis type, many others either did not respond or used a response strategy other than what Coombs' (2007) model would prescribe.

Coombs (2007) suggested that crisis type, prior relationship with a public and crisis history could be used to determine the level of crisis responsibility attributed to a company, and in turn, the crisis response strategy that should be used. As shown in this study, some factors – including investment (money and time) and company size – do seem to influence the perception of the company's responsibility for the crisis, and likely played a role in how some (but not all) companies responded to the crisis. The assertion advanced by the SCCT, however, is that an increased level of responsibility should *always* trigger an increase in accommodation (Coombs, 2007). In the case of Energizer and Yoplait, a shift to more accommodative stances was observed as the crisis progressed, but this was not universally observed.

This highlights the idea that additional factors, like moral conviction or the beliefs of the dominant coalition, may have acted independently to influence a practitioner's strategy. In addition to the variables that were at the center of this study, situational factors such as balancing of interests and those related to the companies' publics (threats, perception of the public on an issue, characteristics of the public), as well as internal factors, such as experience of the PR practitioner (Cancel et al., 1999) were shown to potentially impact strategy decisions. With the exception of one organization (Candy Coburn), all of the companies that responded to the crisis did so after receiving feedback from consumers, making actions of the public another possible factor pushing companies to respond in the way they did.

This study looked only at the public-facing content of responses that were made following the crisis, and the researcher did not have access to internal documents or discussions among the companies' decision makers. Therefore, it is impossible to identify all of the factors that may have played a role in how each company responded to this situation. Despite that limitation, the findings provide support for contingency theorists' claims that a model like the SCCT, which uses a narrow set of contingent factors to predict a crisis response, is not sufficient

to explain why companies responded as they did to the crisis. Additionally, the case examined here challenges the use of SCCT as a tool in determining *how* best to respond a particular situation, as the SCCT does not provide for the complexity of the environment corporations are operating within.

In agreement with what Cancel et al. (1997) asserted, this content analysis shows that the response of Komen's corporate partners depends on a wide range of items, including internal, external, situational and predisposing factors. Examining real life cases like this one helps connect theory with practice. Of course, the findings of this qualitative study should not be confused with recommendations for ideal responses for given situations (Cameron, et al., 2000). Rather, it highlights the notion that depending on the situation, an effective crisis response may be found at a number of points along a continuum, and not within a fixed model.

Conclusions and Practical Implications

The research presented helps to advance our understandings of crisis response and relationship management theories. By examining multiple companies responding to the same crisis, the contingent nature of crisis management has also been further developed. Prior to this study, investment had been examined as an outcome of an organization's relationship with its publics, rather than as a possible contingent variable impacting response strategies during a crisis. Within the framework of corporate social responsibility partnerships, examples of the influence of investment in a charity on a company's response strategy have been identified as being related to the amount of responsibility attributed to the corporation, though further study is needed in this area. Additionally, as a result of this study, the role of other contingent variables (organization size and business exposure) have been explored within the realm of corporate social responsibility partnerships. This research has shown support for the assertion that size/exposure may impact how a company responds to a crisis, though perhaps not in the way other researchers have proposed (Cancel et al., 2009). In this case, larger companies were not as responsive as smaller companies, despite practitioner claims that there is an expectation that larger companies be more responsive to publics (Cancel et al., 2009).

The implications for this study go beyond the theoretical, however. Practitioners can learn from other companies that have experienced crisis scenarios such as the one examined in this case. One of the most evident learnings that can be gleaned from this study is the immense opportunity practitioners have for communication with publics through social media networks. During times of crisis, publics demand information in a timely manner and it is critical for practitioners to be responsive to consumers (Seeger et al., 2003). Within this study, practitioners were faced with a very sensitive situation that elicited a great deal of conversation on the companies' Facebook pages. As was seen in this case, the public nature of posts to a company's page means that those not in the "collective opinion" have a voice (Sturges, 1994, p. 300). But it also provides greater opportunities for public/collective opinion to form and to swell – providing a mouthpiece for the vocal minority that may not have been able to leverage the power necessary to incite change in the past.

Online communication has been praised for its effectiveness in fostering dialogic communication, enhancing transparency and building relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998). However, if during crisis, the conversation is led only by consumers, or the organization uses less accommodative techniques, the very essence of an open social media environment may be disrupted. Managing dissonance between wanting to use social media platforms to build relationships, while realizing that two-way symmetrical communication may not always be

desired or possible, is a challenge practitioners face in using social networking platforms like Facebook. This challenge may be compounded if a disconnect exists between who is managing social media and who manages the overall communication strategy of the organization. Crisis situations highlight the need for strategic management of all organizational communication, including social media content (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009). Companies must realize that social media is a vital component of building and maintaining corporate reputation, and management must be actively involved in developing social media strategies that address the various priorities and challenges of the business (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009).

Finally, this case presents questions for practitioners contemplating potential corporate social responsibility partnerships. As Kotler and Lee (2005) point out, there is inherent risk in partnering with a charity for a social responsibility project. The appropriateness of the charity should be determined in terms of how the charity or cause fits with the company's mission and the target audience's values (Kotler & Lee, 2005). This could prove important to heading off situations like the case in question where the crisis was not a violent one but instead appeared to be one of values or politics.

Limitations

Within this study, there are a few limitations. First, the sample included mainly companies that continued with their partnership with Susan G. Komen following the controversy. A small sample of data was used from corporate partners that have separated from Komen since the crisis, but it is possible that looking at more companies that have ended their partnership since the crisis situation transpired would have garnered different insights. Second, as a result of utilizing qualitative inquiry, there is the lack of generalizability of the findings to other crisis types or organizations. Since the study is based on a specific case study, the results should be considered within the framework of this particular crisis. Third, the study was conducted more than a year after the crisis had taken place. Altheide (2013) cautions researchers that content on social media outlets and websites can be altered or removed without warning. Since the crisis period analyzed in this study was in early 2012, and data analysis did not take place until 2013, it is possible that some Facebook posts were removed and information on websites was altered before data collection took place. Fourth, a second coder was not utilized. Checks on intercoder reliability may have highlighted potential discrepancies in the way the data was interpreted by the researcher, and may have led to different conclusions. Finally, as Coombs and Holladay (2012) noted, a limitation to looking at online communication is that you are only seeing communication amongst people who go online. It could be that consumers reacted in a different manner offline than they did online, impacting the overall threat perceived by the companies.

Future Research

This study focused primarily on the response strategies selected by companies facing the same crisis involving their nonprofit partner. While the context of the responses was considered in exploring the research questions, a natural extension of this study would be to examine the effectiveness of each company's response strategy by more deeply analyzing the resulting comments made by consumers. This study also only looked at a very small number of the variables identified through research on the contingency theory of strategic conflict management, and the applicability of contingency theory to nonprofit crisis applications is an area that remains largely unexplored. Finally, this case provides a wealth of opportunities for future research in a

number of areas including nonprofit autonomy, political communication, organization-public relationships, and ethics of corporate social responsibility programs.

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Wait, We Didn't Say That: Evaluating the Impact of Hostile Internet Communities on Organizational Reputation, Public Relationships, and Commitment

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Abstract

In 2013, the Marine Corps experienced negative press reports associated with the negative online behavior of Marines and this situation served as the impetus for this study. This study examined how exposure to negative content from Internet communities associated with an organization through activism, member employment, or because of distaste for the organization negatively impacts perceptions of an organization's reputation and potentially damages organization-public relationships. The study further examined how exposure to negative content from Internet communities impacted participants' propensity to interact with an organization in the future. A convenience sample (N=173) of San Diego State University students between the ages 18-24 participated in a posttest only control group experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to three experimental treatments designed to depict Internet communities that were negative, neutral, and positive in stance toward the United States Marine Corps. Results indicate that negative behavior and rhetoric displayed on Internet community sites by individuals associated with an organization through activism, employment or distaste for that organization had a detrimental impact on the organization's reputation, organization-public relationships, and commitment levels of key stakeholders.

The Internet offers freedom of speech to users; this freedom both enhances and inhibits an organization's ability to shape public opinion. Social media (SM) have expanded the ability of individual users to influence others by offering the opportunity to develop online relationships with other SM users and organizations (Ito, 2008). These network relationships connect people from different cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, and ethnicities into a common framework (Ito, 2008; Onishi, 2012). As new Internet communities develop on SM platforms, their specific brand of rhetoric may appear to be representative of an organization's ideals. Media agencies, activists, investors, employees, and private citizens are now on a more level playing field when they communicate with organizations and with each other. This, in turn, transforms how organization's monitor key stakeholder relationships and protect their reputation online (Broom & Sha, 2013; Meloy, 2011; PRSA, 2011).

Introduction

Currently, Internet communities that associate themselves with established organizations have the potential to misrepresent an organization's true ideals, which may lead to degraded public opinion and brand reputation. The ability for loosely organized online groups and Internet communities to impact public perceptions about an organization reveals the evolving nature of organizational reputation management. Organizations now face difficulty in minimizing the impact of these communities through traditional mediation channels. Recent studies reveal that public opinion and consumer behavior may be swayed by such individuals and online groups (Goldsborough, 2012; Haigh, Brubaker & Whiteside, 2011; Lim & Kann, 2011).

Previous research has examined how hate groups used Internet communities to recruit new members and espouse their specific brand of rhetoric, yet there is little research that examines how online groups hostile toward specific organizations impact organization-public relationships and an organization's reputation (Botsdorff, 2004).

In early 2013, the Marine Corps' reputation came under fire after several lewd, misogynistic, and obscene images and comments surfaced on Facebook pages external to the Marine Corps' official pages (Hodge, 2013). Many of the members participating in these groups were active-duty Marines. Despite the clear delineation between the Corps' official Facebook pages and these offensive Facebook pages, the news media and U.S. elected representatives blamed the Marine Corps for the behavior displayed on these sites.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps quickly responded to accusations that the Marine Corps was breeding a culture of sexual harassment by apologizing for the inappropriate behavior and pledging before congress to change the Marine Corps' culture (Hodge, 2013; Vander Brook, 2013). The present study used this situation as a research setting to examine how these types of Internet communities impacted the Marine Corps' reputation and organization-public relationships.

Internet Communities

Historically, community has been a difficult term to define. The rise of Internet communities has added layers of complexity to an already elusive concept. Hillery (1955) cataloged 94 separate definitions of the word community in a search for common themes. The only common theme among all 94 definitions was "people" (p. 117). Hillery found that a majority of the definitions included the components "area, common ties, and social interaction" (p. 118). Not surprisingly, such conceptualizations fall short in addressing Internet communities.

Cohen's (1985) conceptualization for community was based on "a system of values, norms, and moral codes which provides a sense of identity within a bounded whole to its members" (p. 9). Boundaries, according to Cohen, can be physical like a river or mountain range, but can also exist "in the minds of their beholders" (p. 12). Cohen's symbolic concept of community provides a useful bridge to understanding communities in an online environment. Unlike traditional concepts of community that looked for physical boundaries and hierarchical structures, Cohen pursued the idea of what community means to community members. Cohen's ideas were supported by more recent studies that highlighted the importance of the individual to the concept of community (Barrett, 2010; Wellman, Boase, & Chen, 2002).

Wellman et al. (2002) asserted that community would be better conceptualized as a social network. "Such networks could be locally bound, as in traditional neighborhoods, or global as in some Internet-based communities" (p. 152). Wellman et al. (2002) saw Internet communities as comprised of individuals sharing "interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity" (p. 153). The group of various individuals becomes "a community network when it connects friends, relatives, neighbors and workmates" (p. 153).

The following definition of Internet communities synthesizes traditional conceptualizations of community from Hillery's (1955) original derivations, Cohen's (1985) symbolic conceptualization of boundaries, and concepts associated with computer-mediated communication as developed by Wellman et al. (2002). Internet communities are groups of people that (1) share common interests and interact socially within a group-defined boundary differentiating them from other groups, (2) establish group values and norms, and (3) almost exclusively use computer-mediated communication in their interactions.

Hate Groups and Hostile Internet Communities

Bostdorf (2004) examined how 23 Ku Klux Klan websites developed Internet communities of "a most egregious sort" (p. 340). Some hate groups established an Internet presence as early as 1995 when the Internet was still a nascent information platform (Bostdorf, 2004). Bostdorf found that online hate groups formed around an opposition to outgroups (minority groups in the case of the KKK). Bostdorf also found that hate groups often produce rhetoric that suggests violent actions against outgroups, noting that website organizers "disavow responsibility for the consequences of their messages" (p. 357).

Many Internet communities (like the ones investigated by the Marine Corps in 2013) share similarities with hate groups, but do not portray such extreme attitudes. Hate groups use a common, hate-oriented rhetoric to target specific outgroups or "inferior populations" (McNamee, Peterson, & Pena, p. 261). Further, hate groups have physical structure beyond their Internet communities.

This study examined Internet communities that formed around negative common interests. Unlike hate groups, these groups are loosely organized. These communities often form around their dislike for a particular product, service, organization; they sometimes form around common interests of lewd, humorous content. The communities investigated by the Marine Corps in 2013 combined humor with offensive comments about rape, obesity, and misogynistic content. Like the hate groups examined by Bostdorf (2004), the administrators of these websites refused to take responsibility for the content posted by community members.

Existing conceptualizations of the term hate group do not properly capture the nature of the Internet communities studied here as they are (1) less organized, (2) their community does

not extend beyond the boundaries of the Internet, and (3) they have more diverse rhetoric than that of traditional hate groups. For this study, these groups are referred to as hostile Internet communities (HICs). *HICs* are Internet communities (as previously defined) that form around negative common interests, are loosely organized, exist online, and share a diversity of typically negative rhetoric aimed at individuals or groups, products, services, or organizations.

Reputation, Relationship, and Organization-Public Relationships

Reputation. The prolific use of the Internet and social media by individuals and groups to share candid opinions and reviews about organizations impacts an organization's ability to develop and sustain a positive reputation with its key stakeholders. Internet communities rapidly share information about an organization's employees, products, services, financial status, and corporate culture even if the information is inaccurate or offensive. Balmer (1998) reviewed the history of reputation as it related to corporate image and corporate identity.

Balmer (1998) found that the term corporate reputation, first labeled as corporate image, appeared in the 1950s when organizations began focusing on new ways to improve key stakeholder relationships. Scholars and corporate practitioners implemented three different approaches to corporate image during this period – the psychological paradigm, the graphic design paradigm, and the marketing and public relations paradigm.

From a psychological approach, Grunig (1993) viewed corporate image as a mental picture, feeling, or idea that stakeholders held of the organization. From a graphic design perspective, visual images that represented an organization's cultural values played a central role in corporate image. These images had the ability to influence public perception (Balmer, 1998). The marketing and public relations paradigm viewed corporate image as a perception of an organization based on feelings and experiences individuals or groups have with an organization. Even with these paradigms in place, Grunig (1993) analyzed corporate image and found the concept to be synonymous with reputation, perception, cognition, attitude, credibility, belief, communication, and relationship.

Corporate image further evolved in the 1970s and 1980s as organizations looked for ways to emphasize their identity and build stronger relationships with key publics (Balmer, 1998). Many organizations focused on strengthening their internal core values, culture, and capabilities, which led to the increased use of the term corporate identity. Corporate identity, often associated with Total Quality Management (TQM), encompasses an organization's mission, philosophy, employees, and operations. But in similar fashion to examinations of corporate image, scholars and practitioners disagreed on the meaning and implications of the term corporate identity. This led to further research surrounding the development of corporate identity based on how key stakeholders perceived an organization's reputation (Bromley, 1993; Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997).

Growing enthusiasm toward brand management by organizations in the 1990s established a common usage of the term corporate reputation separate from corporate identity. Marketing and public relations practitioners expanded their efforts to build and sustain relationships with customers and other key stakeholders (Balmer, 1998). Organizations defined corporate reputation as “the perception of an organization which is built up over a period of time and which focuses on what it does and how it behaves” (Balmer, p. 971).

Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) also studied the maturation of the term corporate reputation. They provided an integrated definition of reputation as “a collective representation of a firm's past actions and results that describes the firm's ability to deliver valued outcomes to

multiple stakeholders” (p. 10). To examine the characteristics of the concept, Fombrun and Van Riel developed a list of factors about reputation to include: “external reflection of a company’s internal identity” (p. 10) and “appraisal of a firms’ economic performance and its success in fulfilling social responsibilities” (p. 10).

Synthesizing previous interpretations of the term, *reputation* in this study is defined as a shared opinion that individuals or groups have about an organization based on perceptions of that organization’s past actions and expected future behavior.

Fombrun, Gardberg, and Server (2000) saw reputation as a multifaceted concept and developed the Reputation Quotient (RQ), which includes six dimensions: (1) emotional appeal, (2) products and services, (3) vision and leadership, (4) social and environment responsibility, (5) workplace environment, and (6) financial performance (p. 253).

Fombrun et al.’s (2000) reputational dimension of “workplace environment” (p. 253) showed how perceptions about an organization’s treatment of its employees could affect the organization’s reputation. Because some HICs are composed of individuals that have an affiliation with an organization through employment or membership, this is a particularly important concept in determining the impact of HICs on an organization’s reputation. Walsh and Beatty (2007) refined the dimension of workplace environment through quantitative and qualitative assessments. This resulted in a dimension of reputation that Walsh and Beatty termed “good employer” (p. 133). In this study, a *good employer* is an organization perceived to treat employees fairly, to manage the organization well, and to retain competent employees.

In addition to the dimensions developed by Fombrun et al., Helm (2005) further refined dimensions of reputation. One dimension Helm saw as important to reputation was loyalty. *Loyalty* refers to an individual’s devotion to an organization, service, or product based on the individual’s previous interaction with the organization, its service, or products. According to Helm, individuals that have positive interactions with an organization will have stronger levels of loyalty to the organization.

The likelihood that an individual will speak positively or negatively about an organization to others can impact an organization’s reputation (Shamma, 2012; Walsh and Beatty, 2007). Shamma (2012) surmised that interactions with an organization’s employees and websites could influence how an individual speaks about the organization after the interaction. In this study, the reputational dimension *word-of-mouth* refers to an individual’s propensity to speak positively or negatively about an organization based on interaction with the organization’s employees, services, or products.

Three dimensions of reputation (word of mouth, loyalty, and good employer) are applicable to this study of HICs (See Table 1). Since HIC websites are often critical of an organization and sometimes have members employed by the targeted organization, in the present study it was posited that individuals who encounter HIC sites would be (1) more likely to speak negatively about an organization, product, or service; (2) have lower levels of loyalty due to negative HIC rhetoric; and (3) have lower perceptions of the organization as a good employer. These three dimensions all contribute to perceptions of reputation overall. As Marine Corps related HICs served as the focus for this study, the following hypothesis was investigated:

H1: Individuals who view HIC sites associated with the U.S. Marine Corps will have a less favorable perception of the U.S. Marine Corps’ reputation than those viewing the organization’s official social media sites.

Relationship. Several scholars have worked to define the term relationship in order to conduct meaningful observations and create effective measures for the concept (Duck, 1986;

Grunig, 1993; Oliver, 1990; Surra & Ridley, 1991). From an interpersonal communication perspective, Duck (1986) suggested that relationships are an ever-changing understanding between individuals regarding how one person views the other and how each individual's attitude and behavior can change based on "mood, circumstances, and the state of the rest of our lives" (pg. 92). Grunig's (1993) research of relationships between organizations and their key stakeholders led to development of three dimensions of relationships: trust and credibility, reciprocity, and organizational legitimacy. Grunig's examination of relationships underscored the importance that "both parties recognize the importance of the other" (p.135).

Oliver (1990) focused on interorganizational relationships to help measure interactions between an organization and two or more other organizations by creating a list of characteristics, which included necessity, asymmetry, reciprocity, efficiency, stability, and legitimacy. More recent literature on relational theory stated that relationships develop when two parties have perceptions and expectations of each other, when resources are needed, when common threats exist, or when legal or communal issues require interaction between both parties (Broom, Casey & Ritchey, 1997). For the current examination of HICs, *relationship* is defined as the way in which individuals or groups and organizations are connected based on perceptions and expectations of one another.

Organization-Public Relationships (OPR). Public relations research over the past decade has explored the dynamic relationship between an organization and "the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Broom & Sha, 2013, p. 26) to determine how public relations practitioners can manage organization relationships with key stakeholders. Several scholars conducted research regarding the impact of organization-public relationships (OPR) on key stakeholder perceptions and organizational success (Broom, Casey & Ritchey, 1997; Broom & Dozier, 1990; Grunig, 1993; Ledingham & Brunig, 1998). Ledingham, Bruning, Thomlison, and Lesko (1997) devised the concepts of openness, trust, investment, involvement, and commitment as measurable dimensions of OPRs. Broom and Dozier (1990) also examined the relationships between organizations and their publics and determined three major factors that influence the OPR: what individuals know about the organization, how these publics and the organization feel about each other, and what the organization and these publics do to each other.

Based on previous studies concerning the impact of public relations on organization relationships and methods of OPR assessment, Ledingham and Brunig (1998) developed a definition of organization-public relationships as "the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity" (p. 60).

Additional studies continued to shape the dynamics of OPR theory as the field of public relations adapts to advances in mediated and interpersonal communication (Ki & Hon, 2007; Yang, 2007). Emerging research exploring how Internet communities influence organizations continues to reveal new complexities in maintaining positive online OPRs. Haigh, Brubaker, and Whiteside (2011) studied the relationship between an organization's social media presence and OPR. Their research revealed that several organizations used Facebook to "maintain their organization-public relationships by bolstering stakeholders' perceptions of trust, commitment, and the appearance of open communication" (p. 5). Haigh et al. (2011) also found that an organization's presence on Facebook and the type of information shared may improve stakeholder perceptions and sentiments toward the organization.

In this study, *organization-public relationships* is an association between an organization and its key publics in which either party can impact the trustworthiness, commitment, and

satisfaction of the other. Three dimensions of Hon and Grunig's (1999) measures of OPR were applicable to this study of HICs: trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Hon and Grunig's operationalization of the terms was employed in this study. *Trust*, as a measure of OPR, shows the "level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p.19) and includes the dimensions of integrity, dependability, and competence. *Commitment*, as the second measure of OPR, gauges the level to which one party believes that the relationship with the other party is worth maintaining (1999). The third measure of OPR, *satisfaction*, tests the extent to which "one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced" (p.20).

Instead of conducting further research on the impact of social media sites managed by organizations, this study explored how HICs impact key stakeholders' perceptions of an organization's relationship with key stakeholders. The following hypothesis was developed as a result:

H2: Individuals who view HIC sites associated with the U.S. Marine Corps will have a less favorable perception of the organization-public relationship than those viewing the organization's official social media sites.

Commitment

Researchers examined commitment both as a part of OPR and separately in this study (See Table 2). The measure of commitment was of particular interest to researchers as it was associated with the likelihood for people to maintain and engage in future relationships with an organization. As the Marine Corps seeks to recruit and retain employees from amongst the American population, it was posited that exposure to Marine Corps related HICs would reduce levels of commitment amongst the sample. As such, a final hypothesis was developed:

H3: Individuals who view HIC sites associated with the U.S. Marine Corps will be less committed to the U.S. Marine Corps than those viewing the organization's official social media sites.

Method

Participant Characteristics

A sample of 173 San Diego State University Students between the ages of 18-24 participated in the experiment. The characteristics of the sample mirrored characteristics similar to the Marine Corps' target recruiting population. Table 3 contains a full list of participant characteristics.

Research Design

Researchers used a posttest-only control group design to measure the impact of HIC websites on participants. This experiment was executed through an online survey. Subjects were randomly assigned through an automatic randomization mechanism to one of three treatments: a negative treatment, a neutral treatment, or a positive treatment. Researchers conducted a manipulation check with ten individuals to determine that the treatments were negative, neutral, and positive in their stance toward the Marine Corps.

The negative treatment consisted of three screenshots from HIC Facebook page, *Just the Tip, of the Spear*. This particular HIC had members employed by the Marine Corps and featured the type of misogynistic and negative rhetoric that brought congressional attention to these sites in 2013. The neutral treatment consisted of three screenshots from the Department of the

Interior's official Facebook page. This treatment was completely unrelated to the Marine Corps and served as a control. The positive treatment consisted of three screenshots from the U.S. Marine Corps' official Facebook page.

Following exposure to the treatments, participants completed a questionnaire designed to measure perceptions of reputation, OPR, and commitment toward the Marine Corps.

Procedure

Participants were recruited using three methods: advertisement, direct solicitation, and recruitment of students through the School of Journalism & Media Studies (JMS). Advertisements for the experiment were posted in high traffic areas on the SDSU campus. Researchers also solicited participants by handing out flyers near the campus library, bookstore, and student union building. Finally, JMS instructors encouraged participation in the study from amongst undergraduate students. As an incentive, participants were entered to win a \$100 gift card.

Questionnaire and Measures

All questions designed to measure reputation, OPR, and commitment were modified from extant measures (Walsh & Beatty, 2007; Hon & Grunig, 1999). With the exception of demographic and participant characteristic questions, the questions consisted of 5-point Likert-type items measuring participant levels of agreement. Levels ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Tables 1 and 2 capture the specific items used in the questionnaire to measure reputation, OPR, and commitment. Other information gathered from the questionnaire included social media usage type and frequency of usage, electronic device usage, knowledge of the Marine Corps, current associations with Marines, and basic demographic information (See Table 3). All participants received identical questionnaires after viewing one of the three experimental treatments.

A scale for reputation was generated using Walsh and Beatty's (2007) reputation dimensions of good employer, loyalty, and word of mouth. Cronbach's alpha for this 12 item scale was .92. A scale for OPR was generated using Hon and Grunig's (1999) OPR dimensions of trust, satisfaction, and commitment. Cronbach's alpha for this 16 item scale was .92. Commitment was also measured with a separate scale comprised of five items. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .85.

The scale measuring commitment was the only scale in which an item did not contribute to reliability. However, improvements in reliability by removing the variable were deemed minimal; therefore all items were retained in the scale.

Data Analysis

Data from the survey were entered into SPSS and a one-way ANOVA test was used to determine the differences in perceived levels of reputation, OPR, and commitment. This test allowed researchers to compare the average responses in the three measurement scales resulting from interactions with the experimental treatments. Table 4 summarizes the results from the ANOVA test.

Researchers also examined the average responses from the previously mentioned ANOVA test while controlling for gender, whether or not a participant knew somebody in Marine Corps, and whether or not a participant had family members in the Marine Corps.

Results

The first hypothesis stated that individuals who viewed HIC sites associated with the U.S. Marine Corps would have a less favorable perception of the U.S. Marine Corps' reputation than those who viewed the organization's official social media sites. The hypothesis was confirmed [$F(1/164) = 13.17, p < .01$]. There was a positive linear relationship between perceived levels of reputation and the experimental treatments (See Table 4). This relationship held when controlling for gender, age, and previous associations with the U.S. Marine Corps.

The second hypothesis stated that individuals who viewed HIC sites associated with the U.S. Marine Corps would have a less favorable perception of the organization-public relationship than those who viewed the U.S. Marine Corps' official social media sites. The hypothesis was confirmed [$F(1/164) = 14.99, p < .01$]. There was a positive linear relationship between perceived levels of OPR and the experimental treatments (See Table 4). This relationship held when controlling for gender, age, and previous associations with the U.S. Marine Corps.

The third hypothesis stated that individuals who view HIC sites associated with the U.S. Marine Corps would be less committed to the U.S. Marine Corps than those who viewed the organization's official social media sites. The hypothesis was confirmed [$F(1/169) = 9.70, p < .01$]. There was a positive linear relationship between levels of commitment and the experimental treatments (See Table 4). This relationship also held when controlling for gender, age, and level of previous association with the U.S. Marine Corps.

Discussion

Previous research has examined how individuals and groups impact an organization's reputation and OPR (Balmer, 1998; Broom, Casey & Ritchey, 1997; Broom & Dozier, 1990; Fombrun, Gardberg, and Server, 2000; Grunig, 1993; Ledingham & Brunig, 1998; Shamma, 2012; Walsh and Beatty, 2007). However, researchers have just begun to explore how negative content from Internet communities loosely affiliated with target organizations can impact the organization's reputation, OPR, and commitment.

This study shows that the online behavior of HIC members is directly related to lower perceptions of the organization's reputation and OPR. Further, an individual's level of commitment toward an organization is also negatively influenced by interactions with HICs. The specific dimensions of reputation and OPR employed in this study are key to understanding why participants were negatively influenced by exposure to HIC treatments.

This impact of HIC behavior on an organization's reputation relates to the specific reputational dimensions word of mouth, loyalty, and good employer. Measures of good employer gauged opinions of whether or not an organization seemed to have good employees, high standards, and strong leadership and management. Measures of loyalty dealt with levels of support for the Marine Corps. Further, loyalty gauged whether individuals would develop a future relationship with the Marine Corps. Finally, word of mouth examined the degree to which a person might say good things or even recommend the Marine Corps to friends seeking to join the military.

The dimensions of OPR measured in this study included trust, satisfaction, and commitment. Trust gauged individual's perceptions that the Marine Corps would treat people fairly. Further, trust was related to promise keeping and organizational competence necessary to complete given tasks. Measures of satisfaction related to perceived happiness with the Marine Corps as an organization, satisfaction of interactions with the Marine Corps, and the importance of maintaining relationships with the organization. Finally, commitment gauged people's

willingness to maintain a relationship with the Marine Corps, and how much they valued their relationship with Marine Corps.

Because participants were exposed to comments made by Marines that were misogynistic, lewd, mean spirited, and counter to traditional Marine Corps' values, this type of online behavior contributed to the lower average responses regarding reputation. The average responses were lower than those of the control group. This indicates that general perceptions of the Marine Corps are higher before people are exposed to HICs.

The impact of HIC exposure becomes clearer when examining the much higher average responses from individuals who interacted with images from the Marine Corps' official Facebook page. The treatments depict Marines volunteering to help those less fortunate, conducting ceremonies honoring fallen warriors, and professionally executing day-to-day military operations. Comments by community members on this Facebook page are largely supportive of the organization and its mission. Further, Marines made many of the supportive comments on the Marine Corps' official Facebook page. The common denominator between the negative and positive treatments are the comments by Marines themselves. These Marines serve as representatives not just of the organization itself, but also of the organization's values and culture.

These findings show that online behavior of an organization's employees can have dire consequences for an organization's reputation, OPR, and commitment. This is especially true when these employees congregate on HIC sites. While freedom of speech laws grant individuals the right to espouse negative rhetoric, this type of online behavior cannot be ignored by organizational leadership.

In the case of the Marine Corps, the top Marine was called out by U.S. elected leaders regarding the negative behavior of Marines in an online setting. For non-government organizations, key stakeholders like consumers and investors may shy away from companies whose employees foster this type of negativity online. Organizations that do not combat HIC rhetoric will likely face mini-crises as the actions of their employees, or those associated with their organization, gain the attention of key stakeholders or the news media.

Additionally, negative rhetoric generated online does not stay online. Many television, radio, and print media outlets highlight social media posts, images, and videos on a daily basis. This practice further exposes individuals to disreputable information from Internet communities. While organizations typically understand the impact their own online content has on key stakeholders, this study's findings suggest the growing need for public relations practitioners to monitor, engage, and mitigate the potential impact of HICs.

More and more people turn to websites and social media as a primary information source (Lenhart, Hitlin, & Madden, 2005; Smith, 2014). This, in turn, increases their chance for exposure to HIC sites. As such, organizations interested in recruiting talented employees or selling products or services must begin to examine and understand the kinds of negative online rhetoric directed toward their organization. Most critically, organizations need to scrutinize the online behavior of their employees. This study clearly shows that the online behavior of employees can have both positive and negative impacts on the organization overall.

Limitations and Further Research

The participants in this study were selected with certain characteristics in order to represent a key recruiting population of the United States Marine Corps. However, beyond the association of age, it cannot be surmised that the sample of SDSU students represent all

characteristics of the population recruited by the Marine Corps. Because researchers employed convenience sampling, the sample was non-representative of the larger population of SDSU students between the ages of 18-24. While the experimental design provided a mechanism to isolate causal relationships, the findings should not be generalized to a larger population.

Administration of the experiment was not conducted in a controlled setting, such as a computer lab. Because of this, researchers accepted some risk for potential impacts to internal validity. However, as participants were recruited through convenience sampling over approximately a two-week period, it is unlikely that that much interaction between experimental groups occurred as participants completed the experiment individually. Further, some participants completed the experiment in classroom settings, providing a degree of control over group interaction. Regardless, interactions between experimental groups cannot be completely ruled out, and future research of this type should be conducted in a more controlled setting.

In future research, it will be important to refine the concept of HICs. Understanding why these groups are drawn together, what different types of HICs exist, and how to more effectively counter HIC rhetoric are potential targets for new studies. To understand the impact of HICs, it will also be important to determine how many people are reached by HICs' negative rhetoric and if exposure to HICs creates long-lasting negative attitudes and opinions about an organization. Also, research should examine the frequency with which HIC behaviors are reported through traditional mass media channels such as television, radio, and print publications.

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Table 1
Measures of Organization-Public Relationship: Trust, Satisfaction, Commitment

Dimension	Measures
Trust	<p>The Marine Corps treats people like me fairly and justly.</p> <p>Whenever the Marine Corps makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.</p> <p>The Marine Corps can be relied on to keep its promises.</p> <p>I believe that the Marine Corps takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.</p> <p>I feel very confident about the Marine Corps' skills.</p> <p>The Marine Corps has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.</p>
Satisfaction	<p>I am happy with the Marine Corps.</p> <p>Maintaining a relationship with the Marine Corps is beneficial to people like me.</p> <p>Most people like me are happy in their interactions with the Marine Corps.</p> <p>Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship the Marine Corps has established with people like me.</p> <p>Most people enjoy dealing with the Marine Corps.</p>
Commitment	<p>I feel that the Marine Corps is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.</p> <p>I can see that the Marine Corps wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.</p> <p>There is a long-lasting bond between the Marine Corps and people like me.</p> <p>Compared to other organizations, I value my relationship with the Marine Corps more.</p> <p>I would rather work together with the Marine Corps than not.</p>

Table 2

Measures of Reputation: Good Employer, Loyalty, Word-of-Mouth

Dimension	Measures
Good Employer	<p>The Marine Corps looks like a good organization to work for.</p> <p>The Marine Corps seems to have excellent leadership.</p> <p>The Marine Corps seems to have good employees.</p> <p>The Marine Corps seems to maintain high standards in the way it treats people.</p> <p>The Marine Corps seems to be well managed.</p>
Loyalty	<p>I am a loyal supporter of the Marine Corps.</p> <p>I have developed a good relationship with the Marine Corps.</p> <p>I would like to develop a good relationship with the Marine Corps.</p> <p>I am loyal to the Marine Corps.</p>
Word-of-Mouth	<p>I'm likely to say good things about the Marine Corps.</p> <p>I would recommend the Marine Corps to my friends and relatives.</p> <p>If my friends were interested in being part of joining the military, I would tell them to join the Marine Corps.</p>

Table 3
Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency
Gender (N=173)	Female: 82% Male: 18%
Race (N=173)	White: 58% Hispanic: 23% Black/African American: 7% Asian/Pacific Islander: 12%
Knowledge of others in USMC (N=173)	I don't know anyone in the USMC: 40% I know a few people in the USMC: 48%
Friends/Family in USMC (N=173)	Yes: 36% No: 64%
Social Media Usage (N=172)	A few times a week: 5% About once a day: 7% A few times a day: 28% Several times a day: 60%
Types of Social Media Used (N=172)	Instagram: 90% Facebook: 93% Vine: 24% Snapchat: 70% Twitter: 74% LinkedIn: 36%

Table 4
ANOVA Table: Reputation, OPR, and Commitment Scores for Experimental Groups

Scales	Experimental Group			<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>
	HIC Facebook Page Treatment (Negative)	DOI Facebook Page Treatment (Neutral)	USMC Facebook Page Treatment (Positive)		
Reputation	2.97 (.82)	3.32 (.74)	3.50 (.68)	13.17**	(1, 164)
OPR	3.02 (.61)	3.20 (.58)	3.50 (.65)	14.99**	(1, 164)
Commitment	2.61 (.79)	2.94 (.76)	3.07 (.79)	9.70**	(1, 169)

Note: ** = $p < .01$. Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means.

The Influence of Crisis Response Strategy on Perceived Organizational Transparency and Reputation

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Abstract

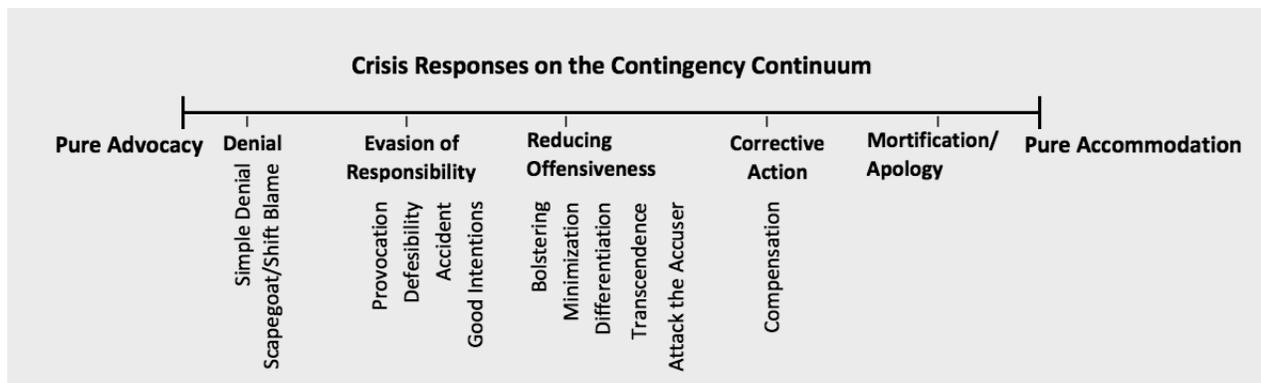
To better understand the influence of crisis response strategy, this experimental research provides a look at the accommodative and substantive nature of responses in relation to perceived organizational transparency and reputational outcome. Although many factors have been proven to have an influence on perceived organizational transparency and reputation, research on the crisis response strategies based on these dynamic factors are new to the literature. Measures based on Rawlins (2009) transparency scale and Coombs (2002) reputation scales were used to understand the influence of crisis response strategies in two different crisis scenarios, a food crisis and product malfunctioning. In both of the crisis scenarios transparency was influenced by crisis response, with the more accommodative responses leading to higher perceived organizational transparency outcome. The product malfunctioning crisis scenario led to both perceived organizational transparency and organization reputational outcome being positively correlated with accommodative responses. Further detailed results are presented below.

Introduction

Public relations research has proven that an organization's reputation is an important asset (Coombs, 2007a). Because a good reputation is shown to have a positive influence on attitudes toward an organization, to increase purchase and investment intention, and to improve the perception of honesty, organizations with stronger reputations reap great benefits (Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Therefore, in time of crisis, an organization's reputation is particularly vulnerable, with a great deal at stake (Coombs, 2006). Previous literature has recommended that an organization try to minimize the reputational threat of a negative event through effective crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007a). These responses defend the organization's threatened reputation by giving explanations, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, or excuses for the organization's actions (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009).

A crisis has a life cycle that begins with issues management, moving to planning and prevention and then implementation (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996). By recognizing a problem before a crisis arises, an organization can take necessary steps in preparing to reduce reputational threat. Once an event reaches the crisis stage, an organization will take an initial stance on the situation, which is conveyed through the crisis response strategy (Cameron et al, 2008). These strategies exist on a continuum from pure advocacy to pure accommodation, varying by time and audience, depending on the circumstances (Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2010). Stakeholders perceive the organization's employment of accommodative responses as the organization showing greater concern for the victims and taking greater responsibility for the crisis (Cameron et al, 2008; Coombs, 2007a). Pure advocacy responses, the most defensive strategy, show denial of fault, with no acceptance of responsibility by the organization.

Table 1



The continuum is a part of the contingency theory, which offers a matrix of internal and external factors affecting the stance an organization takes in a crisis (Cancel et al, 1999). The "It Depends" concept in crisis literature gives researchers an understanding of the dynamic nature of crises based on the contingency theory (Cameron et al, 2008). With more than 80 factors to be considered by the organization when determining the stance and response to a crisis, each event is complex (Cancel et al, 1999). By crafting an effective crisis response, the organization hopes to shorten the crisis life cycle, controlling the crisis and therefore minimizing its reputational damage (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996).

Publics interpret the event, searching for a cause and assessing the organization's ability to control the event, in determining how much the organization is to blame and assigning crisis

responsibility (Coombs, 2007b). This crisis responsibility is the level of attribution the public place on the organization. The increased attribution is a key indicator of reputational damage to the organization (Coombs, 2002; Coombs, 2007b). As the severity of a crisis increases, more attribution for the crisis will be placed on the organization. A greater level of attribution by the public to the organization calls for a more accommodative crisis response to minimize reputational damage (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Coombs, 2002).

Crises have been found to occur in three cluster types: *victim*, *accident* and *preventable* (Coombs, 2007a). The *victim* cluster includes natural disasters, rumors, workplace violence, and product tampering. The victim crises generally produce minimal attribution of responsibility to the organization by the public and present a less severe reputational threat to the organization (Coombs, 2002). Public relations research has shown that an organization can make a stronger advocacy response without experiencing reputational damage in a victim crisis type (Coombs, 2002; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). The *accident* cluster includes crises that result from unintentional events, such as technical error accidents and technical error product harm, which result in moderate attribution of fault to the organization (Coombs, 2007a). The *preventable* cluster includes human error accidents, human error product harm, organizational misdeed without injuries, organizational-misdeed management misconduct, and organizational misdeed with injuries. This crisis cluster holds the highest level of attribution to the organization and the most severe reputational threat (Coombs, 2007a). Two factors that can intensify the level of attribution for a crisis by the public are prior crisis history and prior negative reputation (Coombs, 2007a).

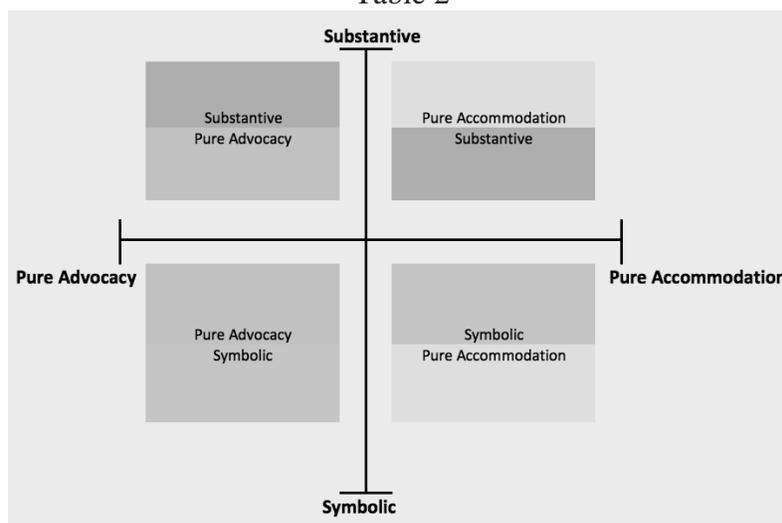
The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) recommends that organizations determine a response to the crisis situation based on the amount of crisis responsibility attributed to the organization, in order to preserve the reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). SCCT is an experimental theory in public relations that examines the use of crisis response strategies to protect the asset of organizational reputation. Reputation appears to be a powerful force in subsequent attributions of crises to an organization; existing reputation of an organization should be accounted for when using this experimental model.

Lyon & Cameron (2004) pointed out that in a time of crisis companies must often attempt to satisfy multiple publics and that communications must be crafted for diverse audiences. The stance an organization takes can also vary given the different and dynamic publics with which the organization is communicating with; thus, there may be multiple or complex responses by an organization (Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2006). Active publics seek information about the crisis in an attempt to understand the issue and respond (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996). This segment of the public is the most important audience to appease first, as its members will organize to act on the problem (Benoit, 1997). The situation continues to be complicated by the fact that no two individuals will have identical experiences with the company or with the response presented, coloring their own interpretation of the information (Benoit & Pang, 2007).

Crisis responses are complex statements by organizations and therefore fall not only on a single axis of the contingency continuum from advocacy to accommodation but on multiple axes. In examining factors to consider when evaluating crisis responses that could minimize reputational damage, this research will look at responses that are substantive or symbolic. Organizations “offer material and/or symbolic aid to victims” in their crisis response (Coombs, 2007a, p. 172). Making a crisis response statement has a symbolic power of public apology (Hargie et al, 2010). Coombs and Holladay defined the term *symbolic* in crisis communication as used to emphasize, “how communication strategies (symbolic resources) are used in attempts to

protect the organizational image” (Coombs & Holladay, 1996, p. 283). A material offering by an organization is a substantive crisis response. The X-axis of this model is the continuum from advocacy to accommodation, and the Y-axis shows substantive to symbolic crisis response. This creates four crisis response quadrants of advocacy/symbolic, advocacy/substantive, accommodative/substantive, accommodative/symbolic.

Table 2



People are becoming more skeptical and critical of the truthfulness of information received from the media (Allen, 2008). To gain stakeholders' trust and loyalty, organizations need to be accountable, ethical, credible and socially responsible, words all tied to the concept of organizational transparency (Allen, 2008; Craft & Heim, 2009; DiSta&Bortree, 2012; Griffin Padgett et al, 2013; Rawlins, 2009). The ability of public relations professionals to demonstrate transparency can be a predictor of an organization's reputation (Rawlings, 2009). Trustworthiness has been highlighted in public relations research for decades as a key factor in organizations reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). A case study by Griffin Padgett et al (2013) showed how crisis responses by two organizations lacked transparency and negatively affected reputation.

In crafting the crisis response, the organization has an opportunity to make everything appear visible and offer substantial information to its public, thus appearing ethical and trustworthy and enhancing transparency. A crisis situation is a critical time for an organization to deliver a message that appears honest, open, and concerned about society (Griffin Padgett et al, 2013; Rawlins, 2009). Highly proactive, quick responses have been shown to function as effective, ethical communication that benefits the reputation of the organization (Arpan & Pompper, 2003; Claeys & Cauberghe, 2012). Although many factors contribute to a stakeholder's perception of the organization, research is needed to understand if there is a correlation between the types of crisis response to the perceived organizational transparency and stakeholders' perception of an organization's reputation.

H1: The more substantive the response strategy used in a crisis, the higher the perceived transparency.

H2: The more accommodative the response strategy used the higher, the perceived transparency.

H3: Substantive, accommodative strategies will have the strongest positive effect on perceived transparency.

H4: Increased perceived transparency of an organization related to the crisis response strategy will have a positive correlation with the public's evaluation of the organizations reputation.

R1: How does the response strategy of an organization to a crisis have an influence on the perceived transparency of the organization?

R2: What are the subsequent reputational benefits?

Method

To strengthen the call for evidence-based, experimental-method research in the field of public relations, this experiment will test the independent variable of response strategies by two organizations using the 4 image repair strategies of *denial*, simple denial (advocacy/symbolic), *reducing offensiveness*, attack the accuser with a monetary threat (advocacy/substantive), *corrective action*, offering a financial plan to compensate the victims (accommodative/substantive), and *mortification* by apologizing (accommodative/symbolic) × 2 crisis types (minimal attribution/victim and high attribution/preventable severity) employing a within/between-subject design on the dependent variables of perceived level of transparency (Rawlins, 2009) and organizational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002) (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). Each participant saw one crisis type (victim or preventable) and response (corrective action, mortification, denial or reduce offensiveness) from each organization (Reliant Foodservice and Holiday Design Inc.).

Measures

An experimental method with an online news article (Appendix 1) explaining the crisis followed by survey questions created a more natural setting; the study was not conducted in a laboratory. The 339 participants from a Midwestern university enrolled in the University of Missouri undergraduate program participated in the survey. This audience would be considered active publics as they attend the campus affected by the crisis.

Pre-reputation: Two organizations were chosen for the experiment, Reliant Foodservice and Holiday Design Inc. In order to account for the influence of prior crisis history and prior reputation, an organization with minimal prior history was selected. To verify, a pre-reputational measure adapted from Coombs & Holladay (2009) will be used. A one-item, global evaluation in which participants are asked to rate four different organizations, including the food distribution organization Reliant Foodservice used in this experiment, on the item "Overall, my impression of 'x' is. . ." Responses were recorded on seven-point scales ranging from "very unfavorable" to "very favorable." While considered a crude measure of organizational reputation, it will give a base of how participants view the organization.

Organization reputation: The organization reputation scale is based on the five items on a five-point Likert scale used in Coombs & Holladay's 2002 study of: (a) "The organization is concerned with the well-being of its publics," (b) "The organization is basically DISHONEST," (c) "I do NOT trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident," (d) "Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what the organization says," and (e) "The organization is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics." This scale was reduced in length from a 10-item version of the scale by Coombs & Holladay 1996.

Organization perceived transparency: The transparency scale was adapted based on Rawlins' 2009 study of measuring transparency. The scale measures three factors of transparency: participation, accountable, and secretive based on a 5 point Likert scale with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree (with secretive being reversed to account for negative wording).

Table 3

TRANSPARENCY MEASURE:

Accountability

1. Holiday Designs Inc is forthcoming with information that might be damaging to the organization.
2. Holiday Designs Inc is open to criticism by people like me.
3. Holiday Designs Inc freely admits when it has made mistakes.
4. Holiday Designs Inc provides information that can be compared to industry standards.

Participation

1. Holiday Designs Inc provides detailed information to people like me.
2. Holiday Designs Inc makes it easy to find the information people like me need.
3. Holiday Designs Inc asks the opinion of people like me before making decisions.
4. Holiday Designs Inc is prompt when responding to requests for information from people like me.
5. Holiday Designs Inc provides information in a timely fashion to people like me.
6. Holiday Designs Inc provides information that is relevant to people like me.
7. Holiday Designs Inc provides accurate information to people like me.
8. Holiday Designs Inc provides information that is reliable.

Secretive

1. Holiday Designs Inc provides only part of the story to people like me.
2. Holiday Designs Inc often leaves out important details in the information it provides to people like me.
3. Holiday Designs Inc blames outside factors that may have contributed to the outcome when reporting bad news.
4. Holiday Designs Inc provides information that is intentionally written in a way to make it difficult to understand.
5. Holiday Designs Inc is slow to provide information to people like me.

Crisis Response Manipulation Check: In order assure the manipulation of the response strategy, participants were asked to evaluate the content of the organization's crisis communication to determine if the organization offered an apology, compensation, denied fault or blamed another when completing the measures.

Results

The pretest showed that both organizations used in the crisis scenarios showed neutral prior crisis history and prior reputation for the organizations based on the seven-point scale for the pre-reputational measure, the covariate analysis for Reliant Foodservice Company 4.10 and Holiday Design Inc. 4.13. A manipulation check with a popular local pizza restaurant was included in the pre-reputational measure with favorable reputation reported of 5.60 for Shakespeare's Pizza.

A post-hoc test was performed for each crisis scenario on the variable of transparency and reputation. Significant results were not found on crisis response influence on crisis type (victim/preventable) in either scenario.

Reliant Foodservices results:

Transparency Variable: $f(3, 328)=9.915, p < .001, p = 0.998$;
 Corrective Action 3.003 > Denial 2.744, $p < .001$;
 Corrective Action 3.003 > Reduce Offensiveness 2.678, $p < .001$;
 Reduce Offensiveness 2.678 < Mortification 3.014, $p < .001$;
 Mortification 3.014 > Denial 2.744, $p < .001$;
 Reduce Offensiveness 2.678 < Denial 2.744, NO significance;
 Corrective Action 3.003 < Mortification 3.014, NO significance;

NO significance for this crisis scenario for reputation or correlation between reputation and transparency

Holiday Design results:

Transparency Variable: $f(3, 328)=61.600, p < .001, p = 1.0$;
 Corrective Action 3.447 > Denial 2.686, $p < .001$;
 Corrective Action 3.447 > Reduce Offensiveness 2.446, $p < .001$;
 Reduce Offensiveness 2.423 < Denial 2.686, $p < .05$;
 Reduce Offensiveness 2.446 < Mortification 3.337, $p < .001$;
 Mortification 3.337 > Denial 2.686, $p < .001$;
 Corrective Action 3.447 > Mortification 3.337, NO significance

Reputation Variable: $f(3, 328)=78.708, p < .001, p=1.0$;
 Corrective Action 3.949 > Denial 2.686, $p < .001$;
 Corrective Action 3.949 > Reduce Offensiveness 2.532, $p < .001$;
 Reduce Offensiveness 2.532 < Denial 2.686, NO significance;
 Reduce Offensiveness 2.532 < Mortification 4.021, $p < .001$;
 Mortification 4.021 > Denial 2.686, $p < .001$;
 Corrective Action 3.949 < Mortification 4.021, NO significance;

Transparency to Reputation Pearson's Correlation $r = .814 p < .001 N=339$

Discussion

This experimental study sought to understand the influence of post-crisis communication response strategies of the organization on perceived transparency and organizational reputation, providing a unique measure of transparency on crisis responses. With research finding that organizational transparency has a significant relationship to organizational reputation (Rawlins, 2009), then research on the influence of accommodative and substantive crisis responses by an organization on perceived transparency was missing in the literature and could be valuable in public relations practice. In both crisis scenarios the crisis response was a significant predictor of perceived transparency, with accommodative responses increasing transparency but inconsistent results on substantive responses. A correlation between the types of crisis responses to the perceived organizational transparency and stakeholders' perception of an organization's reputation was found in the product malfunction scenario. This research not only informs how transparent an organization should be in the midst of the crisis but also could indicate the value of building a strong track record of transparency prior to the adverse event leading to the crisis.

Future Research Direction

Although the crisis responses were placed on the continuum from advocacy to accommodation and symbolic to substantive, the positioning was based on previous research regarding placement of responses on the axes. To help better understand the crisis responses, research should begin to measure where on the axes individuals perceive particular crisis responses to fall. Future research should also consider that dynamic crisis responses could lie on the multiple axes beyond the accommodation continuum and substantive/symbolic continuum, such as responses containing proactive or reactive language (Reliant Foods is voluntarily recalling specific packages of frozen yogurt because of metal shavings/Reliant Foods is recalling specific packages of frozen yogurt after metal shavings were found). Conversational human voice is another factor to be considered.

Limitations

This study looks at two crisis scenarios (food contamination and product malfunction), at two crisis levels (high/preventable and low/victim attribution), and four crisis responses based on two axes, (accommodation continuum and substantive/symbolic). Because of the dynamic nature of a crisis and its communication, future consideration should be given to other types of crises, levels of attribution, and axes that these crises fall. The research is drawn from a student population. Although students would indeed be stakeholders in the model crisis, further research on transparency and reputational outcome of the crisis response should be tested on a more diverse population. Crisis type manipulation check was not done. Had this been done we could have a better understanding if the stimulus failed to convey the different in crisis types or if the crisis types was not relevant on the measured outcome.

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Appendix 1: The Crisis Situations

Crisis 1 Food Contamination: A food contamination crisis case by a food distribution company, Reliant Foodservice, to a Missouri campus dining hall will be used.

Minimal attribution/victim—Crisis Information:

The FDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the public health agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have been working with Reliant Foodservice of Temecula, CA, to confirm the potential contamination of their vanilla frozen yogurt after metal shavings were found in the product at a Missouri dining hall last week. Product tampering by an outside source is being considered.

High attribution/preventable severity—Crisis Information:

The FDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the public health agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have been working with Reliant Foodservice of Temecula, CA, to confirm the potential contamination of their vanilla frozen yogurt after metal shavings were found in the product at a Missouri dining hall last week. Misuse of production equipment is being considered.

Crisis Responses:

Denial: Simple denial (advocacy/symbolic)—Did not perform act

According to the company’s statement, “there have been no confirmed reports of foreign objects found or reports of injuries from the potential contamination of the vanilla frozen yogurt. Reliant Foodservice does not plan to recall any products at this time.”

Reducing offensiveness: Attack the accuser with a monetary threat (advocacy/substantive)—

Reduce credibility of accuser

According to the company’s statement, “the company believes the dining hall is at fault for the potential contamination and will pursue monetary compensation for the loss of revenue from the vanilla frozen yogurt due to the accusations. Reliant Foodservice does not plan to recall any products at this time.”

Corrective action: Compensation (accommodative/substantive)—Offer a financial plan to reimburse/compensate the victims

According to the company’s statement, “there has been a potential contamination of the vanilla frozen yogurt. Reliant Foodservice plans to recall the potentially affected products and give full refunds for anyone affected by the recall.”

Mortification: Apologize for act (accommodative/symbolic)

According to the company’s statement, “there has been a potential contamination of the vanilla frozen yogurt. Reliant Foodservice plans to recall the potentially affected products and deeply apologizes for the event.”

Crisis 2 Product Malfunction: A product malfunction crisis case by a holiday lights and decoration company, Holiday Design Inc, to a Missouri campus building will be used.

Minimal attribution/victim—Crisis Information:

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the safety department in the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) have been working with Holiday Designs Inc of Gainesville, GA, to confirm the potential fire hazard of their outdoor lights after sparks were found coming from the lights on a University of Missouri building last week. Product tampering by an outside source is being considered.

High attribution/preventable severity—Crisis Information:

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the safety department in the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) have been working with Holiday Designs Inc of Gainesville, GA, to confirm the potential fire hazard of their outdoor lights after sparks were found coming from the lights on a Missouri campus building last week. Misuse of production equipment is being considered.

Crisis Responses:

Denial: Simple denial (advocacy/symbolic)—Did not perform act

According to the company’s statement, “there have been no confirmed reports of sparks found or reports of damage from the potential malfunction of the outdoor lights. Holiday Designs Inc. does not plan to recall any products at this time.”

Reducing offensiveness: Attack the accuser with a monetary threat (advocacy/substantive)—Reduce credibility of accuser

According to the company’s statement, “the company believes the campus is at fault for the malfunction of the lights and will pursue monetary compensation for the loss of revenue from the holiday lights due to the accusations. Holiday Designs Inc. does not plan to recall any products at this time.”

Corrective action: Compensation (accommodative/substantive)—Offer a financial plan to reimburse/compensate the victims

According to the company’s statement, “there has been a potential malfunction of their holiday lights. Holiday Designs Inc. plans to recall the potentially affected products and give full refunds for anyone affected by the recall.”

Mortification: Apologize for act (accommodative/symbolic)

According to the company’s statement, “there has been a potential malfunction of the holiday lights. Holiday Designs Inc. plans to recall the potentially affected products and deeply apologizes for the event.”

The screenshot shows the Missouriian website interface. At the top, the word "MISSOURIAN" is prominently displayed in a large, serif font. To the right of the name are navigation links: "log in | register", "Vox", "Members", "From Readers", "Classifieds", "Archives", and "Deals". Below the name is a horizontal menu with categories: "News", "Sports", "Opinion", "Lifestyles", and "Keeping Tabs". A search bar with the text "Google Custom Search" and a "Search" button is located on the right side of the page. The main content area features a breadcrumb trail "Home » 2014 » 02 »" and social media sharing options for "E-MAIL", "PRINT", and "Like". The article title is "CPSC launch investigation on product malfunctioning", followed by the date "Tuesday, February 2014 | 9:00 a.m. CST". The article text reads: "Product Malfunction-The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the safety department in the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) have been working with Holiday Designs Inc of Gainesville, GA, to confirm the potential fire hazard of their outdoor lights after sparks were found coming from the lights on a University of Missouri building last week. Misuse of production equipment is being considered." Below this, a quote from the company's statement is provided: "According to the company’s statement, “there have been no confirmed reports of sparks found or reports of damage from the potential malfunction of the outdoor lights. Holiday Designs Inc. does not plan to recall any products at this time.”"

Examining the Effects of Gender and Response Strategy in Social Media Crisis Communication: Evidence from China

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Abstract

Based on the framework of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), this study examined the effects of gender and response strategy in social media crisis communication on the public's a) perception of organization reputation, b) negative word-of-mouth intention, and c) negative online crisis reaction intention in China through a 1 x 4 (strategies: apology, compensation, excuse, and excuse plus ingratiation) between-subject experiment. Results showed no significant interaction between gender and response strategy, but showed significant main effects for both. For the strategy main effects, apology and compensation generated more positive perception of organizational reputation than excuse, and apology and excuse plus ingratiation generated less negative online crisis reaction intention than excuse. For gender main effects, female participants perceived the organizational reputation less positively, and were more likely to conduct negative word-of-mouth than male participants. Possible explanations, as well as implications for theory development and practices, were discussed.

Introduction

Crisis management and communication is a burgeoning field in public relations (Avery, Lariscy, Kim, & Hocke, 2010). Over the years, two bodies of work have accounted for the majority of studies on this topic: the theory of image restoration (Benoit, 1995, 1997) and the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 1995) (Avery et al., 2010).

Today crisis communication is more complicated with the development and increased use of social media (Coombs, 2012). Attention has been given to the role that social media play in crisis communication. However, most of the materials related to social media in crisis communication are found in practice guidelines. There is the need to build greater knowledge of crisis communication and social media in research (Coombs, 2008).

Although crisis communication has been frequently studied (Avery et al., 2010), differences between genders have not been explored within the paradigms of image restoration theory and SCCT. Past research indicated that associated emotional reaction can be different between men and women during disastrous crises (McIntyre, Spence, & Lachlan, 2011). However, few studies were found regarding the effects of gender on the public's responses during corporate crisis events.

Using SCCT as the theoretical framework, this study sets out to examine how the public responds to different social media crisis response strategies during a corporate accident crisis event, as well as the differences in these responses between men and women. With the evidence gained from the results of an experiment conducted in China, it is hoped that this study will help better understand the use of crisis response strategy and social media during a corporate accident crisis event, and help address gender differences in the public's responses.

Literature Review

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

The situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) “articulates the variables, assumptions, and relationships that should be considered in selecting crisis response strategies to protect an organization’s reputation” (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). SCCT provides a new dimension to crisis communication research as it moves beyond the analysis of existing cases and helps provide predictive theory (Sisco, 2012).

Based on the internal-external and intentional-unintentional matrix, Coombs (1995) identified four crisis types using the attribution theory: faux pas, accident, transgression, and terrorism. Accidents “are unintentional and happen during the course of normal organizational operations” (Coombs, 1995, p. 456.). SCCT proposes that strategic communicative responses should be tailored based on the assessment of the crisis situation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Strategies are categorized into four postures: denial (attacking the accuser, denial, and scapegoating), diminishment (excusing and justification), rebuilding (compensation and apology), and bolstering (reminding, ingratiation, and victimage) (Coombs, 2012).

Response strategies used for an accident type of crisis should be chosen based on specific situations. Nature and human-caused error are both considered for an accident crisis situation with different levels of intensity (Coombs, 1995). Although excuse is often times considered appropriate for this uncontrollable and unstable type of crisis, some form of mortification is required for victims and for severe damage (Coombs, 1995). For an organization with positive history that undergoes a major accident with true evidence, mortification and ingratiation should be used for victims, and excuse and ingratiation should be used for non-victims (Coombs, 1995).

For an organization with negative performance history experiencing the same degree of damage in an accident, mortification should be used for both victims and non-victims (Coombs, 1995).

Previous empirical studies have tested SCCT in different organizational contexts including corporate organizations (Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010), nonprofit organizations (Sisco, 2012), and in the political sphere (Sheldon & Sallot, 2009). Mortification strategies such as apology, sympathy and compensation would lead to more positive perception of organizational reputation and less anger and negative word-of-mouth than an information-only condition (Coombs, 1999; Coombs & Holladay, 2008), whereas an organization's denial of its crisis responsibility would lead to more negative perception of organizational reputation (Lee, 2004). Moreover, compared with corrective action, bolstering, mortification, and separation, blame-shifting would lead to more negative reactions (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000).

Although it can be inferred that accepting responsibility may lead to more positive responses from the public based on the findings from past research, the associated strategies would also lead to greater financial loss and even law suits for the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). It is necessary to test whether mortification strategies such as apology and compensation, or non-mortification strategies such as excuse and ingratiation work better in a major corporate accident crisis event.

RQ1: What are the public's a) perception of organizational reputation, b) negative word-of-mouth intention, and c) negative online crisis reaction intention in response to different social media crisis communication strategies during a major corporate accident crisis event?

Social Media and Crisis Communication

Nowadays, many organizations are integrating the Internet and social media into their crisis responses in practice (Taylor & Perry, 2005). Various studies have been conducted in recent years regarding the use of social media in crisis communication. However, most studies are either detailed analyses of specific crisis cases (Champoux, Durgree, & McGlynn, 2012; Veil, Sellow, & Petrun, 2011) or guidelines and recommendations for practices (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2010; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). There is a lack of theoretical framework to incorporate social media into crisis communication. The only theoretical model found so far is the social-mediated crisis communication (SMCC) model, in which the connections among publics, organizations, media content, and crisis information source are explained (Liu, Austin, & Jin, 2011).

Media type plays an important role in organizational reputation, secondary communication and reactions in crisis communication (Schultz, Utz, & Goeritz, 2011). Social media are suggested to be more effective than traditional media (Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013). However, research gap still exists when it comes to the impact of different media types on crisis communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2009). There is the need to conduct more research on how the public reacts to different crisis response strategies communicated via social media.

Corporate Crisis Communication and Social Media in China

Few studies were found regarding the use of SCCT in corporate crisis communication in the Chinese cultural context. Most studies about corporate crisis communication in the Chinese cultural context are based on cases. It is believed that crisis communication in the Chinese culture context is different from that in the West because of the role that traditional values and norms play in society (Yu & Wen, 2003). Face saving and risky communication avoidance are identified as the two traditional Chinese values that greatly influence crisis communication in

Taiwan (Yu & Wen, 2003). In Mainland China, crisis management is often times approached with government relationships, cover-ups, and denials (Ye & Pang, 2011).

The social media landscape in China is different from those in the rest of the world (Luo & Jiang, 2012). Popular social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube are inaccessible in China due to the media censorship (Chui, Ip, & Silverman, 2012). Instead, Chinese online users use sites such as RenRen, Weibo, and YouKu for social networking purposes. The growing use of social media in China has drastically changed the breadth and nature of public debate (Hewitt, 2012). Chinese citizens are not only highly engaged in social media, but also tend to “trust more what they read online than information published from official sources” (Luo & Jiang, 2012).

The Influence of Gender

Associated emotional reaction can be different between men and women during crises (McIntyre et al., 2011). Past studies on disastrous crisis communication in the field of psychology show that women tend to have stronger emotional responses towards crisis news than men (Seeger, Vennette, Ulmer, & Sellnow, 2002). Higher degrees of fear, sorrow, and sadness are found among women than men (Lachlan, Spence, & Nelson, 2010). However, men are more likely to conduct advocacy behaviors (Hoffner, Fojioka, Ibrahim, & Ye, 2002) and to vent their stress towards others (Brody & Hall, 2000).

Research in the fields of advertising and marketing shows that women are considered to be more pro-social, are more likely to be persuaded, and have higher purchase intention (Berger, Cunningham, & Kozinetz, 1999). Women’s behavioral intention is enhanced more through emotional-oriented message strategies, while men’s behavioral intention is enhanced more through informational message strategies (Lee, Haley, & Avery, 2010). The second research question aims to examine the effects of gender on the public’s responses to different social media crisis communication strategies during a major corporate accident crisis event.

RQ2: How do the public’s a) perception of organizational reputation, b) negative word-of-mouth intention, and c) negative online crisis reaction intention differ between men and women in response to different social media crisis communication strategies during a major corporate accident crisis event?

Method

Experiment, a common method used in studies that are based on the framework of SCCT (Coombs, 2007), was chosen as the method for this study. Experiments can help measure the effectiveness of different crisis communication strategies, and the results may serve as “both theoretical and practical guidelines” during crises (Sisco, 2012).

Participants

One-hundred-and-sixty-six volunteers from a large university in China participated in this study, and 157 responses were usable. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 38 years ($M = 20.08$, $SD = 2.35$), with 89.2% pursuing a bachelor’s degree ($N = 140$), 9.6% pursuing a master’s degree ($N = 15$), and 1.3% pursuing a doctoral degree ($N = 2$). Thirty-eight percent of the participants were male ($N = 59$), and 62% were female ($N = 98$).

Student sample has been used in experiments for crisis communication research in various contexts including political communication, non-profit organizations, and corporate organizations (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Sheldon & Sallot, 2009; Sisco, 2012). As SCCT’s

original development was tested with student participants (Coombs & Holladay, 2002), using student sample creates an environment that resembles the original and previous studies (Sisco, 2012). In an experiment with 585 participants, Sallot (2002) found no significant differences between students and nonstudents. Moreover, college students, as members of the Generation Y, grow up in the digital age and are familiar with social media (Dodd & Campbell, 2011). Therefore, the sample of this experiment is deemed appropriate.

Design and Materials

A 1 x 4 (crisis response strategy: apology, compensation, excuse, and excuse plus ingratiation) between-subject experiment was designed for this study. A questionnaire was designed for this experiment and one of the four crisis response strategies was included in each questionnaire. In this way, participants were randomly assigned to four levels of crisis response strategy manipulation through four versions of the questionnaire: apology (N = 40), compensation (N = 39), excuse (N = 42), and excuse plus ingratiation (N = 36). All questionnaires and manipulations were written in Mandarin Chinese.

Sina Weibo was chosen to deliver the crisis response strategies in this experiment. Weibo, widely known as the Chinese equivalence of Twitter, is one of the most popular social networking sites in China and an essential platform to more than 22% of the Chinese Internet population (Mei, 2012). Although having similar features to Twitter, Weibo has more than twice as many users as Twitter (Mei, 2012) and embodies features that are not incorporated in Twitter such as threaded comment, rich media, and micro topics (Falcon, 2011).

To perform the manipulation, a fictional news brief reported a plane crash while landing caused by loss of flight control due to engine failure. The fictional news was immediately followed by one version of the brief responses on Weibo from the airline company created in PhotoShop. China Southern Airlines Company was chosen for this fictional story because of several reasons. First, it is a large and well-known airlines company to the public in China. Second, this company's headquarter is not located in the province where the experiment took place. Therefore, less biased view towards this particular airlines company was expected. Moreover, China Southern Airlines Company has an active verified account on Weibo. By the time the experiment was designed, it had 5,906 posts, 1,182 followings, and 463,053 followers on Weibo. Following are the four crisis response messages used for manipulation:

(Apology) 我们对此次广州空难事故感到非常痛心。在此，我们对伤者和他们的家属表示深深的歉意。(Translation: We are very sorry, and we express our deep-felt apology to the victims and their families in the Guangzhou accident).

(Compensation) 我们将尽一切所能，为广州空难事件的受伤人员及家属提供赔偿，帮助他们渡过此次难关。(Translation: We will do all that we can to compensate the victims and their families in the Guangzhou accident and help them through their loss.)

(Excuse) 事故调查表明，此次广州空难源于波音公司所产飞机的引擎故障，波音公司须为此次事故负责。(Translation: Investigation showed this crash was caused by engine failure. The Boeing Company should take responsibility for this incident.)

(Excuse plus Ingratiation) 2321号航班机组人员在此次广州空难事故中先人后己，保证了组织紧急撤离的高效率。事故调查表明，此次广州空难源于波音公司所产飞机的引擎故障，波音公司须为此次事故负责。(Translation: Flight 2321 crew members sacrificed their own safety for an efficient evacuation. Investigation showed this crash was caused by engine failure. The Boeing Company should take responsibility for this incident.)

Procedure

The questionnaire used in this experiment consists of several different sections. Questions in the first section examined the participants' social media usage and preliminary attitudes towards the airlines company. Participants were asked to respond by "yes" or "no" to six statements: "I have a Sina Weibo account," "I use Weibo to learn about news," "I have taken flight(s) before," "I think it is safe to travel by plane," "I heard about China Southern Airlines before," and "I have taken flights with China Southern Airlines before". In addition, they were also asked to respond to three five-point Likert scaled items: "I think it is safe to travel with China Southern Airlines Company", "China Southern Airlines Company delivers high quality services", and "my overall impression of China Southern Airlines Company".

Participants were then shown the information of the plane crash and the screenshot of a Weibo post created in PhotoShop containing China Southern Airlines Company's response to the fictional plane crash. In sections following the news brief and the Weibo screenshot, participants were asked to answer the manipulation check items and five-point Likert scaled questions about their perception of organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intention, and negative online crisis reaction intention. Demographic information including gender, education, and age were asked towards the end of the questionnaire. All participants were informed that no such accident had ever happened, and the scenarios were created for the purpose of academic study only when the experiment ended.

Manipulation Checks

Three single items were used for manipulation checks: a) "China Southern Airlines Company took responsibility for the plane crash" (to check apology and compensation), b) "China Southern Airlines Company compensated the victims with money" (to check compensation), and c) "China Southern Airlines Company emphasized the quality of its service" (to check excuse plus ingratiation). Participants were asked to respond using the five-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

Dependent Measures

Five-point Likert scales were used to measure perception of organizational reputation, negative word-of-mouth intention, and negative online crisis reaction intention.

Perception of organizational reputation was measured by six items. Five items were developed from Coombs and Holliday's (2002) Organizational Reputation Scale. In this experiment, the five items were modified by simply replacing the term "organization" with the specific name of the airlines company: a) "China Southern Airlines Company is concerned with the well-being of its publics," b) "China Southern Airlines Company is basically DISHONEST," c) "I do NOT trust China Southern Airlines Company to tell the truth about the incident," d) "Under most circumstances, I would be likely to believe what China Southern Airlines Company says," e) "China Southern Airlines Company is NOT concerned with the well-being of its publics". In addition, a sixth item "my overall opinion of China Southern Airlines Company after hearing the incident" was added.

Negative word-of-mouth intention was measured by three items developed by Coombs and Holliday (2008): a) "I would encourage friends or relatives NOT to take flights with China Southern Airlines Company," b) "I would say negative things about China Southern Airlines

Company to other people,” and c) “I would recommend China Southern Airlines Company to someone who asked my advice”.

Negative online crisis reaction intention was measured by three items drawn from Schultz et al.’s (2011) measurement of secondary crisis communication and secondary crisis reaction: a) “I would share this Weibo post,” b) “I would write negative comments about this incident online,” and c) “I would sign an online petition to boycott China Southern Airlines Company”.

All dependent measures were translated into Mandarin Chinese and were carefully proofread before being used in the field.

Results

Social Media Usage and Preliminary Attitudes

Among the 157 participants whose answers were analyzed, 86% owned a Weibo account (N = 135) and 14% (N = 22) did not. Forty-seven percent (N = 74) used Weibo to learn about news and 53% (N = 83) did not. Seventy-one percent (N = 111) had taken flights before and 29% (N = 46) had not. Eighty-five percent (N = 133) thought it was safe to travel by plane, while 15% thought this was not safe (N = 24). Ninety-one percent (N = 143) heard of China Southern Airlines before, while 9% (N = 14) did not. Forty-one percent (N = 64) of the participants took flights with China Southern Airlines before and 59% did not (N = 93).

A series of ANOVA tests showed equal preliminary attitudes towards the airlines company across all treatment groups.

Reliabilities and Manipulation Checks

The reliability tests for the dependent variables showed an internal consistency of $\alpha = .85$ for perception of organizational reputation, $\alpha = .68$ for negative word-of-mouth intention, and $\alpha = .66$ for negative online crisis reaction intention.

All of the manipulation checks were significant or approach traditional acceptable levels of significance, indicating that the manipulations worked for mortification strategies, compensation strategy, and excuse-plus-ingratiation strategy.

Testing the Interactive Effect between Crisis Response Strategy and Gender

A two-way MANOVA showed no significant interactive effect between crisis response strategy and gender on the three dependent variables ($F(9, 447) = .98, \Lambda = .94, p = .47, \eta^2 = .02$). However, significant main effects were present both for crisis response strategy ($F(9, 358) = 3.69, \Lambda = .81, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$) and gender ($F(3, 147) = 3.02, \Lambda = .94, p = .03, \eta^2 = .06$).

Testing the Effects of Crisis Response Strategy on Dependent Variables

Follow-up ANOVA tests were conducted to test the effects of crisis response strategy on each of the three dependent variables (Table 1). The ANOVA tests showed significant differences of response strategies on perception of organizational reputation ($F(3, 149) = 8.69, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$) and negative online crisis reaction intention ($F(3, 149) = 3.74, p = .01, \eta^2 = .07$). However, different strategies did not generate significant difference on negative word-of-mouth intention ($F(3, 149) = 2.65, p = .05, \eta^2 = .05$).

Table 1
Effects of Crisis Response Strategy on Dependent Variables

Dependent Variables	df	F	p	η^2
Organizational reputation	3	8.69	.000***	.15
Negative WOM intention	3	2.65	.05	.05
Negative online crisis reaction intention	3	3.74	.01*	.07

***p < .001; *p < .05

Post hoc analyses further examined the effects of different crisis response strategies on perception of organizational reputation and negative online crisis reaction intention (Table 2).

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations of Crisis Response Strategy on Dependent Variables

Dependent Variables	Crisis Response Strategies											
	Apology			Compensation			Excuse			Excuse plus ingratiation		
	n	M	SD	N	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
Organizational reputation	40	3.16	.69	39	3.20	.66	42	2.56	.60	36	2.85	.67
Negative WOM intention		2.99	.76		2.95	.72		3.37	.73		3.02	.62
Negative online crisis reaction intention		2.38	.66		2.51	.83		2.89	.75		2.35	.68

For perception of organizational reputation, apology (M = 3.16, SD = .69) and compensation (M = 3.20, SD = .66) generated significantly higher scores than excuse (M = 2.56, SD = .60), but their scores were not significantly higher than that of excuse plus ingratiation (M = 2.85, SD = .67). There was also no significant difference between scores of excuse and excuse plus ingratiation.

For negative online crisis reaction intention, apology (M = 2.38, SD = .66) was rated significantly lower than excuse (M = 2.89, SD = .75), but compensation (M = 2.51, SD = .83) was not. Excuse plus ingratiation (M = 2.35, SD = .68) was rated significantly lower than excuse.

Effects of Gender on Dependent Variables

Follow-up ANOVA tests also showed the effects of gender on the three dependent variables. Significant differences between genders were present on perception of organizational reputation (F (1, 149) = 6.50, p = .01, η^2 = .04) and negative word-of-mouth intention (F (1, 149) = 5.72, p < .02, η^2 = .04), but were not present on negative online crisis reaction intention (F (1, 149) = 3.39, p = .07, η^2 = .02). Specifically, women (M = 2.82, SD = .69) tended to have more negative perception of organizational reputation than men (M = 3.13, SD = .68). Women (M =

3.20, $SD = .68$) were also more likely to conduct negative word-of-mouth than men ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .76$). However, the online crisis reaction intention did not differ significantly between women ($M = 2.63$, $SD = .79$) and men ($M = 2.39$, $SD = .68$).

Discussion

Examining the Main Effects of Crisis Response Strategy

Results of this study showed that different crisis response strategies affected the public's perception of organizational reputation and negative online crisis reaction intention, but did not generate differences in negative word-of-mouth intention in China.

Different crisis response strategies generated different responses in terms of perception of organizational reputation. In this experiment, both mortification strategies—apology and compensation—generated more positive perception of organizational reputation than excuse. This further supported the findings from previous studies as mortification strategies lead to more favorable perception of organizational reputation than non-mortification strategies (Coombs, 1999; Lee, 2004, Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Coombs & Holladay, 2008). In the crisis type of an accident, excuse and ingratiation would normally be a good fit (Coombs, 1995). However, the choice of response strategy should differ based on the organization's performance history, the level of damage caused by the crisis, and the victim-status (Coombs, 1995). The scenario used in this experiment is a major airlines company plane crash caused by engine failure. The damage of the crisis is large. Although the response strategy communicated via social media would face the whole public rather than just for the victims, victim-centered and accommodative strategies such as apology and compensation generated more positive perception of organizational reputation.

For the dependent variable of negative online crisis reaction intention, the strategies of apology and excuse plus ingratiation were both rated significantly lower than excuse, but compensation was not rated significantly lower. Compensation, although generated more positive perception of organizational reputation, did not generate less negative online crisis reaction intention than excuse. One possible explanation is that for perception of organizational reputation, compensation showcases supportive behavior from the organization. However, as the message was somewhat vague and the amount of compensation was not specified in this particular message, it may cause the public's suspicion and curiosity on the Internet. Excuse plus ingratiation, on the other hand, was suggested to generate significantly lower online crisis reaction intention than excuse being used alone. Coombs and Schmidt (2000) suggests that corrective action, bolstering, mortification, and separation produce the same effects on organizational reputation and potential supportive behavior, whereas shifting blame generates less account honoring. They point out "shifting blame downplays victim concerns by minimizing organizational responsibility," while "all but the blame-shifting scenario were considered equivalent in expressing concern for victims" (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). The ingratiation message used in this experiment stressed on the efficiency of the evacuation plan and the fact that the crew sacrificed their own safety to help the passengers. Although the excuse part in this strategy did not change the blame-shifting nature, the ingratiation part did put the victim to the center of the message.

Cultural Implications for Crisis Communication

Some tentative implications can be drawn from this study for crisis communication in Mainland China. First of all, mortification strategies such as apology and compensation generated more positive results in perception of organizational reputation than excuse. Crisis

management in Mainland China is focused on government relationships, cover-ups, and denials (Ye & Pang, 2011). It is likely that the public in Mainland China are more used to blame-shifting and cover-ups, and expect organizations to take more responsibility.

Moreover, this study found that significant differences were present in perception of organizational reputation and negative online crisis reaction intention, but not present in negative word-of-mouth intention. Since negative online crisis reaction requires the same or even higher anger level than negative word-of-mouth. Social cultural factors, rather than anger levels, may better explain this finding. One possible explanation is that social media in China have encouraged the public's self-expression online in a society where silence is valued traditionally (Yu & Wen, 2003). Also, the rich media features on Weibo help make it easier for Chinese Internet users to share information, make comments, and express opinions. Moreover, Chinese online users' "rumor driven" behavior (Luo & Jiang, 2012) may also help explain this result as people tend to "follow the crowd" when they see other negative comments.

Examining the Main Effects of Gender

The effects of different crisis response strategies were consistent between genders. However, women were found to have less positive perception of organizational reputation, and higher negative word-of-mouth intention than men during a corporate accident crisis event.

Previous studies show women are more emotional when they hear disastrous crisis news than men (Seeger et al., 2002) and tend to have deeper feelings of sorrow, anxiety, and fear (Lachlan et al., 2010). Results of this study suggest this is also true when it comes to a corporate crisis event, as female participants in this study rated organizational reputation less positively than male participants no matter what crisis response strategy they were exposed to when they learned the plane crash accident.

Women are considered to be more pro-social and are more likely to be engaged in helping behaviors (Berger et al., 1999). In advertising, women's behavioral intention is enhanced more by emotionally-oriented messages (Lee et al., 2010), and is more likely to be influenced by cause-related advertising (Berger et al., 1999). By conducting negative word-of-mouth about this crisis, participants aim to remind their friends and relatives about the safety issues associated with the airlines company involved, and aim to help them and enhance their safety. Although men are more likely to conduct behavioral advocacy (Hoffner et al., 2002) and to channel their stress into outward hostility towards others (Brody & Hall, 2000) during disastrous crisis, the negative word-of-mouth in this study relates more to the purchase behavior and helping behavior than it relates to the hostility behavioral advocacy.

Implications for Theory and Practices

Results of this study suggest that in a major accident with true evidence and large damage, mortification strategies are more effective in generating more positive perception of organizational reputation, and ingratiation helps reduce negative online crisis reaction intention. This study further supports SCCT by suggesting that the right crisis response strategy should be selected based on the specific crisis situation. Moreover, specific social cultural context should also be taken into consideration when choosing crisis response strategies. In China, caution should be taken online as Chinese Internet users are more likely to react online than offline. As social media emerge and develop nowadays, negative online reactions can easily go viral. Therefore, organizations need to create and maintain positive image on social media and actively engage with the public before crises occur.

This study also shows that women have more negative perception of organizational reputation, and are more likely to conduct negative word-of-mouth than men when they hear about a corporate crisis event. It suggests that public relations practitioners need to take gender differences into consideration in corporate crisis communication.

Limitations and Recommendations

It is hoped that future efforts can be made to include the issues that are not addressed in this study. First of all, this study did not take the organization's performance history into account. Although results indicated that the preliminary attitude towards the airlines company were equal across all treatment groups, it was only measured by three single items instead of an established scale. In fact, positive performance history may create a halo effect that can protect an organization during crisis events (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). It is suggested that future studies test the organization's performance history prior to the manipulations and use the results of performance history test as a covariance.

Second, this research only covered one crisis type—accident, out of the four crisis types in the internal-external and intentional-unintentional matrix (Coombs, 1995). An accident is an unintentional action caused by internal factors. Intentional crisis conditions usually generate higher anger levels than unintentional crisis condition (Coombs, 2004; Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Utz et al, 2013). It is hoped that future research with scenarios of intentional crisis can further test the effects of response strategy and gender on reputation, negative word-of-mouth and negative online crisis reaction intention.

Last but not least, greater sample size and more equivalent distribution of male and female participants within the sample are needed in order to provide stronger evidence in future research.

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“Who Says What, in Which Channels” in Public Relations: Extension of the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) in Terms of Multiple Channels

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to extend the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) by adding media channels in an organizational crisis. It also aims to explore the characteristics of key public and how they influence the organization during a crisis. In order to find a primary channel and key public, an online survey of 360 American participants was conducted based on a real case background. The findings demonstrate that STOPS can be applied to crisis communication as well as can be extended by media channels. Further, the results show that problem recognition and a referent criterion are essential in predicting the communication behaviors and crisis responsibility of the organization. Among the five media factors the survey examined, the SNS (Social Networking Services) was a significant channel, which explains the importance of information seeking in a crisis situation. The survey also found the following characteristics of key public: they tend to be older men who often travel by airplane. They are active publics who display passive information behavior toward information selection, transmission, and acquisition. Overall, the results suggest that PR practitioners need to understand the findings and theoretical logic behind STOPS in order to create a more strategic approach to key publics during an organizational crisis.

Introduction

Since the emergence of the Internet, the media landscape has evolved, seeing traditional media companies lose portions of audiences. According to the Pew Research Center (2013), 50% of audiences cite the Internet as a main news source—consuming news via social media and mobile devices has grown in popularity. Moreover, the use of digital media brings a variety of media options. For example, currently, people access or upload individual ideas through smart phones and tablet PCs that have Internet access. In “An Age of Digitalization,” Grunig (2009) states that Internet-based technologies are two sides of the same coin to PR management. In other words, the increase in digital media usage is helpful to PR practitioners in terms of information diffusion and interaction, but at the same time, it could lead to disaster in a given situation, interweaving negative issues with an organization. Thus, the changing media environment is challenging to PR practitioners. This study aims to identify the main outlets in multiple channels by extending the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) and to explore how the public use them in a given situation (Kim & Gunig, 2011). The STOPS has been helped to explain how publics engage in given on communicative behaviors such as information acquisition, transmission, and selection (Kim, 2006). In other words, the theory successfully addresses “why and how people become active and involved in communication behaviors” (Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim 2012, p.145); however, there is a limitation when it comes to explaining media channels publics use when they engage in communication. When communicating through media strategically, an organization could save money and maximize the effect of communication with publics (Kim, Ni, & Sha, 2008). For this reason, it is necessary to enlarge STOPS in order to identify the main channels and the use of the publics in a given context. This study will extend STOPS by exploring the media channels primarily used by the publics. With regard to a given problem or issue, it is important to know who the key publics are. When a problem occurs, various public arise and disappear as time passes. At this time, the key publics play a critical role in influencing an organization’s reputation. In particular, the active and aware publics are the key publics because these groups account for a problematic situation in a crisis (Monberg, 1998; Vasquez & Taylor, 2001; Ni & Kim, 2009). Even though the term “hot-issue publics” (i.e., publics who pay more attention to negative media issues) was suggested through a research applying STOPS, it is still hard to get an answer to the question of which channels these publics pose a threat to an organization in a given situation. Nevertheless, is essential for PR management to find and understand the public affecting an organization. It is, therefore, necessary to enlarge STOPS to identify primary media channels as well as the key publics. To examine the main media channels and the key publics in the given problem, an online survey with a sample size of 360 for this study was conducted based on a real case background. Methodologically, the study is going to be conducted based on the structural equation modeling (SEM) and hierarchical multiple regression. First, media variables such as traditional and digital media will be expanded as dependent variables after information selection, information transmission, and information acquisition. This will determine which outlets are the primary channels to communicate with a given public. To find the key public’s characteristics, secondly and hierarchical multiple regression analysis will be conducted by adding independent variables, such as social demographic, socioeconomic, trust of information sources and communication variables, and one-way ANOVA will be used to understand the difference among general publics related to information behavior. As a result, predictor variables that could hurt an organization will be verified with their characteristics regarding the key publics in a crisis situation of the organization. Further consequently, the findings of this study will not only contribute to theory

development but PR practitioners also help identify key publics and predict primary media channels.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Key Publics in an Organizational Crisis

When a crisis occurs in an organization, various conditions such as involvement and perception led multiple publics to arise and differently respond to a crisis. Accordingly, it is necessary for the organization to understand publics and consider their communication characteristics because crisis strategies can be used to different publics (Kim, Kim, & Cameron, 2012). The first step of understanding public is to analysis publics through segmentation since targeting the specific public is more effective than communicating with a larger population (Kim, Ni, & Sha, 2008). For this reason, when a crisis occurs to the organization, finding the public negatively influencing the organization is recommended before planning the crisis strategies. In traditional typology of the public relations research, publics are grouped four types as nonpublic, latent public, aware public, and active publics (Grunig, 1997; Ni & Kim, 2009; Kim, Ni, & Sha, 2008; 2008). For the perspective of strategic potential disseminating the issue, the active and aware publics were considered by the key public which explains the issues' arise, sharing, and diffusion (Monberg, 1998; Ni & Kim, 2009; Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). In this study, the key public was focused to uncover the public who affect the organizational crisis. Although the term "hot-issue publics" (i.e., publics who pay more attention to negative media issues) was suggested through a research applying STOPS (Kim, et al. 2012), it is still hard to get an answer to the question of which publics pose a threat to an organization in a given situation. Consequently, in this study, the key public refers to those who play a critical role in a negative influence of organization's reputation during a crisis.

The Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) in an Organizational Crisis

STOPS is based on the Situational Theory of Publics explaining when people communicate and be effective in public relations grounded on classified population(Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim, 2012; Kim & Gruning, 2011). This theory illuminates "why and how people become active about a certain problem and how they engage in communication behaviors", and "generalizes a public's communicative action through individuals' activeness, selecting, transmitting, and acquiring information in given problem" (Kim, et al. 2012, p. 145). Thus, this takes advantage of understanding the dynamics of issue formation and influencing public like opinion leaders among general people. STOPS consists of "four independent variables (problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, referent criterion), a mediating variable of situational motivation in problem solving, and a dependent variable of communicative action in problem solving with six sub variables of information behaviors" (Kim & Grunig, 2012, p. 145). Recently, some communication scholars have been interesting in applying STOPS into public segmentation research (Ni & Kim, 2009; Kim, 2011; Kim, Ni, & Sha, 2008), finding the hot-public related to media and political issue (Kim, Ni, Kim, Kim, 2012), organization (Mazzei, Kim, & Dell'Oreo, 2012) and health communication (Kim, Shen, & Morgan, 2011). However, despite the importance of uncovering the key public in crisis communication, there is no research such study yet. This study therefore aims to test STOPS into crisis communication at first. This study explores how STOPS predict the key public who have activeness of forming the opinions and diffuse the crisis issues on the organization.

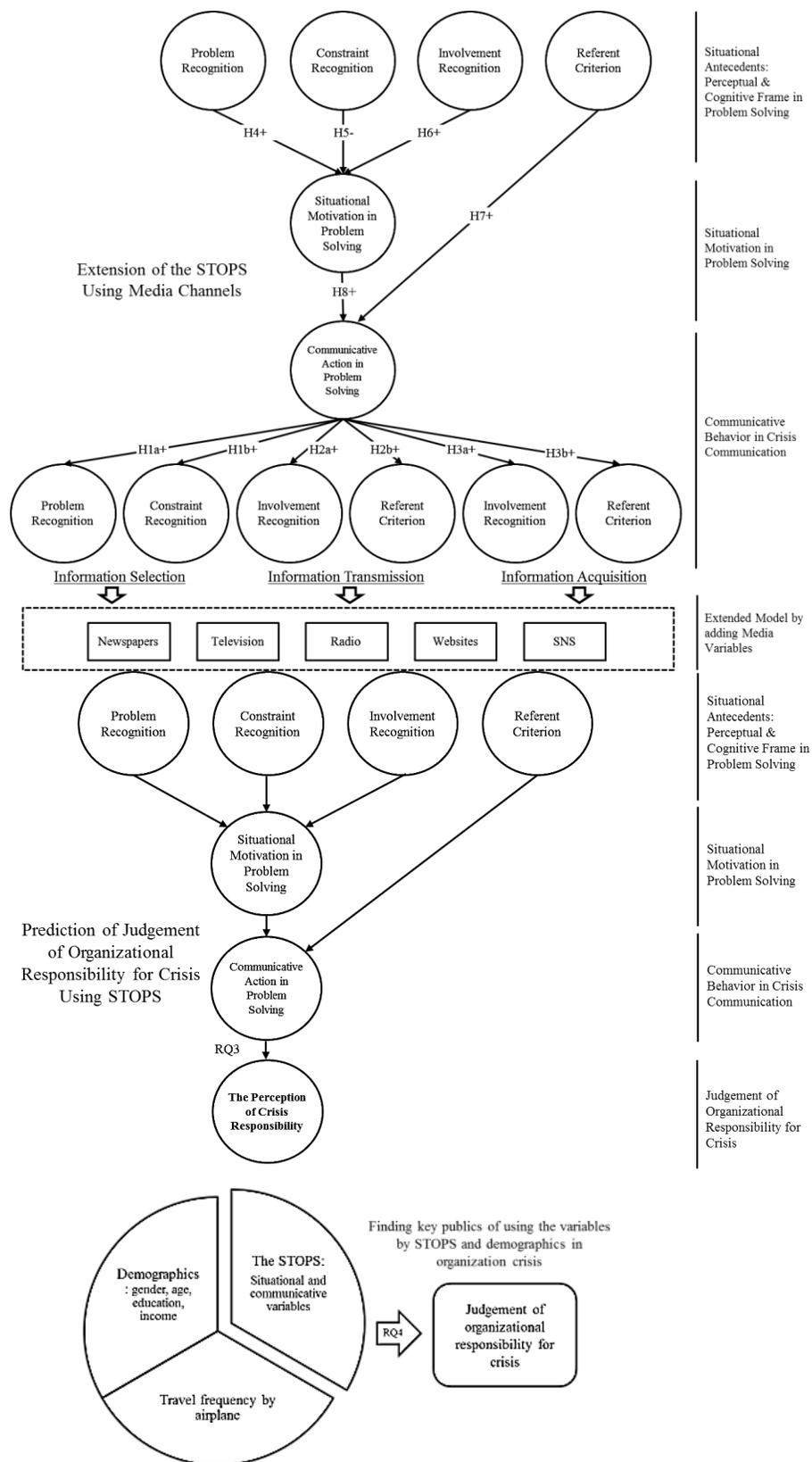


Figure 1. Conceptual models.

Communicative Action in an Organizational Crisis

“Communicative action in problem solving (CAPS) was a conflated construct to measure communicator’s heightened communicative behaviors” (Kim, 2006, p. 26). Kim (2006) also proposed the premise of communicative action as using communication to solve their problems when people confront important problematic situation. In this study, it was suggested for participants to read article of Asiana Airlines Crash as a problem, and then the perception of crisis responsibility on an organization was checked. Accordingly, problem solving in this study includes the judgement of crisis responsibility on an organization. Kim and Grunig (2011) illuminated the concept of the communicative action model by explaining individuals’ activeness in selecting, transmitting, and acquiring information. “Communicative action is a critical concept to bring together three communicative behavioral dimensions.” (Kim, 2006, p. 62). These three factors are divided into active and passive sub dimension, producing six dependent variables. First, selection of information involves information forefending (active) and information permitting (passive). Second, transmission of information entails information forwarding (active), information sharing (passive). Third, acquisition of information consists of information seeking (active) and information attending (Kim et al., 2012; Kim & Grunig, 2011). Three factors of information selection, transmitting, and acquisition will be explained with sub variables as follows.

Information selection: Information forefending and information permitting: Information selection refers to the stage which pursues available and applicable information in problem solving (Kim, 2006). The information selection consists of information forefending and information permitting. Information forefending indicates that individuals choose relevant and useful information with subjective judgment for solving a problem (Kim et al., 2012; Kim & Grunig, 2011). That is, when solving problem situation, individuals select what helpful and relevant instead of accepting all the information, (Kim et al., 2012; Kim & Grunig, 2011; Kim, Shen, & Morgan, 2011). On the other hand, information permitting describes the extent to which individuals generally accept any information related to the situation (Kim et al., 2012; Kim & Grunig, 2011). At an early stage, information permitting tends to occur and not oppose information forefending. An active problem solver can be generally accepting all related information and systematically filtering irrelevant information. Therefore, this study proposes hypothesizes the following (see Figure 1):

Hypothesis 1(H1): Individuals’ activeness in an organizational crisis is positively related to their selection of information, such that the more active the individual, the more information forefending (H1a) and information permitting (H1b) they engage in.

Information transmission: Information forwarding and information sharing: The two variables of information selection were dependent variables in Situational Theory of Publics (STP) which explain communication behaviors based on identified groups (Kim, 2006). Information transmission has two sub variables of information forwarding and information sharing. Although information forwarding indicates a problem solver’s purposeful offering of information to others, information sharing refers to reactive sharing of information (Kim et al., 2012; Kim & Grunig, 2011). Thus, the distinction between these two variables relies on communicator’s efforts whether or not communicator tries to proactively share own expertise and knowledge with others. the study proposes the following hypothesis (see Figure 1):

Hypothesis 2(H2): Individuals’ activeness in an organizational crisis is positively related to their transmission of information, such that the more active they are, the more information forwarding(H2a) and information sharing (H2b) they engage in.

Information acquisition: Information seeking and information attending: Information acquisition states the effort of information-collecting for problem solving (Kim, 2006). In general, people become active when they exert efforts for information acquisition. Information acquisition consists of information seeking and information attending. Information seeking is defined as “the planned scanning of the environment for messages about a specified topic” (Grunig, 1997, p. 9), whereas information attending refers to unplanned discovery of messages (Grunig, 1997, 2003, 2005). An active problem solver not only seeks out information, but also attends provided information. Passive problem solver may, on the other hand, engage in little processing of information. Hence, this study posits a hypothesis as follows (see Figure 1):

Hypothesis 3(H3): Individuals’ activeness in an organizational crisis is positively related to their acquisition of information, such that the more active they are, the more information seeking (H3a) and information attending (H3b) they engage in.

Antecedents to communicative action

STOPS includes predictors of information behaviors: four independent variables of problems recognition, constraint recognition, involvement, and referent criterion, also, one mediating variable of situational motivation in problem solving. These factors can lead to communicative actions of the key publics.

Problem recognition: The STOPS refers to “problem recognition of one’s perception that there is no immediately applicable solution to it.” (Kim & Grunig, 2011), and the original definition of problem recognition from STP was that “people detect that something should be done about a situation and stop to think about what to do” (Grunig, 1997, p. 10), and A problem exists when I recognize it; a problem is not independent of our individual thinking (Kim & Grunig, 2011). Thus, problem recognition is an initial mover of cognitive activity in a problematic situation.

Involvement recognition: Involvement recognition is defined as a perceived connection between individuals and a problematic situation (Kim et al., 2012; Kim & Grunig, 2011). That is, people’s communicative action is affected by the perceived connection of them so that people are likely to be active in communication behavior when their perceived connection is high.

Constraint recognition: The STOPS follows the definition of the STP: “people perceive that there are obstacles in a situation that limit their ability to do anything about the situation” (Grunig, 1997, p. 10). Constraint recognition decreases communication behavior such as information and attending without high levels of problem recognition and perceived involvement (Ramanadhann & Viswanath, 2006). Therefore, when people believe that they hardly do anything to change the situation, they are little likely to communicate about the problems.

Referent criterion: Referent criterion is defined as “any knowledge or subjective judgmental system that influences the way in which one approaches problem solving.” (Kim & Grunig, 2011, p. 131). This variable is more closer a cognition than a perception because it measures “available” and “applicable” knowledge from one’s prior problem-solving experiences (Higgins, 1996). In General, when people approach current problem, they tend to recall prior successful experiences (Carter, 1965; Higgins, 1996). If a problem solver have difficulty in retrieving a workable solution from past experiences, they are more likely to take a communicant action to seek for information in dealing with a current problem. Furthermore, they are eager to select and give information when a referent criterion is present (Kim & Grunig, 2011). That is, the presence of a referent criterion can result in more information behaviors in problem solving such as selection, transmission, and acquisition of information.

Situational motivation in problem solving (mediating variable): In social psychology, studying motivational antecedents and consequences improved theoretical power and utility (Kruglanski, 1996). Moreover, when people realize the importance of a problem, they become cognitively effortful the information they process (Bandura, 1986). Accordingly, a motivational effect is suggested in a problem-solving situation. The situational motivation in problem solving is defined as a state of situation-specific cognitive and epistemic readiness to make problem-solving efforts (Kim & Grunig, 2011). Therefore, this mediates the effect of problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement recognition. Meanwhile, a referent criterion has an independent effect on the information in that this is more cognitive than perceptual. After detecting the problem, individuals will stop to think about the problem (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Kim, Grunig, & Ni, 2010). The three variables of problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement recognition together will determine the motivation to do something in given problematic situation (Kim et al., 2010). Based on the literature reviewed, the study proposes the following additional hypotheses (see Figure 1):

Hypothesis 4(H4): Individuals' problem recognition is positively related to their situational motivation in an organizational crisis.

Hypothesis 5(H5): Individuals' involvement recognition is negatively related to their situational motivation in an organizational crisis.

Hypothesis 6(H6): Individuals' constraint recognition is positively related to their situational motivation in an organizational crisis.

Hypothesis 7(H7): Individuals' referent criterion is positively related to their communicative action in an organizational crisis.

Hypothesis 8(H8): Individuals' situational motivation in an organizational crisis is positively related to their communicative action in an organizational crisis.

Extension of STOPS with media factors in an organizational crisis

The public experience an organization through the media during a crisis (Coombs, 2012). The media's portrayal of organization in a crisis powerfully influences on the shaping the perception of public involved in the crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2001; Pearson & Clair, 1998). The reason the media is of importance to PR management is that it shapes publics' perception via frame (Coombs, 2012; Coombs, 2007). Framing or description of a crisis has an impact on the evaluation of crisis responsibility (Cho & Gower, 2006) and reputation toward the organization (Coombs, 2012). In fact, STOPS addresses why and how in communication behaviors, but it does not address media channels people use despite the importance of predicting the crisis responsibility and key public in crisis communication through media. Since Kim (2006) suggested STOPS integrating the concept both sender-oriented communication (Lasswell, 1948) and receiver oriented communication (Chaffee, 1982), further, it is the time to consider extending STOPS reflecting multiple channels and predicting the effect of communication behaviors. When people behave communication actions for the purpose of solving the given problems, it wonders PR practitioners regarding communication channels that people's information selection, transmission, and acquisition are happen. In digital age, PR practitioners may face difficulties to communicate with the public because there are so many media channels. In this regard, it is time to extend STOPS and then predict primary channels in terms of crisis communication. Hence, it is imperative to account for communication channels key publics mainly use because through primary channels PR practitioners may protect the organization's

reputation and effectively communicate with publics by offering information related to a crisis. This study therefore proposes research questions as follows:

Research Question 1(RQ1): How three active variables of communicative behavior (i.e. information permitting, information sharing, and information attending) are related to five media channels (i.e. newspapers, television news, radio news, online websites, and social networking sites)?

Research Question 2(RQ2): How three passive variables of communicative behavior (i.e. information forefending, information forwarding, and information seeking) are related to five media channels (i.e. newspapers, television news, radio news, online websites, and social networking sites)?

Connecting STOPS to the Perception of Crisis Responsibility of the Key Public

Not until we are perceived do we begin to think an event as a crisis (Coombs, 2012; Penrose, 2000). The public's perception affects how much the organization takes responsibility for the crisis (Coombs, 1995). In general, PR practitioners should pay attention to news media for crisis management because people experience crisis via the news media (Coombs, 2012). For this reason, it is important that PR practitioners consider media channels as well as key publics who influencing on organization via perception of crisis responsibility. In other words, it is imperative to uncover the key publics by utilizing primary channels in organization crisis. In this vein, this study proposes the extension of the STOPS in organization crisis by adding media variables. In particular, it is plausible to apply STOPS to forecast communication behaviors, and extend STOPS to predict primary channels according to communicative behaviors such as information selection, information transmission, and information acquisition. According to the STOPS, active problem solvers become active communicators about problematic issue (Kim & Grunig, 2011). Thus, it is predicted for active publics to not only seek out, select, and transmit more information about the crisis issue of the organization, but also influence less-active publics (Grunig, 1997; Kim & Grunig, 2011; Kim, Shen, & Morgan, 2011). Finding the primary media used by key publics could be useful to PR practitioners when they make a strategic plan and effective communication with people. Accordingly, this study posits two research questions as follows:

Research Question 3(RQ3): How Individual' situational motivation in an organizational crisis influences their perception of crisis responsibility on the organization?

Research Question 4(RQ4): What are the characteristics of key publics influencing the judgement of organizational responsibility for crisis?

Methodology

Participants

Online survey was conducted to test the preceding hypotheses and research questions. The participants in this study were 360 adults living in the United States. The age ranged from 18 to 74 years, with an average age of 38.38% (n=137) of respondents were male, and 220% (n=220) were female. Among the participants, 75% (n=270) were Caucasian, 8.6% (n=31) were African American, 6.9% (n=25) were Asian American, and other races were 9.5% (n=34). Participants in this study were recruited through an online web-based platform (MTurk) with a diverse subject pool from October 11 to October 25, 2013.

Measures

This study is based on a real crisis case of the Asiana crash which occurred in July, 2013. The Asiana Airlines with 307 passengers crashed on landing in San Francisco International Airport (SFO) in the United States. After briefly introducing the crisis event through an official statement, participants were then instructed to answer multiple questions. Respondents rated the variables of situational antecedents (problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, referent criterion) and situational motivation with four questions, each rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all to 7 = very much) was used for the variables of information behavioral (information forefending, information permitting, information forwarding, information sharing, information seeking, and information attending) with each five questions. Also responses were coded on a 7-point Likert-scale about crisis responsibility with two questions. The reliability of each variable is as followings. Problem recognition was measured by four questions ($\alpha = .700$), constraint recognition was asked by four items ($\alpha = .937$), and involvement recognition was assessed by four questions ($\alpha = .881$). Next, they also answered questions of communicative action in problem solving variables to be assessed whether they are active or passive in information acquisition, selection, and transmission. They indicated how much they attend (passive) or seek (active), permit (passive) or forefend (active), and share (passive) or forward (active) the information (Kim, 2006; Kim & Grunig, 2011). Each communicative behavior variables was measured by five items (i.e. information forefending ($\alpha = .757$), permitting ($\alpha = .753$), forwarding ($\alpha = .902$), sharing ($\alpha = .881$), seeking ($\alpha = .871$), attending ($\alpha = .890$)) (Kim & Grunig, 2011). Finally, respondents chose the media they use usually to get news among five news channels of newspapers, television, radio, online website, and social networking sites.

Analysis

First, Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis using AMOS program was conducted to examine H1 to H8, and RQ3. To evaluate the structural equation model proposed, the Hu and Bentler (1999) joint criteria was used. 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) $\leq .06$ and SRMR $\leq .10$. When models usually achieved a reasonable model-fit, it was interpreted that their paths to evaluate the hypotheses and research questions. Second, logistic regression was conducted to examine RQ1 and RQ2. Logistic regression analysis is especially useful when the distribution of responses on the DV is expected to be nonlinear with one or more of the IVs (Tabachnick, & Fidell, 2013, p. 439). RQ1 and RQ2 are to predict communication channels according to communication behavior variables. Third, a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs)

were performed to examine RQ4. Before this method is conducted, public segmentation method (Kim, 2011) was used to classify publics. By using this segmentation method, participants were divided into four subgroups of publics (i.e., nonpublic, latent public, aware public, and active public). Further, hierarchical regression was tested to find the characteristics of key publics (RQ4), adding demographics, information behaviors variables.

Results

First, this study provides results of the eight hypotheses (H1 to H8) related to STOPS. Second, the results of the extension of the STOPS (RQ1, RQ2) about the media variables will be suggested. Third, results of perception of crisis responsibility using situational variables it will be discussed (RQ3). Lastly, this study reports results of finding the characteristics regarding key publics (RQ4).

Hypothesis Testing Related to STOPS through Structural Model Testing: H1 to H8

The conceptual model testing in this study shows $\chi^2_{df} (291) = 2,223.41$, CFI = .72, RMSEA = .14 (see Figure 2). Although this indicated model is not good data-model fit according to the fit criteria of Hu and Bentler (1999), this study interprets the paths to examine H1 to H8 because the purpose of this model is to explore the applicability of STOPS in a crisis situation of the organization. H1 predicted that the more individuals are active about a crisis of an organization, the more they are likely to engage in information forefending (H1a) and information permitting (H1b). As shown in Figure 2, SEM results show significantly positive path coefficients between the communicative action variable and information forefending ($\beta = .66, p < .001$) and information permitting ($\beta = .56, p < .001$). Thus, H1a and H1b are both supported. H2 posited that individuals' activeness about a crisis of the organization is positively related to their transmission of information, such that the greater the level of activeness, the more information forwarding (H2a) and information sharing (H2b) they engage in. There are significant paths both information forwarding ($\beta = .82, p < .001$) and information sharing ($\beta = .79, p < .001$). That is, H2a and H2b are supported. H3 predicted a positive association between communicative action in a crisis of the organization and information seeking (H3a), information attending (H3b). The results show that positive and significant paths from the communicative seeking variable ($\beta = .86, p < .001$) to information attending variable ($\beta = .74, p < .001$). The results support both H3a and H3b. Next, H4 stated a positive association between individuals' problem recognition and their situational motivation in a crisis of the organization. The path between the two variables is not significant; H4 is not supported. H5 posited a negative link between individuals' constraint recognition to situational motivation in problem solving. Even though path coefficient is positive and significant ($\beta = .09, p < .05$), H5 is not supported because the result was positively significant. H6 predicted a positive path from involvement recognition to situational motivation. The path is positive and significant ($\beta = .84, p < .001$). The prediction is supported. H7 expected that stronger subscription to a referent criterion results in greater communicative action in problem solving. This hypothesis is supported with a positive and significant coefficient ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). H8 stated that greater situational motivation in problem solving leads to higher communicative action in an organizational crisis. The prediction is supported by the positive and significant path coefficient value ($\beta = .56, p < .001$).

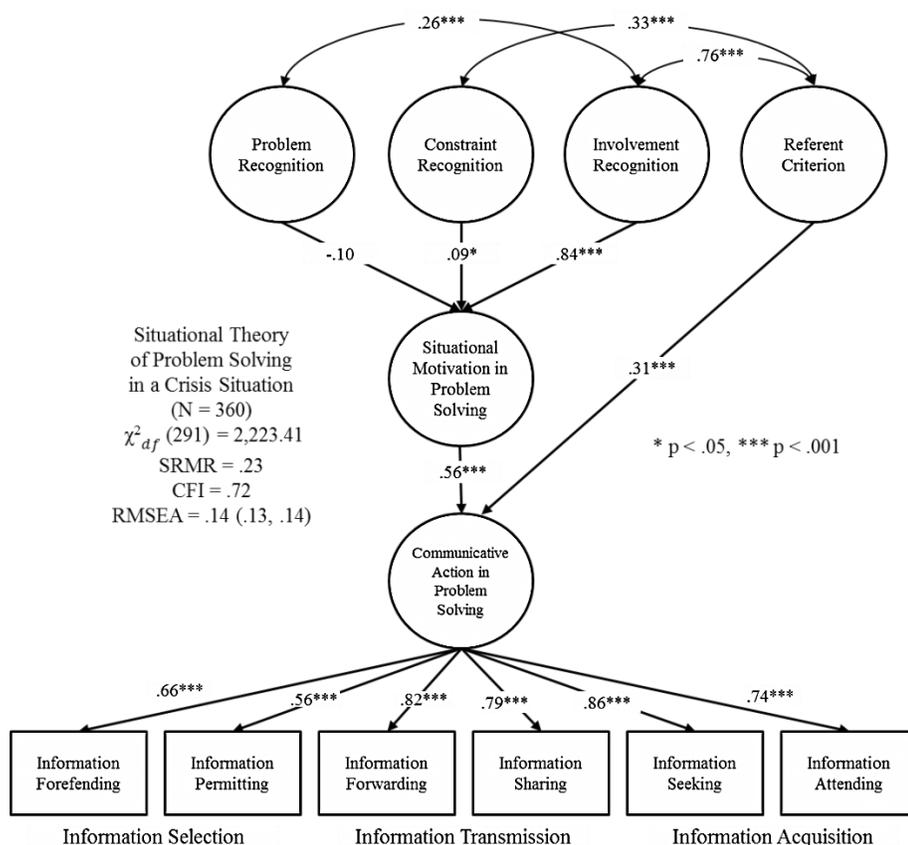


Figure 2. Results of model test about STOPS (standardized coefficients are reported, H1 to H8).

The Extension of STOPS Using the Media Variables: RQ1 and RQ2

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine whether information behavior in problem solving (i.e. information selection, information, transmission, and information acquisition) can predict using each media such as newspapers, television news, radio news, websites, and social networking sites (SNS) as a usual news source in a crisis of the organization. To conduct a logistic regression, dependent variable (as newspapers, television news, radio news, websites, and SNS) was recoded as dummy variable, 1(used) and 0(unused). The full model containing two predictors is statistically significant, $\chi^2 (6, N = 360) = 13.53, p < .05$. The model as a whole explained between 3.7% (cox and Snell R square) and 7.8% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in using SNS, and correctly classified 75.1% of cases. Among six independent variables (information selection: information forefending and information permitting and information transmission: information forwarding and information sharing, information acquisition: information seeking and information attending), as shown in table 1, I found that only two predictors of information seeking ($\beta = .45, p < .05$), recoding an odds ratio of 1.57 and information attending seeking ($\beta = -.45, p < .05$), an odds ratio of .64 were statistically significant. This means that individuals who behave with information seeking will be positively related to use SNS, whereas individuals who behave information attending will be negatively related to use SNS. In order words, publics of active information behavior tend to seek out information about organization crisis through SNS, whereas publics of passive information behavior are not likely to use SNS.

Table 1

Relationship between Information Behavior and SNS Use (RQ1 and RQ2)

SNS	β	S.E.	Wald	df	P	Odds Ratio	95.0% CI	Odds
							Lower	Upper
Information seeking	.45	.23	4.04	1.00	.045	1.57	1.01	2.45
Information attending	-.45	.21	4.70	1.00	.030	.64	.42	.96

The Results of the Judgement of Organizational Responsibility Using Situational Variables (RQ3)

As shown in Figure 3, the conceptual model testing RQ3 indicates $\chi^2_{df} (291) = 2,305.25$, CFI = .72, RMSEA = .13. It is predicted that increased communicative action in problem solving (RQ3) will lead to individuals' greater the perception of the crisis responsibility on an organization (Asiana Airlines). The path coefficient from communicative action in problem solving to the perception of crisis responsibility is $\beta = .33$ ($p < .01$). Therefore, both RQ3 is significantly positive relationship with the perception of crisis responsibility. Based on this result, STOPS illuminates the individuals' activeness of publics in selecting, transmitting, and acquiring situation-specific information under a crisis situation of the organization. Further, as STOPS is applied to the crisis communication, it demonstrates that the communicative actions in a crisis of organization affected the perception of crisis responsibility.

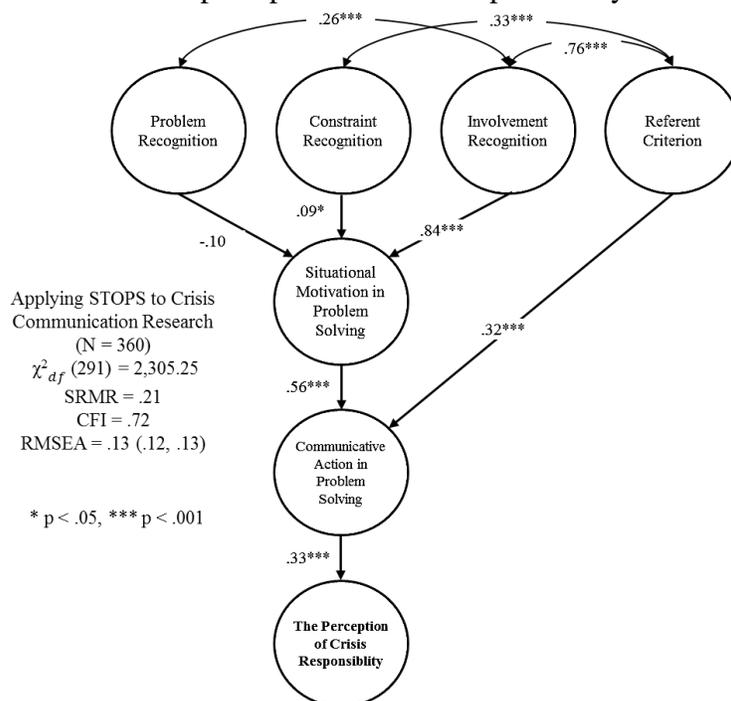


Figure 3. Results of model test about crisis responsibility (RQ3).

The Finding the Characteristics of the Key Public In a Crisis Situation of The Organization: RQ4

In order to find the characteristics of key publics related to active information behavior in a crisis of the organization, first six-one way ANOVA first was examined in terms of public

segmentation. This study predicted that the more active individuals in a crisis situation of the organization, the more information forwarding, the more information seeking, and the more information forefending about the crisis issue. Six one-way ANOVA tests and a series of paired-mean comparisons (Tukey's HSD) were conducted to examine the differences of communicative behaviors according to the type of publics. Second, hierarchical multiple regression was used to uncover the characteristics of the key publics with the perception of crisis responsibility on an organization. The segmentation of the general population was into more meaningful subgroups base on individuals' perceptions of crisis responsibility on an organization (Asiana Airlines) by using the three independent variables of problem recognition, involvement recognition, and constraint recognition. These different types of publics (i.e. nonpublic, latent public, aware public, and active public) tend to can predict the higher active communicative action in problem solving (i.e. information forefending, information forwarding, information seeking). Table 2 shows means and standard deviation. Among active variables of communicative action, findings state the information that forfending, $F(3, 356) = 45.19, p < .001$; information forwarding, $F(3, 356) = 67.69, p < .001$; information seeking $F(3, 356) = 47.28, p < .001$. Meanwhile, in the passive variables of communicative, it was again indicated that permitting, $F(3, 356) = 11.46, p < .001$; information sharing, $F(3, 356) = 21.27, p < .001$; information attending $F(3, 356) = 14.86, p < .001$. Further, the study conducted tests for mean comparisons between nonpublic and latent public, latent public and aware public, and aware public and active public, and aware public and active public in all three information behaviors. There are significantly mean differences for all pairs at $p < .05$ or $p < .001$ for all three information behaviors except for the pair of nonpublic and latent public. Thus, individuals who are segmented into a more active subgroup (active or aware public about the issue) tend to more proactive information behaviors regarding seeking, selecting, and forwarding the information about the issue of an organizational crisis.

Table 2
Information Behaviors by Situational Activeness: ANOVA Results (N=360)

		Situational Activeness (inactive \Rightarrow active)				<i>F</i>	η^2
	Dependent Variable	Nonpublic (n = 57)	Latent Public (n = 166)	Aware Public (n = 78)	Active Public (n = 59)		
Active	Information forefending	3.05(0.97) c	3.09(1.11)c	3.81(3.81)b	4.76(1.02)a	45.19** *	.28
	Information forwarding	2.04(0.98) c	2.42(1.29)c	3.49(1.14)b	4.66(1.18)a	67.69** *	.29
	Information seeking	2.35(1.32) c	2.83(1.36)c	3.71(1.26)b	4.85(1.20)a	47.28** *	.36
Passive	Information permitting	3.81(1.30) c	4.11(1.24)c	4.55(.99)b	4.90(0.96)a	11.46** *	.09
	Information sharing	3.18(1.20) c	3.45(1.43)c	4.12(1.17)b	4.80(1.19)a	21.27** *	.15
	Information attending	3.63(.19)c	3.77(0.11)c	4.41(.17)b	5.09(.19)a	14.86** *	.11

Note: *** $p < .001$. Subscripts placing next to the mean (standard deviation) indicate significant difference among frames at the $p < .05$ based on post-hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test (i.e., $a > b > c$).

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to reveal the characteristics of the key publics with the perception of crisis responsibility on the organization. Demographics with gender, age, income, and travel frequency by airplane were entered at model 1, explaining 7% of the variance in the perception of crisis responsibility. After entry of four situational variables (problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, and referent criterion) at model 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 16%, $F(9, 347) = 7.35, p < .001$. The two control measures explained an additional 9% of the variance in the perception of crisis responsibility, after controlling for demographics, R squared change = .09, F change (4, 347) = 9.16, $p < .001$. Next, after entry of the variables regarding active and passive information behaviors at model 3, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 18%, $F(11, 345) = 6.82, p < .001$. In model 3, it was explained an additional 2% after controlling demographics and situational variables, R squared change = .02, F change (2, 345) = 3.89, $p < .05$. In the final model, five control measures were statistically significant; gender ($\beta = .27, p < .05$), age, ($\beta = .01, p < .05$), problem recognition ($\beta = .12, p < .05$), referent criterion ($\beta = .12, p < .05$), passive information behavior ($\beta = .20, p < .05$). These results indicate the characteristics of the key publics that older male who recognize the crisis of the organization with prior experiences related to the event (Airlines crash) are likely to have a crisis responsibility on the organization. Further, as passive information behavior was the strongest predictor, it is understandable that publics who behave information permitting, information sharing, and information attending tend to attribute a crisis responsibility to the organization.

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Predicting Crisis Responsibility on an Organization (N=360)

Predictor variables	The perception of crisis responsibility		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Demographics			
1. Gender	.330**		
2. Age	.01*		
3. Education	.01		
4. Income	-.02		
5. Travel frequency by airplane	.13**		
Situational variables			
1. Gender		.24	
2. Age		.01*	
3. Education		.01	
4. Income		-.01	
5. Travel frequency by airplane		.06	
6. Problem recognition		.12*	
7. Constraint recognition		-.01	
8. Involvement recognition		.08	
9. Referent Criterion		.13*	
Communicative behavior			
1. Gender			.27*

2.Age			.01*
3.Education			.02
4.Income			-.01
5.Travel frequency by airplane			.07
6. Problem recognition			.12*
7. Constraint recognition			.00
8. Involvement recognition			.06
9. Referent Criterion			.12*
10. Active Information Behavior			-.11
11. Passive Information Behavior			.20**
R^2	.07	.16	.18
ΔR^2		.09	.02
F	5.39***	7.35***	6.82***

Note: Gender was coded as follows: male = 1 and female = 0. Active Information Behavior (information forefending, information forwarding, and information seeking), Passive Information Behavior (information permitting, information sharing, and information attending), * $p < .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p < .001$

Discussion

Responding to the diffusion of multiple channels in digital age, this study explored how the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) is applied to crisis communication. Although STOPS was suggested to its applicability in various applied communication fields (Kim & Grunig, 2011), little research has thus far paid attention to crisis communication despite the importance of predicting communication behaviors of the key public in an organizational crisis. Moreover, it is imperative to build STOPS by adding the media variables in the new media environment. Further, uncovering the characteristics of the key publics is also essential to PR management and to plan crisis strategies. Accordingly, the importance of this research was to extend STOPS by including media variables, applying STOPS to predict the perception of crisis responsibility of the organization, and to reveal the characteristics of the key publics. Hence, the focus of this study lies, firstly, in who says what, and, secondly, in which public relations channels are used by the organization under the crisis situation.

The findings of this study provide several primary implications related to building STOPS and crisis communication practice. This study examined STOPS based on a real crisis of the Asiana Airlines crash, which occurred on July 6, 2013. There were eight hypotheses discussed to test the STOPS in the organizational crisis. Overall, six of these hypotheses were supported by positive, significant results and they predicted the communicative action taken in an organizational crisis. Consequently, STOPS illuminates information about the behaviors of publics in a crisis situation well. This study was especially indicative that involvement recognition has the most powerful positive relationship with situational motivation in an organizational crisis; it accurately predicted the communicative action during an organizational crisis. In other words, when the organizational crisis occurs, people who more highly perceived a connection to the organization are more likely to exhibit communicative behaviors about the issue. The connection with the organization that is perceived by the public affects the communicative action (Kim, & Grunig, 2011). Considering the level of involvement, it could be understandable that a positive relationship between the public and the organization before the crisis is critical to offset the crisis responsibility of the organization. In addition, referent

criterion was found to be one of the most critical factors affecting communicative action. This tells us of the importance of cognition as well as perception, such as problem, constraint, and involvement recognition, in the organizational crisis. Further, this also yields a theoretical implication in that prior crisis experiences are shown to have an effect on communicative action in the crisis. In general, in order to find a way to solve a given problem, people tend to recall relevant experiences from the past (Carter, 1965; Higgins, 1996). According to the STOPS, this relevant experience or knowledge was defined as referent criterion. In the perspective of the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2012), this referent criterion is similar to crisis history. In the SCCT, a crisis history is one of three factors (i.e. crisis type, crisis history, and prior reputation) which are used in SCCT to evaluate not only the crisis responsibility, but also the reputational threat (Coombs, 2012). In particular, unfavorable crisis history leads people to perceive the organization as having more responsibility for the crisis, whereas managing beneficial relationships is important to an organization in a crisis situation (Coombs, 2000; Coombs, 2001; Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Kim & Lee, 2005). That is, these results suggest that both involvement recognition and the referent criterion play a vital role in explaining STOPS in communicative action toward the organizational crisis situation as well as a practical implication to management of crisis history and reputation in the organizational crisis. In terms of crisis communication, STOPS significantly predict a judgment of organizational responsibility for the crisis. In STOPS, the public's communicative action in an organizational crisis affects the public's judgments of the crisis responsibility on the part of the organization. Based on this result, our findings show that applying STOPS in a crisis situation predicts the perception of crisis responsibility of the organization. As a result, PR managers need to plan crisis strategies to reflect factors such as involvement recognition and referent criterion for the purpose of undertaking strategic communications with key publics, thereby displaying an understanding of the theoretical meaning of STOPS when an organizational crisis occurs.

One of the important contributions of this study is the attempt to extend the STOPS by adding five new media variables: newspapers, television news, radio news, websites and social networking services (SNS). Among these five media channels, the SNS was significantly predicted by information acquisition; more specifically, information seeking (positive significant) and information attending (negative significant). In particular, in terms of information acquisition, active publics are likely to seek out information about an organizational crisis through SNS, whereas they hardly see unplanned discovery of messages via SNS. Publics having interests in an organizational crisis actively seek out the information through SNS. Thus, SNS can offer the key publics the release of crisis information and participation with their own opinions about the organizational crisis. Since the information seeking represents an active communication behavior which can be described as, "the planned scanning of the environment for messages about a specified topic" (Grunig, 1997, p.9), it is understood that publics search for information related to the organization in an organizational crisis through SNS. This active communication behavior of the publics could be an opportunity in terms of information diffusion and interaction in a two-way communication for the organization. Currently, however, many PR practitioners tend to use the new communication tools in the same way they used the traditional media, conveying the message to the general population by a one-way, symmetrical mode (Grunig, 2009). However, some scholars have suggested that the importance of dialogic communication in crisis communication. The openness to dialogic communication leads to the creation and enhancement of audience engagement in crisis communication as well as positive perception after a crisis (Yang, Kang, & Johnson, 2010). The interactive communication during

the crisis portends a promising future between the organization and publics. Given these facts, a style of two-way, interactive, symmetrical and dialogical communications are essential to improving publics' engagement during an organizational crisis. Thus, Asiana Airlines needs to reflect these results for the company's future crisis communication tactics by utilizing social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

This study also identified the characteristics of the key publics influencing the judgment of organizational responsibility for a crisis through the segmentation of the general population according to the information behavior in tandem with causal relationships between demographic variables and the perception of crisis responsibility. First, examining the different types of publics can predict the likelihood of occurrence of information, information transmission, and information acquisition as well as active information behaviors (information forefending, forwarding, and seeking) versus passive information behaviors (information permitting, sharing, attending). These findings represent that the more active publics (i.e., active or aware publics) tend to seek and forward more information, and to select more information than other, less active, publics. This result agrees with a prior study of the STOPS on different types of publics interested in health communication (Kim, Shen, & Morgan, 2011). Next, these findings suggest that key publics can display passive information behavior toward information selection (information permitting), information transmission (information sharing), and information acquisition (information attending). Finally, this study identifies several demographic characteristics about the key publics and how they influence perceptions of the crisis responsibility of the organization. First, male publics are more likely to perceive crisis responsibility of the organization than females. Second, the older that the publics are, the greater their crisis perception of the organization is. Third, publics having high travel frequency by airplane are more likely to perceive the crisis responsibility of the organization. Fourth, publics with high recognition more were likely to perceive the crisis responsibility than publics with low recognition. Lastly, publics perceive greater crisis responsibility when they display more passive information behavior. Therefore, it can be surmised that the key publics are older males who often travel by airplane, and show passive information behavior about the organizational crisis.

As with any research, this study has limitations. It adopts a nonprobability sample based on online research. Additionally, it was previously mentioned in results part that the model fit does not meet the criteria of general suggestion (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kim et al, 2012, 2011), and future studies will need to modify the STOPS to meet the criteria of general suggestion in the crisis situations. Thus, it will be necessary to find the optimized model fit in those researches. Finally, the study applying the STOPS to the organizational reputation in a crisis will also be one of the more interesting topics in terms of communication behavior prediction.

Conclusion

In a crisis of the organization contexts, STOPS extended by media channels can shed light on strategic plans in the perspective of communication behavior. STOPS suggests that our communicative actions are causal and sequential as we follow the order of perception, motivation, and communication (Kim, Shen, & Morgan, 2011). In this regard, the organization in a crisis needs to understand the theoretical logic and finding of STOPS to become more strategic in order to uncover the key public influencing crisis responsibility on the organization. Based on the findings in this study, involvement recognition and referent criterion could be critical variables to evolve key publics by boosting communicative action. Further, this study illuminates that active communicative behavior of information seeking affects the use of SNS. Hence, it is

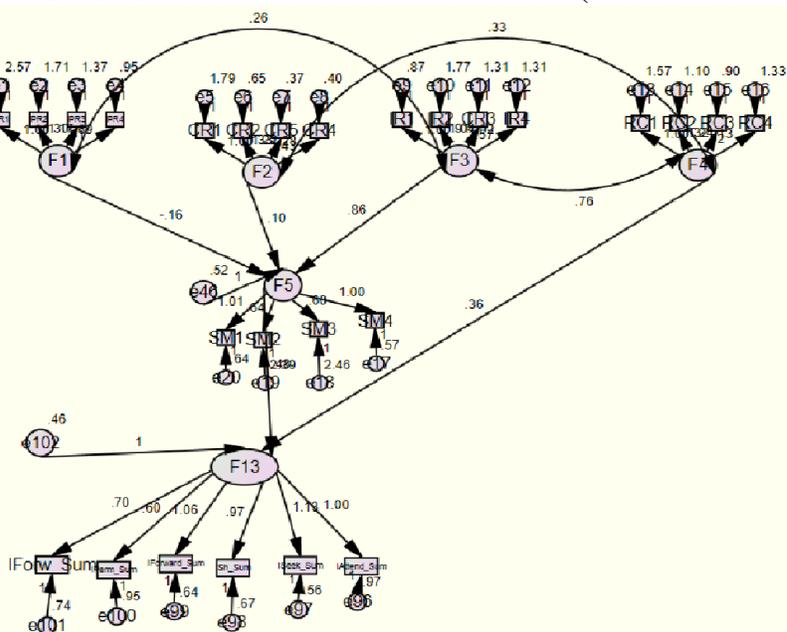
necessary to consider the SNS as an important communication tool with publics during a crisis of the organization. Especially, this study is based on a real case of Asiana Airlines crash last year. Therefore, the results of this study could be useful to PR practitioners as well as PR scholars.

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Appendix 1 A. The STOPS model in crisis communication (unstandardized coefficients)



Appendix 1 B. Judgement of organizational responsibility for crisis (unstandardized coefficients)

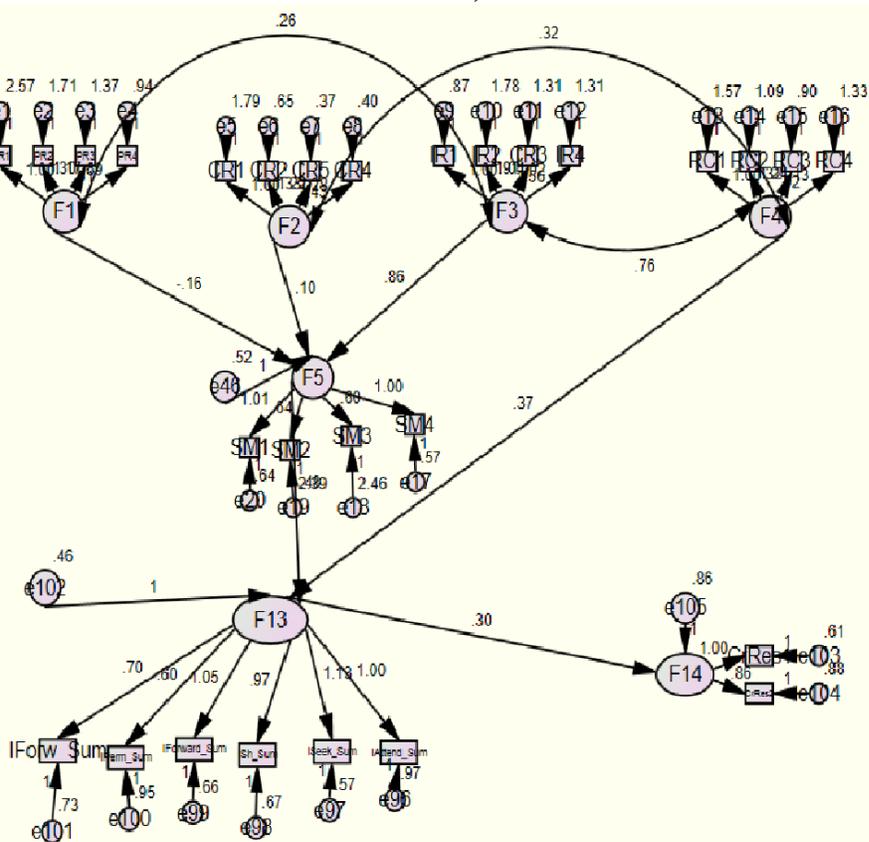


Table 4
Correlation Matrices, Means, and Standard Deviations of Variables

	<i>Mea</i> <i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>PR</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>IR</i>	<i>RC</i>	<i>MOT</i> <i>V</i>	<i>IFF</i>	<i>IPM</i>	<i>IFW</i>	<i>ISH</i>	<i>ISK</i>	<i>IA</i> <i>T</i>
PR	4.02	1.1 8	-										
CR	2.63	1.5 2	.359 **	-									
IR	2.80	1.5 2	.294 **	.657 **	-								
RC	2.96	1.3 7	.305 **	.631 **	.631 **	-							
MOT V	3.33	1.3 2	.286 **	.489 **	.594 **	.566 **	-						
IFF	3.52	1.1 7	.265 **	.520 **	.543 **	.675 **	.499* *	-					
IPM	4.31	1.1 6	.239 **	.252 **	.338 **	.379 **	.444* *	.522 **	-				
IFW	2.98	1.4 8	.322 **	.649 **	.674 **	.614 **	.656* *	.601 **	.478 **	-			
ISH	3.78	1.3 9	.229 **	.391 **	.456 **	.485 **	.606* *	.548 **	.537 **	.679 **	-		
ISK	3.30	1.4 8	.261 **	.562 **	.587 **	.556 **	.726* *	.572 **	.513 **	.769 **	.711 **	-	
IAT	4.11	1.5 1	.162 **	.320 **	.438 **	.449 **	.633* *	.481 **	.540 **	.610 **	.762 **	.705 **	-

Note. A seven-point Likert scale. PR = problem recognition, CR = constraint recognition, IR = involvement recognition, RC = referent criterion, MOTV = situational motivation in problem solving, IFF = information forefending, IPM = information permitting, IFW = information forwarding, ISH = information sharing, ISK = information seeking, IAT = information attending. P < .01

The Pathways of Successful Entrepreneurial Women in Public Relations: Ethical Challenges and Modes of Practice

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Abstract

In the past two decades, women have dominated the public relations practice, leading to a feminization of the field. Women's enrollment in public relations courses has skyrocketed and now exceeds 80 percent in undergraduate programs. Studies on women in public relations have focused on the field's loss of status, salary disparity, discrimination, stereotyping, and practitioner roles. Few studies, however, have investigated women who broke through the glass ceiling and forged their own pathway in the practice. Furthermore, in the past four decades, the public relations practice has shifted from the press agency/publicity model to a two-way symmetrical model of public relations, one considered most ethical. Several studies have revealed that women are much more inclined to consensus build and focus on the interests of others, which are important characteristics in the two-way symmetrical model of the practice. This study used a phenomenological approach to investigate the pathways of women entrepreneurs in public relations, those women who founded their own public relations firms and bypassed the glass ceiling by constructing their own reality. Thirty women – ten from Los Angeles and Orange Counties, ten from New York City, and ten from London – who head top public relations firms, which they founded, were interviewed in depth about the ethical challenges they face and how they deal with them. Participants also completed a questionnaire about their modes of practice. The career pathways of the participants were forged by formal education and on-the-job learning experiences. Ethical dilemmas involved client credibility, billing, and various employee issues. Although the participants practiced a coalescence of the four models of the practice, the women leaned more heavily toward the two-way symmetrical model. Requiring courses on ethics and gender issues in public relations was recommended for undergraduate and graduate programs, along with ethical training for professionals.

Overview and Purpose of Study

In the past two decades, women have dominated the public relations practice, leading to a feminization of the field. Women's enrollment in public relations courses has skyrocketed and now exceeds 80 percent in many undergraduate programs. Studies on women in public relations have focused on the field's loss of status, salary disparity, discrimination, stereotyping, and practitioner roles. Few studies, however, have investigated women who founded thriving public relations practices and examined their approach to ethical challenges. Furthermore, in the past four decades, the public relations practice has shifted from the press agency/publicity model to a two-way symmetrical model of public relations, one considered most ethical. Several studies have revealed that women are much more inclined to consensus build and focus on the interests of others, which are important characteristics in the two-way symmetrical model of the practice. Thus, this study examined the ethical challenges of successful female practitioners, women who bypassed the glass ceiling by becoming their own boss, and the model of the public relations practice they employ.

This study used a phenomenological approach to investigate the pathways of successful women entrepreneurs in public relations. Thirty women – ten from Los Angeles, ten from New York City, and ten from London – who head top public relations firms, which they founded, were interviewed in depth about the ethical challenges they face and how they deal with them. Participants also completed a questionnaire about their modes of practice.

Literature Review

Women and Career Paths

In 2010, women comprised about 47 percent of the workforce in the United States, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. According to the U.S. Department of Labor in 2008, women constitute less than 10 percent of senior executives despite the surge of women entering management in the last 45 years. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited employment discrimination based on race and sex. In the early 1970s, feminist pressure for its enforcement assisted women in their pursuit of management positions. In 1972, Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment and Title IX of the Higher Education Act, which prohibited sexual discrimination in school admissions. Hence, female enrollment in business schools surged, which paved the way for women's subsequent movement into high-paying, male-dominated professional occupations.

According to Choi and Hon (2002), Hymowitz & Schelhardt were the first to report on a glass ceiling, the invisible barrier faced by middle-management women who want to attain top-level positions, in an article of the Wall Street Journal on March 24, 1986. Glass ceiling is a metaphor for a barrier preventing women from advancing to the executive suite. The Department of Labor (1991) defined glass ceiling as "artificial barriers based on attitudinal bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions" (Wrigley, 2002, p. 1).

In a 1993 study of over 4,000 women by Korn/Ferry International, an executive search firm, and the UCLA Anderson Graduate School of Management, five traits were most frequently cited as being of greatest importance in becoming successful in the workplace: ability to make decisions, concern for financial results, capacity for hard work, desire for responsibility, and integrity. More than 90 percent believed in the glass ceiling, and almost 80 percent said they had been sexually harassed. O'Neil, Hopkins & Bilimoria (2008) examined research on women's

careers appearing in academic journals from 1990 to 2008 in three areas – careers, management, and applied psychology. The researchers found that the bulk of empirical studies continued to rely predominantly on traditional male-oriented career outcomes, such as position in the corporate hierarchy, income, and wealth accumulation. Admirable management practices, such as sharing responsibility and contributing to the development of others, reflect stereotypically feminine behaviors, but these best practices are not publicly acknowledged as feminine. Schein (2007) found that males still perceive men are more suitable for management positions than women. O’Neil et al. (2008) also noted that women face a “paradoxical reality” in the workplace (p. 734). Their management skills included collaboration, teamwork, and conflict resolution, but these attributes did not result in reward or recognition.

Mainero (1994) interviewed 55 high-profile executive women, who broke through the glass ceiling, about key events in the early stages of their careers that allowed them to become fast tracked. She found that the women were team players and alliance-builders with fellow employees and their own subordinates. Blair-Loy (1999) found many of the female entrepreneurs starting firms 15 years ago said they were trying to bypass the glass ceiling in large companies and to accommodate their families’ needs. In contrast, those launching businesses more recently report they were motivated by the desire to escape bureaucracies and to create new business opportunities.

In the 1990s, studies addressing gender and career paths surfaced, suggesting that women are disadvantaged by social constraints and discrimination. Historically, men and women have assumed different societal roles. Some jobs are considered more appropriate to men while others are more suitable for women. The growth in entrepreneurship by women increased despite – or because of – discrimination and stereotyping in the workplace (Mueller, 2004). Furthermore, starting one’s own business is a way to bypass the glass ceiling (Wrigley, 2002).

Moreover, women’s definition of success may not align with the traditionally male, corporate criteria but instead may embrace a sense of personal fulfillment, integrity, and lifestyle balance. Women entrepreneurs are creating their own businesses instead of continuing in careers constricted by organizational structures and policies (O’Neil, Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008). Empirical research on socialization and gender roles generally supports the proposition that women are more cooperative and empathetic, and are more interested in the welfare of others and achieving harmony in the group. They tend to place more value on interpersonal relationships (Mueller & Dato-On, 2008).

Women in Public Relations

In 1960, women comprised a quarter of the public relations practitioners. In 1968, student societies in public relations formed, and women accounted for 34 percent of the membership (Gower, 2001). In the 21st century, however, women comprise about 70 percent of the practitioners in the public relations field (Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Sha & Toth, 2005). In 2008, more than 80 percent of the undergraduates enrolled in public relations programs in the United States were women. According to Grunig (2006), “the study of women in public relations provides a superb model of women in the workplace as a whole” (p. 135).

Some scholars claim that public relations is a feminized field where women are ghettoized in technical positions, which garner lower pay and prestige (Aldoory & Toth, 2002). Other scholars warn that women relegated to the technician role are kept out of the boardroom, thus creating a “velvet ghetto” (Gower, 2001, p. 14). Encroachment, the assignment of

nonpublic relations professionals to manage the public relations department or function in an organization, such as marketing, may be tied to the loss of status as a result of the feminization of the public relations field (Farmer & Waugh, 1999). Two influential research reports – *The Velvet Ghetto* (Cline et al., 1986) and *Beyond the Velvet Ghetto* (Toth & Cline, 1989) – were commissioned by the IABC Research Foundation to explore the effects of feminization, including salary disparity, gender bias, and gender roles. Toth and Grunig (1993) sampled 1,012 respondents on a list of 17 role activities “to challenge the interpretation of roles research... as means of providing the missing story of women in public relations so that we also may empower women and begin to change the social structures that have devalued them” (p. 159). They found that women who devoted more time to managerial activities still performed technical tasks while the managerial men performed more traditionally managerial tasks, such as counseling, policy making, and supervising the work of others.

Patterns of gender role segregation and salary discrimination exist in public relations (Tam et al., 1995). Women practitioners appear to be clustered in technician roles unlike men who appear to dominate managerial roles. In turn, role and gender appear to affect advancement in the field. Hon (1995) explored the factors explaining discrimination against women in public relations and the liberal/radical feminist strategies that affect equity for women in public relations and found that women faced major obstacles in the practice, including gender stereotyping, marginalization of women, and the balancing of work and home responsibilities. One of the coping strategies recommended by Hon (1995) was becoming the boss. For some women in her study, becoming the boss was “the ultimate form of empowerment” (p. 79).

Krider and Ross (1997) used a phenomenological approach to examine the roles and experiences of seven women in public relations who were employed at a large public relations firm in the Midwest. Participants used terms such as “white male ego at the top of practically every organization... very male dominated world... very heavily male dominated” (p. 444). The terms that surfaced most were white male ego, superwoman, sexism, and glass ceiling.

Toth et al. (1998) looked at data on the roles of PRSA members and the kinds of experiences they received on the job, using data from more than 1,000 respondents. The researchers noted that women will be unable to advance in salary and role if they are not given the opportunity to handle research, counsel management, or engage in policy-making. Serini et al. (1998) took data from a national survey completed by 678 PRSA members and six focus groups to explore the effects of sexual harassment in public relations. Focus group findings revealed that some women in agencies found relationships with their male clients a particular concern, especially social obligations after work involving alcohol. Based on the results of focus groups and depth interviews with women as potential managers, Cline and Toth (1993) found that women were seen as caring, understanding, and capable of working well with clients, especially in small agencies. Grunig et al. (2000) discussed how feminist values, such as cooperation, justice, equality, equity, honesty, perceptiveness, intuition, fairness, loyalty, commitment, and altruism, enhance the ethical practice of public relations. With the onslaught of women in the field, such values “help establish the field as a vital and ethical organizational function” (p. 49).

Wrigley (2002) conducted a qualitative study, using in-depth interviews and focus groups, to identify the factors supporting and perpetuating the glass ceiling for 27 female managers in public relations and corporate communications. Examining her findings from a feminist perspective, she suggested a new theoretical concept titled “negotiated resignation”

(p.37) for explaining the psychological process of denial that women use to come to terms with the glass ceiling. O'Neil (2003) conducted a study of 309 senior-level corporate practitioners and looked at perceived organizational influence of men and women in corporate public relations. No differences in gender were found in relationship power or influence. Women had less formal structural power than men.

Aldoory and Toth (2004) used a quantitative survey and focus groups to examine perceptions of leadership styles and opinions about gender and leadership – particularly styles considered most effective in public relations. Focus group participants perceived women as making better leaders in public relations due to acquired socialized traits of having empathy and being collaborative nature in nature, which are traits of transformational leadership style. Pompper (2004) conducted four focus groups of 28 African American women and discovered that women in her study practiced a special brand of two-way symmetry by fulfilling the role of pioneer, educator, mentor, and agenda-builder.

Grunig (2006) conducted a content analysis of 500 articles over a 20-year period on women in Public Relations Review and the Public Relations Research Annual/Journal of Public Relations Research. Grunig claimed that most hypothesized studies which make distinctions between males and females are either unsupported or weakly supported. She noted that some scholars believe “the work of women – clustered disproportionately in the technician’s role – is trivialized and devalued. Instead, they would argue (and I would agree) that we need to respect the preferences that become reflected in the career choices of individual women in this postmodern era” (p. 120).

Ethical Approaches in the Practice

Public relations remains a relatively new professional occupation. Uncertainty exists among its practitioners about what it is, what its ethics and its values are (Starck & Kruckeberg, 2003). Its professional ideology remains amorphous and is yet to mature, especially with professional value systems that differ greatly throughout the world. If the goal of public relations is harmony and the development and maintenance of community, then the practice of public relations should be, in large part, an ideal paradigm for all other practices. In the business world, such an approach furthers the concept of public relations as the conscience of an organization, according to Leeper and Leeper (2001). Public relations practitioners are perhaps best qualified intellectually and professionally to address questions related to corporations’ relationships with their stakeholders (Starck & Kruckeberg, 2003). As reputation managers, “ethics and reputation concerns go hand-in-hand, making ethical counsel a natural activity in public relations” (Bowen, 2008, p. 285). On the other hand, Bowen noted that managers have little training in ethical decision making (2002) and recommended a practical and rational model of ethical decision making (2005).

In the two-way symmetrical model of the public relations practice, public relations professionals act as the social conscience of their organization (Gower, 2003). Practitioners employing this model serve as mediators between the organization and its various publics, achieving mutual understanding through consensus building (Bivins, 1989). The two-way symmetrical model is the best model of practice to achieve organizational excellence (Pompper, 2004) and one considered to be most ethical (Grunig et al., 2002). Some researchers argue that women are more ideally suited for practicing two-way symmetrical public relations because of

feminist values, such as caring, sensitivity, and diversity (Hon, 1995; Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2000; Andsanger & Hust, 2005).

Female leadership has been found to be expressive, by focusing on relationships, cooperation, and consideration (Aldoory, 1998). Grunig's 1992 excellence study suggested that "the most effective public relations grows out of an entire world view that is feminine" (Grunig et al., 2000, p. 59). Most participants in Choi and Hon's (2002) study "believed that more women in top management positions would make a qualitative difference in how organizations and society overall would function. They also felt that both women and men, as well as the public relations function, would benefit from this change" (p. 239).

Women's perceived feminine traits, such as cooperation, consensus building, and conflict resolution, are actually well suited to the practice of excellent public relations and communications management (Grunig, Toth, & Hon, 2000; Wrigley, 2002). Public relations is an industry founded on feminist values, such as honesty, justice, and sensitivity, and such values are replete in the two-way symmetrical model of the practice considered most ethical. These feminist values have a positive effect on the practice (Frohlich & Peters, 2007). "In summary, it is argued that men lack crucial sensitivity and empathy toward maintaining relationships with clients, journalists, and target groups; women, in contrast, are 'naturally suited,' as one participant puts it, for service-oriented professions like public relations" (Frohlich & Peters, 2007, p. 240).

Gilligan (1982) conducted a well-recognized qualitative that illuminated how women and girls resolve the serious moral dilemmas in their lives. She found that the development of morality for women centers around responsibility and care. To be impartial and fair, men are more inclined to adhere to abstract laws and universal principles to handle ethical dilemmas. Women, on the other hand, tend to use dialogue to allow each individual to be understood on his or her own terms. "They believe that mutual understanding is most likely to lead to a creative consensus about how everyone's needs may be met in resolving disputes (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 8). Hence, these studies further the notion that women possess natural abilities in consensus and relationship building, which are skills needed in the public relations profession.

This study's theoretical framework draws on feminist perspectives and on the theoretical models of the public relations practice, particularly Grunig's excellence theory. The feminist perspective uncovers women's experiences through their own cultural lenses rather than from a traditionally patriarchal viewpoint. Grunig's framework of the public relations practice identifies the two-way symmetrical model as the most ethical and most successfully implemented by women.

Research Questions

To discover the ethical pathways of women who head their own public relations firms regarding their ethical challenges and modes of practice, the following research questions were addressed:

- What are the ethical challenges these successful women entrepreneurs face and how do they deal with them?
- What theoretical model of public relations practice do they employ?

Methodology

This study used a phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of women entrepreneurs in public relations. Qualitative study lends itself well to feminist research (Grunig, 2006) and is typically associated with the feminist paradigm (O'Neal, 2003). In-depth interviews are ideal for small, purposive samples in public relations (Broom & Dozier, 1990). Thus, data were collected using in-depth interviews with 30 women at their place of business. Women from three major media markets – Los Angeles/Orange Counties in California, New York City, and London – were selected, identified through agency rankings in the area business journals and O'Dwyers Directory of Public Relations Firms. A set of open-ended questions were asked of each participant, using a standardized interview guide approach. At the end of the interview, a brief questionnaire was administered to each participant, which included four demographic questions and attitudinal questions about the nature of their practice. Interviews lasted from one hour to two and a half hours with the average interview being 97 minutes in length. Responses were transcribed in verbatim and analyzed for common themes and unique comments that emerged from the interviews.

Results and Discussion

Four major themes emerged concerning the ethical challenges faced by these women: client credibility, billing issues, intolerance of bad client behavior, and employee issues.

Client Credibility

All 30 of the women mentioned that the credibility of the client affected their own reputation, and their agency's reputation meant a great deal to them. They affirmed that they tried to accept only ethical clients and avoid ones who cannot deliver what they say.

- “We really do as much research as we can because I don't want to be affiliated with unethical companies, frauds, gimmicks. There's always a grey area with some of that stuff. To me our people here have to be proud of what they are doing, so that's the ultimate test here. It's not just their reputations. They affect our relationships and our credibility with the media.”
- “I'm careful about the clients that I choose to work with. For instance, I've had a couple of clients in the past who I didn't feel that they were good people or ethically wise people. Nothing good is going to come of it, so I don't want anything to do with it.”
- “I don't take on shady clients. Someone very wise in public relations once told me, ‘You make your money walking away from a deal or from clients.’ You know that if someone is dishonest, they're not going to be fun to work with.”

To avoid working with a dishonest client, one participant explained that she uses her intuition:

- “I get a sense. I do a little research, but it's just a gut instinct. Like, I have someone right now begging me to take their account. And I don't feel that I can distinguish them. I don't want to take their money and not be able to deliver the results.”

Others also say they get a sense, a gut feeling that something is not right about a potential client or an existing client. One gave an example of her reasons for resigning an account:

- “I don't have any outside proof it (the product) works, and we've been working (on it) for some time now. I've had the growing realization that I don't have a lot of

confidence in this product...I don't want to be responsible for recommending the product or the company."

Others use methods of investigation before taking a new client, including social media and the Internet to investigate the legitimacy of claims:

- "If a client can't deliver, I won't take them on. You need to be honest. I counsel on the content and credibility of the message so I have to look at scientific research, third-party endorsements, and the long-term implications of the product. I have turned down business without it."
- "You can find a great deal about potential clients on the Internet and through social media about all kinds of things."
- "Not only do clients interview us, we interview clients. I have to believe in what I promote. If it was unethical and it was a lot of money, it would end up screwing you anyway. If they're going to be unethical, they'll be unethical with me too."

On the other hand, a few of the women owners felt it was unreasonable to thoroughly investigate the claims of the client:

- "I can't tell you that I've researched every _____ company in the country before we accepted the _____ company we work with as a client, but they seem really good and really smart. I think I probably want to, but I don't know if you could find someone that knew enough about their clients and their competitors on the inside. That would require some kind of crazy amount of research that I'm not sure that we would have any access to. We'd have to buy it. How would you go and find out which _____ companies are the best?"
- "We had clients come to us and tell us this is the fact, and we don't know their company better than they do. You promote it the way they tell you to. You can't (check out all the facts). We're not engineers. There's no way...there's not an ethical review in the new business process. I wouldn't even know how."

One woman discussed the ethical dilemma of angel investing – that is, obtaining investors for a new product venture that may or may not work.

- "So we're always striking a balance between helping our clients communicate what is possible and what is real without preventing them from communicating incorrect information to employees, to investors, to media. That's one of the biggest ethical dilemmas because you know very much the nature of an entrepreneur is some guy creates a product. They believe in it, but they also very often believe in their own hype, so we have to help dissect that hype into very real and tangible elements."

Billing Issues

Another major theme was billing issues: charging for time and projects, employee mistakes, clients not paying, and reducing fees for clients. Overwhelmingly, the agency owners talked about full disclosure with the client, the importance of detailing agency charges and ensuring clients get their money's worth. Some struggle with over serving their clients:

- "I think our biggest challenge in agency is not to over service our clients. We get so excited we just go running and sometimes we forget to get the budget signed...we also have an agreement with our clients that there are no surprises...part of customer service is sending invoices that people expect. And not sending surprises over or being vague about what it's going to cost."

- “We are the shepherds of our clients’ money, so we will have fiduciary responsibility for that. We don’t take that role lightly... We run our shop as if it is totally transparent and we will always error – if there’s a billing issue or whatever – to the benefit of the client. So that if and when we get audited – and we have been audited before – we can open up the books and you can see what it is. Not to say that we’re always perfect. We might make a math error or whatever. But, by the end of the day, the client is going to find out they got a really good deal because there were a lot of things that we didn’t bill them for.”

Some of the agencies work for other agencies. Some of the participants’ firms pick up the slack or use their particular specialized expertise for another agency. Sometimes this causes ethical dilemmas in billing:

- “We’re always spending above and over the time that we’ve allotted for. But we don’t bill that back to the client. The ethical issue with billing was when a client, a third party, thinks that they’re paying X for a retainer, but then they have this major mark-up that increases their retainer to Y, and we’re being asked to perform to the client’s expectations. But the reality is that we’re only getting paid X. That was the dilemma that I had to resolve directly with the other agencies we were working under. It put us in an ethical dilemma that we’ve really had a hard time with.”

Probably all agencies have experienced a non-paying client. These women have as well, but one faced a rather unusual ethical dilemma:

- “A client refused to pay us. I was really angry because we worked so hard. We bill our time and we always bill under, and I just eat it. We’re always giving so much value for the dollar. We had a client that wouldn’t pay their bill and then they accidentally double-paid a different bill and mailed me a check for almost the whole amount that I felt they owed me...I took my scissors out and chopped up the check and threw it in the trash because I didn’t trust myself. You kind of have to make your decision whether or not you’re a thief pretty early on.”

One owner fired an employee who overcharged:

- “I had one employee that overcharged a client. I have a policy that no invoice goes out without my final approval. She sent it out without my approval. She charged them, and she charged them to estimate, and we came in under estimate...I think she thought she was doing me a favor, pay me more money. But you don’t make money like that.”

Another agency owner faced an ethical dilemma when a client asked her to reduce her fees in exchange for continuous business:

- “When it goes on for years and years and years, it came to the point where I feel that that was a very ethical issue...that to me was an ethical issue because I knew I was being taken advantage of.”

Non-payment or reduced payment by clients extends to agency vendors, and for some women, these relationships are important. In one case, a client authorized payment for a rush job. The agency owner said the vendor worked extremely hard, putting in far more hours than he billed. The client, however, refused to pay the vendor for the full amount. This agency owner stepped in and paid the vendor, after several attempts with the client failed:

- “Sometimes it’s the little guy that always seems to get the short end of the stick. That doesn’t seem fair. I’m the little man myself, but I’m always going to make sure that vendors get a fair shake.”

Miscellaneous Client Issues

Other client issues surfaced, such as working with clients that may compete with one another, which can be a problem for agencies that specialize in certain industries, such as technology, health care, and land development. One woman described her biggest ethical issue being when to disclose to a client that the key account liaison has departed from the agency: “My biggest ethical dilemma pretty much comes when you lose a staff member. At what point do you go in and tell the client. And, how much do you reveal about it because clients tend to leave.” She described the first ten years of her career before she was a business owner when “e-mails going back and forth from names that weren’t there anymore... That to me is an ethical dilemma.” She explained that “Not every client’s happy all the time. Every single client is going to have an issue at least once or twice a year. Sometimes it’s your fault. Most of the time, to be honest, it’s not. But you’re a scapegoat.”

Many of the agency founders handled global clients, and for some, they explained what is unethical in the United States may be an ethical practice abroad. Gift giving in some cultures may be seen as a bribe. In other cultures, the absence of gift giving is seen as an insult. One owner gave another example: “You do things that North America would perceive as unethical. Like we’ll pay a reporter for a piece of coverage.”

Intolerance of Bad Client Behavior

The third major ethical theme to surface among the women was an intolerance of bad client behavior. Although many of the women have mentioned that they have counseled their female employees when they have encountered inappropriate advances from clients or journalists, they did not see this as an ethical dilemma. Rather, they seemed to view it as part and parcel of the business world. When probed about sexual advances in their agency role, all admitted being hit on by clients and some by clients, subordinates, and reporters. All seemed to feel that male advances were part of the reality of doing business:

- “You nip it in the bud.”
- “It’s all how you handle it.”
- “You don’t back down.”
- “You just address it and move on.”
- “I think if I’m going to be one of 200 women in a room of 15,000 people, and if you expect not to have, you know, verbal comments, what am I doing here?”
- “Never had problem. But you set boundaries though. I’m there as your friend. I’m there as your agency partner. I’m there because we’re here networking. I’m not here because this means it’s a date or anything else.”
- I’ve been hit on. I’ve been put in very precarious situations. But I have thick skin so if I didn’t have thick skin, then I don’t think that I would have a lot of my clients. Unfortunately, that’s really the way it is. The way I handle that and especially that kind of situation is I laugh it off. I make it funny and I say, ‘Oh, well.’ A couple of

times I've had to say, 'I'm a happily married woman, but thank you. Ha-ha.' You just kind of have to stand your ground and remain true to yourself."

- "One of my clients was always saying, 'Oh, you should come over here and give me a back rub, and blah, blah, blah,' and this guy's married, of course, and older by 15 or 20 years. It bothered me, but I would go, 'Oh, ha-ha.' And he kept saying stuff, 'oh, we should get a drink.' So one day I said, 'You know what?' I had some releases for him to approve. I said, 'Why don't I come over around 5 o'clock and I'll bring something to drink and it'll just be you and I.' And he said, 'Okay.'"

Weary of his harassment, she brought California Coolers to the meeting and opened two of them after they concluded their business, daring him to approach her:

- "There's nobody else left in the office because everyone went home at five. We're sitting there, and we've having our mixed beverages. That's alcohol at that point in my life. We finish them and I said, 'Well, I guess I'll go.' He said, 'Okay, thanks for coming by.' And he never bugged me again. I sort of called him on it – like, 'What are you going to really do, buddy?' But I didn't say that. He was my client, and I didn't want to be rude. I was tired of him bugging me."

All of the women seemed adamant that sex and romance have no place in their relationships with clients, subordinates, vendors, or journalists. The following statement in particular best represented their thoughts on this matter:

- "But the key to success when it comes to that kind of stuff – and this is where I think too many women do a disservice – don't sleep with people in your industry! Stay the hell out of the bedroom! I will never date anybody that I ever have to pitch or have to work with. Period. I think it's a good business model for women."

On the other hand, poor treatment of agency members by clients was intolerable to all:

- "I do not tolerate men ganging up on a woman."
- "I will fire a client for the way the team is treated. I won't take abuse from a client. It doesn't have a place here. It affects morale."
- "I have resigned clients because they've been too abusive to me or my staff."
- "There was client who wanted to do a press tour and wouldn't let the associate eat – only like hot dogs off the street and stay in these seedy motels. I said, 'Forget it,' and I resigned them. Because safety becomes an issue. Well-being is an issue. I mean, that's just not acceptable."
- "I take very seriously the way the team is treated because they are a very professional, respectable group. They work really hard. When there's abuse going on from a client, which does not happen very often – maybe one percent – we don't have room for them at this agency because that leads to a lack of morale. When they go home at the end of the day, they don't feel successful. And it impacts their ability to service their other clients. So when that happens, we'll let the client know that we just need to conclude their contact or we'll set up some new ground rules for how they communicate."
- "I just have some real issues with how they treat their people and how they treat our people. I just don't feel comfortable working with them any longer."

The last theme concerning ethical dilemmas dealt with employees, but the issues relating to employees were varied. There were few similarities among the participants.

The issue mentioned most was layoffs and firings:

- Making payroll – “My biggest concern is making sure I make payroll. I absolutely do not ever want to go through a layoff. For me, that’s just not acceptable. You offer somebody a job; you got to pay them.”
- Losing an account that will result in a loss of jobs – “You know there’s a layoff at the end of the quarter because a contract is ending or a client is experiencing financial difficulties, but there’s still a lot of work that needs to get done by then. When do you give employees a heads-up?”
- Firing an employee – “You’re playing with someone’s life. You can’t forget the impact that it has on the other side that this is their job that they’re losing. And like, especially in this economy, if you toss someone out, they probably can’t find something else and you’re really hurting them. That feels like ethics to me.”

One agency owner faced a difficult ethical situation that cost her a valued employee:

- “There was one instance where I had an employee who shared information with one of my client’s competitors, and I immediately fired him. That was an ethical dilemma. And he was fired. Period. That day. He was a pretty valuable employee to me, but that was just not acceptable.”

Another agency owner felt that the method of payment – salaries for managers vs. hourly for technicians – was an ethical issue, surfacing from recent changes in the law. Another felt it was only ethical to give her employees an opportunity to decline working on an account they could not support, such as controversial political issues. Another said she encountered an ethical issue when an employee took databases and client contacts when the individual left her employment. One owner questioned the use of social media as a tool used by employees to tell others about their lives, including their thoughts about an employer:

- “I’m still trying to figure out how do I respect that and not impede in their private area. At the same time, how do I communicate that we need to just be aware of how we’re going to be presenting ourselves? We brought in a consultant to provide some guidelines. So while I would never want to impede in their own personal life, when you’re reflecting back on (your place of employment), there just needs to be some thought about you’re putting out there.”

Although the results of the questionnaire cannot be extrapolated to the general population based on a sample size of 30, the results are nevertheless interesting. Almost half – fourteen of the women – reported that they practice the two-way symmetrical model of the practice, described on the questionnaire as “building relationships with your clients’ publics through communication tools, consensus building, and socially responsible business practices.” Eight reported that they practice the two-way asymmetrical model, described as “communicating with your clients’ publics through various means and getting audience feedback.” Two reported they practice the public information model, explained as “preparing news releases, brochures, and other forms of media to inform and educate audiences about your clients’ products or services,” and six reported they practice the press agency/publicity model, detailed as “employing publicity techniques to obtain coverage in the media.”

Ethical issues and social responsibility were two concerns that surfaced from the participants’ responses. Client credibility topped the ethical dilemma list. Ensuring that a client

is credible and able to deliver what it promises is a concern and a challenge for most of the women. All said they have not accepted a client they suspect is unethical or unable to deliver. Some research clients and client claims thoroughly while others find it unrealistic to do so.

Billing issues were understandably a concern. Overcharging, undercharging, employee mistakes in billing, and clients refusing to pay are ethical issues that concerned these women. Miscellaneous client issues also surfaced, which included when to inform the client that the account person has left the agency and working with competing clients. Moreover, a few of the women mentioned facing varying ethical standards in different countries.

Another major theme that the women considered an ethical dilemma was bad client behavior. The majority of women mentioned an assortment of client abuses they found intolerable, such as men ganging up on a woman, abusive behavior toward agency members or the client's own staff, and poor treatment when traveling with a client. All were concerned about ethical issues involving employees – lawful payment arrangements, meeting payroll, losing an account that results in a layoff, and the firing of employees.

Models of the Public Relations Practice

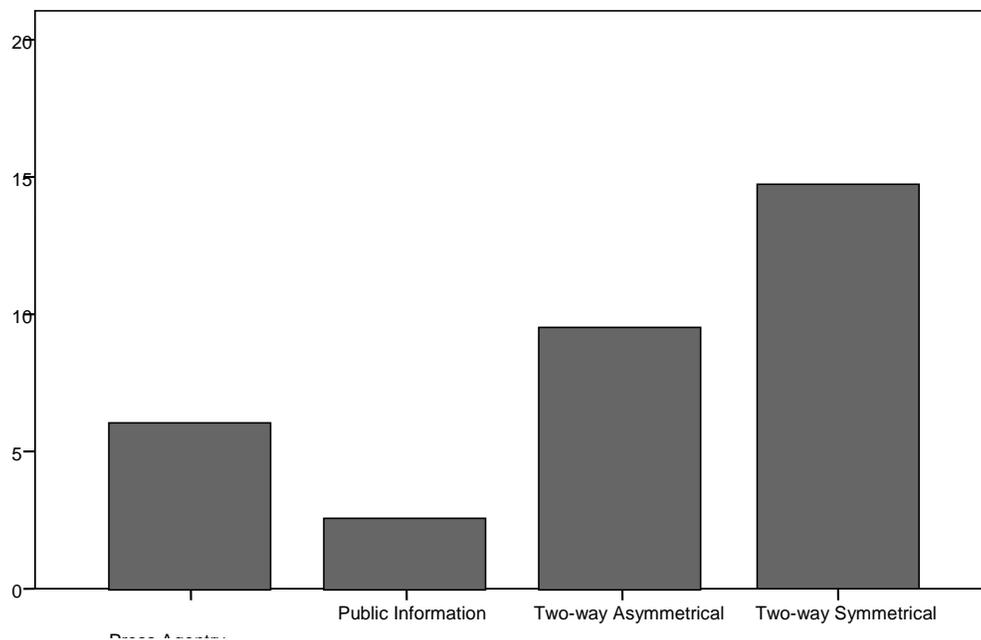


Figure 4. Models of public relations that participants selected as the best description of their own agency.

These women addressed these ethical issues by seeking special counsel, legal services, setting policies, consensus building, and confronting the issues directly through consultation. Instead of practicing one particular model of the public relations practice as described in the literature, these women appear to practice a coalescence of the four models. Still, in the participants' responses to ethical issues, they expressed a real concern about the importance of

being social responsibility and ensuring that their agency dealings and recommendations are ethical. To them, ethics is just good business.

Recommendations for the Profession

Ethical issues surround the women in this study. Few of the participants indicated that they have received much formal training in this area. Most have learned by doing. Some have consulted other agency owners, asked the advice of clients, and sought legal counsel. Therefore, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) should offer seminars, workshops, white papers, and other resources on how to address a wide array of ethical issues. Public relations professionals must challenge their organization's particular way of thinking, of solving problems, and of viewing the world. An organization's ideology, values and worldview cannot remain static or unchallenged within the professional public relations community. However, practitioners must first acknowledge their own professional ideology, values, and belief systems before they can address the same for their clients or the organizations which employ them. Public relations professionals must work with management to establish ethical guidelines that focus on community building with all stakeholders, including multicultural and diverse societies worldwide. As professionals, public relations practitioners must not blindly take orders nor accept their client or organizational worldviews without question or challenge; rather, public relations practitioners must be able to apply professional problem-solving methodologies and their own professional body of knowledge to address client and corporate issues of relationship-building and community-building across cultures and nations.

Limitations

The participants in this study were selected from the top firms in Southern California, New York City, and London, using agency rankings based on billings and the number of employees. Therefore, the participants have achieved a certain level of success. Their situation is unique. Women who oversee the public relations function in companies and nonprofit organizations were not included in this study. Women who head smaller agencies, firms that handle smaller accounts, and businesses that specialize in multicultural relations were not included in this study. The sample size of 30 women is not large enough to extrapolate the findings to the broader population. Since women are the only subjects in this study, no gender comparisons can be made between men and women.

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Cultivating Relationships through a Mobile Website: The Importance of Modality Interactivity and Message Interactivity

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Abstract

Corporate websites are being increasingly accessed via smart phones, and companies are scrambling to offer a mobile-friendly user experience on their sites. However, very little is known about how design factors such as interactivity in the mobile context affects user perceptions of companies. This study investigates the effects of two types of interactivity upon individuals' relational outcomes towards companies through a 2 (modality interactivity: high vs. low) x 3 (message interactivity: low vs. medium vs. high) between-participants factorial experiment. The results suggest that incorporating modality interactivity and message interactivity on a mobile website can enhance relational outcomes and behavioral intentions towards the company. However, modality and message interactivity need to be carefully designed in the mobile context as they may also evoke negative reactions among users who are less competent at using technology. In addition, the results of this study highlight the importance of several psychological variables (i.e., enjoyment, user engagement, contingency, and dialogue) as they come together to inform theoretical mechanisms underlying the effects of mobile website interactivity on outcome variables of interest to corporate public relations.

Introduction

Online access using mobile phones has become commonplace in the past several years. As of 2012, 55% of U.S. mobile phone users went online using their mobile phones, marking a 24% increase since 2009 (Smith, 2012). This increased popularity of the mobile web presents many opportunities for public relations. Ubiquitous information access enables publics to reach companies and access their information more conveniently, which facilitates connectivity between both parties. However, the adoption of mobile web may also be a double-edged sword if the site itself is not well designed for mobile browsing. According to a recent industry survey, 52% of mobile web users reported that a bad website experience would make them less likely to engage with the company (Google, 2012). Therefore, it is absolutely vital for companies to pay attention to design aspects of mobile websites in order to leave a good impression and yield positive relationships with their publics.

Previous studies of online public relations have identified several design factors, with site interactivity being the most prominent one (Hallahan, 2003). Corporate websites offering interactive user experiences have been found to be more effective in inducing better attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, including liking of the company (Guillory & Sundar, in press) and revisiting the website (Coursaris & Sung, 2012). However, to date, we know little about how interactivity plays a role in the mobile web context. Given that the design and context of mobile device use differs from PC use (e.g., small screen size, touch screen, used on the go), interactivity may not be as effective as on computers, and may even result in negative outcomes. In order to determine how companies could use mobile websites for organization-public communication, empirical studies of interactivity need to be conducted in the context of mobile media.

This study seeks to address this need by examining the effect of interactivity through an experiment with a fictitious company's mobile website. It focuses on two types of interactivity, modality interactivity and message interactivity, and investigates how they affect individuals' relational outcomes and behavioral intentions towards the company. In addition, this study also considers negative outcomes of interactivity, such as distraction and user dismissal of interactive features as mere "bells and whistles." Finally, an individual-difference factor, power usage, is also taken into account as it may moderate the effects of interactivity on outcome variables.

This study is the first to experimentally demonstrate the role played by interactivity on mobile websites in shaping the relationship between a company and its publics. By shedding light on the psychological mechanisms underlying the carryover effects of interactivity on company image, the findings from this study can guide PR practitioners in strategically leveraging interactive tools for deployment in mobile media.

Literature Review

Use of Mobile Media in Corporate Communications

Mobile media are wirelessly connected portable information technologies that can serve as a hub for users to interact with others and with information resources almost anywhere and in any setting (Kakihara & Sorensen, 2002). Because of their potential for ubiquitous information access, mobile media, especially mobile phones, has been gaining attention among strategic communication scholars (e.g., Leppänen & Karjalainen, 2005; Okazaki, 2009).

Previously, much attention was paid to mobile phones' short message service (SMS), and mobile media were often seen as tools that offer companies an alternative way to deliver

advertisements to their consumers (e.g., Kolsaker & Drakatos, 2009). However, current technological advancements enable companies to use mobile phones beyond simply sending commercial messages. For example, individuals can actively search for a company's information through its mobile website and applications. In addition, the GPS function of mobile phones allows companies to offer new types of services (e.g., enable users to easily locate nearby stores) that are convenient for website visitors and thus increase their satisfaction.

This kind of interactivity afforded by mobile services has resulted in favorable attitudes toward companies and in cultivating relationships between the two parties (Galloway, 2009; McCordindale & Morgoch, 2013). In their survey study with airline loyalty program customers, Liljander, Polsa and Forsberg (2009) found that customers who access services through sophisticated mobile phones (i.e., mobile phones that have Internet access) showed significantly more positive attitudes toward services and the company. An increasing number of companies now develop their own mobile applications in addition to mobile websites in order to enhance their responsiveness to their respective publics (Charlton, 2012).

Interactivity in Public Relations

Interactivity is a key component of mobile websites and applications. Interactivity, the concept that is often used to describe the uniqueness of online media, has been studied extensively over the last decade across various disciplines. Many definitions of interactivity have been proposed, such as the medium's ability to provide users with control over content presentations (Klein, 2003; Lombard & Snyder-Duch, 2001; Steuer, 1992), its responsiveness toward a user (Rafaeli, 1988), or the medium's ability to facilitate two-way communication (McMillan, 2000; Pavlik, 1998), to name a few.

In the field of online PR, interactivity is often associated with media's capability to assist bidirectional communication between companies and their publics (Kelleher, 2009). Particularly, the term "contingency interactivity" is often used in the online PR literature to capture this bidirectional communication potential of online media (Kelleher, 2009; Smith, 2010). Originally, contingency interactivity was proposed by Sundar, Kalyanaraman, and Brown (2003) as a contrast to another type of interactivity, namely functional interactivity. While contingency interactivity refers to the contingent back and forth of message exchange for facilitating a dialogic loop, functional interactivity focuses on interface features that allow users to interact with websites and underlying content. Later, Sundar (2007) extended this initial conceptualization of interactivity and proposed the model of interactivity effects. In this model, functional and contingency interactivity are termed modality interactivity and message interactivity respectively.

Given their relevance to PR, this study examines modality interactivity and message interactivity in the context of mobile media. Particularly, the study tests the effect of these two types of interactivity on four outcome variables—trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction. The four variables pertain to relationship maintenance strategies and outcomes (Hon & Grunig, 1999), and have been used in many studies for evaluating the relationships between companies and their publics (Bortree, 2010; Ki & Hon, 2009). Since relationship cultivation has been the central focus of PR scholarship (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994; Ferguson, 1984), these four outcomes are critical for this study. The next sections explicate the two types of interactivity and discuss theoretical mechanisms by which they can affect relationship cultivation between companies and their publics.

Message Interactivity and Relational Outcomes

Message interactivity, or contingency interactivity, concerns the manner in which messages are exchanged during an interaction process. The core variable that determines the level of message interactivity is contingency, which refers to the degree to which “subsequent messages are contingent or dependent on previous messages” (Sundar et al., 2003, p. 35), drawing upon Rafaeli (1988), who distinguished between two-way, reactive, and interactive communications. In two-way communication, messages are exchanged back and forth; however there is no coherence between later messages and those preceding them. In reactive communication, later messages refer to those immediately preceding them. In interactive communication, later messages refer to not only the ones immediately preceding them but also to earlier messages exchanged. The level of interactivity is therefore determined based on the degree to which messages are interconnected, which is the degree of contingency.

The effects of message interactivity on PR outcomes are well documented in previous studies (e.g., Kelleher, 2009; Lee & Park, 2013). A critical variable used to explain the effect of message interactivity is perceived dialogue. Scholars in public relations have long argued that dialogic communication is the basis of cultivating relationships between companies and their publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007). Interactive online media expand the potential for such dialogic communication, primarily by facilitating greater message interactivity (Kelleher, 2009). For instance, in his study of organization blogs, Kelleher (2009) found that contingency interactivity can heighten individuals’ feelings that companies are willing to have a conversation with them (i.e., conversational human voices), which in turn are positively correlated with relational outcomes (e.g., trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality).

However, there are questions surrounding how to adopt this principle to the corporate website context. From the definition, message interactivity can only be realized during an interaction process such as message exchanges between an individual and a company. This means users will not be able to experience message interactivity if they are simply browsing corporate websites. Can a company somehow induce a sense of dialogue among users through their website even without actually exchanging messages with users? One way to address this question is to examine the cue effect of interactivity. In the MAIN model, Sundar (2008) argued that the sheer presence of an interaction feature on an interface could influence users’ evaluation of the interface. This is because each interaction feature can cue a number of cognitive heuristics, (or mental rules of thumb) that trigger positive (and sometimes negative) evaluations of the site and its content. For example, if individuals go to a company’s Facebook page and see histories of exchanged messages between the company and its Facebook page users, the presence of this conversation history can trigger the contingency heuristic, leading users to feel that the company’s Facebook page is active and responsive. Such impressions can in turn encourage the individual to explore more of the page and have a positive feeling toward the company.

In sum, we propose that showing conversation history in a company’s website can trigger the contingency heuristic. This in turn would lead to an increase in perceived dialogue, and as a result yield better relational outcomes. Therefore, we hypothesize

H1: Higher message interactivity will lead to better trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction.

H2: Perceived dialogue will mediate the effects of message interactivity on better trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction.

Modality Interactivity and Relational Outcomes

Modality interactivity, or functional interactivity, focuses on the variety of interaction techniques available on the interface (Sundar, 2007). The concept of “modality interactivity” is different from “modality,” as modality refers to ways of presenting information (i.e., text, video, image, audio), whereas modality interactivity refers to different ways of interacting with the interface to access content (Sundar, Xu, & Bellur, 2010). For example, users can use the zoom function to get a closer look at the content. On the other hand, users can use the slide function to view contents in a continuum. Thus, the higher the number of interaction techniques employed, the higher the modality interactivity.

Although modality interactivity has gained little attention in previous PR research, recent studies show that it can also affect individuals’ perception towards companies (e.g., Dou, Lu, & Kumar, 2011). In their study of corporate websites, Guillory and Sundar (in press) found that when a website provides higher level of modality interactivity, users rated the reputation of the company higher. By extension, modality interactivity can also yield better relational outcomes towards a company, likely mediated by perceived enjoyment. Data from empirical studies indicate that a website with more interaction techniques could make users’ website browsing experience more enjoyable (Xu & Sundar, in press). This enjoyment is likely to result in better attitudes towards the company. According to theories about relational maintenance strategies, one of the ways to improve relational outcomes is to employ a strategy called positivity. By definition, positivity is “anything the organization or publics do to make the relationship more enjoyable for the parties involved” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 14). Therefore, incorporating modality interactivity in a company’s website is a way to implement a positivity strategy, which could in turn improve users’ relational outcomes towards the company.

In fact, positivity has been connected to interactivity in previous studies as well. For instance, in their content analysis of corporate weblogs, Cho and Huh (2010) included the presence of interactivity features as one of the measures for positivity. They argued that interactivity can make users’ website viewing experiences more fun and enjoyable. Thus, offering interactivity in websites can be considered as an execution of the positivity strategy. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses for study:

H3: Higher modality interactivity will lead to better trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction.

H4: Enjoyment will mediate the effects of modality interactivity on trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction.

In addition to relational outcomes, this study also tests whether the two types of interactivity affect individuals’ behavioral intentions towards the company. Previous literature on relational outcomes indicates that relational outcomes have significant effects on individuals’ willingness to actively engage with companies (e.g., Ki & Ho, 2007; Park & Rhee, 2010; Kang & Yang, 2010). For example, Kang and Yang (2010) found an indirect as well as a direct effect of relational outcomes on individuals’ supportive behavioral intentions toward the organization, such as whether they would continue to support the organization and would engage in positive word-of-mouth communication for the organization. Therefore, if the two types of interactivity can yield better relational outcomes, they can also have effects on behavioral intentions.

H5: Message interactivity will positively affect behavioral outcomes towards the company via perceived dialogue and relational outcomes.

H6: Modality interactivity will positively affect behavioral outcomes towards the company via enjoyment and relational outcomes.

Negative Outcomes and Power Usage

Increase in interactivity levels may also lead to some negative effects on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. One possible reason for negative effects may be due to the fact that offering too much interactivity exhausts individuals' cognitive resources and increases individuals' confusion and frustration (Bucy, 2004). Sundar (2008) also pointed out that negative effects of interactivity might occur due to "the nature of cues transmitted by technological affordances" (p. 79). In addition to those cues that elicit positive outcomes, technological affordances, such as interactivity, can sometimes convey cues that promote a negative evaluation of the website and its content. For example, an interface with multiple interactive features may trigger a bells-and-whistles heuristic, causing individuals to feel that the website is "all flash and no substance" (Sundar, 2008, p. 82). Similarly, offering too much interactivity on a website might initiate a distraction heuristic, which prevents users from effectively evaluating the website's content. If individuals fail to process the content and only have a feeling that they are distracted, they are likely to form negative feelings toward the website.

Mobile phones have a smaller screen size, and individuals' cognitive resources are often divided when they access information on these devices. Therefore, it is important to test the possible negative effects of interactivity in the current study.

RQ1: Will higher level of interactivity trigger bells and whistles and distraction heuristics, and therefore lead to negative attitudinal and behavioral outcomes?

The effects of interactivity can also be influenced by individual factors related to the user's proficiency in using technologies. Power usage concerns "user's motivation, efficacy, expertise and demonstration of evolved technology use" (Sundar & Marathe, 2010, p. 305). If individuals are high in power usage (i.e., power users), they are likely to consider themselves experts in information technologies and show greater confidence when testing newer technology by themselves. In contrast, non-power users often display less interest and enthusiasm toward interacting with newer technology (Sundar & Marathe, 2010).

In the same way, power usage could influence the degree and direction of interactivity effects. It can be assumed that power users may enjoy the interactive features more, whereas non-power users may feel distracted by having multiple interactive features on the website. Particularly, as the mobile phone is considered one of the most up-to-date information technologies in the current market, individuals' level of power usage can critically influence how one experiences mobile websites. In fact, some recent studies indicate that individual differences in self-efficacy in using mobile phones can affect how they use mobile phones and their acceptance of mobile services (Bakke, 2010; Lee, Hsieh, & Huang, 2011). Thus, this study will also consider the role of power usage as a potential moderator of effects hypothesized earlier:

RQ2: Will the degree of power usage moderate the effect of modality interactivity and message interactivity on participants' attitudinal, behavioral and relational outcomes?

Methods

In order to investigate the aforementioned hypotheses, a 2 (modality interactivity: low and high) \times 3 (message interactivity: low, medium, high) between-subject factorial experiment was conducted online. Six versions of the stimulus mobile website were developed that varied in

the level of modality interactivity and message interactivity.

Participants

A total of 272 undergraduate students from a major university in northeastern United States participated in this study. Among the 272 students, 20 students were excluded from the final analysis as they encountered issues during the experiment (such as being unable to swipe to change the pictures). The age of the final sample ($N = 252$) ranged from 18 to 30 ($M = 20.1$, $SD = 1.70$) with 117 females and 135 males. A majority of them (79%) were iPhone users. The time that they spend accessing Internet through mobile phones ranged from 0 to 600 minutes per day, with an average of 70.8 minutes. On the question relating to the primary purpose for using their mobile phone, 96% indicated sending or receiving text messages, followed by 85% making calls, 75% using applications, 68% browsing websites, and 63% listening to music.

Stimulus

A mobile website of a fictitious catering company was used as the stimulus. The study created six mobile websites that differed in the level of message interactivity and modality interactivity, but shared the same page layout, theme color and contents.

Basic layout of the website pages. Each stimulus website comprised seven webpages. All of the seven webpages had a top section that showed a banner of the fictitious catering company, a center section presented contents that varied from page to page, and a bottom section that displayed a link directing participants to the next page of the website (see Figure 2).

Contents in the center section. The center section of the first webpage included a greeting message and an instruction on how to change images in slideshow (see Figure 3). This was followed by three webpages that described the content of three buffet package options offered by the catering company. The center section of each page presented six images in the form of a slideshow. These images contained names and pictures of menus in package options. Further, the images could be changed by either tapping or swiping the slideshow window (see Figure 4). In the fifth webpage, the center section displayed an online calculator that automatically estimates the cost based on the number of people and the package chosen. At the top of the calculator, three images of the package menu's summary were presented in the form of a slideshow. Similar to the previous pages, participants were able to check the three images by tapping or swiping the screen (see Figure 4). The sixth webpage was used to manipulate message interactivity. The center section of this webpage displayed the phone number and e-mail address of the catering company. At the bottom of this contact information, the webpage displayed the interaction history between the company and its customers (see Figure 5). The final page of this website showed a message from the company along with a picture of the company's staff. Underneath the picture was a link that directed participants to the post-stimulus questionnaire (see Figure 5).

Modality Interactivity Manipulation

Modality interactivity was manipulated by varying the number of interaction techniques employed in the mobile website. Tap-based interaction technique was used as a baseline interaction technique in this study. In both low and high modality-interactivity conditions, participants had to tap the screen in order to proceed to the next page and make the cost estimation. This tap-based interaction technique was also used to change the images displayed in slideshow windows in the low modality-interactivity condition. In the high modality-interactivity

condition, swipe-based interaction technique was added. That is, in addition to tapping the screen, participants were able to swipe the screen to change the images in the slideshow window.

Message Interactivity Manipulation

Message interactivity was operationalized as the degree to which the interface displays message exchanges in a threaded manner. Six messages were used to manipulate message interactivity. Three of them were questions from customers and the other three messages were replies from the catering company. These messages were displayed along with the company's logo and icon representing an anonymous customer. While the messages and logos were the same across the three conditions, the way these messages are displayed varied across the conditions.

In the medium message-interactivity condition, questions and responses were displayed separately in individual dialogue boxes. The first message was a question from a customer (Customer A) regarding the company's drink menu. This question was followed by the company's response. The next two messages were questions from two other customers (Customer B and Customer C), and these questions were followed by two replies from the company (see Figure 6).

In the high message-interactivity condition, each response from the company was shown under the preceding dialogue box that contained customers' questions. In addition, the question asked by Customer C in medium condition was displayed as a reply to the preceding message by the company. This question was labeled as asked by Customer B instead of Customer C (see Figure 6). In this way, participants could perceive these messages are interconnected and exchanged in a threaded manner, but without varying the content across the two conditions.

For the low message-interactivity condition, the webpage showed the same six messages, but labeled them as "Frequently Asked Questions." In addition, there was no mention of who initiated the message (e.g., Customer A, All Events Catering). Messages were simply tagged with the letter Q or A (see Figure 6).

Procedure

This study took the form of an online experiment and was conducted over a period of one week. Prospective participants first received an e-mail that contained the link to an online survey. They were instructed to access this first online survey through PCs (i.e., laptop or desktop computers). The first page of the pre-questionnaire was the online implied consent form of this study. Once they read the consent form and clicked "proceed," they filled out a series of questions about their demographic information, mobile phone usage, and level of power usage.

After participants submitted the pre-questionnaire, they were directed to an instruction website that showed a scenario of the study and steps to access the stimulus mobile website. In the scenario page, participant was asked to imagine that s/he is one of the board members of a student organization and receives an e-mail from Lisa, the president of the student organization, who asks him/her to check a catering company's mobile website (see Figure 7). After the participant read the scenario, they would submit an e-mail using a dialogue box presented in the instruction website. The system automatically sent each participant an e-mail that contained the link to the stimulus mobile website.

The e-mail was designed as if it was sent by Lisa who was described as the president of a student organization in the scenario message (see Figure 8). Six e-mail messages were created

for this study. Each e-mail message contained a link to one of the six stimulus mobile websites at the end of the message. Participants received one of them depending on the condition to which they were randomly assigned. Participants were asked to check the e-mail through their mobile phone and click the link in the message to access the stimulus website.

In the stimulus mobile website, participants explored the seven webpages one by one, in the order described in the stimulus section above. When they reached the seventh webpage, they clicked the link at the bottom of the screen to go to the final questionnaire. This questionnaire contained all the measures for the mediating and dependent variables in the study.

Measures for Mediating Variables

Perceived dialogue: Perceived dialogue was measured using the items adopted from Sundar, Oh, Bellur, Jia, & Kim (2012), with seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The measure consisted of five items, and these items were averaged to form a scale. The reliability of the scale was good with the Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$ (for the details of the items, please see the Appendix A).

Perceived enjoyment: Three items adopted from Cyr, Head, Ivanov (2009) was used to measure perceived enjoyment. Items were measured using seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability for this scale was .92.

Measures for Dependent Variables

Relational Outcomes: Eighteen items were used to measure the four relational outcomes constructs of trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction. These items are modified from the PR Relationship Outcome Scale proposed by Hon and Grunig (1999), and measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Three of the four constructs indicated good reliability (Trust, $\alpha = .91$, $M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.98$; Commitment, $\alpha = .89$, $M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.11$, Satisfaction, $\alpha = .92$, $M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.08$). The reliability for control mutuality was low ($\alpha = .57$). A further examination revealed that one item "In dealing with people like me, this catering company has a tendency to throw its weight around" did not correlate well with other three items, and therefore dropped from the analysis. The final scale of control mutuality showed good reliability ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.07$).

Behavioral Intention towards the Company: Participants' behavioral intentions towards the company were measured using a four-item instrument developed by Bearden, Lichtenstein, and Teel (1984). Participants were asked to indicate their likelihood of using the service from the catering company by marking on a 7-point semantic differential scale with four pairs of adjectives: unlikely/likely, improbable/probable, uncertain/certain, and definitely not/definitely. Besides their likelihood of using the services, participants were also asked to indicate their likelihood of recommending the company to their friend by using the same four pairs of adjectives. The two scales showed high reliability (Behavioral intention towards the company, $\alpha = .94$, $M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.48$; Recommendation, $\alpha = .96$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.43$).

Measures for Negative Outcomes and Power Usage

Bells and Whistles: Five items were created to measure perceived bells and whistles. Items were measured using seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability for this scale was .81.

Distraction: Three items was created for this study to measure perceived distraction.

Items were measured using seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability for this scale was .89.

Measures for Moderating Variable

Power Usage: Individuals' power usage was assessed through twelve items adopted from Sundar and Marathe (2010). Items were measured using seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability for this scale was .82.

Manipulation Check Items

For the modality interactivity manipulation, two items were used to check if participants did use the tapping or/and swiping techniques while they were exploring the site. For the message interactivity manipulation, three items were used to evaluate whether the display of interaction history between the company and its customers was psychologically apparent. The items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Results

Manipulation Check: Modality Interactivity

A 2 x 2 chi-square was employed to examine the scores of the two manipulation items as a function of modality interactivity. As expected, most of the participants in both condition answered that they tapped the screen to access information on the mobile website (92% for low modality interactivity condition and 82% for high-modality interactivity condition), $\chi^2(1, N=252) = 5.4, p < .05$. Also, significantly more participants in high modality-interactivity condition (92%) answered that they swiped the screen to access information on the mobile website than participants in low modality-interactivity condition (44%), $\chi^2(1, N=252) = 66.28, p < .001$.

Manipulation Check: Message Interactivity

A series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) with level of message interactivity as the independent variable, and the three message interactivity manipulation check items as dependent variables was used to check whether the manipulation of message interactivity was successful. The results of the one-way ANOVAs showed that there were significant effects for all of the three items (see Table 1). The Tukey HSD post hoc test indicated that Medium message-interactivity condition evoked greater perception of the display of interaction history ($M = 4.61, SD = 1.45$), back and forth interaction ($M = 4.95, SD = 1.45$), and threaded conversation ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.66$) between the company and its customers, compared to the Low message-interactivity condition (interaction history, $M = 3.89, SD = 1.59$; back and forth interaction, $M = 4.22, SD = 1.57$, threaded conversation, $M = 3.53, SD = 1.65$). However, the Medium message-interactivity condition was not significantly different from the High message-interactivity condition for all of the three items (for High message interactivity condition, interaction history, $M = 4.32, SD = 1.53$; back and forth interaction, $M = 4.53, SD = 1.64$, threaded conversation, $M = 4.53, SD = 1.78$). In addition, the differences between High and Low conditions were not significant for the item that measured the display of interaction history and back and forth conversation. These results indicate that the manipulation for high message interaction condition was not fully successful. We attribute this issue to the design of the interaction history, and will examine this issue further in the last part of this Results section.

The Effect of the Two IVs on Relational Outcomes

A series of Factorial ANOVAs was employed to test the effect of message interactivity and modality interactivity on relational outcomes (H1 and H3). The results indicated that there were significant main effects from modality interactivity on control mutuality, $F(1, 246) = 3.93$, $p < .05$, and commitment, $F(1, 246) = 6.37$, $p < .05$. Specifically, participants in the high modality-interactivity condition perceived a higher level of control mutuality ($M = 4.78$, $SE = .09$) and commitment ($M = 4.55$, $SE = .10$) when compared to those in low modality-interactivity condition (control mutuality, $M = 4.49$, $SE = .09$; commitment, $M = 4.19$, $SE = .10$). A marginally significant effect from modality interactivity to satisfaction was also found, $F(1, 246) = 3.93$, $p = .05$, such that high modality-interactivity condition evoked higher level of satisfaction ($M = 4.66$, $SE = .10$) than did low modality interactivity condition ($M = 4.38$, $SE = .10$).

Also, there was a marginally significant effect of message interactivity on control mutuality, $F(2, 246) = 2.66$, $p = 0.07$. The subsequent post-hoc comparison with student's t test revealed that medium message-interactivity condition ($M = 4.87$, $SE = .12$) differed significantly from low condition ($M = 4.52$, $SE = .11$) with regard to control mutuality. However, the high message-interactivity condition ($M = 4.54$, $SE = .11$) did not significantly differ from both the medium and low conditions (see Table 2). Therefore, H1 and H3 were only partially supported.

The Effect of Mediating Variables

H2 and H4 proposed the mediating effect of enjoyment and perceived dialogue. Prior to the mediation analysis, a 2 x 2 factorial ANOVA was run to examine the effect of the two independent variables on the mediating variables. As can be seen from Table 2, there were significant main effects of modality interactivity on enjoyment, $F(1, 246) = 5.68$, $p < .05$, such that participants in high modality-interactivity condition indicated significantly higher level of enjoyment ($M = 4.17$, $SE = .12$) when compared to those in the low condition ($M = 3.76$, $SE = .12$). In addition, there were significant main effects of message interactivity on perceived dialogue, $F(1, 246) = 5.82$, $p < .001$. Participants in the medium message-interactivity condition indicated higher level of perceived dialogue ($M = 4.60$, $SE = .13$) than did the low message-interactivity condition ($M = 3.98$, $SE = .12$). However, high message-interactivity condition ($M = 4.26$, $SE = .13$) did not significantly differ from low and medium conditions.

Testing Indirect Effects

In order to test the indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variables via mediator(s), this study used Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS with 5000 bootstrap resamples and 95% confidence intervals (Hayes, 2013).

Mediating effects of enjoyment. The indirect effect of enjoyment was tested through PROCESS macro (Model 4) by entering modality interactivity as independent variable, enjoyment as mediating variable, and the four relational outcomes as dependent variables separately. Also, power usage and message interactivity were entered as covariates in the analysis. The results indicated significant indirect effects of modality interactivity on the four variables of relational outcomes through enjoyment (see Table 3). Therefore, H4 was supported.

Mediating effects of perceived dialogue. A series of mediation analysis using PROCESS macro was also conducted to examine whether perceived dialogue mediated the effect of message interactivity on the four relational outcomes. However, since the macro requires the

independent variable to be either dichotomous or continuous variable, message interactivity was dummy-coded as the first step of the mediation analysis. After referring the manipulation check results, this study recorded message interactivity into a dummy-coded variables “HighMedium-Low” that compared the addition of High and Medium message-interactivity conditions with the Low message-interactivity condition. Both the High and Medium conditions were coded as 1 whereas the Low condition was coded as 0. This new variable was entered as the independent variable in the PROCESS macro (Model 4). Perceived dialogue was entered as mediating variable and the four relational outcomes were entered as dependent variables respectively. Modality interactivity and power usage were entered as covariates in the analysis. As can be seen from table 3, there were significant indirect effects of message interactivity on the four relational outcomes via perceived dialogue. Thus, H2 was supported.

The Role of Power Usage and Negative Outcomes

In order to explore RQ1 and RQ2, a General Liner Model (GLM) was employed. Modality interactivity, message interactivity, and power usage were included as predictor variables, along with interaction terms. As can be seen from Table 4, power usage is a significant predictor of perceived distraction. In terms of interaction effects, the analysis revealed three-way interactions among modality interactivity, message interactivity, and power usage on the two negative outcomes, perceived bells and whistles, $F(2, 240) = 3.64, p < .05$, and distraction, $F(2, 240) = 3.16, p < .05$. As can be seen from Figure 9, when modality interactivity is low (i.e., only tapping), the increase in the level of power usage led to more negative outcomes (i.e., high in perceived bells and whistles, and perceived distraction) with high message interactivity, and less negative outcomes with medium and low message interactivity. When the modality interactivity is high (i.e., both tapping and swiping), higher level of power usage led to less negative outcomes with high and medium message interactivity, more perceived bells and whistles with low message interactivity. The degree of perceived distraction stays the same regardless of power usage when the modality interactivity is high and message interactivity is low. The results also indicated that individuals high in power usage felt the mobile website has highest level of bells and whistles and distraction with the combinations of low modality interactivity and high message interactivity, or with high modality interactivity and low message interactivity. On the other hand, individuals low in power usage perceived the highest level of bells and whistles and distraction with the combination of low modality interactivity and low message interactivity, or the combination of high modality interactivity and high message interactivity.

The Effect of Relational Outcomes to Behavioral Intentions

The current study proposed two hypotheses (H5 and H6) that examined whether the two types of interactivity affect individuals' behavioral intentions towards the company via mediating variables proposed in this study's model (see Figure 1). A series of analyses with PROCESS macro Model 6 showed that modality interactivity had an indirect effect on the two behavioral intention variables via enjoyment and all of the four variables in relational outcomes (Table 5). However, such indirect effects were significant only when both the mediators were included in the model in the order of enjoyment and relational outcomes. This implies that the higher level of modality interactivity resulted in better enjoyment, which in turn led to better trust, control mutuality, commitment, or satisfaction, yielding higher behavioral intentions. A similar analysis showed that the presence of message interactivity led to higher level of

perceived dialogue, which in turn resulted in better relational outcomes, followed by higher behavioral intentions (Table 6). Given these results, hypothesis 5 and 6 were supported.

Further Examination of Message Interactivity Manipulation

As mentioned above, the manipulation of high message interactivity was not fully successful in this study. Particularly, the high condition scored less compared to the medium condition for all the three items. After a scrutiny of the stimulus, we speculated that such results occurred because of the design of the interaction history. While the manipulation for message interactivity in this study resembled the comment function that appears in many websites, the design of the manipulation did not allow participants to actually leave comments or exchange messages with the company. Participants in high message interactivity conditions might had a high expectation of seeing commenting function, such as a dialogue box or send message button, when they are exposed to the interaction history, since the threaded design of interaction history may have led participants to remember similar online communication activities such as leaving a comment on a friends' blog or Facebook page. When they discovered that there was no commenting function available in the webpage, they may have formed a somewhat negative impression about the companies' willingness to communicate with their customers via the mobile website. This negative impression may have led them to become suspicious of the authenticity of the comments shown on the mobile web page by way of the interaction history between the company and its customers.

There is some evidence in the data to support this interpretation. In addition to the scales described in the method section, the current study happened to include two items that measured how much the participants felt the mobile website allowed them to interact. Those items were: "The catering company's mobile website allows me to perform a lot of actions," and "The catering company's mobile website is interactive." The ANOVAs revealed a significant effect for performing a lot of actions, $F(1, 249) = 4.09, p < .05$, and a borderline significant effect for perceived website interactivity, $F(2, 249) = 2.94, p = .05$. For both items, high message interactivity scored the lowest when compared to the other two conditions (see Table 7). In addition, a simple linear regression analysis revealed that "performing a lots of actions" positively affected "perceived website interactivity," $\beta = .055, p < .001$. Subsequent mediation analysis using Baron and Kenny (1986) revealed that the effect of message interactivity on perceived website interactivity reduced significantly when "performing a lot of actions" was included as a covariate in the analysis (from $F = 2.94, p = .05$ to $F = 1.05, p = .40$). Since the three conditions were consistent in the degree of interactive functions presented in the mobile website, the only reason for these results to occur was because participants in the high message-interactivity condition had higher expectations to be able to perform a lot of actions in the website, such as leaving a comment or exchanging messages with the company. When these expectations were not met, they felt that the website had lesser interactivity, which in turn led them to score lower on the three message-interactivity manipulation-check items.

Discussion

As predicted, modality interactivity and message interactivity had significant main and/or indirect effects on relational outcomes with the company. Enjoyment and perceived dialogue were significant mediators for the effect of interactivity on the outcomes. In addition, power usage moderated the effects of these two interactivity types on negative user perceptions of the

mobile website.

One of the goals of this study was to test cue effects of message interactivity. In previous message-interactivity studies, participants were asked to interact with the company or the system, and the message-interactivity manipulation was realized by way of actual interactions (i.e., the “use effect” described by Sundar and Bellur, 2011). In contrast, this study investigated the “cue effect” and demonstrated that the effects of contingency interactivity could take place even when individuals were simply exposed to threaded interaction history. Despite the subtle manipulation, the comparison of the three message-interactivity conditions indicated a significant main effect and multiple indirect effects on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, thus verifying the strong cueing potential of visual illustrations of message interactivity on a mobile interface.

Meanwhile, the manipulation results of message interactivity suggested the cue effects of message interactivity might not be realized under certain circumstances, such as the lack of realism. The current study intentionally excluded communication tools (e.g., comment box) in designing interaction history for the purpose of eliminating confounds introduced by participants creating their own content. However, as discussed in the results section, the lack of such communication tools could have led individuals to feel that the interaction history was unreal, resulting in a lower score for perceived threadedness and back and forth interactivity.

Another key finding of this study was the moderating role of power usage on the effect of interactivity. The results indicated that, in general, power users preferred higher interactivity levels compared to non-power users. Moreover, the three-way interaction results for the two negative outcomes (i.e., bells and whistles, website distraction) indicated that, when the mobile website presented high modality interactivity in the presence of message interactivity (i.e., high or medium message interactivity), non-power users felt more bells and whistles and website distraction than did power users (see the right part of Figure 9). These results suggest a general pattern of power users preferring interactive features and non-power users preferring simpler mobile interfaces. Interestingly, the three-way interaction results for the two negative outcomes also revealed that power users were more likely to feel bells and whistles and website distraction when one type of interactivity was paired with another type of interactivity at different interactivity levels (e.g., low modality interactivity and high message interactivity; high modality interactivity and medium message interactivity). Perhaps individuals scoring higher on the level of power usage are more likely to routinely use mobile websites and are exposed to many types of interactive website features. Exposure to one type of high-level interactivity might trigger them to think that they will encounter more interactive features when they are exploring a mobile website. When such expectations are not met, the user might perceive the high level of interactivity as an irrelevant design feature that distracts from the website viewing experience.

Theoretical Implications

This study also provided some theoretical implications for research in public relations, especially in the area of relational maintenance strategies and outcomes. Studies in this area often use content analysis methods to investigate whether companies’ online media platforms have certain features (e.g., interactivity) that are regarded as executions of relational maintenance strategies (Cho & Huh, 2010). However, few studies have empirically tested whether such features can indeed positively affect relational outcomes. Through an online experiment, this study provides empirical support for the effect of interactivity on relational outcomes.

In addition to relational outcomes, the results of this study imply that the effects of

interactivity could even be extended to behavioral intentions towards the company. According to the mediation analyses, the increased relational outcomes from interactivity could make individuals have greater intentions of using the company's services and recommending them to friends. These results echo recent discussions in the literature about how technological features such as interactivity contribute to individuals' behavioral change (e.g., Sundar, Oh, Kang, & Sreenivasan, 2013). Traditionally, studies in public relations tended to focus on messages and communicators (both sources and audience members) when it comes to examining publics' behavioral outcomes (i.e., Grunig, 1997; Kim, Ni, & Sha, 2008). The results of this study suggest that technological features could also have significant effects on publics' behaviors, and should therefore be given greater theoretical and empirical attention in future research.

Practical Implications

This study focused on those interaction techniques that are unique to mobile devices. Therefore, the results from this study are more useful than studies conducted in PC environments in helping PR practitioners and website designers develop mobile website interfaces.

Given the importance of ensuring an enjoyable experience while browsing the website (e.g., Cho & Huh, 2010), PR practitioners can consider increasing the number of interaction techniques employed in their companies' mobile websites. Although the current study only tested tapping or swiping, other forms of modality interactivity, such as visually-based (e.g., QR code) and audio-based (e.g., sound control) interaction techniques can be also considered, as they promise greater user enjoyment, in turn enhancing individuals' relational outcomes and behavioral intentions towards the company.

In addition, the results suggest that simply presenting threaded conversation history in a company's mobile website is effective in improving users' relational outcomes with companies. Similar to how this study translated the FAQ section into interaction history, PR practitioners can change the structure of website content in a manner that resembles interaction history between companies and their publics. In addition, companies can also incorporate commenting tools, such as Facebook comments, into their website and actively reply to comments received in order to automatically accumulate an interaction history with their publics (Smith & Sundar, 2011). If it is difficult to include such functions in their website, companies can at least encourage website visitors to check other communication-focused online media that companies are operating, such as companies' blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. In this way, website visitors would be exposed to the interaction history that the companies have had with their publics, which is likely to improve their relational outcomes with the company.

PR practitioners and website designers can also refer to this study's findings regarding the relationship between power usage and the negative outcomes of interactivity to guide their companies' mobile website design. This study found that individuals' preferences for interactivity level differ depending on their level of power usage. In general, power users prefer mobile websites that incorporate various types of interactivity features, while non-power users prefer simpler ones. Thus, it would be important to assess the primary clientele of the mobile website and change the level of interactivity accordingly. For example, if the website visitors are members of the younger generation or are tech savvy, the website can employ various types of interactivity features. On the other hand, if a website is likely to be used by those who are incompetent with information technology, features with lesser interactivity may be preferable. In fact, scholars in HCI have long argued that simpler websites are preferred by users and tend to

yield better user experiences (e.g., Nielsen, 2007). This may be especially true in the mobile platform, which is often used in contexts (urgent, public, on the go, limited bandwidth, small screen size) that do not lend themselves to elaborate interactivity. Practitioners and designers would do well to consider these pressures on different kinds of users when developing sites for mobile use, with a view to maximizing their PR potential.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, this study used food related products in the stimulus (i.e., catering company). While it was not under the scope of this research to examine how product categories influence the effect of interactivity, there are already studies indicating that the effects of interactivity on individuals' website attitudes are influenced by users' anticipated degree of interactivity, which in turn is determined by the types of products that the website offers (Sohn, Gi, & Lee, 2007). Also, these studies suggest that individuals expect to experience higher levels of interactivity on websites that offer technology-related products (e.g., automobiles) than websites that offer other types of products (e.g., furniture). Thus, the results of this study, especially for perceived bells and whistles and distraction, may be different if other types of products, such as technology-related products, are selected. Future research can test the same manipulated variables with different product categories.

Finally, this study did not explore novelty effects that are associated with swiping interaction techniques. Previously, users were only able to access information by tapping the keypad of their mobile phones. Swiping became available only after the penetration of smartphone. Therefore, when compared to the tapping technique, swiping is newer and novel to users. Such differences in novelty may have led users to perceive the two interaction techniques differently. Hence, once swiping technique becomes common to users, it may become harder for users to psychologically differentiate the two interaction techniques. Future research should examine how novelty is likely to influence the psychological effects of interaction techniques noted in this study.

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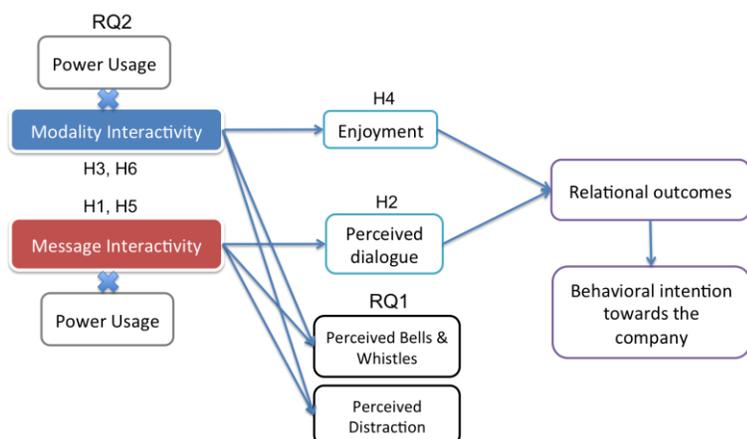


Figure 1. Study model.



Figure 2. The basic layout of the webpages.

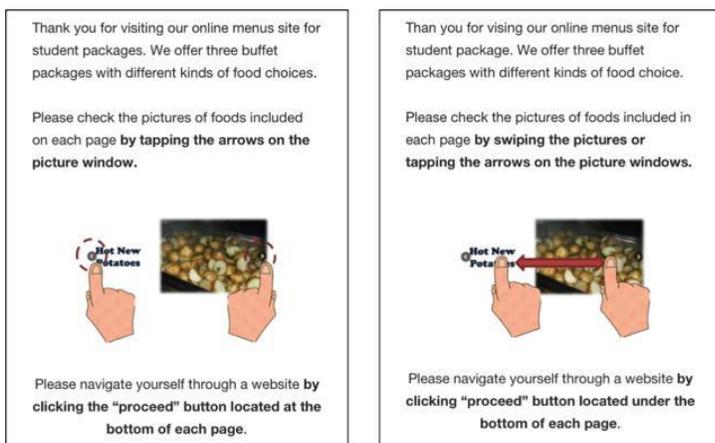


Figure 3. Screenshots of the introduction page (center section only). The left one is for low modality interactivity condition (i.e., tapping only) and the right one is for high modality interactivity condition (i.e., tapping and swiping).

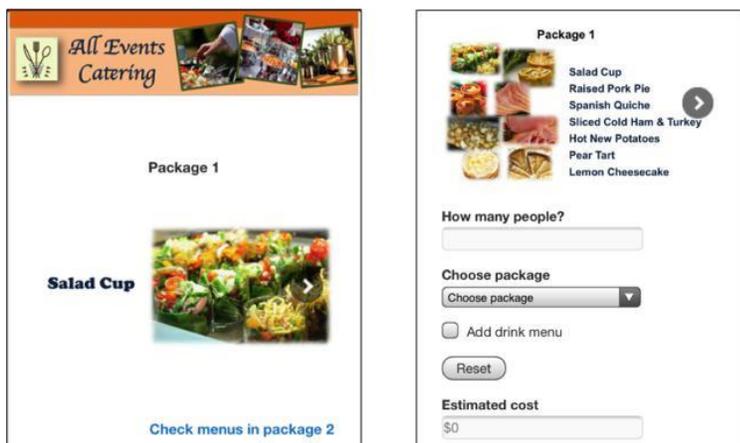


Figure 4. An example screenshot of a webpage that shows package menus (left), and a screenshot of the center section of the fifth webpage (right).



Figure 5. Screenshots of the sixth page (left) and the final page (right).

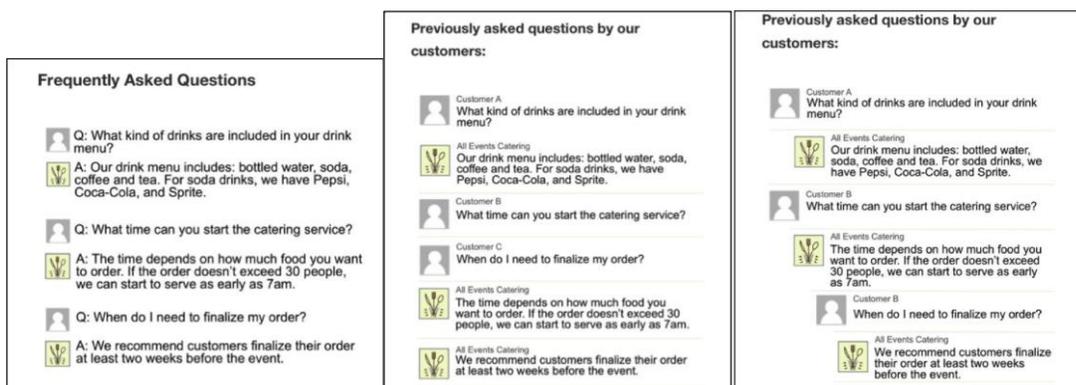


Figure 6. Stimulus for message interactivity (from Left to Right: Low Message Interactivity Condition, Medium Message Interactivity, High Message Interactivity)

Please read the following carefully and imagine yourself in the scenario below.

----- Scenario -----

"You are one of the board members for a student organization. Your organization is planning to hold a party to celebrate its 10-year anniversary.

One day when you are waiting for the bus to school, you check your e-mail from your mobile phone. You receive an e-mail from your president, Lisa, who asks you to check a catering company's mobile website and get a sense of the menus they offer"

Please click here to proceed

In the box below, please enter **an e-mail address that you usually use through your mobile phone**. Then press the "send" button.

This will allow the system to automatically send you an e-mail regarding this study to your e-mail box.

Your Email

Once you press the "send" button, please take **your mobile phone** and **check your e-mail box for the e-mail address that you entered**.

You will find an e-mail from Lisa, the president of your student organization.

Please read her message carefully and click the link in the e-mail.

Figure 7. A screenshot of the first (left) and the second (right) page of the instruction website.

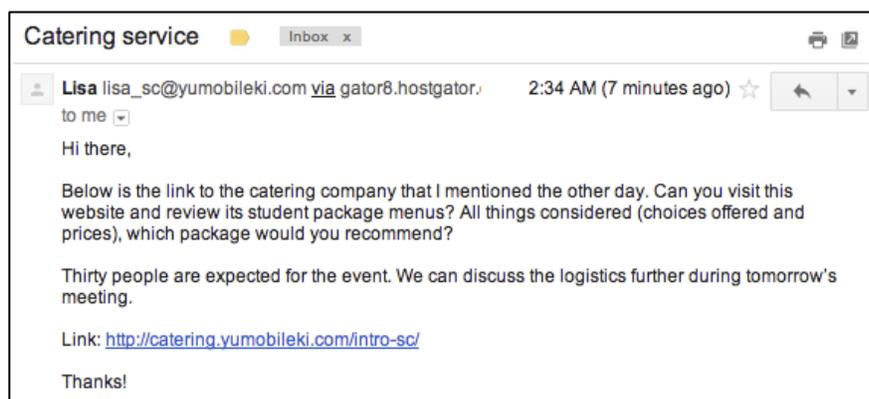
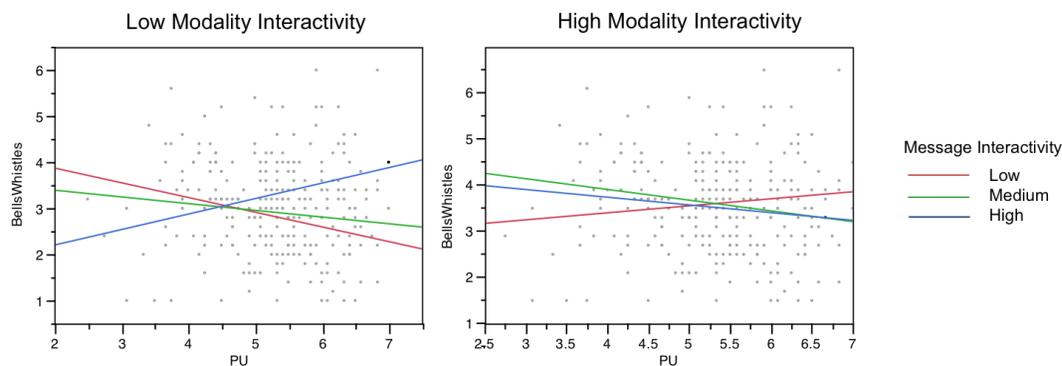


Figure 8. E-mail sent from Lisa.



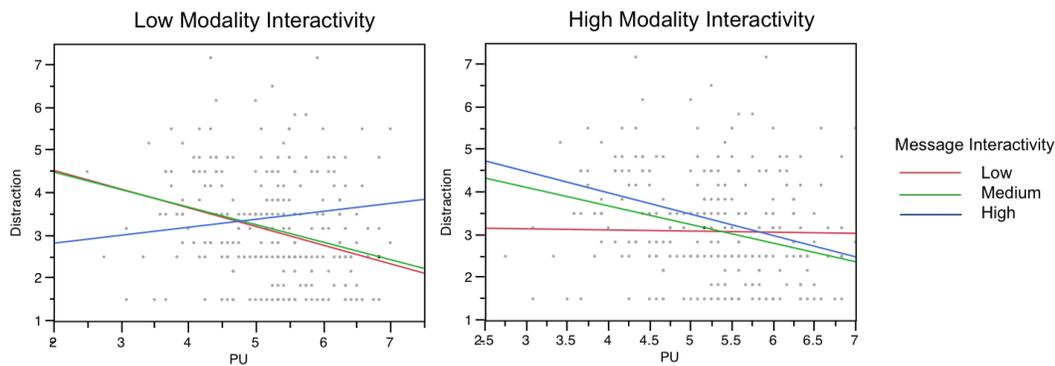


Figure 9. Three-way interaction effects on negative outcomes.

Table 1

Manipulation Check Results of Message Interactivity

Items	Low	Medium	High	<i>F</i>
1. The catering company's mobile website displayed a history of interaction between the catering company and its customers.	3.89 _b (1.59)	4.61 _a (1.45)	4.32 _{ab} (1.53)	4.75**
2. The catering company's mobile website displayed a back and forth interaction between the catering company and its customers.	4.22 _b (1.57)	4.95 _a (1.45)	4.53 _{ab} (1.64)	4.63*
3. The catering company's mobile website displayed a threaded conversation between the catering company and its customers.	3.53 _b (1.65)	4.98 _a (1.66)	4.53 _a (1.78)	14.49**

Note. * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$. Means that do not share lowercase subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$ according to Tukey-Kramer HSD post-hoc test.

Table 2

Main and Interaction Effects on Relational Outcomes and Mediating Variables

	Modality Interactivity (MoI)	Message Interactivity (MeI)	MoI x MeI interaction
Trust	$F = 1.00$	$F = 1.71$	$F = 1.15$
Control Mutuality	$F = 3.93^{**}$	$F = 2.66^*$	$F = 0.49$
Commitment	$F = 6.37^{**}$	$F = 1.18$	$F = 0.61$
Satisfaction	$F = 3.76^*$	$F = 0.81$	$F = 0.27$
Enjoyment	$F = 5.86^{**}$	$F = 0.16$	$F = 0.32$
Perceived Dialogue	$F = 1.24$	$F = 5.82^{***}$	$F = 0.47$

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Indirect Effects of Modality Interactivity (MoI) and Message Interactivity (MeI) on Relational Outcomes via Mediators

	Indirect Effect Bootstrap Estimate (<i>b</i>)	Indirect Effect 95% Confidence Intervals	
		LL	UL
MoI → Enjoyment → Trust	.12*	.03	.24
MoI → Enjoyment → Control Mutuality	.13*	.03	.26
MoI → Enjoyment → Commitment	.14*	.03	.28
MoI → Enjoyment → Satisfaction	.19*	.04	.36
MeI → Perceived Dialogue → Trust	.26*	.10	.44
MeI → Perceived Dialogue → Control Mutuality	.28*	.10	.47
MeI → Perceived Dialogue → Commitment	.28*	.11	.48
MeI → Perceived Dialogue → Satisfaction	.26*	.10	.46

Note: * $p < .05$.

Table 4
Main and Interaction Effects of power Usage

	Power Usage (PU)	Modality Interactivity (MoI) x (PU)	Message Interactivity (MeI) x (PU)	MoI x MeI x PU
Relational Outcomes				
Trust	$F = 1.32$	$F = 0.35$	$F = 0.62$	$F = 1.04$
Control Mutuality	$F = 3.18^{\wedge}$	$F = 0.59$	$F = 0.20$	$F = 2.43^{\wedge}$
Commitment	$F = 2.45$	$F = 0.11$	$F = 0.37$	$F = 1.75$
Satisfaction	$F = 0.38$	$F = 0.01$	$F = 1.17$	$F = 1.13$
Behavioral Intentions				
Company	$F = 0.00$	$F = 0.12$	$F = 0.51$	$F = 0.96$
Company (Recommendation)	$F = 0.27$	$F = 0.82$	$F = 0.35$	$F = 1.05$
Enjoyment and Perceived Dialogue				
Enjoyment	$F = 0.00$	$F = 0.12$	$F = 0.21$	$F = 1.08$
Perceived Dialogue	$F = 3.63^{\wedge}$	$F = 0.64$	$F = 0.53$	$F = 0.90$
Negative Outcomes				
Perceived Bells & Whistles	$F = 0.72$	$F = 0.07$	$F = 1.17$	$F = 3.64^*$
Perceived Distraction	$F = 8.99^{**}$	$F = 0.31$	$F = 0.77$	$F = 3.16^*$

Note: $^{\wedge} p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 5

Indirect Effects of Modality Interactivity (MoI) on Behavioral Intentions Towards The Company via Mediators

	Indirect Bootstrap Estimate (<i>b</i>)	Indirect Effect 95% Confidence Intervals	
		LL	UL
Dependent Variable: Using the service			
MoI → Enjoyment → Trust → DV	.06*	.01	.13
MoI → Enjoyment → Control Mutuality → DV	.07*	.01	.16
MoI → Enjoyment → Commitment → DV	.07*	.02	.17
MoI → Enjoyment → Satisfaction → DV	.14*	.03	.28
Dependent Variable: Recommendation			
MoI → Enjoyment → Trust → DV	.07*	.02	.15
MoI → Enjoyment → Control Mutuality → DV	.07*	.02	.15
MoI → Enjoyment → Commitment → DV	.08*	.02	.18
MoI → Enjoyment → Satisfaction → DV	.15*	.04	.28

Note: * $p < .05$.

Table 6

Indirect Effects of High Medium-to-Low Message Interactivity (MeI) on Behavioral Intentions Towards the Company via Mediators.

Mediators	Indirect Bootstrap Estimate (<i>b</i>)	Indirect Effect 95% Confidence Intervals	
		LL	UL
Dependent Variable: Using the service			
MeI → Dialogue → Trust → DV	.18*	.07	.32
MeI → Dialogue → Control Mutuality → DV	.20*	.07	.36
MeI → Dialogue → Commitment → DV	.16*	.08	.34
MeI → Dialogue → Satisfaction → DV	.24*	.09	.43
Dependent Variable: Recommendation			
MeI → Dialogue → Trust → DV	.21*	.09	.38
MeI → Dialogue → Control Mutuality → DV	.19*	.07	.36
MeI → Dialogue → Commitment → DV	.21*	.08	.37
MeI → Dialogue → Satisfaction → DV	.25*	.10	.46

Note: * $p < .05$.

Table 7
Results for Website Interactivity

Items	Low	Medium	High	<i>F</i>
1. The catering company's mobile website is interactive.	5.10 _{ab} (1.36)	5.18 _a (1.45)	4.69 _b (1.53)	2.94*
2. The catering company's mobile website allows me to perform a lot of actions.	4.03 _a (1.57)	4.03 _a (1.45)	3.48 _b (1.64)	4.09**

Note. * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$. Means with no lowercase subscripts in common are significantly different.

Appendix A Posttest Questionnaire

Manipulation Check

Q2. Please think back to the catering company's mobile website and answer the questions below.

1. While I was exploring the catering company's mobile website, I tapped the screen to access information on the site.

a. Yes b. No

2. While I was exploring the catering company's mobile website, I swiped the screen to access information on the site.

a. Yes b. No

Q3. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree 7 = Strongly Agree.

1. The catering company's mobile website displayed a history of interaction between the catering company and its customers.

2. The catering company's mobile website displayed a back and forth interaction between the catering company and its customers.

3. The catering company's mobile website displayed a threaded conversation between the catering company and its customers.

4. The catering company's mobile website is interactive.

5. The catering company's mobile website is easy to browse.

6. The catering company's mobile website allows me to perform a lot of actions.

7. The catering company's mobile website allows me to access information in a variety of ways.

Perceived Enjoyment

Q5. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements about your interaction with the catering company's mobile website on a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree 7 = Strongly Agree

1. I found my visit to this mobile website entertaining.

2. I found my visit to this mobile website enjoyable.

3. I found my visit to the mobile website pleasant.

Perceived Bells and Whistles

Q6. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree 7 = Strongly Agree

1. The site is quite fancy but lacks useful content.

2. The site has a lot of bells and whistles.

3. The site is very flashy but no substance.

4. The site has a lot of features that are nonessential

5. The site has many extravagant functions that are not necessary

Perceived Distraction

Q7. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree 7 = Strongly Agree

1. I felt that the design of the site made me unable to focus on the content while I was browsing the site.

2. I felt that the website is designed in a way that distracted me from processing the information on the site.

3. I felt that my attention was diverted while I was browsing the site due to the design of the site.

Perceived Dialogue

Q9. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding your thoughts about the catering company after interacting with their mobile website.

(Strongly Disagree = 1; Strongly Agree = 7)

1. I felt the company considered its customers' unique requests.
2. I felt like the company was engaged in an active dialogue with their customers.
3. The company's interaction with their customers felt like a back and forth conversation.
4. The company responded quickly to its customers' questions and requests.
5. The company was efficient in responding to its customers' questions.

Relational Outcomes

Q11. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding your opinion about the catering company on a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree 7 = Strongly Agree

(Trust)

1. This catering company treats people like me fairly and justly.
2. Whenever this catering company makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.
3. This catering company can be relied on to keep its promises.
4. I believe that this catering company takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.
5. I feel very confident about this catering company's skills.
6. This catering company has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.

(Control Mutuality)

1. This catering company and people like me are attentive to what each other say.
2. This catering company believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate.
3. In dealing with people like me, this catering company has a tendency to throw its weight around. (R)
4. This catering company really listens to what people like me have to say.

(Commitment)

1. I feel that this catering company is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.
2. I can see that this catering company wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.
3. There will be a long-lasting bond between this catering company and people like me.
4. Compared to other companies, I value my relationship with this catering company more.

(Satisfaction)

1. I am happy with this catering company.
2. Both the catering company and people like me benefit from the relationship.
3. I think most people like me are happy in their interactions with this catering company.
4. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship this catering company has established with people like me.

Behavioral Intention toward the Company

Q14. Suppose this catering company is located near where you live, what is the likelihood that you will use their service?

unlikely/likely, improbable/probable, uncertain/certain, and definitely not/definitely

Q15. If your friends asked you about this catering company, what is the likelihood that I will recommend them to use this catering company?

unlikely/likely, improbable/probable, uncertain/certain, and definitely not/definitely

Assessing the Reliability Metrics Proposed as Standards for Traditional Media Analysis – Phase Two

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Abstract

At the 16th Annual IPRRC in March 2013 the researchers presented the first phase of the study *Assessing the Reliability Metrics Proposed as Standards for Traditional Media Analysis*. Researchers received considerable, thoughtful feedback both during and after the Conference that has informed Phase Two of the research – an enhanced, stronger piece of research building on the previous study. The initial study tested the metrics using *inexperienced* coders, trained using a coding guidebook and instructions developed by the researchers and based on the *Proposed Interim Standards for Metrics in Traditional Media Analysis* guidelines. The Phase One study results yielded low to moderate intercoder reliability based on Krippendorff’s *alphas*. The most significant feedback on this work was the recommendation to repeat the study using trained coders to see if/how reliability improves with experience.

The research paper addresses efforts to repeat the methodology from Phase One with two pre-tests followed by independent coding of the identical set of 106 articles about Wal-Mart, using three *experienced* coders. Results indicate that coding for the metrics of standards of traditional media analysis is reliable. Ten of the thirteen media items had moderate to high *alphas*, indicating that the three coders were in agreement the majority of time. The paper documents additional best practices and includes updates and improvements to the coding guidebook gleaned from working with the experienced coders.

The standards document evolved to meet the practitioners’ need for replicable, comparable and transparent outcomes in media content analysis. The implementation of Phase Two of this study allows for clearer, more definitive conclusions and provides readers with robust guidance and best practices, and a “ready-made” set of tools in the form of a tested and effective coding guide and coding grid, to implement media content analysis with the necessary transparency in methodology and confidence of replication.

Introduction

Analyzing media coverage has been a common public relations practice since the 1930s (Michaelson & Macleod, 2007). Organizations have varied objectives for engaging in traditional media relations, and likewise many reasons for analyzing the media coverage. Media measurement can evaluate an organization's success, or lack of success, in conveying organizational messages, in countering undesired or incorrect messages, in positioning company or third party spokespeople, and in generating favorable coverage, among other reasons. Public relations professionals analyze media coverage to help demonstrate the value of public relations, provide insights to make better decisions, improve performance, and understand issues.

Communications professionals often face the need to compare the results of multiple public relations campaigns across brands, business units, and geographies. In the absence of an industry-wide methodology for data collection and analysis, in-house communication teams, their public relations agencies, and their media measurement firms use inconsistent definitions and calculations for reporting results. This frustrates management, limits the possibilities for organizational learning, reduces efficiency, and puts budgets at risk. Senior communication leaders want transparent, replicable, credible metrics—similar to those presented by their counterparts in marketing, advertising, or sales—to demonstrate their results.

Practitioners have thus been asking for measurement standards to ensure that all their public relations efforts can be evaluated using consistent definitions and measurements.

In June 2012, the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) released a paper (Eisenmann, Geddes, Paine, Pestana, Walton, & Weiner, 2012) proposing industry standards on how to calculate some of the most fundamental and commonly debated metrics in traditional media analysis: (i) what counts as a media “hit,” (ii) impressions, (iii) assessing sentiment, and (iv) gauging quality. In line with the process outlined by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the IPR standards were open for comment from industry practitioners who wanted to participate in the development and revision of the proposed standard metrics. In October 2013, four companies that are major buyers of public relations research and measurement services adopted the standards. The corporations are General Electric, McDonald's USA, General Motors and Southwest Airlines.

The ISO process also recommends validation of the standards to demonstrate that the standards actually measure what they say they measure. This research seeks to validate the proposed media standards by measuring the level of agreement among three independent coders when coding media stories based upon the proposed standards and by strengthening the validity of the media analysis codebook, the instrument created to measure the proposed media standards. The purpose of this research is threefold. First, to support public relations practitioners in successfully implementing the proposed standards in their measurement work by providing guidance and best practices on how to set up a detailed coding guidebook and instruction, based upon the proposed traditional media standards. Second, to test the reliability of the proposed standards based upon a coding analysis of a randomly selected sample of media coverage, providing a path to uncovering best practices to improve the process. Success in defining this pathway should lead to more frequent use of media analysis for measurement in public relations and, more importantly, higher quality, useful results that contribute to communications planning and strategy development. Third, to strengthen the validity of the codebook designed to measure the proposed standards, based upon this research study.

Literature Review and Research Purpose

According to public relations historians (Lamme & Miller, 2010; Watson, 2012), media analysis began as early as the late 18th century, when US presidents informally monitored coverage in newspapers to understand public opinion. Watson (2012) says that media analytics proliferated in the mid-20th century, and by the 1990s, measurement and evaluation in general was a popular topic of interest among public relations academics and professionals. Indeed, contemporary books on public relations measurement and evaluation provide excellent guidance and examples of how to use content analysis to analyze media coverage (Paine, 2007; Stacks, 2012; Stacks & Michaelson, 2010; Watson & Noble, 2005). Traditional media analysis includes quantitative measures such as item counts and impressions and qualitative measures such as tone and key message presence, all typically referred to as outputs in public relations measurement and evaluation. Michaelson and Griffin (2005) have proposed alternative approaches focused on content accuracy to track omissions, misstatements, incomplete information, and basic facts. Although more recent developments in media analysis have focused on linking media coverage to business outcomes (Jeffrey, Michaelson, & Stacks, 2006, 2007) and examining the return on investment of media coverage (Likely, Rockland, & Weiner, 2006; Weiner, Arnorsdottir, Lang, & Smith, 2010) analysis of basic media coverage outputs such as impressions, tone and key performance indicators are nonetheless important as a measure of public relations efficiency. Support for practitioners undertaking media content analysis is important as there is little training available and many times it is the more junior and less experienced team members who are asked to implement the work. Michaelson and Griffin (2005) suggest that media analysis is not frequently used because the evaluation rarely offers any valuable insights or solutions for communication challenges beyond tonality. They also contend that successful results depend on the knowledge and experience of the coders and that rigorous training is needed for consistent and reliable results.

In addition to the many published books and papers on how to do media analysis, entities in the private sector—agencies, corporations, service providers, and consultants—have also developed proprietary systems of media analysis. Widely inconsistent results in media analysis are common, rendering the data useless for comparison among programs and an unreliable source for business decision-making. For example, in 2009 the Central Office of Information (CIO) in the United Kingdom sent an identical brief comprising 138 items of media coverage to five companies for evaluation. They wanted to know how many people consumed the coverage, how much it cost per 1,000 reached and what was the favorability and tone of the coverage was. Despite the fact that these are common measures for public relations, the results were all different and the range within each was very large (CIO). In an effort to address inconsistencies such as these in public relations measurement, public relations practitioners and academics from around the world have collaborated to create clear and transparent standards and approaches to measuring and evaluating public relations results. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a standard as “an idea or thing used as a measure, norm, or model in comparative evaluations” (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011, p. 4). According to Institute for Public Relations president Frank Oviatt (2013), a standard is a published specification in the public domain that provides a common language for comparison purposes. Standards can help foster innovation and increase the credibility of public relations work (Oviatt). Michaelson and Stacks (2011) contend that standardization of public relations measures requires significantly more than a description of the measure to be included in the analysis. They

highlight that the implementation of specific research procedures and protocols that will be applied uniformly and consistently are needed.

However, a public relations standard is not synonymous with a best practice. As explained by Michaelson and Macleod (2007), a best practice is a “technique, method or practice that is more effective than others in reaching an established goal” (p. 3). Standards define *what* needs to be measured whereas a best practice indicates *how* to best meet the objective of the standard (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011).

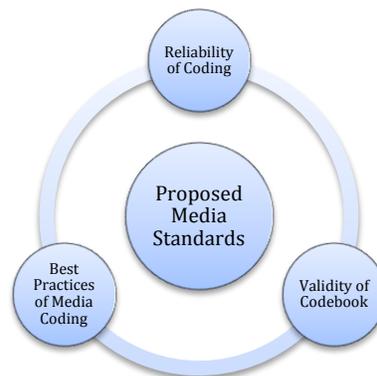
The Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles (2010), developed by the Institute for Public Relations Measurement Commission and the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication, and subsequently endorsed by other public relations industry organizations, represented the first step toward creating public relations measurement standards. The Barcelona Principles advocate that (1) advertising value equivalency (AVE) does not equal the value of public relations, (2) that media measurement should include quantity and quality, and (3) that transparency and replicability are paramount to sound measurement, among other principles.

In 2012, a newly formed industry group—the Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards—launched with the purpose of creating a broad platform of standards and best practices of public relations research, measurement, and evaluation. Partners include the Council of Public Relations Firms (CPRF), the Global Alliance, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communications (AMEC), and the Institute for Public Relations. Later in 2012, the Coalition for Public Relations Research Standards created and released the *Proposed Interim Standards for Metrics in Traditional Media Analysis* (Eisenmann et al.), and sought industry input on the proposed standards. In fall 2013, four corporations that are buyers of public relations research and measurement services—General Electric, McDonald's USA, General Motors and Southwest Airlines—adopted the first round of interim standards recommended by the Coalition. In the words of Coalition chair David Geddes, “Basing our process on the recommendations of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), we said from the beginning that customers like these corporations are the final arbiters of when a standard is ready to move forward” (Four Major Corporations Adopt Public Relations Standards, 2013).

Eisenmann, O’Neil, and Geddes sought to test the reliability of the proposed interim traditional media standards in 2013 by using inexperienced coders, trained using a coding guidebook and instructions developed by the researchers and based on the *Proposed Interim Standards for Metrics in Traditional Media Analysis* guidelines. The research results yielded low to moderate intercoder reliability based on Krippendorff *alphas*. The most significant feedback on this work was the recommendation to repeat the study using trained coders to see if/how reliability improves with experience.

This study addresses this feedback by seeking to accomplish the following objectives (1) to strengthen the validity of the codebook by clarifying and refining the coding descriptions and definitions based upon the proposed standards, (2) to retest the reliability of the proposed standards with three experienced coders using the same corpus of 106 media stories about a single company, and (3) to document best practices for measuring the proposed media standards.

The following model documents this validation process this study seeks to address:
Proposed Media Standards



Reliability: Independent coders who code media stories using the codebook with instructions on how to code for the standards should reach similar conclusions or agreement.

Validity: The measuring instrument, in this case the codebook, must actually measure the concepts described in section 3.1 through 3.4 using proposed media standards.

Best Practices: Coders must be carefully trained on how to use the codebook and a quality control system should be implemented to systematically check on intercoder reliability and provide ongoing feedback.

The specific objectives of this research are as follows:

1. Clarify some of the descriptions in the codebook, which is a set of clear instructions for coding, based upon the proposed standard metrics and the 2013 research study by Eisenmann, O’Neil, and Geddes.
2. Train a team of three analysts, professional full-time media coders, using the 12 training documents. The analysts and researchers will review and discuss their findings as a team, and then revise the codebook as necessary to clarify coding instructions.
3. The analysts team members, working independently, code the test set of 106 documents.
4. Analyze inter-observer agreement using an appropriate statistical test, in this case Krippendorff’s *alpha*.
5. Document an appropriate procedure for testing inter-observer agreement in the practice of media measurement, and make recommendations to the practice.
6. If needed, follow-up with analyst team for feedback on how to further clarify the coding instructions for the proposed standards and then make revisions to the codebook.

Standard Definitions and Guidelines for Traditional Media Analysis

Items for Media Analysis

An item for media analysis is a “manifest unit of analysis used in content analysis consisting of an entire message itself (e.g., an advertisement, story, press release)” (Stacks and Bowen, 2013). General guidance for what should be included in media analysis is that the item has passed through some form of editorial filter, which is what distinguishes public relations from other forms of marketing. Items for analysis can include many types of communications content, including but not limited to the following:

- An article in print media (e.g. *New York Times*).
- News wire stories from organizations such as Dow Jones, Reuters, Associated Press and Bloomberg. In addition to counting as an item for the news wire, each media outlet running the story counts as a separate item or “hit” because it has different

- readership. If the wire story is updated multiple times in one day, only count the story once in a 24-hour period using the latest, most updated version.
- Article in the online version of print media (e.g. nytimes.com). An article appearing in both the online and print version of media outlet should both be counted because the readership is different for each channel.
 - Article in an online publication (huffingtonpost.com).
 - Broadcast segment (TV or radio). In the case of a broadcast segment that repeats during the day, each segment should be counted as an item because audiences change during the day.
 - News item on the web site of a broadcast channel or station.
 - Analyst report.
 - Reprints or syndication of an article. Each appearance in an individual media outlet counts because the readership is different.
 - Bylined feature by company executive.

Press release pick-ups from “controlled vehicles” such a posting stories on PR Newswire, Business Newswire and other sites where the content is not “earned” should not be counted as an item for analysis.

Other items for content analysis could include blog posts, comments on blog posts, posts and comments on discussion boards and forums, tweets, Facebook posts and comments, videos and comments posted. These social media channels are not considered part of traditional media and typically have little or no editorial screening, so would not be captured for analysis. However, as this study’s goal is to provide a practitioners tool, we have given exception to blog posts, the more notable of which in practice are frequently included in media analysis. This might include the blogs of traditional print media publications such as the *Wall St. Journal* (<http://blogs.wsj.com/>) or those popular with key target audiences such as Mommy Blogs.

Impressions

Impressions are the number of people having the opportunity for exposure to a story that has appeared in the media. Impressions are also known as “opportunity to see” (OTS) and usually refer to the total audited circulation of a publication the verified audience-reach of a broadcast vehicle or viewers of an online news story (Stacks & Bowen, 2013). Impressions should not be mistaken for awareness. “Awareness” exists only in people’s minds and must be measured using other research tools. Impressions are indicative of the opportunity to see (OTS). Organizations may want to consider OTS as an alternative nomenclature to better clarify what “impressions” mean – potential to see/read and a potential precursor to “awareness.”

- For print media, impressions should be based on circulation figures such as those provided by the publication, or through resources such as subscriptions tools such as Cision, or Alliance for Audited Media (formerly Audit Bureau of Circulations) in North America and audit bureau of circulations in the UK, India, Australia, Hong Kong and elsewhere. Multipliers should not be used for calculating impressions.
- For online media – impressions should be calculated by dividing the number of unique visitors per month by the number of days in the month to get the number of daily views. Impressions should be based on the unique URL or sub-domain for the

- item (e.g., www.yahoo.com vs. [finance.Yahoo.com](http://finance.yahoo.com)). Unique visitors per month can be sourced through several services, such as Compete.com or Nielsen NetRatings.
- For broadcast – organizations are advised to use the numbers distributed by the broadcast monitoring service provider, i.e. usually Nielsen. For example, a monitoring report for a single clip typically includes the following: Time: 9:30am, Aired On: NBC, Show: Today (6/8), Estimated Audience Number: 5,358,181
 - For wire services (AP, Bloomberg, Dow Jones, Reuters, etc.) – no impressions are assigned to stories simply carried by wires services, only to the stories that they generate in other media.

Tone or Sentiment

Tone (or sentiment) measures how a target audience is likely to feel about the individual, company, product or topic after reading/viewing/listening to the item, typically defined as positive, neutral/balanced, or negative.

- Analysis of tone is a subjective aspect of media analysis and there are multiple approaches to assigning tone. The standards recommend that whatever process is defined and applied, the methodology must agreed on from the beginning and must be consistently applied throughout any analysis.
- The approaches for judging tone include “latent analysis,” which is to look at the entire article or mention and judge the item as a whole based on the overall tone. A second approach is called “manifest analysis.” It looks at an item as a series of sentences or paragraphs, judges each one on its sentiment and then adds up the total number of positives and negatives to obtain an overall score. A third approach is to avoid assessing tone based on the whole story and make the evaluation on the basis of pre-determined positive and negative messages present in the article.
- Likewise there are several approaches for assigning a numeric score for tone. For example, tone could be scored on a three-point scale (positive, neutral or negative), a five-point scale (very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative and very negative) or other similar scales. Another option is to use a 101-point scale ranging from zero (totally negative) to 100 (totally positive). The scoring approach must also be established in advance with defined examples. Typical definitions are:

Positive	An item leaves the reader more likely to support, recommend, and/or work or do business with the organization or brand.
Neutral	An item contains no sentiment-bearing information at all, just reports the facts. If the news is negative, an article can be neutral if it just reports the facts, without any editorial commentary. In an unfavorable environment, neutral may be the best that can be achieved. Coding should be based on whether or not the clip makes people more or less likely to do business with an organization.
Negative	An item leaves the reader less likely to support, and/work or do business with the organization or brand.

Balanced

Requires both positive and negative sentiment-bearing information in roughly equal proportions, and therefore the resulting overall tone is balanced.

- Organizations must define for what or whom they want to determine sentiment. For example, they may seek to understand tone regarding an industry or sector, or sentiment around a specific product or service, an individual or an organization. A single article could mention all of these. As a result, it is necessary to define specifically what element(s) are being targeted for sentiment.
- Organizations must define from whose perspective they are judging the sentiment. It could be the point of view of the general public; a specific stakeholder group such as investors, physicians, teachers or parents.

Quality Measures

Quality measures should also be included when analyzing each item. Examples include:

- Visuals – percent of items including a photo, chart or logo in the article that will make the article more prominent for the reader.
- Placement – percent of items with preferred placement in the item i.e. front page, first page of a section or website landing page.
- Prominence – percent of items where an organization/program is mentioned in the headline, first paragraph or prominent side-bar, or number of times the organization, brand, or program is mentioned in the item.
- Spokesperson – percent of items including a quote from an organization's spokesperson(s).
- Third party – percent of items including quotes from third parties endorsing a company's organization or program.
- Dominance —(shared vs. sole mention) – (i) percent of items where an organization/program is the sole subject of the item vs. (ii) percent of items where an organization or program shares space with competitors in the same space or a mere passing mention.
- Message Penetration – percent of items that include one or more key message.
- A more advanced approach is to measure message integrity by analyzing message pick-up as full, partial, amplified, or incorrect/negative.

Quality measures can be scored to allow comparisons among those being tracked. If some qualitative factors are more important than others, weighted values could be assigned to reflect this.

Research Methodology

In the first phase of this research, the researchers revisited and refined some coding instructions contained in the codebook that was initially developed in 2012 (Eisenmann et al., 2013). Clearer coding instructions were provided for metrics that coders in study one indicated needed clarity. The codebook describes what counts as a media hit, impressions, tone, quality measures, and positive and negative corporate reputation measures, among others. The complete

codebook is contained in Figure One.

Notable in the codebook is the approach to assessing sentiment, which was to use latent analysis—assessing the overall tone of the entire article with respect to the company of interest and coding the story on a five-point scale—very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative and very negative. Sentiment is assessed on how the item might influence a reader/viewer’s perceptions of the organization and, as a result, his or her decision about doing business with the organization – e.g., buy or recommend its products, apply for a job, etc. Sentiment is not based on the inherent positivity or negativity of the specific news reported and could be impacted by the reporter’s approach.

Standard corporate reputation messages, derived from those used by the Reputation Institute and other organizations, were also used in the analysis. These included financial soundness, quality of leadership/management, quality of products and services, innovation, workplace environment and citizenship (the latter includes corporate social responsibility). Reputation messages were coded positive or negative only when prominently present within a story; a mere passing or implied mention was not considered to be substantive enough to be recalled by a reader/viewer and consequently impact reputation. Not all items would be expected to carry a reputation message and these messages are not expected to appear verbatim; therefore, some level of interpretation was required by coders.

Next, the researchers trained three full-time, professional media analysts with an average of 5-6 years of experience how to code media stories using the developed codebook. The initial coding training session lasted approximately two hours.

The media stories used in this study were the same ones that were coded in 2013, when the researchers used systematic random sampling to select 106 media articles about Wal-Mart that appeared during a one-year period July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012. Items for analysis included traditional media items from print, online and broadcast outlets, as well as some blogs, all captured via Factiva and containing at least three mentions of Wal-Mart.

After the training session, the three coders and two of the researchers independently coded twelve stories about Wal-Mart as a part of a pretest to identify and clarify discrepancies. There were some inconsistencies in the pretest, so the researchers spent time with the coders clarifying coding instructions and later revising and clarifying codebook descriptions. A second training was held with the coders to address specific questions and inconsistencies. Again, the researchers spent time reviewing results and answering questions from the coders. Revisions were made to the codebook to elaborate coding instructions for certain media items.

In the next part of the research, the three coders independently coded the 106 randomly selected stories. Coders did not confer with the researchers or fellow coders, even when they had questions.

Once the coding was completed, the researchers calculated intercoder reliability for the variables involved in the coding project. Intercoder reliability refers to the level of agreement among coders when coding a corpus of messages using the same coding instructions and or codebook (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). Although reliability can be calculated in many ways, Krippendorff *alpha* was calculated because it “can be used regardless of the number of observers, levels of measurement, sample sizes, and presence or absence of missing data” (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007, p. 77). Krippendorff’s *alpha* was calculated using a macro (Hayes & Krippendorff) with version 19 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Krippendorff *alpha* ranges from 0.00 to 1.00, but should not in any way be considered

comparable to percentage agreement. Krippendorff (2004) recommends an *alpha* level of at least .80 as a standard, accepting data in situations where $.800 > \alpha \geq .667$ “where tentative conclusions are still acceptable,” and rejecting data where $.667 \geq \alpha$. (p. 241). Krippendorff emphasizes that neither increasing the sample size or increasing the number of coders will increase intercoder reliability.

Following the statistical analysis, the researchers conferred with the coders to review additional stories and discuss items that presented difficulty with the coders. Based upon those in-depth conversations, the researchers refined coding descriptions for item type, other company/brand mention, and citizenship. The final codebook presented in Figure 1 includes all changes.

Results

As indicated by results presented in Table 1, Krippendorff *alphas* ranged from a low of .3849 to a high of .9374. Overall, the *alphas* indicate moderate to high reliability, thereby suggesting a moderate to high level of agreement on the coding decisions made by the three coders.

From 2013 to 2014, *alphas* improved for 11 of the 13 media variables, indicating the importance of robust training, using a codebook with clear coding instructions, and employing experienced media coders.

Not surprisingly, agreement was high for three of the basic, straightforward items in the media analysis project. For example, prominence (whether the first Wal-Mart mention was in the headline, first paragraph, or other paragraphs) had an *alpha* of .9374, shared/sole mention (whether there is a mention of other retail companies in addition to Wal-Mart) had an *alpha* of .8759, and media type (whether the story was a print, online, wire, radio/TV broadcast, or a blog) had an *alpha* of .8116. It was also encouraging that two of the corporate reputation messages—workplace environment and quality of leadership/management—had high *alphas*, .8652 and .8403 respectively. When coding these two items, coders had three choices to select from: no message, positive, or negative. However, because the messages were not verbatim from one story to the next, coding of this variable required interpretation on behalf of the coders. Sentiment when measured on a five-point had a moderate to high *alpha*, .6775. This indicates that the coders had a mid- to high-level of agreement in terms of coding a story from a latent point of view, which involved interpreting whether the overall attitude about Wal-Mart in the story was very positive, positive, neutral, negative, or very negative. Given that the researcher clarified the coding instructions of sentiment in the codebook and that they spent a fair amount of time training coders how to code for sentiment, the researchers were pleased to see that this year’s results improved from .1746 in 2013 to .6775 in 2014. Moreover, when the five-point sentiment scale was collapsed to a three-point scale, the *alpha* increased to .796.

Surprisingly, the experienced coders had low agreement for three media items: (1) item type (*alpha* = .3682), (2) other company/brand mention (*alpha* = .3854) and (3) the citizenship corporate reputational message (*alpha* = .3849). Due to these low scores, the researchers combed through the details of the results to determine areas of coding confusion. Researchers next selected three stories from the corpus of 106 stories to review in detail with the coders to better understand the thought process for the coding decisions of item type, other company/brand mention, and the citizenship corporate reputation message. Once the researchers better understood how and why the coders disagreed on these media items, the researchers went back to

the codebook to clarify the coding instructions for these three items.

For item type, coders were originally instructed to code whether a story was best characterized as corporate news, product news, column/opinion to the editor, interview, editorial, feature, or round-up. Out of 106 coding decision, coders disagreed 38 times regarding whether a story was corporate news or a round-up and they disagreed ten times whether a story was best characterized as corporate news or product news.

To improve the codebook, the researchers added some additional description of corporate news, product news, and round-up. For example, they added that when coding for a round-up story or industry overview, “the target company/organization would be mentioned only as an example, not as the sole focus of the item” and for product news they bolded key terms such as “**target company/organization branded** products or services, such as **marketing programs or campaigns** (among others listed in the codebook).

Coders explained to the researchers that they had some difficulty determining whether a company/brand mention was prominent enough to warrant a “sharing of the story.” To alleviate this confusion, the researchers changed the coding instructions to: “Is there a mention of other organizations, government bodies, companies or brands (non-retail) as a subject or driver of the story (as opposed to offering comment or analysis)? For example, a company or organization from another industry sector which is being discussed in the same context as Walmart or being compared to Walmart. Or, a government entity imposing or enforcing regulatory action on Walmart, and possibly others in the same category. Other company/organization mention is quite common in the news media. Such a mention should be coded when it is prominent and relevant (e.g. pertinent to understanding the full item and its meaning or impact).”

Conversations with the coders regarding the citizenship corporate reputation message indicated that coders had difficulty differentiating whether a company’s CSR activities were implied or explicit in a media story. There was also some confusion regarding whether consumer social media contests were indicative of corporate citizenship. Therefore, to clarify the confusion regarding the citizenship corporate reputation message, the researchers rewrote the coding instructions to the following: “Behavior is/is not socially responsible; does/does not support good causes, contribute/commit to the community beyond selling products; CSR is specific to initiatives or goals that the company has set forward, not solely implied as part of good management. Examples include philanthropic donations, employee volunteerism, community relations involvement, cause-related marketing and cause promotions. A program to engage customers/prospective customers via crowdsourcing or participation in events such as competitions, photo submissions, social media, etc. is not CSR.”

The final codebook (see Figure 1) has undergone 14 iterations since this study was initiated in spring 2012. Revisions have been based upon four pre-tests, two coding projects, and two-follow-up discussions with different coders. Examples of how to code for media items are contained in the sample story contained in Figure 2. Commentary is offered in the footnotes of the sample story to identify the elements for coding and to explain the logic of the coding decisions.

Discussion and Conclusions

This research has a number of implications essential to the practice of media analysis, remembering that the main objective of standardization is to ensure quality data and comparability of data. First, this research indicates that coding for the metrics as defined by the

standards of traditional media analysis—and operationalized in the codebook—is reliable, provided that the coders have a well-developed codebook and sufficient training. Ten of the thirteen media items had moderate to high *alphas*, indicating that the three coders were in agreement the majority of the time. Three of the thirteen items—item type, other company/brand mention, and the citizenship corporate reputational message—had low *alphas*. However, based upon a follow-up meeting with the coders, the researchers were able to clarify the coding instructions for these three items to address some of the coding confusion. The researchers are cautiously optimistic that, based upon these codebook enhancements, coding reliability will improve for these three items in future media analysis projects. Moreover, the stories coded in this research project were fairly substantive, because each story had at least three mentions of Wal-Mart. Some coding projects may involve shorter and perhaps, even more straightforward stories. Therefore, the reliability of coding projects involving less substantive stories might be even higher.

As noted earlier, the 2013 (Eisenmann et al.) study had low to moderate intercoder reliability among the three inexperienced coders. Results of this 2013 study raised the key question of whether some of the standards such as sentiment/tone and corporate reputational messages needed revision or whether the coders lacked sufficient experience and training to code with reliability. The answer to that question is likely a combination of all three. The much improved results of this 2014 study are likely due to greater and improved training, using experienced coders, and clarifying and including more detailed coding decisions for the traditional media metrics in the codebook.

This study indicates the importance of sound training, a well-developed and tested codebook, and the use of Krippendorff's *alpha* as best practices. Human coders need to be carefully trained and ideally have some knowledge of the subject area. In this study, the researchers were a bit surprised that the original plan for one training session with the experienced coders was not sufficient and that an additional training was needed, an indication of the importance of robust training as a best practice. Regardless of the level of coder experience, two rounds of pretests are ideal when initiating a new media analysis project.

It is also important to set realistic expectations with clients, in regards to the time and training needed to secure reliable results. The level of detail needed in a coding project depends upon the client or organizational objectives. Public relations project managers can utilize the codebook to decide coding elements are needed to provide insights so as to not over-complicate the codebook with any unnecessary detail, which could impact reliability. Moreover, measurement agencies and firms should use Krippendorff's *alpha* as part of their training and quality management processes. Clients should expect that agencies and measurement firms provide results of the inter-observer agreement testing.

This study raises important questions about the media analysis training process. In practice, a quality control system should be implemented to systematically check on intercoder reliability and provide ongoing feedback. Using one coder regularly may deliver the most reliable results, but may not be a realistic long-term approach. This study raises important questions about this quality control process. For example, should a project manager of a large media coding project review 10% of coders' stories? Should coders confer after 25 stories? How often should coders be trained? How many stories should be coded as part of the training process? How much disagreement will be tolerated in the training process? Future research might build upon this study to test for the effects of training to better understand best practices.

With respect to relationships between client organizations and measurement teams, clients should not cherry-pick cases where they disagree with the coding of a specific item. This will not improve reliability. Rather, they should provide feedback that can be incorporated into codebook revisions and ongoing training of the coders.

Another key question related to best practices is to determine how many stories should be coded on behalf of a client or organization. The scope of a coding project will be determined by multiple factors, including project objectives, budget, and organizational or client background. For example, when coding stories about the presence of a company like Wal-Mart, it may be best to code more stories to fully capture the range of publications and activities.

Practitioners must also decide whether to code sentiment on a three-point scale (positive, neutral, negative) or a five-point scale (very positive, positive, neutral, negative, very negative). As indicated by the results, *alpha* for the three-point scale was high, .796, whereas the *alpha* for the five-point scale was moderate to high, .675. It may be that when testing for inter-observer agreement, seeking a .796 on the three-point scale is the gold standard, but that practitioners may need to review some project results on the 5-point sentiment scale to discern finer differences. In summary, this research has helped to validate the proposed standards for traditional media analysis. Public relations practitioners can use and amend the detailed codebook for their specific purposes and borrow from some of the recommended best practices, including training and systematic quality control and feedback. As more practitioners continue to adopt and use the proposed standards, the coding instructions in the codebook can be revised and elaborated. Moving forward, the researchers recommend submitting the same set of stories to one or more automated sentiment scoring companies. Comparing the reliability of stories coded by humans compared to automated sentiment scoring would provide a comparison of the reliability of the two approaches.

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2013 Standards Testing: Guide to Database Coding

The goal of this project is to test the Proposed Interim Standards for Traditional Media Analysis. To do that we will test code a batch of articles using the methodology proposed in the standards.

The topic chosen for analysis is Wal-Mart. Items for testing were sourced from Factiva based on the following:

For print, online, wires and broadcast: Used Factiva's pre-set list Major News and Business Publications in the US. Capture 3+ mentions of Wal-Mart for a one year period, July 7, 2011-July 6, 2012. We will then selected every 7th story to yield a sample of about 100 items.

For Blogs: Used Factiva's new blog lists called Business Strategy Classification. Capture 3+ mentions of Wal-Mart for a one year period -July 7, 2011-July 6, 2012. As the volume was low, (partially because this is a new feature on Factiva), we did not use the 'every nth item' approach.

To qualify for the study, each item must meet the following criteria:

- Mention Wal-Mart at least 3 times
- Appear in an item dated between July 7, 2011-July 6, 2012
- It has passed through some form of "editorial filter," i.e. a person has made a decision to run or not run the story. While not classified as traditional media, in practice coverage in blogs is also included in media analysis. Therefore, we will be including blogs here too, particularly as they are more likely to relay sentiment, which is one of the standards we want to test.

Coders: in practice it is quite common for coders to confer with each other when any questions or issues arise. However, this is a test to see if applying the standards can generate consistent outcomes. Therefore, please do not confer with each other, but select the best possible option based on the briefing and what is described in the coding instructions below.

Variable	Methodology	Data Entry	Data Review/ Clean-up	Notes
ArticleID	Each item entered should have its own ID number. Enter that here. If there are several coders each should be given a range of numbers to represent their batch.	Enter unique article ID number here.	Check for duplicate numbers	Each record must have a unique number. Start with 100 so that each article in the batch is assigned a number, even if it is not coded.
STANDARDS TEST: Does the item meet the criteria for a 'media hit':	<p>All items must at least meet the core criteria of 3 or more mentions of Wal-Mart and occur in the date range July 7, 2011-July 6, 2012.</p> <p>Not all items appearing in the media count as a 'hit' for PR evaluation purposes. The criteria for each type of media is outlined below.</p> <p>Wire stories: each media outlet running a wire story counts as a separate 'hit' because it has different readership. If the wire story is updated multiple times in one day, only count it once in a 24-hour period using the latest, most updated version. [Coders on this project may not be able to identify which is the most updated version until all articles have been coded]. Wire stories themselves also count as a hit, although, per below, no impressions are assigned.</p> <p>Article appearing in both the online and print version: both articles should be counted because the readership is different for each channel. Note, when coverage for analysis is captured using Factiva an online story will include a URL.</p> <p>Press release pickups generated from 'controlled vehicles' such as posting a story on PR Newswire or Business Newswire: Do not count as a "hit". These numbers generally come from the vendors reports and are therefore easily identified. Wire services like DJ, AP, Reuters, etc. are NOT controlled vehicles. Items appearing from those wires count as a hit.</p> <p>Reprints or syndication: count as a hit because they appear in unique, individual media titles with different readership.</p> <p>Company bylined features: count as an article</p> <p>Blog: whether affiliated with a media outlet or independently operated will count as a hit for purposes of this study. Note, when coverage for analysis is captured using Factiva an online story will include a URL. Although they are not officially traditional media, they are influential and are regularly included in media content analysis.</p> <p>In some cases the coder will not be able to make this assessment when they selecting a single article for coding. Some of these, such as the most updated wire story, will need to be assessed after the batch has been coded. Therefore this standard will have to be applied in the clean-up and review phase of the analysis. For purposes of this test, each coder will be asked to review their batch to ensure that all articles coded meet the standard. Coders: please remove unqualified rows from the data and include them on a separate worksheet. We will still need the documentation.</p>	<p>0=Yes (this would mean as best you can tell, it counts as a hit. It is possible that as we review the data in its entirety we may see that an item should be deleted e.g. two wire stories on the same day/topic.)</p> <p>1=No</p> <p>If the article does not meet the criteria, do not code further.</p>		

Variable	Methodology	Data Entry	Data Review/ Clean-up	Notes
Media Type:*	Item can be either Print, Online, Wire, Broadcast or Blog . Note: A wire service includes Dow Jones (DJ), Associated Press (AP), Reuters, United Press International (UPI), etc. Individual media organizations subscribe to a wire service in order to use their reporting in their own outlet. Online includes the online version of a print outlet [e.g. WSJ.com, NYT.com] or a stand alone online outlet [e.g. huffingtonpost.com]. Broadcast includes TV and radio and for this project would be in the form of transcripts captured through Factiva as it is not possible to capture broadcast retrospectively. Blog is news or opinion expressed in the post on an individual or organization-owned blog (weblog).	0=Not sure 1=Print 2=Online (includes the online version of a print publication) 3=Wire 4=Radio/TV broadcast 5=Blog	Check for consistency and omissions	Each record must have a unique number.
Outlet Title:	Title of media outlet [use sentence case - upper and lower case letters]	Enter media title or broadcast show name. Online media and blog items are listed by their URL: for example, the Austin American-Statesman is listed as Statesman.com. Be consistent, for example, use Boston Globe vs. The Boston Globe. Other media should be listed by their official title.	Check for blank fields and inconsistency in title entry.	
Byline	The reporter, or other author, attributed to a news item	First Name and Last Name e.g. Michael Jackson 0=no byline		
Date:	If a monthly magazine, please use the first day of the month. mm/dd/yy	Entries should be consistent mm/dd/yy	Check for blank fields Scan for incorrect dates (transposed month/day entries, etc.)	
Headline:	OPTIONAL - this is not part of the standards test or basic coding, but it is common in practice and we use it often to give us quick insights.	If there is a headline or title to the piece of any kind, enter here. If the article has no headline, please include a subhead or something to help us identify which article on the page and possibly give a bit of insight as to the article topic. Broadcast segments need some kind of topic noted if there is not a "headline" to the piece. Recommend you just cut and paste to ensure accuracy. 0=no headline	Check for blank fields	This is optional for the standards testing, but we find it a very useful entry.
STANDARDS TEST: Impressions:	Print: impressions based on circulation e.g. "number of copies of a publication as distributed" through paid and free distribution, based on figures such as those provided by the publication. Multipliers should not be used. Online: impressions are based on the daily viewers. To get this number, divide the number of unique visitors per month (UVPM) [available at Compete.com] by the number of days in the month to get the number of daily viewers. Should be based on the unique URL or sub-domain for the item. For online media whose visitor numbers are small enough not to be included on Compete use 500 (50% of the lowest visitor number on Compete). Free Compete data only goes back one year. For articles more than one year old, please use the data from next closest month. For example, for an item appearing in SmartMoney Blogs on Jan 3, 2012, paste the url into the Compete.com search box and select the UVPM for January. Divide by 30. Note Compete will only give the UVPM for the blog, not the specific post. Broadcast: organizations are advised to use the numbers distributed by the broadcast monitoring service provider or go to TVbytheNumbers.com. Wires: no impressions are assigned, but they count as a "hit". Again this could be DJ, AP, API, UPI, Reuters, etc Blog: similar to online media, impressions are based on the daily viewers. Use Compete.com to capture the (UVPM). Paste the URL into the Compete tool to get the UVPM, then divide by 30 to get the daily readership.	Enter the number as sourced. Wires = 0. If NA use 0. Wire services are not assigned impressions because they are not distributed/generally available to the public, but rather accessed directly by media which convey the news to the public via their own channels.	Check for consistency and that it makes sense	Broadcast for this project is sourced through Factiva transcripts, so unless they include readership, it will be impossible to provide impressions.

Variable	Methodology	Data Entry	Data Review/ Clean-up	Notes
Item Type*	<p>Corporate News: Coverage of current or timely company/organization events/issues not directly related to products or services (e.g., quarterly earnings/results and other financial news, alliances, executive appointments and other management news, union actions, employee relations, philanthropy/CSR, etc).</p> <p>Round-up story or Industry overview: Coverage in a discussion of industry-wide events, issues or themes not specific to a single organization, partnership or alliance. Target company/organization would be mentioned only as an example, not as the sole focus of the item.</p> <p>Product News: Coverage focused on target company/organization branded products or services (e.g., product reviews/comparisons, new product launches/introductions, marketing programs or campaigns, pricing changes, product-specific marketing initiatives, etc.).</p> <p>Column/Opinion/Letter-to-the-Editor: Column: A bylined, regularly scheduled advice, review, opinion, gossip or humor item. Opinion Piece: A stand-alone, bylined item advancing a personal opinion rather than reporting news or facts. Letter-to-the-Editor: Typically appears on the Op-Ed page of a print publication. The latter two are more likely to contain emotive language.</p> <p>Interview: Q&A featuring a company representative or mentioning a company.</p> <p>Editorial: A statement collectively authored by the editorial board of a news organization expressing an official position on an issue (typically appear on the Editorial Page of a print publication).</p> <p>Feature: Extensive coverage profiling an organization or topic covering multiple facets. Usually some historic perspective which could include products, events, legacy, leadership, partnerships, financial status, strategy/direction, employees/constituencies, etc. Typical feature would be 3+ pages in a word document.</p>	<p>0=not sure</p> <p>1=Corporate News</p> <p>2=Round-up/Industry Overview</p> <p>3=Product News</p> <p>4=Column/Opinion/Letter-to-the-Editor</p> <p>5=Interview</p> <p>6=Editorial</p> <p>7=Feature</p>		
STANDARDS TEST: * Sentiment/Tone:	<p>The overall "attitude" conveyed in a news item toward an organization, in this case Wal-Mart, rated on a 5-point scale. Sentiment ratings are not based solely on the inherent positivity or negativity of an event, topic or issue (e.g., a product recall, contract win, etc.) but on how the reporter chooses to communicate the news as well. Negative news item reported in a factual manner can be neutral. Similarly, an article with both negative and positive facts can present a balanced profile which would be considered neutral overall. The goal of Sentiment ratings is to assess how a news item might influence a reader/viewer's perceptions of an organization and, as a result, their decision about doing business with the organization – e.g., buy or recommend its products, purchase its stock, enter into alliances/partnerships, etc. Based on the overall tone of the entire article and calculated on a five point scale - very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative and very negative TOWARD WALMART specifically. Tone is not being assessed for any of the other organizations mentioned in the item.</p> <p>Positive: reader more likely to support, recommend, and/or work or do business with the brand after reading</p> <p>Negative: reader less likely to support, and/work or do business with the brand after reading</p> <p>Neutral: just reports the facts, unqualified by praise, criticism, even if they are negative OR is mixed, containing both positive and negative facts - balancing out the perspective - without indicating bias.</p> <p>Very positive/very negative: these are the extreme, exhibiting strong bias, and are likely to be rare in mainstream top-tier media outside of editorial, letters to the editor (LTE). Blogs are more likely to express stronger sentiment. A very positive or very negative piece is unlikely to contain any strong balancing messages relevant to the topic. [e.g. a headline Wal-Mart Changed the World with multiple positive messages and just one negative message would be positive, but not likely to be very positive if there is a strong, tempering/relevant, negative message]. Moreover, the focus of the story can temper the degree of negativity or positivity. For example, if very negative or very positive messages about Walmart constitute only a small percentage of a broader round-up story focused on multiple companies (therefore tempering the sentiment), the story, in turn, would be coded negative/positive, not very negative/very positive.</p>	<p>0=Very negative</p> <p>1=Negative</p> <p>2=Neutral</p> <p>3=Positive</p> <p>4=Very positive</p>		<p>Sentiment should be coded based on the perspective of the average reader.</p> <p>Positive - An item leaves the reader more likely to support, recommend, and/or work or do business with the brand.</p> <p>Negative - An item leaves the reader less likely to support, and/work or do business with the brand</p> <p>Neutral - An item contains no sentiment at all, just reports the facts. If the news is negative, an article can be neutral if it just reports the facts, without any editorial commentary. In an unfavorable environment, neutral may be the best that can be achieved.</p>
STANDARDS TEST: Quality Measures				
Prominence*	Where is the first Wal-Mart mention in the story?	<p>0=Headline</p> <p>1=First Paragraph</p> <p>2=Other paragraphs (not the first)</p>		Helps understand how much of the story deals with target company
Dominance	How many times is Wal-Mart mentioned in the story? This includes nicknames, such as Wally World, and mentions in a photo caption, headline, chart, link to website within the editorial, or mention in URL, etc. This should be entered regardless of whether the story is negative, positive or neutral. Coder must count the number of mentions in the story. Note: in this project the dominance will be somewhat skewed because of the methodology (items must mention Wal-Mart 3 or more times to be included). Recommend using the key word search feature as opposed to counting by hand to improve accuracy.	Enter the number of mentions. Do not include mentions such as "the company" which do not specifically name the brand. DO include company name mentioned in website address or other URL.		Helps understand how much of the story deals with target company

Variable	Methodology	Data Entry	Data Review/Clean-up	Notes
Visual*	Inclusion of any chart, graph, logo, photo or other image that conveys a company 'presence' in the news item is coded, even if the story itself is negative. For the purposes of this project, only use the full-text version of the article from Factiva, do not click-thru to the link. Rely on the Factiva notation for visuals at the end of the article for information on visuals.	0=Yes 1=No		
Shared/Sole Mention*	Are other retail companies/competitors also mentioned in the story or just Wal-Mart? If so, this is a shared mention. If Wal-Mart is the ONLY retail company mentioned in the item, it is a sole mention. Any other company mention must be substantive, for example, a direct comparison to Wal-Mart in the retail space, not a mere passing mention.	0=Yes, Shared (other retail companies/competitors are mentioned) 1=No, Sole (Wal-Mart is the only retailer mentioned)		The purpose of this entry is to understand the likelihood of the reader recalling Wal-Mart. If there are other companies mentioned in the item, the reader may be less likely to remember Wal-Mart.
If shared (above), with whom	Which other retail competitors are mentioned in the story? Please enter in the order in which they appear.	If the entry in the previous column is "SHARED" enter the competitor company name in this column - up to three competitors in the available columns. Please enter in the order in which they appear. 0=no competitor mentions	check for consistency	
Other Company/Brand/Organization Mention*	Is there a mention of other organizations, government bodies, companies or brands (non-retail) as a subject or driver of the story (as opposed to offering comment or analysis)? For example, a company or organization from another industry sector which is being discussed in the same context as Walmart or being compared to Walmart. Or, a government entity imposing or enforcing regulatory action on Walmart, and possibly others in the same category. Other company/organization mention is quite common in the news media. Such a mention should be coded when it is prominent and relevant (e.g. pertinent to understanding the full item and its meaning or impact).	0=Yes, other organizations/government bodies/companies/brands - non-retail- are mentioned as a subject of the story. 1=No		Mentions of other brands or companies, not just competitors, will minimize the Wal-Mart mention and detract from what is remembered.
Third party quoted*	Is a third party organization or notable/influential individual directly quoted [in quotation marks] either criticizing or endorsing Wal-Mart. This would include a credible analyst or advocacy grp or individual who has some level of knowledge or authority to comment, not an average consumer. Enter name/affiliation/title of the FIRST third party mentioned.	Enter the name and the affiliation/title of the FIRST third party directly quoted [as in quotation marks] in the article in this column 0=no third party quote		
	If a third party is quoted, are they supportive/unsupportive?	0= No 3rd party quoted 1= Unsupportive 2= Neutral, neither supportive or unsupportive 3= Supportive		
Company Spokesperson	Is a named Wal-Mart company spokesperson/executive directly quoted [in quotation marks] in the article speaking on behalf of Wal-Mart for the specific item [not reported second hand]? Does not need to be labeled as spokes person [e.g. Sue Jones, Walmart's Director of HR said, "..."]. If the Wal-Mart spokesperson is UNNAMED count that as NO SPOKESPERSON and enter 0.	Enter the name of the quoted spokesperson/executive in this column 0=no spokesperson quote or UNNAMED spokesperson		
<p>Corporate Reputation Messages: Clear and apparent editorial positioning of a company favorably or unfavorably on the core reputation drivers. Presence of a reputation driver will be prominent in the article, a strong mention – not a mere passing or minor mention, but a discussion that will influence the perception of the reader and/or their desire or intent to do business with the organization. The message should be explicit in the content, not implied or assumed based on the actual content.</p> <p>Coders should note that not all items will have reputation messages. In fact, many will not include them.</p> <p>This is a quality measure and we are only looking for a clearly positive or negative mention of each driver.</p> <p>Code messages for Wal-Mart only, not any of the competitors.</p>				
MESSAGE: Financial Soundness*	Strength/weakness of capital structure, cost control, financial history, profitability, revenue growth, stock performance. Example would be an item on improved revenues due increased market share vs. item on declining earnings due to rising oil prices.	0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive		
MESSAGE: Quality of Leadership/Management*	Thought Leader, CEO and management does/does not demonstrate strength and vision, is/is not responsible/ethical, strong/weak corp culture. Message is specific to overall management quality and can have multiple indicators/is not driven solely by one single factor like CSR. Example would be item on company turnaround due to management reaction after period of decline vs. item on company's future threatened due to lack of succession planning.	0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive		
MESSAGE: Innovation	Does/does not have innovative/cutting edge products; is/is not standard-setter, committed to R&D. Innovation message must be clear and present, not implied, and separate from quality of products and services. Example would be item on expected approval for a pipeline drug with a new delivery system vs. a company losing share/revenue due to patent expirations and no/failed pipeline investment/prospects.	0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive		
MESSAGE: Workplace environment*	Good/bad perception of organization as an employer, good/bad place to work/work environment. Example would be item on company receiving award for good place to work vs. litigation against company for employee discrimination.	0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive		

Variable	Methodology	Data Entry	Data Review/ Clean-up	Notes
MESSAGE: Quality of products or services*	As compared to competitor products/services, does/does not match branding & communications claims, does/does not meet/exceed expectations, good/bad value, does it work/not work, safe/unsafe; implies a happy/unhappy end user; is about the experience with the product or service, distinct from innovation level of the product; perhaps contains statement or quote from consumer, trade group, advocacy organization or business partner. Example would be an item on delicious low cal drink option that tastes as good as full calorie version vs. low calorie drink contains cancer causing artificial sweeteners.	0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive		
MESSAGE: Citizenship* CSR = Corporate Social Responsibility	Behavior is/is not socially responsible; does/does not support good causes, contribute/commit to the community beyond selling products; CSR is specific to initiatives or goals that the company has set forward, not solely implied as part of good management. Examples include philanthropic donations, employee volunteerism, community relations involvement, cause-related marketing and cause promotions. A program to engage customers/prospective customers via crowdsourcing or participation in events such as competitions, photo submissions, social media, etc. is not CSR.	0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive		
Coverage Driver	OPTIONAL - this is not part of the standards test or basic coding, but it is common in practice and we use it often as part of the analysis.	Enter the leading topic or driver of the story. Coders may want to align on a set list of 5 or 6 topics after having reviewed a few articles i.e. corruption, industry trends, employee relations, financial, etc. 0=no driver	Check for consistency within topics. Can be left blank.	Drivers are basically tags to help identify issues within the coverage, and can be edited, refined, and consolidated as needed.

*represents the variables for which we calculated Krippendorff's Alpha

Figure 1. Media codebook based upon proposed standards.

Table 1
Krippendorff Alpha Results

Media Variables	Coding Operationalization	Krippendorff's Alpha (2013)	Krippendorff's Alpha (2014)
Media Type	0=Not sure 1=Print 2=Online (includes the online version of a print) 3=Wire 4=Radio/TV broadcast 5=Blog	.6952	.8116
Item Type	0=Not sure 1=Corporate News 2=Round up/Industry Overview 3 = Product news 4=Column/Opinion/Letter-to-the-Editor 5=Interview 6=Editorial 7=Feature	.3589	.3682
Sentiment/Overall Tone	0=Very negative 1=Negative 2=Neutral 3=Positive 4=Very positive	.1746	.6775 .796 when using a 3-point scale ¹
Prominence	Where is the Wal-Mart mention? 0=Headline 1=First Paragraph 2=Other paragraphs (not the first)	.9347	.9374
Shared/Sole Mention	Is there a mention of other retail companies in the story in addition to Wal-Mart 0=Yes 1=No	.6629	.8759
Other Company/ Brand Mention	Is there a mention of Other Company/ Brand/ Organization Mention (non-retail) in the story 0=Yes, shared 1=No, not shared	.195	.3854
3rd Party Quoted	0= No 3rd party quoted 1= Unsupportive 2= Neutral, neither supportive or unsupportive 3= Supportive	.3919	.5952
Corporate Reputation Messages	Financial Soundness 0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive	.262	.6448
Corporate Reputation Messages	Quality of Leadership/Management 0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive	.4091	.8403
Corporate Reputation Messages	Innovation 0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive	.5901	.5132
Corporate Reputation Messages	Workplace environment 0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive	.3892	.8652

¹ Alpha was also run for sentiment after collapsing the five-point sentiment scale to a three-point scale (positive, neutral, and negative)

Corporate Reputation Messages	Quality of products or services 0=No message 1=Negative 2=Positive	.4096	.5244
Corporate Reputation Messages	Citizenship 0=No message 1=Positive 2=Negative	.4342	.3849

Figure 2. Sample item for analysis.

THE BOTTOM LINE²

Business³

Move to oust Walmart CEO grows amid bribery, cover-up reports⁴

Andrew S. Ross⁵

24 May 2012

The San Francisco Chronicle⁶

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More blows from the West have been raining down on Walmart ahead of what is likely to be a contentious annual shareholders meeting next week.

The California Public Employees' Retirement System,⁸ which has 7.7 million shares in the world's largest retailer, said Wednesday that it will be voting to oust CEO Michael Duke and eight other directors, including venture capitalist James Breyer of Menlo Park's Accel Partners. The reason: CalPERS thinks they're unfit to be part of an investigation into allegations of bribery and a cover-up relating to Walmart's Mexico subsidiary.

"In our view such an investigation should not be overseen by current members of the board that served in either a board oversight or senior management capacity at the time of the alleged bribery," the nation's largest public pension fund said.⁹

The announcement comes one day after the California State Teachers' Retirement System, which filed suit this month against Walmart executives and board members for "alleged gross misconduct," said it would vote its 5.3 million shares to remove the company's entire board.

² ITEM TYPE: This heading implies that the item may be a regular section in the publication or a regularly scheduled column providing advice, review, opinion, gossip or humor. Review of the content will inform the coder. In this case the item is factual reporting without opinion, advice, etc. Therefore, this item should be coded as Corporate News.

³ ITEM TYPE: This notation that the item is from the Business section is a hint that this is a Corporate News item. Review of the content will confirm this.

⁴ HEADLINE: Walmart mention in headline; PROMINENCE: The first Walmart mention is in the headline

⁵ BYLINE: Andrew Ross

⁶ OUTLET TITLE: The San Francisco Chronicle

⁷ MEDIA TYPE: This item was sourced from Factiva and in the absence of any online link, blog URL, etc. is assumed to be from the print version of the outlet.

⁸ OTHER COMPANY/BRAND/ORGANIZATION MENTION: CalPERS is a non-retail organization whose action is driving the story (not offering commentary or analysis) and whose mention is both prominent and relevant.

⁹ THIRD PARTY QUOTED: CalPERS (the nation's largest public pension fund) is a relevant third party organization directly quoted (in quotation marks). SUPPORTIVE/UNSUPPORTIVE: Third party quoted, CalPERS, is unsupportive of Walmart.

Such opposition has been building since reports emerged last month that senior executives at Walmart in 2005, including Duke, then head of the company's international division, suppressed an internal investigation into \$24 million in bribes paid to Mexican officials to speed permits for Walmart stores south of the border.¹⁰

In addition to a new internal company probe, various criminal and civil investigations, by the U.S. Justice Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission among others, have begun. Matters took another turn last week, when Walmart disclosed in an SEC filing that an internal audit committee was looking into "other alleged crimes or misconduct in connection with foreign subsidiaries."¹¹

San Francisco's Glass Lewis, an influential proxy advisory firm, took note of that development Friday, when it advised those of its 900-plus, mostly institutional clients with Walmart stock to vote against Duke and several directors.

"In regard to Mr. Duke, while we are generally reluctant to recommend voting against current CEOs, we believe the concerns in this case are material enough to warrant such a vote recommendation," the firm said. Unlike CalPERS, the firm recommended an "aye" vote for Breyer.

On Saturday, another major proxy advisory firm, ISS of Rockville, Md., made similar recommendations to its 1,700 clients, saying the reports of bribery and cover-up are "troubling."

Troubling enough for shareholders to oust a sitting CEO, when the votes are counted on June 1? Coming off a boffo first quarter, with \$3.7 billion in earnings and sales on the rebound, Walmart's stock, which was sinking like a stone as the investigations mounted, closed Wednesday at \$64.58, reaching heights the company hasn't seen in 10 years.¹²

Perhaps not the best time, some might think, to rock the boat further. That would include the Walton family, which controls approximately 50 percent of the stock.

Consolation prizes: Another local setback, albeit smaller, occurred Tuesday night when the Hayward City Council rejected Walmart's application to open one of its smaller Neighborhood Market stores at a former Circuit City site, which has been empty for three years.¹³

But fans of Walmart will be pleased to know that Pleasanton gave the go-ahead last week for a Neighborhood Market at a former Nob Hill grocery location. And construction is proceeding

¹⁰ CORPORATE REPUTATION MESSAGE: Quality of Leadership/Management -- Negative, management does not demonstrate responsible, ethical behavior.

¹¹ SENTIMENT/TONE: Negative -- These few paragraphs all deliver negative messages about the behavior of Walmart. They exhibit strong negative bias toward Walmart. The average reader would be less likely to want to do business with Walmart, based on the facts presented in this story.

¹² SENTIMENT/TONE: This statement about share price strength helps to balance the negative messages in the previous paragraphs and prevents the item from being coded as Very Negative. It is only negative. CORPORATE REPUTATION MESSAGE: Financial Soundness -- Positive, strong share price indicates positive financial performance and serves to provide some balance to the negative leadership message.

¹³ SENTIMENT/TONE: This negative message is balanced by the opposite positive message in the next paragraph.

space for a Walmart market at Country Club Village Shopping Center in San Ramon and one at the Westgate Shopping Center in San Jose.¹⁴

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¹⁴ DOMINANCE: Walmart is mentioned 12 times in this story.

¹⁵ ITEM TYPE: This could be confused to be a blog as opposed to a print item, as the URL and contact information of the author appear at the end of this print item.

Building a Global Brand Identity: Analyzing the PR Campaigns of Turkish Airlines

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Yeditepe University

Abstract

Brands actively take part as major players in all daily life practices ranging from economy, socio-cultural fields, sports and music in current modern societies.

This study will present public relations works carried out by brands in order to create and develop a brand identity, the importance of these works, their principles, management phases, relations with target audience and tools and analyze branding process of Turkish Airlines that is one of the global brands of Turkey and its current position.

Semi-structured interview technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods, will be used in this study, where branding process of THY and its public relations activities during this process will be analyzed. Accordingly, interviews will be made with directors of marketing, PR, corporate communication and customer relations management departments, which constitute PR activities of THY.

Literature Review

Brand

The name “brand” was derived from old Norwegian language word “brandr” which means “to fire with light” and it had a mighty progress till modern life at 11th century (Keller,1998:2). Brands actively take part as major players in all daily life practices ranging from economy, socio-cultural fields, sports and music current modern societies. According to Schultz and the others (1993:304) brand is a service and product that presents with a name, symbol, graphic and other visible, recognizable and identifiable elements and embraces such features;

- should be preserved by legislation.
- should add a perceptual value to the relation between the customer and the seller.
- should incorporate financial values.
- should possess an ongoing value management by the owner of a trademark.

When looking into the official definitions of brand, the Turkish Copyright Institute (*Türk Patent Enstitüsü*) defines it as all sorts of signs that distinguishes the product and services of a corporation from the ones introduced to the consumer by other companies which comprises of visuals that distinguishes the packaging and images such as an illustration, a figure, a letter, a word and a name (<http://www.turkpatent.gov.tr/portal/default2.jsp?sayfa=220>). Similarly American Marketing Association defines brand as a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers (http://www.marketingpower.com/_layouts/dictionary.aspx?dLetter=B). These definitions describe the concept of brand through icons, images, fonts, logos etc. which is correct but imperfect as such definitions leave out the impact of customer experience in the process of formation and development of brand. Customer experience is a relationship that develops upon the interaction of brands with a mass of customer through their products, and has importance at the point of completing brand identity through a mass of consumer (Landa, 2006:9).

Brands should effectively make use of a number of features to establish a strong brand identity through customer experience. Kotler (1999) explains the following features to be employed to build a strong brand identity;

- Owned word: Own a powerful brand name to designate a distinctive feature to the brand which is recognizable in the mind of the target group (Volvo- Safety, Apple Computer- Graphics).
- Slogan: Brands should have a slogan which is relevant to brand identity and supports the expression of the brand that will be used in all advertisement and public relations activities (British Airways-The World’s Favorite Airlines, Turkish Airlines- Globally Yours, AT&T- The Right Choice).
- Colors: Identification of brands with a certain color makes the process easy to recall the identity of the brand in the mind of the target group (IBM uses blue in its publications and IBM is called Big Blue).
- Symbols and Logos: Using famous people renown by society and catchy images to support the identity of the brand is important in communicating with target groups. Using a famous person that will become a symbol of the brand is significant in strengthening the expression of the brand and making the brand recalled yet it is an expensive factor. On the other hand, using popular images supporting the logos is less expensive (Nike- Air Jordan).
- Series of Story: Each brand should have a story that will support the brand’s identity it has developed and strengthen its recalling by minds of the target groups.

Brand Identity

Brands should have a number of attributes to create a strong and successful brand identity out of customer experience besides all of these mentioned features; they should be personal as desire for status, being the property of and self-expression within the society lie at the core of brand preferences of individuals; they should appeal to senses since brand awareness and popularity are in direct proportion with passions, enthusiasms and emotions they reveal; a strong brand has an interaction with its consumer therefore they should have a mutual communication with each other. They come to learn from their consumer and they appeal in a different way to different consumers. The brand should inspire confidence on the customer to let him become a representative of the brand. More important than all, it should be able to ensure experience as brand is based on an interrelationship with the customer. Brands may become strong according to the unforgettable experience they create (Temporal,2010). Briefly, experience felt by the target group is a factor that reinforces the strength and identity of the brand.

Brand identity is generated by PR and marketing experts in the process of the brand's access into the market, but it describes the impact the brand on individuals which are redefined through its consumers' experiences in the process of brand development. Towards that end Kapferer (2003:91) describes brand identity and its significance as such, "...Brand identity is the common element sending a single message amid the wide variety of its products, actions and communications". According to him brands create a common brand image on target groups through their identities implanted into mind of consumers. Kapferer (2003:173-174) evaluates brand identity as a structure composed of three different layers which he explains in a model he has called identity and pyramid;

"At the top of the pyramid is the kernel of the brand, the source of its identity. Invisible, it must nevertheless be known because it imparts coherence and consistency; The base of the pyramid are the themes: it is the tier of communication concepts and the product's positioning, of the promises linked to the latter; The middle level relates to the stylistic code, how the brand talks and which images it uses. It is through his style that an author (the brand) writes the theme and describes him or herself as a brand. It is the style that leaves a mark."

This model is used by the strong brands to improve their brand identity helps to create a powerful brand loyalty. Brands are classified as local and global according to their certain characteristics. Local brands are the ones which dominate the domestic market of a certain country, they are limited to certain geographic areas and has limited or not awareness at all beyond the borders of a country. Global brand, on the other hand, transcends the boundaries of the domestic market of a country which has a wide mass of customers and it is known and consumed by in several countries and geographic regions. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000:306) define global brands as "...Brands with a high degree of similarity across countries with respect to brand identity, position, advertising strategy, personality, product, packaging, and look and feel." In addition to this, Hankinson and Cowking (1996:3) define the global brand as, "offers consumers across the world, a consistent proposition and the same product formation." Furthermore Hollis (2008:25-26) defines global brand; "...global brand as one that has transcended its cultural origins to develop strong relationships with consumers across different countries and cultures."

Brands have developed a number of expansion strategies to transcend national geographic boundaries and expand to the global field. Mooij (2010:34-35) has compiled the global strategies of brands under six main headlines;

1. Cultivate established local brands: Transforming a national brand into an international brand through spreading the brand value and strategy to an increasing number of countries. One of the the most well-known examples of this strategy is Coca-Cola becoming a global brand which is local by origin.

2. Global concept, local adaptations: Respecting the cultural values, local products are presented through integrating them into a concept formulated for the global territory. This is a strategy successfully realized by McDonald's. A typical example is Mc Donald's introducing the local beverage *ayran* in Turkey whereas in other countries incorporating the local food and beverages of different countries into its own menus.

3. Create new brands: Identifying a global demand and developing a new product to supply that demand. This is considerably a high-risk strategy and has a few successful examples like those technology corporations of Nokia and Nintendo Gameboy.

4. Purchase local brands and internationalize: Under this strategy which is successfully applied especially by brands like Unilever, Danone, Kraft and Nestle, a local brand is incorporated under the framework of a global brand without interfering to the name and identity of the local brand but adding it to the portfolio of the global brand and thus while the main umbrella brand progresses local brand is able to prosper as well.

5. Develop brand extentions: The aim of this strategy is to present subsidiary products in the related field as a supplement to the main category representing the brand and to expand the brand name through introducing them into the market. An example to this practice can be the strategy applied by the company Gillette. Gillette which is a brand for razor blade has subsidiary products like aftershave, shaving foam and deodorant supporting the main product. Literally developing the main brand with subsidiary products as such is called Brand Extension.

6. Employ a multilocal strategy: Different strategies are employed in different countries for local awareness. Brand name which plays a key role in this strategy guarantees the product quality in every country where it enters to their market.

Strong brands speak to their target groups through their own PR activities. The origin of the concept has to be explained at this point to demonstrate the role of public relations in transmitting the brand's expression.

Public relations have a critical importance during the branding process of brands. Brand identity is created with certain practices such as events, sponsorship and stakeholder newsletters etc. during the branding process and discourses of the brand can be communicated accurately to target audience in line with these practices. In this context, brands should not be contented with certain financial investments and should implement some public relations activities to develop brand identities.

Public Relations

Grunig and Hunt (1984:6) define the concept of public relations as "management of communication between an organization and its publics". Grunig (2008:4) has broadened this definition in one of his other books and takes up the concept as a component of communication management where he defines public relations as the department of an institution which plans, applies and evaluates the communication of its internal and external shareholders.

Another significant definition conceptualized by the Public Relations Society of America; "Public relations are a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (www.prsa.org)".

Studies of Prof. Dr. Filiz Balta Peltekoğlu in Turkey are the prominent ones regarding the concept in this field. She (2005:4-5) emphasizes the following three roles of public relations.

- › PR is a task of management. Besides the administrative tasks of an institution such as determination of the founding mission-vision, getting the institution adapt to the market environment, it also undertakes the product sales function in the marketing conceptualization.
- › PR has four separate activities in terms of the institution's communicational deeds. These are gathering information, ensuring communication with the target group, consumer and the media.
- › Influencing public opinion is a controversial activity of PR. PR towards that end embrace plans which are developed to upgrade and improve the institutional prestige.

Public Relations appear to take place in two main sectors when examining their organizational structure. One of them is in public sector and the other is in the private sector. Organization in public sector is seen as a section within an institution. In private sector it is seen in two ways. Either as a PR department within a company or appear as a Public Relations company (Erdoğan, 2006). The very first public relations appear to have started in Turkey in the mid of the 20th century within government institutions like the Directorate General of Information under Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Press and Head of Press and Public Affairs under the Ministry of National Defense (Balta Peltekoğlu, 1993:28). In Turkey, public relations have concentrated in the field of politics between the years of 1960 and 1980. The first wide scope book in Turkey on public relations was written by Alaaddin Asna in 1969. The first association in the field of public relations (HİD- Public Relations Association) was established in 1972. The first company in Turkey on public relations was founded in 1974 (Asna, 1997). Along with the neo liberal policies implemented in Turkey and the development of free market economy since 1980s the importance of public relations has also been understood by the new emerging private sector.

Public Relations play a key role in the process of creating a brand identity. According to Levine (2003:16-19) the main task of public relations is to encourage the public to develop positive thoughts about a company, a product, service or individuals. The role of public relations to that end has been defined as follows within the branding process;

“... In Correlation with Branding, the goal of public relations must always be to create a feeling in the mind of the target audience for which the message is being tailored. If Branding is about creating an identity for product, service, or entity (company or individual), public relations' contribution to Branding is about making that identity friendly and likeable for the public- specifically, the public for which the message is intended.”

As the brand and product have come to the forefront within the branding process and by the emergence of the factor of consumer experience, public relations activities have transformed today from the classical meaning of the concept and have come to be defined in a different structure and started to be named as Marketing Public Relations (MPR) especially in the field of marketing.

The new current terminology of the concept of Marketing Public Relations has been defined by Thomas L. Harris (1991:12) as such; “... new promotional discipline which comprises specialised application techniques to support marketing activities and which is referred to by some theorists and authors as product publicity.”

According to Philip J. Kitchen and Ioanna C. Pappasolomou (1997:73) MPR is; “... the process of planning, executing and evaluating programmes that encourage purchase and customer satisfaction through credible communication of information and impressions that

identify companies and their products with the needs, wants, concerns, and interests of consumers.”

Rene A. Henry (1995) describes the term as; “Marketing Public Relations is a comprehensive, all-encompassing public awareness and information program or campaign direct to mass or specialized audiences to influence sales or use of a company’s product or services.”

According to Kotler (1999); there are some factors which must be absolutely implemented within the MPR strategy which has to be displayed to create a strong brand identity.

“MPR consist a set of tools that can be classified under the acronym of PENCILS, namely;

P (Publications): company magazines, annual reports, helpful customer brochures etc.

E (Events): sponsoring athletic or art events or trade shows.

N (News): favorable stories about the company, its people or products.

C (Community Involvement Activities): contributions of time and money to local community needs.

I (Identity Media): stationary, business cards, corporate dress codes.

L (Lobbying Activity): efforts to influence favorable or dissuade unfavorable legislation and rulings.

S (Social Responsibility Activities): building a good reputation for corporate social responsibility.”

This research towards that end will be examining the PR activities developed by the Turkish Airlines within the process of its transformation as a global brand according to Kotler’s MPR strategies based on the PENCILS initiative.

Methodology

This research has been analyzing the PR activities of Turkish Airlines developed within the process of becoming a global brand and its story of becoming a brand through a semi structured interview technique realized with the brand’s managers. Negotiations within the scope of the semi structured interview were held in January 2014 with the THY Brand Specialist Elif Aksoy, THY Public Relations and Corporate Communication Departments’ Communication Supervisor Fatih Karaman, THY Advertising Supervisor Barış Akın and THY Interactive Marketing Communications Supervisor Neşet Dereli at the Turkish Airlines General Directorate in Yeşilköy. During the interviews conducted, 16 open-ended questions were asked and nearly 30 minutes was given to answer them. All information obtained from the interviews has been described in detail according to the PENCILS model. The research questions are;

1. Could you explain the public relations activities of Turkish Airlines to become a global brand?
2. When has Turkish Airlines taken the first steps towards becoming a global brand?
3. What are the first public relations campaigns you have developed?
4. Is there a PR agency Turkish Airlines has been working with?
5. How was your global campaign planned? What were your goals with this campaign?
6. Are there other PR campaigns performed in the global field? Is there a continuity of these activities?
7. Could you explain the role of external and internal stakeholders in Turkish Airlines’ becoming a global brand?

8. To what extent the campaigns you had performed globally had an impact on brand identity and awareness?
9. Did you utilize local factors when creating Turkish Airlines' global brand expression?
10. How would you explain Turkish Airlines' brand expression in the global field?
11. When performing marketing PR activities in the global field;
 - a) What sort of publications have you used? (Such as company magazines, annual reports, helpful customer brochures).
 - b) What are the event activities?
 - c) Tell how THY reported in the news published in the press?
 - d) Do you prepare community involvement activities?
 - e) Are there any identity media practices?
 - f) Do you have lobbying activities?
 - g) Did you give place to social responsibility projects? If so, could you tell about them?
 - h) Do you take place in social media? If so, what sort of activities are you involved in?

Research

Turkish Airlines (THY) was established on 20 May 1933 as the State Airlines Administration under the Ministry of National Defense. The first fleet of THY was comprised of two King Birds (five seated), two Junkers F-13 (four seated) and one ATH-9 (ten seated) aircrafts, seven pilots, eight enginemen, eight officers, and one radio operator which made up a total number of 24 staff. The State Airlines Administration has increased its fleet up to 33 aircrafts in 1955 and has started to use its current name of Turkish Airlines in the May of the same year. The first sales offices overseas were opened in Rome and Athens in 1959. Turkish Airlines which has started to operate flights in 3 continents in 1983 published its first flight magazine THY Magazin that has been its very first PR activities. In 1987 Turkish Airlines had been realizing 42 flights to overseas destinations. The Turkish Airlines Magazine was renamed by its current name Skylife in 1989. THY set up its website www.thy.com to serve its customers in 1996. Turkish Airlines was rewarded by Airbus the same year as "the first airlines utilizing A340 aircrafts in the most efficient manner in the world" and THY pilots were appointed by Airbus as training pilots. THY was awarded in 1998 the Golden Plaque by the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce honored as the company bringing the most foreign currency into Turkey. (<http://www.turkishairlines.com/tr-tr/kurumsal/tarihce>). Continuing to expand its investments and fleet despite the global-scale economic crisis in 2008-2009, THY became a member of Star Alliance in 2008 and was named the best airline company in Europe for three consecutive times based on the results of Skytrax Evaluation that is recognized as the Oscar of aviation industry in 2013. Additionally, THY that was named the best airline company of Southern Europe for five times at total was awarded with the best business catering service in the global ranking with its Flying Chief service offered to its Business Class passengers during long haul flights. THY offers the possibility to fly to 196 cities in 103 countries at international lines as well as 38 cities and 39 airports at domestic lines.

With the advent of the 21st century the Turkish Airlines has developed its communication strategies towards becoming a global brand and started new applications especially in the digital field. The first example of this has been the online check-in practice

initiated in 2003 and the “Customer Relations Online Service” launched in September 2004 where passengers were able to transmit their opinions and complaints within the website of the company www.turkishairlines.com.tr. In 2006 it has initiated the Miles&Smiles card programme to its special customers offering different opportunities with four different types of cards.

The rise of Turkish Airlines in the 21st century is explained by the following statement of Fatih Karaman who is the Communication Supervisor of the departments of Public Relations and Corporate Communication of the institution; “Since 2003, more than a decade Turkish Airlines has grown at least between 15 percent to 25 percent. This is a period when several airlines were closed, had gone bankrupt or declared losses due to the economic crises in the years of 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 whereas Turkish Airlines continued to open new routes. After 2010 this growth made returns primarily with awards. It has been rated Europe’s third best airline and significant awards had been received in the international arena. In 2008 it has progressed to Star Alliance membership. Awards granted by an airline rating company Skytrax and receiving these awards for three consecutive years have started a new era in Turkish Airlines; the advent of this new era has additionally increased the importance of investments to communication and has led to the necessity of saying more to our target audience. Therefore, after 2007 there had been significant increases in the communications budget, and significant budgets have reflected on our successful PR campaigns towards our target audience. Turkish Airlines (THY) claims to be the only airline currently flying to 104 countries and became a four-star premium airline as of 2014. Unlike its competitors THY was rated by Star Alliance a four-star-airline in all segments. However, the goal of Turkish Airlines is to be granted five stars in all segments. For that reason, THY is continuously striving to improve its investments to communication”.

Turkish Airlines’ first step in positioning itself as a global brand in the 21st century was initiated during the process of its Star Alliance membership with the ‘Feel like a Star’ campaign with the acting of Kevin Costner in the commercial spots. Fatih Karaman paraphrases the process as such; “Globally a start was given with Kevin Costner and Feel like a Star. A one-year agreement has been signed in 2009. Simultaneously with this agreement Turkish Airlines had also been conducting various country-specific local promotional campaigns in different countries. Through all these efforts, Turkish Airlines has increased brand awareness globally and strengthened the global campaign of Feel like a Star with the local campaigns it has been carrying out.”

The Advertisement Supervisor Barış Akın pointed out that under the motto of ‘Feel like a Star’ this commercial spot where Kevin Costner took part in the acting has been the first time where a Turkish brand used a celebrity globally, and aimed to increase the global awareness of THY.

After its short term ‘Feel Like a Star’ campaign, Turkish Airlines announced its new international PR campaign ‘Globally Yours’ which was developed in 2010 with the local agency Alametifarika. THY which has successfully announced its brand name with the support of a celebrity in ‘Feel Like a Star’, added a new sound for its brand with its new PR campaign giving a message to its global target audience that they are the brand to meet their needs and be with them. In order to support the ‘Globally Yours’ campaign worldwide and proportionally reinforce the brand awareness with the goals of the campaign THY focused particularly on sports sponsorship activities. Towards that end Turkish Airlines has sponsored the British Football League team Manchester United, the Spanish Football League team Barcelona, the German Football League team Borussia Dortmund, the Ukrainian Football League team Shakhtar Donetsk and the French Football League team Olympique de Marseille. However, the Turkish Airlines

has also been the title sponsor of tennis championship as well as the title sponsor of Euroleague which is Europe's highest international basketball organization at teams level.

Approaching the year 2012, THY has started activities to improve its brand expression. However, in line with its Premium Brand image due to awards it has received and effective PR campaigns it has carried out THY gave up the team sponsorships of Manchester United, Barcelona and Borussia Dortmund and tended to head for brand names with faces of successful sportsmen in their field such as Lionel Messi, Kobe Bryant, Wayne Rooney and Caroline Wozniacki.

Today THY has been working with different worldwide PR agencies in several countries and has become to adapt itself to the local markets of the countries where it is present as a global brand. Elif Aksoy from its Brand Department has addressed activities towards the development of brand communication initiated in 2012 and renewal of its brand expression as such; "Turkish Airlines started activities to build a new brand strategy considering that time has come for brand awareness and communication in the global market and they are required to identify a commitment which is brand-specific, unique to the brand. Broad based in-house studies were primarily conducted towards that end. Staff opinions at all levels, from the top to the lower level of all employees' ideas were taken. Then a new strategic plan has been revealed from the information collected and processed through global research, surveys for focus groups, customer feedbacks and social media."

Turkish Airlines laid the foundations of its new PR campaign "Widen Your World", in 2013 launching a worldwide concourse as a Turkish brand following its in-house studies and other externally-funded activities regarding brand consultancy. Elif Aksoy explains their new PR campaigns and goals as follows; "The original rhetoric of the THY brand is as follows; THY offers a travel experience for people who are in pursuit of innovation, seeking novelty and have passion to discover the unknown. While doing this, in fact it benefits from the Turkish hospitality which is inherited genetically. Again, services provided by Turkish Airlines are often globally perceived by passengers as more than expected especially in the global market. Nevertheless to go beyond what is being expected; designing services which could offer beyond what is being expected has increased. Yet, Turkish Airlines offers a brand commitment of bringing together the differences in people, a combination of different perspectives, different views, and different cultures which is an advantage that comes from Turkey's geography. As a result of bringing all of these differences together it has called its new motto "Widen Your World".

Publications: The Sky Life Magazine issued monthly within the Turkish Airlines introduces various places people would like to visit around the world. Readers are informed about what to eat and drink, where to stay and what sort of activities they can enjoy in different countries. Customer brochures are also another means Turkish Airlines often makes use of.

Another significant study method of THY in the field of publication is its partnership to some publications like its involvement in the Project called 'Future of Aviation' conducted in Germany. The Turkish Airlines is making a market research with German professors and German nationals within this project to introduce an expression on the travel habits of people and thus gives an expression in this project.

Events: Another method most frequently applied by THY is the sponsorship to sport-art shows and trade shows. Major sporting sponsorship takes place primarily for Barcelona, Manchester, Borussia Dortmund, Olympique de Marseille and Aston Villa. As a sponsor of Borussia Dortmund THY continues to provide the flight of the team players to the international

tournaments and football matches. This partnership also covers jointly organized events besides activities such as displaying commercials inside and outside the stadium.

As of 2013 THY made a strategic decision to leave its sponsorship to major football teams except for its title sponsorship in Euroleague. Turkish Airlines which had been the title sponsor of Euroleague Basketball over the last three years has decided in October 2013 to extend its sponsorship until 2020. The foundation of this sponsorship was laid in 2012 when Turkish Airlines became the co-founder of Euroleague's social responsibility Project 'One Team'.

Bariş Akan from the Department of Advertisement has cited the reason for giving up team sponsorship as follows: "You have to sponsor minimum 5 players in the team otherwise there would be an imbalance within the team. It is more costly to become a sponsor of a team. Alternatively, Turkish Airlines has become more oriented to individual sport sponsorship. Turkish Airlines has made a deal with celebrities to become the brand face at a rate of one fifth or one sixth less cost. Lionel Messi, Kobe Bryant, Wayne Rooney, Caroline Wozniacki are the major sportsmen who are sponsored by Turkish Airlines."

Besides these, it has become a sponsor of few segments of important golf tournaments which is one of the most exclusive sports in the world.

News: According to the statement of Barış Akın from the Department of Advertisement the sport of golf has become a means for the Turkish Airlines' necessity to make investments to its business class where the actual Premium class exists and to earn more from this class.

Fatih Karaman from the Public Relations Department expresses as such; "recently we gave a lot of importance to the sport of golf and golf is now functioning like our PR machine".

The name of Turkish Airlines currently is mentioned in many places in the news related to Tiger Woods due to his title sponsorship. Although they are not sponsors of Tiger Woods, the name of Turkish Airlines is mentioned along with Tiger Woods due to sponsorship to some segments of major golf tournaments.

On the other hand, news about the introduction of a Lounge in the Signal Iduna Park Stadium of Borussia Dortmund sponsored by Turkish Airlines, and about the wide range of catering of Turkish desserts, coffee choices and Turkish tea which are being served by a staff dressed in the same way Turkish Airlines cabin crew are dressed have found a wide coverage in the Turkish and German press.

Turkish Airlines' international organization Social Trippin', The first two meetings were organized in London and Berlin. News about Social Trippin' events have taken place in the digital media (<http://www.socialtrippinistanbul.com>) which bring prominent names expertised in their own field together and give an opportunity to exchange different opinions and views stated on several topics related to aviation.

Community Involvement Activities: Two well-established institutions of the Turkish civil aviation Turkish Airlines and Turkish Airlines Corporate Academy have activities on pilot training and train pilots for the aviation sector.

Identity Media: Harmony within the company's employee outfits, having a common and same color of dress suit, using the same font size and font type on the corporate business cards are examples for identity media.

Lobbying Activity: Sharing with public the organization's annual activity reports through the web site can be shown as an example.

Social Responsibility Activities: As the Founding Partner of the "One Team" Project of the Euroleague Basketball organization to which Turkish Airlines has been a title sponsor, it aims to integrate communities through sports with an important social responsibility project

besides cooperation in the field of sports. It is aimed with this Project to teach children who are victims of violence in society or physically and mentally disabled.

Turkish Airlines had a major contribution to education through its engagement in the social responsibility campaign called “ Borders are Joining through Education” supported by the Ministry of National Education whereby the flight of high school students from 39 districts who are financially in an unfavorable situation are sponsored to go for a language education in the United Kingdom.

With the continuing cooperation protocol between THY and Turkish Red Crescent, it has an ongoing contribution to the Turkish Red Crescent activities of providing blood, training, fundraising and promotional activities in disaster. Turkish Airlines has been delivering Turkish Red Crescent’s assistance in national and international disasters in this context. Through the collaboration of two institutions various social responsibility projects are also being carried out.

When we look at PENCILS model today, there is a need to add an extra ‘S’ step to the model and this is Social Media which is the most effective means of communication today. Turkish Airlines is in the forefront today which effectively uses this need.

Interactive Marketing Communications Supervisor of Turkish Airlines Neşet Dereli has emphasized that Turkish Airlines is one of the most notable Turkish companies which exist in social media since 2010. Dereli says that they have been in direct contact with nearly 5.000.000 people in almost every social media platforms from Flickr to Foursquare where as the most frequent platforms they use are Twitter and Facebook. As Turkish Airlines is a global brand it has both Turkish and English accounts in both platforms. Although Turkish Airlines has captured a much more intense traffic of interaction in Twitter, it is important for THY to consider in the future to exist in a platform or platforms which offer the most appropriate solutions in mobile devices because “travel experience” constitutes Turkish Airlines brand commitment. Turkish Airlines consider that the most important part of this experience lies at being in communication with passengers who effectively use mobile devices and to that end it has introduced the applications of Turkish Airlines Flying Pin, Sky Library, İstanbul Atatürk Airport+Flight Tracker HD, Turkish Airlines Open and Curio City which are available in Apple Store.

Apart from all of these, Turkish Airlines actively utilizes the new products of social media and developed a game called Classico Hunt for Facebook’s Time Tunnel. Turkish Airlines’ viral advertising has also reinforced its existence in social media.

Conclusion

When the PENCILS model is examined within this research, it has become compulsory today to add an extra ‘S’ (Social Media) step within the marketing PR due to current requirements. Social media has gained importance in PR activities because today customers (consumers) wish to be in continuous contact with companies which they are in interaction, follow the news of these companies closely and make instant sharing with the products and services of these companies. Comprehending the importance of social media for companies in a short time Turkish Airlines has created Turkish and English accounts, and furthermore has effectively used social media through applications it has developed for smart phones, its facebook and pinterest games and viral ads.

With the motto ‘Widen Your World’ THY has gone beyond introducing itself as a global brand and explains that it is currently a global brand whereby its international audience can now open to the world using Turkish Airlines. Its new motto which is created as ambitiously as at least ‘Globally Yours’ has not only reinforced Turkish Airlines’ brand expression but it has also

become a global brand in the minds of its target audience completing the process of global brand awareness initiated by its 'Globally Yours' campaign. Turkish Airlines has successfully realized the communication of its renewed brand commitment by creating the desired change in the perception of the target audience in all of the PR activity it has carried out and which has been examined in this research.

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Prioritizing Skills and Knowledge for Public Relations Undergraduates in an Integrated Communications World

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Abstract

The study was designed to gain insight about desired skills and knowledge for entry-level public relations employees. The research placed an emphasis on how and if the growth of social media changed the core competencies required to launch a public relations career. Benefits and limitations to separate Advertising and Public Relations sequences as well as an integrated undergraduate degree were explored. Interviews were conducted with 31 communications professionals representing agency, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations from around the country. Research included an analysis of written feedback collected from 167 Kent State University advertising and public relations interns and their supervisors from 2011 to 2013. Websites of 22 U.S. universities were reviewed to gain insight about who offered separate Advertising and Public Relations degrees compared to a Strategic Communications degree. The study included a literature review focused on undergraduate public relations education, qualifications for new hires and trends in the public relations. Findings provide insight about how to better prepare undergraduate public relations students for an ever-changing, integrated communications world.

Introduction

The practice of public relations continues to evolve with the growth of digital communications and the changing business landscape. Organizations are presented with increasing opportunities to share their brand stories and create conversations with customers, influencers, media, and other target audiences across multiple channels. The attention of niche audiences can be successfully secured through highly focused content delivered via owned, shared, earned or paid media. Public relations and advertising disciplines are blurring in some areas. Rubel (2013) reported that the popularity of audiences using social media and its feeds has “arguably changed audiences attitudes towards the permeability between advertising and editorial” (p. 4). Audiences are reluctant to pay for online news, but are more inclined to accept advertising in exchange for free content. Will the rise of sponsored content on news sites, blogs and other channels influence the desired skill sets and expertise needed for entry-level public relations professionals?

Further, communicators have the ability to mine, capture, and analyze digital data to both develop and measure communications strategies. According to Skerik (2013), “PR is a bigger job than ever before, and the profession is growing in rigor.”

Has technology and changes in the marketplace influenced the skill set and industry knowledge needed for entry-level public relations jobs? How should curricula and training be changed? Should a combined Advertising and Public Relations degree be explored? This research study examined the prioritization of skills and industry knowledge for entry-level public relations jobs and gauged future career opportunities for public relations graduates.

Literature Review

Literature has documented that written and oral communications, research and planning skills as core skill sets for public relations graduates.

Skills and Knowledge

The 2006 Commission on Public Relations of Education Report cited a range of skills including “mastery of language in written and oral communications, issues management and audience segmentation to informative and persuasive writing, critical listening skills and applying cross-cultural and cross-gender sensitivity” (The Professional Bond Executive Summary, 2006, p. 5). The Commission advocated that educators and practitioners strongly supported professional experience, including internships, practicums or other work experiences, as a core curriculum requirement. The Commission recommended “more emphasis on ethics and transparency, new technology, integration of messages and tools, interdisciplinary problem solving, diversity, global perspectives and research and results measurement” (The Professional Bond Executive

Summary, 2006, p. 5). Public relations educators were directed to ensure students were proficient in the use of technology and its application in communications strategy. The Commission recommended that communications technology be integrated across the curriculum rather than isolated. Overall, this report emphasized that the foundation of undergraduate public relations curriculum be an integration of liberal arts, language, social sciences, and business courses.

According to the 2011 PRSA White Paper – “The Public Relations Professional in 2015, PRSA advocates that the following 10 areas of skills and knowledge are needed to successfully practice public relations: (1) Business Literacy (2) Communication Models and Theories (3)

Researching, Planning, Implementing and Evaluating Programs (4) Media Relations (5) Ethics and Law (6) Management Skills and Issues (7) Crisis Communication Management (8) Using Information Technology (9) History of and Current Issues in Public Relations (10) Advanced communication skills

This publication documented feedback about the future of the public relations practice obtained via a survey among PRSA delegates who attended the 2009 Leadership Delegate Assembly. The research indicated six additional areas of desired skills and knowledge for public relations professionals including: (1) Expanded Business Literacy (2) Writing Skills for Multiple Platforms (3) Advanced Technical and Web-based Knowledge (3) Emotional Intelligence Focused on Interpersonal Skills (4) Social Sciences including Psychology, Sociology and other sciences (5) Integrated Marketing Communications relating to how public relations another disciplines work together.

One of the key takeaways of the survey and discussion among delegates focused on the need for specialization for future public relations professions. “Specialization is growing: Public relations will become more specialized, thus driving future careers in the profession. While basic writing and research skills will remain vital, the value of generalists in public relations will diminish because a specialized knowledge base will be required to meet company and/or client demands” (p. 4).

Jacques (2012) interviewed five U.S. public relations educators about keeping public relations curriculum relevant and preparing the next generation of communications professionals. The educators noted that technology created new communications tools, but the fundamentals of public relations education focused on writing and strategic thinking.

Trends in Public Relations

A review of literature, particularly professional articles, revealed an increased discussion about integration of communications disciplines and diversification in the public relations field. Edelman (2013) discussed how some public relations agencies were taking steps to diversity to focus on more integrated services including paid to earned media. “For us, the approach is putting PR, digital and research together yielding a new type of integrated marketing firm with social at the core and the ability to deliver on the 24/7 living brief.” He also discussed opportunities for public relations to partner as a publisher with media to convey content rather than just work with media as channel.

Rubel (2013) reviewed the emergence of three approaches to sponsored content in the United States: (1) paid syndication of sponsored content placed in news sections (2) paid integration of a brand’s message into content (3) paid co-creation involving an advertiser funding the creation and operation of a site, section or app. Rubel noted that sponsored content raises ethical considerations and may need to deal with obstacles like government and Google intervention.

Flaherty (2014) noted the importance of “engaging audiences through the full PESO spectrum of media (paid, earned, shared, and owned), search engines, mainstream mass media trends, online media (blogs, video sharing, social platforms, Twitter), the human channel.”

The growth of content development and multimedia storytelling in public relations strategy is evident in the literature. Skerik stated (2013) “public relations professionals are increasingly employing a variety of message formats, and they’re deploying this content across multiple channels. Done well, this approach does two things – it acquires new audiences for the organization, and encourages deeper engagement from the audience.”

At the 2013's PR News PR People Awards in Washington, D.C, Morscheck (2013) identified ten trends for in public relations during 2014 based on input from award winners. The trends include core public relations practices like research, campaign planning, and research, as areas that are influenced by evolution of technology. These trends included:

- (1) Storytelling
- (2) Campaign Strategy
- (3) Native Advertising
- (4) C-Suite Coordination
- (5) Integrated Campaigns
- (6) Hyper Targeting
- (7) Content Creation
- (8) Visual Communication
- (9) Social Media
- (10) Research and Measurement

Social and other web channels have created additional opportunities to reach targeted audiences, and public relations professionals are increasingly using these tools. Wright and Drifka (2013) conducted an eighth annual survey measuring how practitioners use social and new media in the practice of public relations. (The 2014 study wasn't published at this time.) Results indicated the survey participants advocated social and new media have improved the public relations practice and that practitioners are increasingly using these tools to communicate with audiences, particularly external audiences. Further, the study showed that public relations practitioners perceived that "social and other emerging media continue to improve in terms of accuracy, credibility, honesty, trust and truth telling" (Wright and Drifka, p. 14). The study also documented that the time public relations professionals work with blogs and other social media continues to increase during an average workday. The key social networking sites used during the workday included Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.

The rise in the public relations professionals' use of social and other web channels may be contributed to the growth of internet access and smartphone ownership among target audiences. According to a Pew Research Center study published February 27, 2014, "87% of American adults now use the internet, with near-saturation usage among those living in households earning \$75,000 or more (99%), young adults ages 18-29 (97%), and those with college degrees (97%). Fully 68% of adults connect to the internet with mobile devices like smartphones or tablet computers." Another Pew Center Research study conducted in October 2013 indicated that photos and videos are a key component of the online social experience with 62% of internet users either posting or reposting photos and videos.

The literature also discusses data analytics to better target audiences and measure social engagement as another major trend for public relations. Bugasch (2012) noted "technologies and tools will grow more sophisticated, faster and easier to use in the months ahead. PR professionals who use them every day, and who combine them with a practical approach to segmentation, monitoring and research, will better manage the data explosion."

Methods

In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 communications professionals and thought representing 22 agency, nonprofit, and for-profit organizations from around the country. Research objectives included:

- 1) To understand, assess, prioritize key areas of importance for new hires, specifically in terms of both skills and industry knowledge
- 2) To gauge expectations and projections for the advertising and public relations markets in the foreseeable future
- 3) To explore the perceived benefits and limitations to both separate advertising and public relations sequences as well as a combined degree

Three Kent State University faculty members used personal networks and snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009) to recruit appropriate interviewees for the study from July to February 2014. Criteria for sources included public relations professionals who had experience with recruiting and/or supervising entry-level public relations and advertising employees, as well as thought leaders in advertising, public relations and/or social media. An interview guide was developed to facilitate the discussions between the researchers and interview sources. A data sheet was designed to organize information collected during the interviews. Phone and in-person interviews were conducted.

Since the research involved interpretation of collected data, the grounded theory method was applied for data analysis (Morse & Richards, 2013). An ongoing analysis was conducted to assess emerging concepts throughout data collection (Morse & Richards, 2013). At periodic intervals, the researchers met to pinpoint emerging themes from the data and assess the mix of interview sources to ensure representation of agencies, nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

The research also included an analysis of written feedback collected from 167 Kent State University public relations and advertising interns and their internship supervisors from spring 2011 to summer 2013. This data was obtained through online reporting conducted among interns and their supervisors during internships, which required at least 300 hours to earn academic credit.

For public relations interns, corporations were the most popular internship category, followed by agencies, and then nonprofits. Advertising students were more evenly split among categories, with media internships emerging as a substantially represented sector for advertising students. Most of the internships were completed in Ohio and Pennsylvania, although students did represent Kent State from California to New York City.

This analysis provided insight about the weaknesses and strengths of advertising and public relations curricula and skills and knowledge required in the work place. Data collected via interviews was compared with data collected from the interns' and supervisors' reports and emerging themes determined for knowledge needed for both public relations and advertising fields.

Based on interns' feedback about strengths and weaknesses of advertising and public relations courses and intern supervisors' feedback on students' performances, an analysis was conducted to determine the benefits and limitations of separate advertising and public relations sequences as well as an integrated undergraduate degree.

Finally, curricula at peer institutions and AEJMC accredited schools were reviewed to gain insight about how universities structured undergraduate advertising and public relations education.

Findings

An analysis of interview findings and written feedback from intern supervisors revealed the following key insights about desired skills and knowledge for entry-level communications employees.

Strategic communications planning

As documented in the 2006 Commission on Public Relations Report and other literature, research and communications strategy should be the foundation of public relations education. Employers expect students to understand the basic principles of identifying target audiences, establishing communications objectives, and developing, implementing and measuring strategies and tactics. They need to understand conceptual thinking and how to see the bigger picture.

Graduates need to know how to uncover information, determine its relevance and credibility, and understand how those data can contribute to a better product and more effectively communicate with audiences, e.g. real-time communications. It's not enough to know how to collect the data; they need to translate them into meaningful insights and recommendations as well. As previously noted, this includes a need for more emphasis on data analytics as well as training in how to use secondary databases and Excel. Holtz noted that curriculum focused on real-time marketing would be beneficial for advertising and PR students. They could learn "everything from processing the data that's coming in – assessing the opportunities to communicating instantly" (Holtz, personal communication, September 11, 2013).

Writing Skills Across Multiple Platforms

Strong writing skills continue to be a top priority in both public relations and advertising curriculum. Students need to be able to write across platforms and media. They need to be effectively at telling stories suited in form, tone, and style to the appropriate medium. This message was particularly strong for public relations graduates. Public relations remains a writing-intensive field. "No surprise, the biggest thing is good writing skills, preferably great writing skills. Henary stated (personal communication, August 6, 2013) "Five years from now or 50 years from now, you will have to be a strong writer and know your audience."

In addition to excellent overall writing skills, professionals also stressed the importance of editing on the fly and exercising savvy judgment. Nash stated (personal communication, August 1, 2013) "We've had people who have been good writers, but they don't understand the appropriate platform of when to say something and when not to say something in today's instant media."

Expectation for digital expertise

As "digital natives," students are expected to be fluent in digital communications, both in terms of strategy and tactics. Employers stressed the importance of understanding social media and digital communications in these key areas:

- ◆ Strategic understanding about how to effectively engage with audiences via web and social media.
- ◆ Multimedia skills (including writing) to produce content across a range of platforms and understanding how to produce and adapt content with/for mobile phone.
- ◆ Web and data analytical skills to develop and measure digital strategies. Familiarity with some of the key monitoring and measurement tools like Vocus, Cision and Radian6 or at least free tools so that they understand the process.
- ◆ The ability to critically assess data in order to identify marketing opportunities and make informed decisions in real time.

Holtz stated (personal communication, September 11, 2013) "Good digital skills. A well-rounded communicator needs to shoot video and photos with their phone and be able to process

these visuals so that they are useful to the organization. Be able to engage on behalf of the organization through digital channels we're commonly using like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.”

Campbell stated (personal communication, January 28, 2014) “Being technical savvy in social media issues is important.” She noted that social media is often used as a collaborative tool in military public affairs. Fine stated (personal communication, January 27, 2103) “It’s (digital skills) huge. Everyone wants a social media manager or digital manager at entry level. It’s not just tweeting – need a strategy. Need to think about your voice. Different institutes are using social media for different reasons.”

Students need to be familiar with ways to measure the effectiveness of and return on investment for digital campaigns. They also need to learn about mining and analyzing data to effectively produce content and reach audiences via a range of channels at ideal times. Expertise in data analytics will give both Advertising and PR students a huge competitive edge. Nash stated (personal communication, August 1, 2013) “For us, understanding what the data is and where it’s coming from, what to glean from it and take the salient data points and integrate those into marketing strategy. I’ve watched a couple of our young people swim in the data.”

Employers expect students to know social media and check students’ social profiles to assess their digital presence and understanding of social platforms. Baldwin stated (personal communication, August 6, 2013) “There’s a ton of data that can be captured to show how we pushed the needle or succeeded or didn’t succeed. A general awareness of what analytics and what it means. I’m finding that many of clients don’t even know to look at the analytics or don’t know how to interpret them.”

Multimedia storytelling expertise

Both Advertising and Public Relations graduates need to be able to research and produce engaging, relevant stories across multiple platforms. Respondents discussed the growth of content development – driven by the fact that companies or brands can directly go to their audiences without the need to communicate with traditional media gatekeepers. The analysis of reports from interns and their supervisors documented the growth of content creation as a key task of a communications internship. Both Advertising and Public Relations graduates need to know how to tell engaging, relevant stories across multiple platforms. Research documented an increase with opportunities for brand journalism. Public Relations graduates need storytelling/journalism skills to help companies convey news (not necessarily promotional content) directly to target audiences.

Joilet stated (personal communication, August 6, 2013) “In today’s world, social media is such a big thing, but it’s important that students get strategy and can produce content for these channels. Writing is key here. As newsrooms have shrunk, the media outlets are shrinking – a company becomes your own news source. You don’t have to rely on news outlets. You have this great story, and you don’t necessarily have to pitch it. I have a weekly editorial meeting with staff and go over ideas and timing. You (company) become the brand journalist, and that’s really what companies need.”

A Shift in Visual Communications

The more training and experience students can get with creating visually exciting and engaging content, the better. Interview respondents discussed the growing use of visuals to break through the clutter of communications and effectively engage audiences. Social media and mobile

usage, as well as changes in audiences' preferences, have contributed to the growth of visual storytelling.

Holtz stated (personal communication, September 11, 2013) "Over the past five years, skills with mobile has expanded and understanding of how to tell a story with image is more vital now. Knowing when an infographic is going to tell the story, a better story. This shift to mobile has created a greater need for storytelling through visuals."

Graduates need to understand of how to shoot and produce engaging photography and video, as well as transform complex information into easy-to-read graphics. The Adobe Creative Suite specifically was noted in both the internship reports and interviews.

Interpersonal Communication

Graduates must be comfortable with speaking to teams, clients, bosses, and in front of groups. They need to understand when their voices should be heard. They also need the ability to accept criticism and apply feedback to improve their performances. This requires practice and polishing to build both their skills and their confidence.

Increased Business Knowledge

A thorough understanding of how a business works will help position graduates for both traditional and freelance career paths. Employers emphasized that many young professionals lack business expertise in terms of the Advertising and Public relations industries and the corporate world. This includes entrepreneurship, business development, profit margins and bottom lines, and basic economics associated with profit-driven industries. Graduates need to understand how to connect business objectives with communications objectives and strategies.

Bruglar stated (personal communication, July 30, 2013) "Understanding the pulse of an agency and how to help a business are skills that get you at the table." Johnston noted (personal communication August 1, 2013) "It's about orchestrating media to produce business outcomes rather than focusing on reach and frequency. We used to see ourselves as artists, but now we're architects. It's about what's the business effect."

Respondents also discussed opportunities for Advertising and Public Relations graduates to work as freelancers, and a business understanding can help them do this. An entrepreneurial spirit should be encouraged.

Familiarity with Commonly Used Computer Programs

More in-depth training is needed with Microsoft Office and Adobe Creative suites. Respondents emphasized the need for graduates to have experience working with Excel and databases. "A basic understanding of Excel is crucial at entry level" (Elliott-Numbers, personal communication, August, 2013).

Experience Outside the Classroom Highly Valued

Employers emphasized the importance of students taking advantage of opportunities to build relationships and portfolios outside of the classroom. These opportunities help students network, gain experience, and build their portfolios—all things that employers are looking for. Employers recommended students get involved in organizations and activities that help them gain relevant experience and learn about the communications industry. They also discussed the value of students demonstrating a passion through blogging and/or other social media. Employers

recommended students be required to complete an internship and advocated that students be encouraged to complete multiple internships.

Reinforce Professionalism

Specific coaching about best practices in terms of conduct, demeanor, and dress is important. Some intern supervisors and interviewees noted that recent graduates often don't know how to act in a place of business or what it means to be professional. The more students are knowledgeable of what it means to be professional, the easier their transition to post-graduate life will be. Employers are looking for flexible, highly motivated, and competitive graduates with a strong work ethic. Graduates who demonstrate willingness to learn and go-getter mentality are more likely to succeed.

Career Growth Opportunities

While career opportunities in digital communications and data analytics are significant, traditional public relations practice areas are growing. Public relations graduates need exposure to key practice areas including media relations and employee communications. Bykowski stated (personal communication August 6, 2013) "Media relations is alive and well, but it's so customized and so researched. Here's the story, give me the top five national pubs, what angles and who are the reporters, and how should we approach them." She discussed the need for graduates to understand media tools like Cision and how conduct an analysis of coverage.

Respondents discussed career opportunities in internal communications for both entry-level and experienced communications professionals. Kessel stated (personal communication, September 17, 2013) "Shortage in talent who understand employee engagement – these roles pay a premium and are in high demand." Holtz noted that the growth of social media has presented new opportunities for internal communications. "The wall between external and internal communications is ridiculously porous. Employees are on Facebook and Twitter. I worked with one organization where 80% of their employees were asked a question about their employer based on the fact that they list their employers on their social media profiles. These employees are your front PR people even more than they used to be" (Holtz, personal communication, September 11, 2013).

Other growth practice areas include business-to-business, crisis, healthcare, technology and global communications.

Separate Degrees or Combined Degree?

Another research objective focused on exploring the perceived benefits and limitations to both separate Advertising and Public Relations sequences as well as a combined degree. Overwhelmingly, the interviewees supported an expert rather than a generalist for Advertising or Public Relations graduates. Some respondents advocated that an integrated approach would be better for a graduate program because the students would possess the core communications skills by that point. Research findings conveyed that while students need to be grounded in the strategic communications/integrated marketing communications models, they need the deep dive training of having a specific Advertising or Public Relations degree. Graduates need to develop familiarity with "partners" in the other discipline, but concerns were expressed that broadening communications skills too far could result in undermining core skills. Interviewees were consistent in their advocacy for shared knowledge and an increased understanding of the

partnerships that occur across these two disciplines, but they emphasized that our students need to have specific expertise in one. While breadth is needed, it cannot be at the expense of depth.

Wade noted that the lines are blurring between PR, Advertising and Marketing disciplines, but advocated for separate disciplines with more understanding about an IMC approach. Wade stated (personal communication, August 1, 2013) “I still believe there are separate disciplines because there are things that PR does that marketing/Ad will never get involved in – media relations, strategy around reputation management, crisis communications and employee communications. There are some communications that aren’t IMC challenges.”

Campbell (personal communication, January 28, 2014) noted that Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) focus on traditional public relations practices such as internal communications, media relations, community relations, event planning, and crisis communications.

Still, public relations graduates need understand to advertising concepts, like paid content, because they’ll be working in an integrated world. Tressel stated (personal communication, September 17, 2013) “This (converged) strategy where we (Edelman) are going to move in terms of creative insights and communicating broader media.” Holtz noted that all departments or disciplines need work together to produce a unified content mix. “Strategy comes first. The processes and relations with each department need to be there so they can work together. It doesn’t make sense to have one big department. It makes sense to have the resources and expertise where needed and working in a converged atmosphere” (Holtz, personal communication, September 11, 2013).

Johnston noted (personal communication, August 1, 2013) “A combined major is the wrong solution for the right reasons. You need to be able to work well in the different disciplines. Combining the two won’t solve the problem. You need to teach people how to use the different platforms in each discipline. Employers want the specialists but want a broader understanding and connection of other communications.”

An analysis of some universities who earned accreditation by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and/or Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) revealed a mix of schools with separate Advertising and Public Relations programs and schools with either a combined or integrated degree. Any trends or correlations to better outcomes for graduates weren’t discerned through this analysis. Additional research could further explore. (See Appendix B to review list of universities.)

Discussion/Conclusion

Research and strategic planning should continue to drive public relations curricula. Findings indicate written and verbal communications remain fundamental skill sets; digital expertise is expected; an understanding of data analytics is ideal; and multimedia storytelling abilities are in demand. This study and literature support the need to incorporate digital training and multimedia storytelling throughout public relations curriculum. In-depth training in measurement and analytics is becoming increasingly important. Beyond additional emphasis in digital communications and content development, educators should examine ways to help public relations graduates prepare for career opportunities in internal, healthcare, technology, business-to-business and global communications, as well as public affairs.

This study supports training a public relations expert who will be familiar with advertising, marketing, business, and other disciplines and clearly understands an integrated communications model. Employers emphasized the importance of public relations graduates being knowledgeable about business and entrepreneurship. Previous literature has documented

the importance of integrating the public relations field with other disciplines. With advances in technology and changes in the marketplace, the need for an interdisciplinary knowledge base is escalating, but this study conveys the need for discipline integration without undermining core communications skills in each discipline. Faculty expertise, resources and organizational structure play key roles in how educators determine the appropriate steps for curricula integration in their programs.

To ensure curriculum stays relevant, educators should collaborate with respected, cutting-edge professionals as often as possible. Opportunities to offer short-term courses and guest lecture series with professionals should be explored and include engaging alumni to foster mentoring relationships with students and receive continual input on curricular development. Students should be encouraged to pursue a wide range of opportunities to gain relevant experience.

Educators also should consider moving away from traditional three-credit-hour, fifteen-week classes toward more flexible options that allow curriculum to accommodate the ever-changing public relations field in an integrated communications world.

In terms of limitations with this study, the sample of interview respondents were selected based on personal networks of the researchers and a higher number of respondents worked at communications agencies. The data collected from interns and their supervisors was limited to one university. Future research could further explore specific curricula developments, particularly in digital communications and analytics. While this study didn't address ethics training, future research could examine how curriculum should be updated to address ethical dilemmas related to areas where blurring lines exist between public relations and advertising strategies.

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Appendix A Interview Participants

Name	Title	Company	Interviewer
1. Baldwin, Chris	SVP/Managing Director	True Digital Communications	M. Ewing
2. Bruglar, Ben	President	Akhia PR & Marketing	M. Ewing
3. Bykowski, Christy	SVP/Managing Director	Fahlgren Mortine	M. Ewing
4. Campbell, Captain Jane	Director of Public Affairs	United States Fleet Forces	M. Ewing
5. DeLeo, Jack	President & CEO	Command, Norfolk, VA Hitchcock Fleming & Associates (HFA)	
6. Fine, Amanda	Public Affairs Specialist	National Institutes of Health	M. Ewing
7. Flaherty, Rob	Senior Partner & CEO	Ketchum	M. Ewing
8. Fontana, Peter	Director & Senior Analyst, Research/Insights	We Are Social	D. Coombs
9. Froseth, Heidi	SVP/Target Team Leader	Catapult Marketing	D. Coombs
10. Gusich, Jan	President and Owner	Akhia PR & Marketing	M. Ewing
11. Henary, Ryan	Manager, Marketing and Communications	FedEx Custom Critical	M. Ewing
12. Hirt-Marchand, Jennifer	Associate Partner/ Strategic Insights Exec.	Marcus Thomas, LLC	M. Ewing
13. Holtz, Shel	Principal	Holtz Communication + Technology	M. Ewing
14. Johnson, Angela	EVP/Managing Director	Ogilvy & Mather	D. Coombs
15. Johnston, Phil	SVP/Planning	Marcus Thomas, LLC	M. Ewing
16. Joilet, Andrea	Director of Corporate Communications	Akron Children's Hospital	M. Ewing
17. Kandes, Carrie	VP of Public Relations	Marcus Thomas LLC	M. Ewing
18. Kessel, D. Travis	VP of Recruitment	Edelman	M. Ewing
19. Lawson, David	Research Associate	Hill Holliday/Erwin Penland	D. Coombs
20. McBride, Shawn	Senior VP	Ketchum	D. Coombs
21. Frank-Modarelli Heidi	VP of Public Relations	Marcus Thomas, LLC	M. Ewing
22. Mesek, Todd	VP of Marketing & Communications	Rock and Roll Hall of Fame	M. Nylander
23. Nash, Jim	Managing Partner	Marcus Thomas, LLC	M. Ewing
24. Numbers-Elliott Lyndsey	Social Media Strategist	Sterling Jewelers	M. Ewing
25. Pennica- Hedrick, Lori	Partner/Human Resources	Marcus Thomas, LLC	M. Ewing
26. Shafer, Jason	Management Supervisor	Marcus Thomas LLC	M. Ewing
27. Thierren, Jason	President	Thunder::Tech	M. Nylander

28. Throckmorton, Rob	Director of Employment & Staffing	MARC USA	D. Coombs
29. Wade, Polly	Management Supervisor	Marcus Thomas, LLC	M. Ewing
30. Whitehouse, Rob	Director/Communications, Operational Excellence & Research & Develop.	The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company	M. Ewing
31. Zone, Lisa	Senior VP	Dix & Eaton	M. Nylander

Appendix B

Analysis of Peer Institutions and AEJMC/CEPR Accredited Programs

Some schools with separate Ad and PR programs include:

School	AEJMC accredited	CEPR accredited
Auburn	✓	
Ball State	✓	✓
Ohio Northern		✓
University of Florida	✓	
University of Georgia	✓	
University of Oklahoma	✓	✓
University of Oregon	✓	
University of Missouri	✓	
Syracuse	✓	✓
University of Tennessee	✓	
University of Texas	✓	✓
West Virginia	✓	

Some schools with either a combined degree and/or integrated Ad & PR programs:

School	AEJMC accredited	CEPR accredited
Arizona State (not much Ad focus)	✓	
Brigham Young	✓	✓
Bowling Green (not much Ad focus)	✓	
Elon	✓	
University of North Carolina	✓	
Ohio University	✓	
Penn State	✓	
Northwestern (not much Ad focus)	✓	
Seton Hall		✓

Perceptions of Public Relations Graduates Concerning Public Relations Degrees and Positions

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Abstract

Alumni respondents (659) from five universities indicated through a survey very positive perceptions of the degree and field, but a majority did not expect to stay in public relations. Recommendations included more social media and business instruction in degree programs, completion of more internships, and more exposure to careers.

Introduction

The public relations profession, college degree programs, specific class offerings, and related elements have all grown and diversified over past decades. Research has been conducted on perceptions of the public relations field from the perspectives of practitioners and students majoring in public relations. In addition, other researchers have analyzed overall public relations practitioner job satisfaction and perceptions based on their college degrees. Other studies have focused on perceptions of public relations educators, but relatively few scholars have specifically considered perceptions and recommendations from public relations alumni, not all of whom may be public relations practitioners, concerning their degrees and career paths.

DiStaso, Stacks, and Botan (2009) stated that the field of public relations was growing—not only in terms of the number of public relations jobs, but also in the amount of money spent on public relations communication and the field’s overall role within organizations. Because public relations had become “much more strategic” (p. 269) and involved more decision-making and advising, the education provided to future public relations practitioners was “called on more and more to provide strategic, international, ethical, and research methods training and leadership” (p. 254). DiStaso et al. then posed the question of whether public relations undergraduate curricula had answered that call and kept up with these advancements in the field.

The ability of a college or university curriculum to stay on top of changes in the profession plays a significant role in determining whether graduates are prepared for entry-level public relations jobs. Studies cited that anywhere from 94.5% (Rentner & Bissland, 1990) to 99% (DiStaso et al., 2009) of practitioners had earned at least a bachelor’s degree, while Becker, Vlad, & Kalpen’s most recent annual survey (2012) found that 26.1% of the 218,751 students enrolled in journalism and mass communication programs in the United States were focused on public relations, advertising, strategic communication, or some combination. Becker et al. also reported that those programs granted more than 57,000 degrees in the 2010-2011 academic year, indicating a potentially significant number of recent graduates entering the public relations workforce and showing the impact their respective schools’ curricula could have on the profession.

One way of measuring the efficacy of these programs is through the perspective of the public relations graduates themselves based on their experiences post-graduation. Further insight into their experiences would contribute to the body of knowledge on public relations, which is small compared with other areas within communication (Vasquez & Taylor, 2001). In addition, learning about how these graduates view themselves and their undergraduate training could help to solidify public relations’ strength as a profession (McKee, Nayman, & Lattimore, 1975). Collecting and examining the perspectives of these graduates is necessary in order to form a complete picture of the college-to-workforce transition and the factors involved.

Though important insights would be obtained through listening to the public relations graduates themselves, few scholars have explored views of these alumni, exposing a gap in the literature. Despite the lack of existing research on public relations graduates, a number of related topics have been examined, as summarized below.

Literature Review

Perceptions and Attitudes of Public Relations Students

Studies have explored the perceptions of public relations students before graduation, pointing out their position as future professionals and leaders in the field. Sha and Toth (2005) stated that “very little research” had focused on how students viewed their future careers (p. 94).

According to their study, 62.6% of public relations students believed they would be working in public relations 10 years from their graduation, while 28.4% were uncertain. The results also indicated a strong interest in work-life balance and flexible work hours compared with previous generations. The authors pointed out the need to “demystify” the workplace for future public relations professionals, asserting that “understanding... students’ perceptions of work, life, and gender issues in public relations is not only relevant, but even critical, to the survival of our field” (p. 99).

Farmer and Waugh (1999) studied students’ attitudes regarding their future careers and related issues. Their survey indicated that 60% of public relations students expected a promotion within one to two years of starting their jobs, and 53% stated that in their ideal job, they would counsel top management on a frequent basis—reflecting the strategic advisor role of public relations professionals mentioned above (DiStaso et al., 2009). DeRosa and Wilcox (1989) and Morton (1989) examined the perceptions and attitudes of public relations students toward the profession in general, while Kim and Park (2011) looked at public relations majors’ views about corporate social responsibility. Studies have focused on whether or not public relations students feel prepared for professional practice (e.g. Gower & Reber, 2006), and one study explored the perceptions of African-American students regarding the profession and whether race may play a role in their future success (Brown, White, & Waymer, 2011). In another study conducted with students in public relations classes, overall goals were to determine factors and perceptions that motivated them to major in public relations. Major rationales for students choosing the major included the following: growing field, combined interest areas, liked being creative, and liked to work with people. Typical majors surveyed in this study were age 23 or under, female, had never married, had one or no prior majors, and chose their college to attend before choosing a major. Future recommendations from this study included analyzing more demographic comparisons in similar studies, surveying graduate student perceptions, surveying perceptions of students as they choose majors, and analyzing practitioners’ feelings about the major and field. Other related areas of future study suggested included “satisfaction with degrees or courses” (p. 2), perceptions of the field by those in other fields, and factors of major choice by comparing different majors (Forde, 1988).

Perhaps the literature’s focus on current students as opposed to graduates is due to the convenience of studying individuals while they are still attending their colleges and universities, since alumni can be harder to locate and contact. Regardless of the reasoning for studies of public relations students, the views of current public relations majors may be of use since they could reflect the views of future public relations professionals. But with the increase of social media and enhanced databases, the ability to reach out to former students concerning trends is much more feasible and continues to be very important.

Job Satisfaction in the Public Relations Field

Another topic related to public relations graduates is job satisfaction of public relations professionals, regardless of their college backgrounds and years of work experience. Studies from Pincus (1986); Pincus, Knipp, and Rayfield (1990); Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey and Dik (2012); Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch (1997); and Wolniak and Pascarella (2005) examined job satisfaction in general, especially as it relates to organizational communication and career commitment, among other factors. Kang (2010), who studied the role of ethical conflict in public relations practitioners’ job satisfaction, pointed out that satisfaction with one’s job “is closely related to the steady prosperity of a profession and employers” (p. 152). Kang’s research

found that ethical challenges seemed to have a direct tie to job dissatisfaction, indicating that public relations, as a profession, “cares about ethical concerns” (p. 155).

Some job satisfaction research has focused specifically on Millennials working in the public relations field. Gallicano, Curtin, and Matthews (2012) found that Millennials were fairly satisfied with their employers overall, and also found evidence that job satisfaction correlates with autonomy (Olson, 1989), work-life balance, and inclusive communication. Blum and Tremarco (2008) found a correlation between job satisfaction and the employers’ values, including the employers’ commitment to those values. They suggested that if Millennials lack an emotional attachment to the organizations they work for, this could have a negative impact on employee retention.

An earlier study stated that “the public relations practitioner desires a greater amount than he now has,” including a desire for more opportunities to improve professional competence and influence important decisions (McKee et al., 1975, p. 49). Similarly, Dozier and Broom (1995) found a positive relationship between job satisfaction and participation in decision-making. Shin (1989) found that public relations managers’ job satisfaction was higher for those with critical orientation rather than a technical focus. Broom and Dozier (1986) and Rentner and Bissland (1990) also found that the roles of public relations practitioners impacted their job satisfaction, with higher satisfaction being related to professional and managerial roles. A study of public relations practitioners in Korea found that those with a higher professional orientation reported higher job satisfaction (Kim & Hon, 1998), and a study of Bulgarian practitioners had similar findings, stating that their job satisfaction “originates from what they are doing” (Karadjov, Kim, & Karavasilev, 2000, p. 216). Pratt’s (1986) study of Nigerian public relations practitioners also found a positive relationship between job satisfaction and professional practices.

Rupprecht (2011) explored public relations practitioners’ definition of work satisfaction and identified themes such as trust and respect, recognition, community, and personal growth. In order to experience immense job satisfaction, the practitioners were completely engaged with their work environments and experiences and supported by their leaders and organizational culture. A number of studies (e.g. Park, 2003; Wright, Grunig, Springston, & Toth, 1991; Serini, Toth, Wright, & Emig, 1997) examined the difference in job satisfaction between male and female public relations professionals, while Zerbinos and Clanton (1993) studied ethnic minority practitioners’ satisfaction with their careers, job functions, and the public relations field in general.

Satisfaction with the College Degree

Several studies have focused on general college degree satisfaction. When studying individuals two years after their graduation, Pike (1993) found that perceived learning was positively related to college satisfaction. In a later study, Pike (1994) found that graduates’ work experiences and current job satisfaction were also related to satisfaction with college. Another study found that alumni satisfaction was significantly related to satisfaction with experiences in the classroom and in social situations (Rosser & Sanusi, 2007). Yet another study pointed out a relationship between graduate satisfaction and their perceptions of employment preparation (Martin, Milne-Home, Barrett, Spalding, & Jones, 2000). Researchers have examined college degree satisfaction in various academic areas, such as law (Dau-Schmidt, Stake, Mukhopadhaya, & Haley, 2006), nursing (Cangelosi, 2007), engineering (Sageev & Romanowski, 2001), psychology (Landrum, Hettich, & Wilner, 2010), social science (Kressel, 1990), and business (Van Auken & Chrysler, 2005).

Only a few studies have focused specifically on those who majored in communication. Richardson (1993) surveyed University of Tennessee alumni, including some who studied communication. He found that communication majors were satisfied with their education in terms of developing social skills, verbal skills, and cultural understanding, while pointing out that context played a significant role in graduates' views of their college experiences. Todd (2012) studied Millennial communication graduates' perspectives of their own professionalism and job skills, and found that most saw themselves as outstanding and above average. Becker et al.'s (2012) annual survey of communication graduates explored a number of subjects, including post-graduation employment, salary, and job satisfaction. Of note, the study stated that two-thirds of the graduates felt content about their decision to study communication and journalism, while about a quarter said they felt regret. Similarly, 27.7% of respondents said that they regretted their career choice. Around 60% felt that their programs prepared them adequately for the job market, and most said that their professors and courses were up-to-date and gave them the necessary education and skills.

There is a lack of previous research on public relations graduates, though a small portion of Becker et al.'s study (2012) provided some general statistics about those who had studied public relations: 71.4% of recent public relations graduates were employed in full-time work and the median salary in public relations was \$33,000. Overall, 4.6% of communication graduate respondents worked at a public relations agency and 2.6% worked in a public relations department.

Public Relations Education

Much of the public relations education literature focuses on the perspectives of educators and practitioners, rather than graduates of particular universities and public relations programs. Many studies have focused on employers' expectations of public relations graduates, including the skills and knowledge areas that are most important to employers (Wakefield & Cottone, 1987; Brody, 1988; Brody, 1990) and whether students have been trained sufficiently in areas such as writing (Hardin & Pompper, 2004; Cole, Hembroff, & Corner, 2009) and intercultural competence (Fitch & Desai, 2012). A number of studies (e.g. Stacks, Botan, & Turk, 1999) offer a general examination of public relations education from the perspectives of both educators and practitioners, some of which found disagreements and differences in priorities between the two (Sohodol, 2010; Sriramesh & Hornaman, 2006). For example, Todd (2009) stated that public relations professionals valued practical, hands-on experience more highly than did public relations educators.

The Commission on Public Relations Education (2006) also reported in "The Professional Bond – Public Relations Education and the Practice" that educators and practitioners typically agree on many elements that should be included in public relations curricula. This includes specific study in traditional areas of writing, oral communication, problem-solving or critical thinking abilities, and overall emphasis on positive attitudes and individual initiative. They further emphasized there should be an increased focus of academic study in other related topics, such as business management and behavioral sciences. In addition, the commission highlighted other major areas that will continue to be important in public relations education, both in the classroom and beyond: technology use, global impact, public relations ethics, and diversity.

Few scholars have focused their public relations education research on the graduates' perspective. One study by Gale and Bunton (2005) examined the impact of ethics courses on

public relations and advertising students after they graduated and found that those who took courses in media ethics were more likely to consider and identify ethical issues in their careers. Another noteworthy finding was that only 56% of the alumni in their study were working in the communications field at that time, which is higher than the 46.5% figure found by Becker and Engleman (1988). Gale and Bunton (2005) also pointed out that “few [scholars] have assessed whether ethics instruction has a direct effect on students’ value systems and subsequent professional lives” (p. 272), indicating a lack of research on how public relations education affects students after graduation.

Alumni Satisfaction

A number of scholars have focused their efforts on understanding alumni satisfaction in general. Clotfelter (2003) studied alumni financial contributions and found that the amount given was associated with how satisfied the alumni were with their college experiences. Bristol (1991), Mael and Ashforth (1992), Okunade and Berl (1997), and Pearson (1999) also looked at alumni relationships and why certain alumni are more likely to give to their colleges and universities. Gaier (2005) stated that the alumni who were satisfied with their college experiences were more likely to give to and be involved with their universities.

Cabrera, Weerts, and Zulick (2005) explored uses for alumni surveys and research, which can provide valuable information about college experiences and workforce preparation. Martin et al. (2000) stated the importance of collecting feedback from graduates and of alumni who are satisfied with their college experiences “because through word of mouth they can increase undergraduate numbers which in turn increases financial assistance” (p. 200). Morgan and Shim (1990) also pointed out that satisfied alumni were more likely to recommend their colleges to other individuals, as well as consider studying at that college themselves again in the future. Mangan (1992) stated that alumni perceptions can affect a university’s accountability, while Chadwick and Ward (1987) suggested that the employability of graduates strongly predicted whether one would recommend a university to another person.

Morgan and Shim stated that measuring alumni satisfaction was a “crucial issue” with “significant marketing implication” (p. 49) and compared it to the post-purchase evaluation of consumers. Similarly, Haistead, Hartman, and Schmidt (1994) and Hartman and Schmidt (1995) examined alumni satisfaction in terms of a consumer satisfaction framework. Their studies found that performance quality, perceived outcomes, intellectual environment, and employment preparation were the strongest influences on alumni satisfaction. Other studies found that alumni reported higher satisfaction if they felt a sense of community when they were students (Delaney, 2004) or participated in research experiences as undergraduates (Bauer & Bennett, 2003).

These perspectives offer evidence of the value of exploring alumni satisfaction and can be considered when carrying out similar research with public relations graduates. Few scholars have examined satisfaction among public relations alumni specifically. One study (Rybacki & Lattimore, 1999) found that, according to educators and practitioners, the assessment of public relations programs should be built around alumni satisfaction surveys, among other sources. The same study found that 44.6% of respondents said that they used surveys of alumni satisfaction as a part of their assessment protocols.

Methodology

Alumni from five different public relations programs were invited to complete an online survey that was administered via Qualtrics through one university location. Graduates of public

relations programs from American University, Arkansas State University, Brigham Young University, Mississippi State University, and Virginia Commonwealth University were recruited using alumni databases (through email) and social media (including Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter). All public relations alumni who could be identified from these five programs were invited to participate. There was some concern about the comprehensiveness of the lists received from alumni offices, and participants were encouraged to share the link to the survey with other alumni. After about three weeks and a few follow-up emails and social media postings to encourage participation, the online survey was closed.

The survey was constructed of open-ended and forced-choice questions with Likert-type rankings. Many categories for the forced-choice questions were derived from qualitative data collected in focus groups and interviews from two previous stages for this research project. Participants were given the chance to respond to an “other” category and provide a different response than the ones provided in many of the forced-choice questions.

Researchers at the five universities participating in the project were approved by their own Institutional Review Boards (IRB). Each followed the same protocols and used the same wording to solicit participation from among their alumni.

Demographics

A total of 659 respondents completed the survey. The majority of participants who indicated gender (n=647) were female (n=412, 63.7%), while 235 (36.3%) indicated male.

In addition, younger alumni tended to respond. Based on the 644 who indicated age, 43.8% (n=283) listed ages 21-30, 27.9% (n=180) checked ages 31-40, 15.0% (n=97) answered ages 41-50, and 13.2% (n=85) were older than 50. In addition, when they earned their degrees also showed a relatively young group of respondents. Based on years of graduation (indicated by 644 respondents), those who graduated within the past five years elicited the most responses (n=212, 32.9%), followed by those graduating more than 15 years ago (n=200, 31.1%), those graduating within 6-10 years (n=161, 25.0%), and those graduating within 11-15 years (n=71, 11.0%). (Percentages above are based on the 644 who responded to this question.)

Of the 655 indicating alma mater, graduates of Brigham Young University comprised the largest percentage of respondents (n=346, 52.8%), followed by Mississippi State University (n=174, 21.9%), American University (n=57, 8.7%), Virginia Commonwealth University (n=41, 6.3%), and Arkansas State University (n=37, 5.6%).

More than a third of the respondents had pursued graduate education (n=237, 36.0%) with master's in a communication-related field (n=54, 22.8%), MBA (n=54, 22.8%), JD (n=26, 11.0%), and MPA (n=25, 10.5%) being the most popular choices. (Percentages above are based on the 237 who indicated they pursued a graduate degree.)

Results

Results are indicated below for each research question, with specific explanations for each. Because of multiple rationales provided by numerous respondents on open-ended questions, and because space limitations allow only major themes to be included, theme or sub-theme totals will not equal the total number of responses in these qualitative discussions. Response numbers and percentage estimates are based on total number of alumni answering each question and based on broad themes. In addition, some respondents gave multiple answers, while others did not answer or provided only single responses. Uncommon abbreviations, misspelled

words, or similar atypical responses could also slightly skew some thematic results in open-ended areas.

RQ 1: Why did public relations alumni from these universities first choose public relations as their area of study?

The first question was open-ended to elicit a broad range of responses. A total of 632 alumni responded. Based on applying sensitizing concepts from previous research and experiences, numerous themes and sub-themes emerged. (Percentages listed below are based on the 632 respondents for this question.)

Skills

Many respondents (n=153, 24.2%), indicated they liked writing, were good at writing, or saw the importance of writing. Problem-solving, strategizing, or broad planning was another major sub-theme of skill areas with 8.9% (n=56) responding in that combined area. Being creative or applying creativity also was listed by many respondents (n=40, 6.3%). Speaking or making presentations was another major area of interest with 5.5% (n=35) of respondents in this sub-theme. Design abilities or related graphic arts possibilities were also mentioned by numerous alumni (n=19, 3.0%). Additionally, other respondents commented specifically on the diversity of jobs the field (n=7, 1.1%).

Like People or Personality Match

A high number of graduates indicated choosing the field because they liked to work with people, were good with people, liked to help people, liked to meet people, were interested in how people communicate, were attracted to impacting people or persuading others, or the field seemed to fit their personality. For this question, 86 respondents (13.6%) indicated this theme was a major factor in choosing to major in public relations.

Changed Major From or Interest in Other Fields

Many respondents indicated they changed their college major to public relations from other areas they perceived to be a less appropriate fit, or they saw public relations as a more suitable major. Areas from which respondents changed majors included business in general (n=73, 11.6%), journalism/news reporting (67, n=10.6%) marketing specifically (n=41, 6.5%), broadcasting (n=28, 4.4%), English (n=16, 2.5%), advertising, (n=14, 2.2%), and law (n=14, 2.2%)

Interest in Public Relations Sub-Fields

For this question, 19 (3.0%) respondents mentioned interest in event planning, while others specifically mentioned interest in sports (n=7, 1.1%). Few other specific sub-areas of public relations were mentioned.

RQ 2: What factors motivated these alumni to complete their degrees?

Alumni were asked on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (definitely) what factors motivated them toward degree completion in public relations. Respondents indicated primary motivating factors were writing skills gained (M=4.30), enjoyed the classes (M=4.22), the broad application of the major to other fields (M=4.01), problem solving opportunities (M=3.95), and the diversity of public relations career choices (M=3.92). The least important factors were friends in the major

(M=2.36), high salary opportunities (M=2.49), group projects (M=2.67), travel opportunities (M=2.87), and layout and design knowledge (M=2.87). (See Table 1.) (Response categories were provided on the survey in alphabetical order and are reported in tables based on means.)

Table 1
Factors for Completing the Public Relations Degree

Factors	5=Definitely					Total Response	Mean	SD
	1=Not at All	2	3	4	5			
Writing skills gained	9	13	68	243	317	650	4.30	0.84
Enjoyed classes	7	13	101	238	289	648	4.22	0.86
Broad application to many other fields	18	59	94	203	274	648	4.01	1.09
Problem solving opportunities	17	34	131	248	217	647	3.95	0.99
Diversity of public relations career choices	18	66	113	203	248	648	3.92	1.10
Speaking skills gained	21	56	125	246	200	648	3.85	1.06
Emphasis on relationships	33	53	134	197	231	648	3.83	1.15
Relationship of field to business	23	69	146	194	206	638	3.77	1.12
Planning skills gained	32	69	158	219	167	645	3.65	1.12
Positive role of public relations in society	38	94	185	195	132	644	3.45	1.14
Research skills gained	48	120	211	170	95	644	3.22	1.14

The most frequently mentioned factors listed in the “other” category were the ability to influence or persuade others, flexibility of public relations career, creativity, and needing to complete a college degree. However, no major themes resulted from the open-ended responses to this question.

RQ 3: What aspects of the public relations degree did alumni dislike?

The aspects of their education they disliked the most were the lack of social media instruction (M=2.54), too many group projects (M=2.32), boring classes (M=2.22), and research instruction (M=2.18). However, none of these “highest ranking” areas approached 3.0 on a 5.0 scale of disliked a little (1) to disliked a lot (5). The most frequently mentioned disliked aspects in the “other” category were unprepared/inexperienced faculty, not enough of a connection to business operations, need for updated curriculum, and the requirement to write for the school newspaper. Again, no major themes emerged from the variety of responses given in this area. (See Table 2.)

Table 2
Aspects of Public Relations Degree They Disliked

Aspects	1=Disliked					5=Dislike d Greatly	Total Response s	Mean	SD
	a Little	2	3	4					
Lack of social media	138	49	74	55	50	366	2.54	1.46	
Group projects	162	110	87	53	38	450	2.32	1.30	
Boring classes	164	113	87	41	30	435	2.22	1.24	
Research	162	111	74	47	23	417	2.18	1.22	
Class sizes too big	211	69	55	26	10	371	1.80	1.10	
Analytical thinking	227	68	64	10	5	374	1.66	0.94	
Presenting in classes	213	80	48	11	4	356	1.63	0.91	
Writing	232	66	36	10	4	348	1.53	0.88	
Other	9	1	7	7	21	45	3.67	1.99	

RQ 4: What kinds of jobs did alumni hope for while seniors and heading into the job market?

Alumni were asked to rank their top five areas of envisioned employment. The two most popular options were public relations in a corporation and public relations in an agency/firm: 491 of the 659 respondents (74.5%) identified corporate public relations in their top five choices and 375 in their top three (56.9%), while 486 of all respondents (73.7%) identified agency/firm in their top five choices and 357 in their top three (54.2%). Rounding out the top five choices were nonprofit/association (n=331, 50.2% in top five choices), special events (n=319, 48.4%), and entertainment (n=260, 39.4%). Working in government (n=252, 38.2%) and university public relations (n=248, 37.6%) were close behind. (Percentages total much more than 100% because respondents could list up to five choices.)

Several respondents did not intend to find a job in public relations: 93 selected this as their first option, while 144 chose this option in their top five. Another group identified teaching public relations as a career option (23 as first choice, 158 in top five choices), although it was more likely to be a third, fourth or fifth choice, suggesting that it might be an option later in their careers.

Of the 144 respondents who checked a top-five open-ended response for an envisioned career not in public relations, 106 listed a specific title (or multiple anticipated careers). (Percentages listed below are based on the 106 who listed a specific title or titles.) Major categories or themes included the following: marketing (n=17, 16.0%) business (n=13, 12.3%), lawyer/attorney (n=11, 10.4%), advertising (n=7, 6.6%), journalism (n=7, 6.6%), sales (n=7, 6.6%), graduate school (n=6, 5.7%), and broadcasting (n=4, 3.8%).

Of the 57 who listed a top-five career pursuit in public relations (but not listed in the public relations choices given), 44 respondents listed a specific title or area they perceived to be in public relations. (Percentages are based on the 44 who listed a specific title or titles.) Major categories included the following: travel/tourism/hospitality (n=4, 9.1%), graduate school (n=3, 6.8%), marketing (n=3, 6.8%), broadcasting (n=2, 4.5%), church or religious (n=2, 4.5%), family or small business (n=2, 4.5%), museum/art (n=2, 4.5%), politics (n=2, 4.5%) and general public relations (n=2, 4.5%).

RQ 5: What types of jobs have alumni held?

The first job after graduation was almost as likely to be something other than public relations; 45.3% (n=296) of respondents' first jobs were outside of public relations, while 54.8% (n=357) listed a specific or general public relations area. (Percentages below are based on the 357 of 653 who listed an area in public relations.) Of those who did find their first job in public relations, they were most likely in agencies/firms (n=95, 26.6%), corporations (n=63, 17.6%), or nonprofit/associations (n=50, 14.0%). Another 5.6% went straight to graduate school (n=20), and 12.6% (n=45) identified the "other (in public relations)" category.

Graph 1 shows the difference between graduates' first choice for employment after graduation and the first job they were actually able to acquire. Three times as many graduates started in a job other than public relations than the number who had anticipated or hoped to start in a job outside of public relations. In the case of the public relations jobs, only a fraction of those seeking the positions were able to obtain them right after graduation. For example, only 95 of the 145 seeking agency/firm jobs as first choice (65.5%) were successful right after graduation. It was even worse for graduates seeking the more "glamorous" positions and industries: four of the 16 seeking fashion as first choice (25.0%), 9 of the 51 seeking sports teams as first choice (17.6%), 8 of the 51 looking first for jobs in entertainment (15.6%), and 6 of 58 who identified special events as first choice (10.3%). However, those who focused on niches that were probably perceived not as glamorous were more successful:

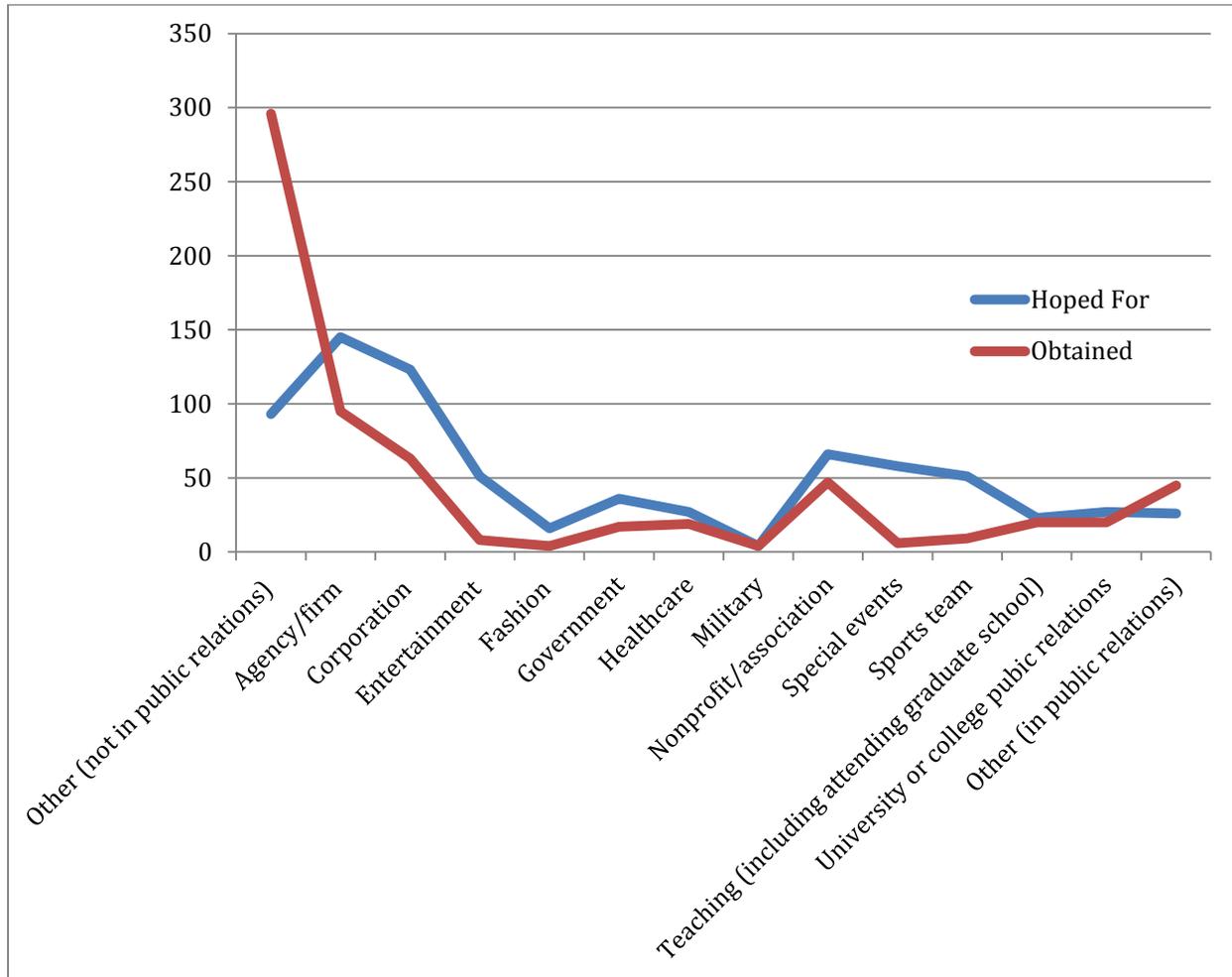
- 4 of 4 who identified military as first choice, 100%;
- 20 of 23 who identified teaching as first choice (including graduate school), 86.9%;
- 20 of 27 who identified university or college public relations as first choice, 74.1%;
- 47 of 66 who identified nonprofit/association as first choice, 71.2%; and
- 19 of 27 who identified healthcare as first choice, 70.4%.

Of the 296 respondents who said the first position they received after graduation was not in public relations, 101 listed a specific title (or career area). (Percentages below are based on the 101 who listed a specific title or area.) Major categories or themes included the following: sales (n=12, 11.9%), graduate school in various areas (n=11, 10.9%), media (n=10, 9.9%), management/administration (n=9, 8.9%), marketing (n=6, 5.9%), law school (n=4, 4.0%), advertising (n=3, 3.0%), government (n=3, 3.0%), hotel (n=3, 3.0%), teaching/education (n=3, 3.0%), real estate (n=3, 3.0%), politics (n=2, 2.0%), and retail (2, 2.0%).

Of the 45 respondents who said the first position they received after graduation was in public relations (but not included in the closed-ended categories), 44 listed a specific title (or career area). (Percentages below are based on the 44 who listed a specific title or area.) Major categories or themes included the following: event planning (n=6, 13.6%), graduate school (n=4, 9.1%), marketing combined with public relations (n=4, 9.1%), media (n=3, 6.8%), internship (n=2, 4.5%), real estate (n=2, 4.5%), sales (n=2, 4.5%), and school PR (n=2, 4.5%).

In the end, 438 of the 659 respondents found employment in the field of public relations, (66.5%). When the 93 respondents who didn't intend to look for a job in public relations are subtracted, the percentage of those seeking jobs in public relations rises to 77.3%. The majority (n=331) found a job in public relations within one year (50.2% of all respondents, and 58.4% of those seeking public relations jobs). Another 56 (8.5% and 9.9% respectively) found a position by their second year, 38 (5.8%, 6.7%) between two and five years, and the other 13 (2.0%, 2.3%) after five years.

Graph 1
Comparison of Job Hoped for Versus Job Obtained after Graduation



Of the 211 respondents who checked that they never have worked in public relations, 101 listed a comment. (Percentages below are based on the 101 who listed a specific comment.) Major comment themes of why haven't worked in the field included the following: never worked in PR (n=26, 25.7%), law school/attorney (n=10, 9.9%), graduate school (n=8, 7.9%), media (n=6, 5.9%), marketing (n=5, 5.0%), only paid job internship (n=3, 3.0%), specifically did not look (n=3, 3.0%), advertising (n=2, 2.0%), business (n=2, 2.0%), education (n=2, 2.0%), government (=2, 2.0%), internship led to job (n=2, 2.0%), and volunteer (n=2, 2.0%).

Many graduates held jobs other than public relations positions since their first jobs after graduation. Of the 560 responding to this question, the majority listed jobs outside of public relations (n= 358, 63.9%), while 15.9% (n=89) had later employment in corporations, 15.7% (n=89) in agencies/firms, and 13.6% (n=76) in nonprofits/associations. (Percentages listed above are based on the 560 respondents.)

Of the 358 respondents who identified any position they have held that was not in public relations, 101 listed a specific title (or career area). (Percentages below are based on the 101 who listed a specific title or area.) Major categories or themes included the following: marketing

(n=13, 12.9%), management/administration (n=11, 10.9%), sales (n=10, 9.9%), media (n=9, 8.9%), teaching/education (n=7, 6.9%), writer/editor/publisher (n=6, 5.9%), banking (n=4, 4.0%), retail (n=4, 4.0%), advertising (n=3, 3.0%), attorney (n=3, 3.0%), financial planning (n=3, 3.0%), government (n=3, 3.0%), graduate school in various areas (n=3, 3.0%), real estate (n=3, 3.0%), human resources (n=2, 2.0%), pilot (n=2, 2.0%), recruiting (n=2, 2.0%), and waitress (n=2, 2.0%).

Of the 49 respondents who checked another position held in public relations (but not included in the closed-ended categories), 47 listed a specific title (or career area). (Percentages below are based on the 47 who listed a specific title or area.) Major categories or themes included the following: consultant/own firm (n=13, 32.7%), marketing (n=5, 10.6%), writer/blogger (n=5, 10.6%), legal public relations (n=3, 6.4%), travel/tourism/hospitality (n=3, 6.4%), political campaigns (n=2, 4.3%), sales (n=2, 4.3%), school public relations (n=2, 4.3%), social media (n=2, 4.3%), and volunteer (n=2, 4.3%).

RQ 6: Why are alumni in the field (or why not), what keeps them in the field (if applicable), and what are their future plans?

A minority of respondents, 37.5% (n=243) said they definitely or probably expect to spend their professional career in public relations. Of these 648 respondents, another 17.6% were unsure (n=114), while 44.9% said they would probably not or definitely not spend their careers in public relations (n=291).

Table 3
Motivations for Staying in the Public Relations Profession

Motivations	1=Not at All	2	3	4	5=Def- initely	Total Response s	Mean	SD
Enjoyable career	3	4	22	74	167	270	4.47	0.80
Flexible career paths	4	19	47	85	113	268	4.06	1.01
Opportunities for advancement	7	26	64	76	90	263	3.82	1.09
Financial opportunities	28	37	73	69	50	257	3.30	1.24
Travel opportunities	55	44	61	47	51	258	2.98	1.42
Other	5	0	1	3	15	24	3.96	1.99

The alumni who were still working in public relations (n=270) did so primarily because it was an enjoyable career, gave them a flexible career path, and they found opportunities for advancement. Making a lot of money and traveling were not as high on the list for motivating factors. (See Table 3.) Several other reasons were provided as well, including the possibility of making a difference, using creativity in the job, and connecting with people.

Of the 24 respondents who checked the “other” category related to what keeps them in public relations, 21 listed a specific comment. (Percentages below are based on the 21 who listed a specific title or area.) Just a few multiple responses or themes resulted: freelancing ability or flexibility (n=4, 19.0%), relationship building (n=4, 19.0%), and creativity (n=2, 9.5%).

Table 4
Determinants for Leaving Public Relations Profession

Determinants	1=Not at All	2	3	4	5=Def- initely	Total Responses	Mean	SD
Like other career choices more	30	20	34	56	141	281	3.92	1.37
More money in other field	53	14	31	39	122	259	3.63	1.59
Could not find a public relations position	71	15	29	42	89	246	3.26	1.67
Geographic limitations led to few public relations opportunities	87	20	39	24	41	211	2.58	1.57
Significant other's career limited my public relations opportunities	135	4	10	22	36	207	2.13	1.64
Bored in former public relations position	129	20	21	21	23	214	2.01	1.44
Feminization of the field	142	9	13	16	12	192	1.68	1.27
Released from former public relations position	148	5	6	6	11	176	1.45	1.13
Other	7	1	4	6	62	80	4.44	2.25

Those who were no longer working in public relations (n=259) seemed to leave because they found other preferable career choices, found better paying jobs, or couldn't find a job in public relations. Less likely to be factors were geographic limitations, significant others' career choices, being bored with public relations, the feminization of the field, and being released from a former public relations position. (See Table 4.) Those who responded to the "other" category most often mentioned leaving the career to start a family or be at home more with the family. Some became disillusioned with the practice because the "real world" didn't operate as ideally as they had been taught in school. For example, some found the agency environment too focused on pitching and sales rather than strategic planning and research.

For the 102 who listed a specific comment in the "other" category related to why they were not working in public relations, many major themes were evident. (Some apparently did not check the "other" category, but nevertheless made a comment.) Some of these comments could be seen as positive toward another field or area, while others could possibly be perceived as critical of the public relations profession. (Percentages listed below are based on the 102 who listed specific reasons.)

Other Careers

Many respondents listed other fields or careers as the reason they were not in public relations. Going to graduate school (n=10, 9.8%) was a major reason listed as why they were not in public relations. About half of those listed either MBA or a different field for their graduate pursuits. Pursuing careers in business (n=7, 6.9%) was a major reason some left a direct public relations career with five of those listing marketing specifically. Working in education or

teaching was mentioned by numerous alumni (n=4, 3.9%), while being a lawyer or attorney was mentioned by just a couple of respondents (n=2, 2.0%).

Public Relations Field Factors

There were also perceptions of the field by graduates that affected their decisions to work outside the public relations profession. Only four (3.9%) indicated they could not find a position in the field after apparently trying. Another four (3.9%) said they never intended to work in public relations. (Some of these responses overlap somewhat with the graduate degree theme since some included both themes in the same answer.)

Family or Personal Reasons

A very high percentage of alumni were not working in the field because of family responsibilities. Staying at home to raise children was a major reason that many respondents were no longer working in public relations (n=39, 38.2%).

Retired

Another reason listed multiple times was that alumni respondents were retired. Just a few of these respondents were not in the field because of retirement (n=3, 3.0%). Some of these were still working in a part-time position.

When asked about their ideal job in public relations in five years through an open-ended question, 564 alumni provided a great variety of responses. Many included titles, while others indicated responsibilities or philosophical aspects. Multiple major themes again emerged.

Public Relations Segments

Respondents listed many different aspirations to work in specific applications of public relations. Again, many listed multiple areas, so percentages are based on the numbers for each category based on the 564 total respondents for this question. Major response theme categories included the following: firm/agency/consulting (n=75, 13.3%), teaching/education (n=39, 6.9%), nonprofit (n=36, 6.4%), corporate (n=25, 4.4%), government (n=18, 3.2%), and church or religious (n=8, 1.4%)

Already In Desired Position

A high percentage of alumni (n=40, 7.1%) indicated they were happy in their current position or they already had their ideal job. Many stated they would like to stay in their current job, but with more responsibilities and salary.

Leadership Titles or Goals

Many respondents listed specific advanced titles as their aspiration within five years. Some named president, CEO, or business owner (n=52, 9.2%), with at least three indicating they already were in that position. Again, there was overlap here with the theme above since some also said they were already in their ideal position. Numerous respondents indicated a vice presidential title goal (n=34, 6.0%), while a very high percentage listed a director title as a career target (n=112, 19.9%). An additional number (n=22, 3.9%) listed that they were either retired already, planned to be retired, or would work part time within five years. Others (n=13, 2.3%) indicated specifically they were not sure or did not know what their ideal career would be.

Skills

Concerning some broad skill areas, many (n=24, 4.3%) mentioned leadership or leading organizations, and a small number mentioned growing as a professional or impacting business growth (n=7, 1.2%). Other skills were implied under multiple major theme areas.

Degrees

A small percentage of alumni included degrees as a goal, such as doctorate or Ph.D. (n=8, 1.1%) or master's (n=3, 1.0%). As mentioned above, many were much more focused on titles, areas of practice, or skills.

For alumni not planning to spend their professional careers in public relations, they were asked why not and for further explanations. A total of 350 responded with more specific details of why they did not plan to stay in the field. (Percentages listed below are based on the 350 who listed specific reasons.)

Other Careers

Many alumni mentioned business areas that would draw them out of public relations: marketing (n=51, 14.6%), business (n=44, 12.6%), management (n=20, 5.7%), advertising (n=11, 3.1%), and sales (n=9, 2.6%). Teaching (n=22, 6.3%) and education (n=18, 5.1%) were also mentioned by numerous respondents. Again, some respondents listed more than one of these in a response.

Family or Personal Reasons

Once again, the issue of family priorities was mentioned in this question. For this question, numerous alumni (n=17, 4.9%) listed being at home with children as a reason to not work in the field.

Aspects of Public Relations Career

Two additional sub-themes also resulted from this question. Several respondents (n=5, 1.4%) referred to limited opportunities in public relations, while many more (n=15, 4.3%) mentioned the lower pay in public relations compared to other potential fields.

RQ 7: Do alumni recommend public relations degrees and careers to others?

A vast majority (n=489, 75.3%) of the 649 respondents for this question said they would recommend the public relations degree to others. A very low percentage (n=74, 11.4%) indicated they would probably not recommend or definitely not recommend the public relations degree.

They also were asked if anything additional should be included in the public relations degree. Again, many themes emerged that coincide with other responses above. A total of 443 respondents included a specific applicable comment, and multiple themes emerged. (Percentages listed below are based on the 443 who listed specific recommendations. Percentages again equal much more than 100% since many listed multiple areas.)

Creativity, Technology, Communication Channels

A very high number of respondents indicated more instruction should be provided in various areas of technology use and production-related activities. A huge number (n=118, 26.6%) indicated that social media instruction should be part of the public relations curriculum, with another 15 (3.4%) stating that digital media training should be included. Design (including

general, graphic, and web) resulted in 65 responses (14.7%), while video production (n=4, 1%) elicited limited responses of more emphasis needed in the curriculum.

Business Areas

A very high percentage of respondents indicated more business knowledge should be included in future degrees: business (n=105, 23.7%), marketing (n=77, 17.4%), management (n=27, 6.1%), finance (n=18, 4.1%), accounting (n=15, 3.4%), statistics (n=14, 3.2%), and sales (n=7, 1.6%). This coincides with results of many other questions in this study.

General Communication

Two areas of general communication skills also emerged from this question. Writing (n=46, 10.4%) and speaking (n=16, 3.6%) were mentioned by alumni as areas that should be emphasized more in public relations programs.

Areas Specifically Related to Public Relations

Many alumni (n=38, 8.6%) surveyed stated that more emphasis should be placed on internships or related professional experiences. Other major areas they felt should be included or focused upon more included the following: strategic thinking or planning (n=30, 6.8%), research (n=23, 5.2%), advertising (n=22, 5.0%), media pitching (n=18, 4.1%), budgeting (n=12, 2.7%), ethics (n=10, 2.3%), event planning (n=10, 2.3%), crisis planning (n=6, 1.4%), and portfolio preparation (n=5, 1.1%).

There also were numerous comments made about students needing to know what various career areas truly involve, such as agencies, corporations, etc. Alumni indicated in various contexts that they needed a greater understanding of business cultures prior to graduating.

While a minority of 648 respondents definitely (n=100, 15.4%) or probably (n=143, 22.1%) expect to continue careers in public relations, a sizeable majority of 650 respondents recommend it as a career path: 70.3% (n=457) would definitely recommend or probably recommend a public relations career to others entering college, while 13.7% (n=89) would probably not or would definitely not recommend the career.

Concerning perceived benefits from having a professional mentor, 75.9% (n=483) of the 636 respondents said they would very much or somewhat benefit from having a mentor. Only 14.9% (n=95) indicated they would not benefit at all.

A total of 171 alumni provided responses for a summary open-ended question. Responses resulted in various themes related to the public relations profession and curriculum. (Percentages listed below are based on the 171 who listed specific responses. Percentages again equal much more than 100% since many listed multiple areas.)

Appreciation for Degree

A major theme evident from this question was the appreciation for their degrees. Many alumni (n=61, 35.7%) indicated in this open forum that they enjoyed their degrees and felt very prepared for work and related later activities. Many mentioned again the broadness of the degrees in public relations and the application to many other fields. Within these responses, some indicated the value of writing, speaking, strategic thinking, and other specific skills. A few mentioned specific names of professors and the quality or instruction or mentoring they received.

Value of Mentors

An overwhelming number (n=30, 17.5%) responded positively about the value of mentors. A very small number (n=3, 1.8%) responded negatively about the overall value of mentors. Many said they currently served as a mentor, while some indicated they would have liked to have had a mentor early in their careers or as they were graduating. Alumni indicated they had professor mentors and/or professional mentors. Suggestions were made that mentor programs really needed more specific direction to allow relationships to be positive. Others indicated they thought having mentors overall was a great idea, but they were at the point in their careers where they really didn't need one. (Perhaps this overall mentor topic was voluntarily focused upon in this summary open-ended question since a question concerning desire of having mentors was just asked in the previous question.)

Business Focus Needed

Numerous respondents (n=23, 13.5%) again indicated that business, marketing, or other related areas should be emphasized more in public relations curricula. Of those replying, many said they had ended up working in positions that were blended or included more specific business areas with public relations.

Frustration with Degree

Still another group of respondents (n=19, 11.1%) indicated they were frustrated with their degrees, felt unprepared for work, or did not feel their educational backgrounds painted a true career picture. Many of these also expressed that they learned some of these perceived inadequacies as they entered the field, and they wished they could have known before. A few of these who were frustrated with what they did not receive in their degrees also indicated overall that they liked their degree programs.

Importance of Internships and Connections

Numerous alumni (n=15, 8.8%) also mentioned the importance of their internships or that they wished they would have done more internships. Many of these overall expressed the importance their professors placed on these experiences, but an indication is that alumni feel they can always gain more valuable experience before entering the work place. Four (2.3%) indicated specifically that networking or making business connections while in school should be emphasized more.

Thanks for Survey

Some alumni expressed appreciation for being contacted about their opinions (n=7, 4.1%). A couple of these also said they would like to have more contact and opportunities for input with their alma maters.

Graduate School

Only a few mentioned the importance of graduate school (n=5, 2.9%), with four of those mentioning the value of an MBA. Those with MBAs indicated that degree typically opened more doors by supplementing the public relations degree.

Opportunity or Choice of Staying Home

A small number of respondents (n=5, 2.9%) again said the degree either allowed them to stay at home or work from home. Some seemed to indicate this was their choice, while others stated they did not pursue full-time careers because of family responsibilities.

Discussion and Conclusions

Because of the continuous growth in public relations majors and many related careers, it is more necessary than ever that educators provide appropriate training for future practitioners and for those who plan to apply these degrees to other areas. Educators and practitioners need to work together to help smooth transitions for students entering the work place, and practitioners need to provide input to enhance public relations degrees by making sure curricula are appropriate.

One evident recommendation derived from multiple areas of this study is that an increased focus on business areas should be included in the public relations curriculum. In multiple questions, many alumni said they have worked in marketing or areas in business similar to public relations. It seems that it would be helpful to upcoming graduates if they were more familiar with marketing and similar concepts, especially since public relations and marketing positions are often blended.

Social media is another area that many alumni feel underprepared for related to career expectations. Even though these “new media” communication channels as a group have only been in existence for a few years, educators need to determine where and how instruction in social media management can be added to the curriculum.

Since writing is often listed as the most important specific public relations skill, it is very positive that many alumni indicated they completed degrees for that reason. They also overwhelmingly enjoyed their classes, which may also indicate why there has been so much growth in the numbers of majors, classes, degrees, and related areas.

It should be of some concern that about a third of the respondents did not ever find a job in public relations and especially in the specific areas they planned to pursue. More exploration should be undertaken considering whether those who desire to be in the field need more knowledge, skills, mentors (or connections), or simply more patience. Many chose not to pursue a career in the field, but based on multiple responses to various questions it also appears that many of them chose other career paths because they were not able to secure employment in the field and/or chose another area, never reentering public relations.

Additionally, the degree appears to be perceived as very valuable since such a high percentage (about 71.0%) would probably or definitely recommend the degree and the field to others. However, a much lower percentage of respondents indicated they are currently working in the field or planned to stay in the profession. Many use their public relations degrees and even their public relations positions to lead to other career opportunities. Their input seems to indicate that they believe their public relations degrees provided them proper preparation for many other careers. Educators and practitioners need to examine further whether this perceived broadness of the degree and field is positive. Since many graduates in a wide variety of majors do not pursue careers in their major fields anyway, this diverse application toward many areas for public relations majors and professionals could be viewed as an opportunity. The idea that the public relations degree has become more of a liberal arts program is perhaps one of the most important outcomes of this survey. Many alumni seem to view this degree in a very general sense, allowing them to learn skills in writing, speaking, and strategic thinking (although not necessarily applied

later in a public relations setting). More research should be conducted to ascertain if alumni feel the public relations field is unstable or if they by choice plan to leave the field and apply to other professions the knowledge, skills, and abilities learned in public relations degrees and practices. It will be interesting to track in the future where the profession takes new graduates and if the field will continue to provide sufficient opportunities in the overall job market. With advances in technology, healthcare, and globalization, and the challenges in financial markets, it will be important to see if the number of jobs available for public relations practitioners in the upcoming decades continues to increase.

Another important aspect to this study is that students, while in school, should complete public relations internships. That gives them a small taste of the profession, but it isn't until after graduation when students who do find jobs may understand the rigor and the skills/traits needed to succeed and survive in a very demanding specific job. Internships are not equivalent to full-time positions, and a real job can be quite different and daunting for some. That was evident in the open-ended responses where several stated they did not want to remain in the field once they entered due to stress factors. However, if students can at least complete multiple internships while in school, then they can receive somewhat of a feel for business cultures in different working environments.

Additionally, substantially fewer than 100 were working just after graduation or ever in each of three areas considered as major subcategories by many educators and practitioners in public relations: agency/firm, corporate, and nonprofit. Again, the broadness of the practice and opportunities into additional areas should be emphasized early in academic careers.

It appears that simply defining public relations for alumni is still a challenge since many respondents listed what some would consider non-public relations positions under "other" public relations categories in responding to multiple questions. Numerous alumni in this study seem to continue to be unsure whether marketing, sales, media, and similar areas are part of public relations or completely separate fields.

Another major result indicates that many feel public relations may be a good field to "stop out" of to raise a family. Some, especially females, believe they will eventually return to work in the field after their children are older.

Other future research could include perceptions of alumni compared by gender, type of university, age or number of years past graduation, and other related factors. In addition, perceptions of other groups toward the public relations field should continue to be analyzed. These future studies could further direct educators and practitioners to bridge any gaps between what is taught in colleges and the realities in the field.

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Outline of a General Theory of Intermediaries in Strategic Communication

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Abstract

The aim of this conceptual paper is to develop a general theory of intermediaries (e.g., trade associations, trade unions, advocacy groups, think tanks, government agencies, PR agencies and the media). The primary function or mission of these actors is to mediate organization-stakeholder relations, that is, to represent and/or to intervene in their relationship by furthering or impeding their interests and activities. We are in particular interested in how the specific status and function of intermediaries affect how they communicate strategically. After a brief review of the research on stakeholders in general, and organization-stakeholder relationships and organization-public relationships in particular, a definition and a typology of intermediaries are presented. The theory is illustrated with a case study of the crisis communication of trade associations in the Danish fashion industry. The paper concludes with a discussion of the consequences for future research with specific reference to the concept of reputation.

Introduction

Relationships play a key role in the broad field of strategic communication. In corporate communication, the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders (OSR) is viewed as defining the discipline. “Stakeholder management, more than any other subject in business, has profound implications for corporate communication” (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 39; see also Frandsen and Johansen, 2014a). Similarly, in public relations, the relationship between an organization and its publics (OPR) is viewed as the core focus; some scholars even regard the ‘relational perspective’ as the basis for a new paradigm of public relations (Ledingham, 2008). Corporate communication and public relations stem from different approaches to strategic communication, and they disagree on many points (such as terminology: are we talking about ‘stakeholders’, ‘publics’, or ‘stakeholder publics’?). However, they also share many interests and insights, especially regarding the study of relationships.

Recently, the study of OSRs and OPRs in strategic communication, but equally in various subdisciplines of business administration, has started focusing on the complexity of these relationships. This applies to the theoretical complexity of the topic (the stakeholder concept as an ‘essentially contested concept’, Miles, 2012) as well as to important aspects of the corresponding empirical complexity: the dynamics of relationships (the application of negotiated-order theory, Beaulieu and Pasquero, 2002), stakeholder attributes such as emotions (Luoma-Aho, 2005), dialogue and co-creation with multiple stakeholders (Hutt, 2012), advanced graphical representations of stakeholder relationships (Fassin, 2008), and relationships in specific contexts such as alliances, conflicts and crises (Friedman and Miles, 2002, Alpaslan, Green and Mitroff, 2009).

The overall goal of this conceptual paper is to contribute to the study of this complexity by offering an outline of a general theory of *intermediaries* in strategic communication, that is, a theory of the actors whose primary function or mission is to mediate, that is, to *represent* and *intervene*, in different ways and with different outcomes, in the relationship between a focal organization and its stakeholders. We are in particular interested in how the specific status and function of intermediaries affect how they manage their own strategic communication activities. The role of these intermediaries is becoming more and more salient challenging our understanding of key concepts such as reputation and trust.

The theory is inspired by Friedman and Miles (2006) who put forward the following claim:

”Contributors to the stakeholder literature have typically considered the stakeholder-organization relation as dyadic: a direct, linear relationship. This simplifies reality and ignores the impact of interdependent stakeholders and established networks. It also overlooks the roles of intermediaries as mediators, facilitators, campaigners, and as stakeholders in their own right, and in particular the role of the media as an intermediary” (Friedman and Miles, 2006, p. 220).

The overall goal of the paper can be broken down into five more specific purposes:

- First, we will define what we understand by intermediary
- Second, we will clarify the theoretical underpinnings of the concept
- Third, we will establish a set of taxonomic criteria (area of society, organizational form, status, representation, main types of intervention, main types of strategic communication) allowing us to classify intermediaries

- Fourth, we will illustrate the theory with a small case study (the crisis communication of meta-organizations or “organizations of organizations”, in this case: trade associations)
- And finally, fifth, we will briefly discuss some of the consequences for future research, especially concerning the concept of reputation.

Friedman and Miles (2006) already contains some of the building stones for a general theory of intermediaries. It is the ambition of the theory outlined in this paper not only to systematize these elements, but also to add some new elements. The structure of the paper follows the order of the five purposes mentioned above except from the literature review in the next section.

Literature Review

In this section, we give a short overview of the research on relationships conducted within three academic fields: (1) stakeholder theory (subdisciplines of business administration), (2) corporate communication, and (3) public relations.

Business Administration: Stakeholder Research

It is relatively easy to gain an overview of the stakeholder research conducted in the field of business administration. Apart from Friedman and Miles (2006), two comprehensive state of the art reviews have been published recently.

Laplume et al. (2008) have produced a list of *research themes* in stakeholder theory. Based on a content analysis of 179 articles, all published in mainstream and specialty management journals between 1985 and 2007, a total of five broad themes are identified: 1) *stakeholder definition and salience* (Which stakeholders should managers pay attention to? Which stakeholders do they really care about?); 2) *stakeholder actions and responses* (How do stakeholders influence companies? When will stakeholder groups mobilize? When will they support companies?); 3) *company actions and responses* (How do companies gain stakeholder support? How do/should companies manage stakeholders? How do/should they balance stakeholder interests?); 4) *company performance* (What is the relationship between stakeholder management and company performance? What is the relationship between stakeholder management and CSR? What other organizational outcomes are affected by stakeholder management?); and 5) *theory debates* (What are the normative foundations of stakeholder theory? What are the problems of stakeholder theory? Which theories does stakeholder theory compete with?). Theory debates (44 percent) and company actions (32 percent) are the two most popular research themes. Laplume et al. (2008) also identify three periods in stakeholder research: an incubation period (1984-1991), a period with incremental growth (1991-1998), and a maturity period (1999 to the present). They claim that stakeholder research seems to peak in the field of business administration at the end of the 1990s (p. 1180).

Parmar et al. (2010) have produced a similar list, but this time of the various *research disciplines* where stakeholder research has been applied: (1) *business ethics* (normative core of stakeholder theory, the parts of stakeholder theory, stakeholder legitimacy, CSR); (2) *strategic management* (economic justification for stakeholder theory, stakeholder influences on company strategies), (3) *finance* (a foundation for stakeholder theory in finance, shareholders vs. stakeholders from a finance perspective), (4) *accounting* (accounting for company influence on stakeholders and society, stakeholder influence on other accounting practices); (5) *marketing*

(core stakeholder concepts in marketing; (6) *management* (the stakeholder perspective in the “soft” side of management, the stakeholder perspective in the “hard” sciences of management).

Neither Laplume et al. (2008) nor Parmar et al. (2010) mention strategic communication as a specific research themes or research discipline. Both reviews come close to discussing a network perspective on organizations and their stakeholders. However, intermediaries is never thematized as such.

Corporate Communication: Research on Organization-Stakeholder Relationships

While it is easy to gain an overview of stakeholder research in the field of business administration, it is harder to do the same in corporate communication. So far, Frandsen and Johansen (2014a) is the closest you get to a state of the art review.

Until a decade ago, the interest in studying OSRs from a corporate communication perspective was modest, and the concept of stakeholder was taken for granted and remained implicit. Today, however, we see a growing number of OSR studies in corporate communication including the concept of emotional stakeholders (Luoma-Aho, 2005); a stakeholder approach to internal communication (Welch and Jackson, 2007); the conceptualization of OSRs as a dialogue or co-creation (Johansen and Nielsen, 2011); studies of how organizations communicate with multiple stakeholders (Hutt, 2012); and how different groups of stakeholders interpret the company’s communication differently (Helm, 2007).

Although corporate communication scholars are aware of the complexity of OSRs and have turned *integration* into one of the key concepts of the discipline, intermediaries still do not figure on their research agenda.

Public Relations: Research on Organization-Public Relationships

The study of OPRs in public relations is comprehensive and has been reviewed in several publications (Ledingham, 2008). It is possible to identify two traditions conducting research within two specific areas: *relationship attributes* and *scales to measure relationship quality*.

The first tradition is represented by relationship management theory. The scholars belonging to this approach have identified five relationship attributes or dimensions: trust, openness, involvement, investment and commitment (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998). The five dimensions have more recently been clustered into three groups or types of relationships (personal, professional, and community) (Ledingham, 2003).

The second tradition is represented by the Excellence Theory. The scholars working within this tradition have identified four relationship attributes: control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Huang, 1997). Subsequently, this list has been expanded with two more attributes and turned into an organization-public relationship measurement scale (Hon and Grunig, 1999).

The research on OPRs in public relations seems to peak at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millenium. The overall impression is that of a group of scholars searching for a normative definition of the *good* relationship between an organization and its stakeholders. The complexity of OPRs, including the role of intermediaries, has still not been addressed properly in public relations research. Recently, however, Heath (2013) has argued for “a complex and thoughtful approach to relationships, one that acknowledges that relationships are not inherently positive and understands how they are co-defined and negotiated discursively” (p. 426).

Developing a General Theory of Intermediaries

We would like to begin this section with two important comments. First, we would like to emphasize that the concept of intermediary as such is a *relative* concept, that is, a concept that always will be apprehended from a specific perspective; either that of the focal organization or that of a specific stakeholder group. Put differently, an intermediary has its own intermediaries (in the broad sense of the word). Second, we would also like to emphasize that ultimately *all* organizations and stakeholders can serve as intermediaries to each other. This brings up one of the key questions in this paper: What is the difference between a stakeholder and an intermediary?

What Is an Intermediary? An Attempt to Define the Concept

Before we present our definition of an intermediary we would like to introduce a distinction between four different conceptual models: (1) a simple, two-parts model which serves as the basis of the traditional dyadic and linear understanding of organization-stakeholder relationships; (2) a more complex, three-parts model which includes intermediaries; (3) an even more complex five-parts model which includes the media defined as an intermediary; and (4) a network model which includes the three previous models together with some other relationships.

The simple, two-parts model (see Figure 1) describes the relationship between a focal organization and a specific stakeholder group. This relationship can be a one-way or two-way relationship, it can be positive or negative, in singular or plural, but it remains a two-parts model.

Much of the previous crisis communication research is based on this model. An early version of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) applies relationship management as its theoretical framework defining an organizational crisis as 'relational damage' taking place within a 'relational history' (Coombs, 2000; Coombs and Holladay, 2001). The purpose of the crisis response strategies examined by crisis communication scholars is to protect and/or repair the reputation of the organization in crisis, but only at the corporate level.

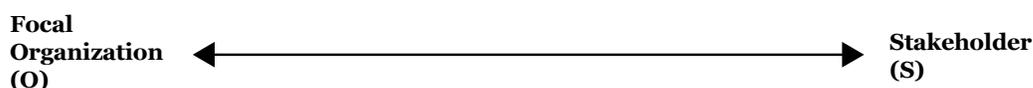


Figure 1. Organisation/stakeholder relationship model

The more complex, three-parts model (see Figure 2) describes the relationships between a focal organization, an intermediary (type I) and one or more specific stakeholder groups. These relationships form a relational configuration where it is difficult to isolate one relationship from the others.



Figure 2a. Intermediary model (type I) from the perspective of the organization.

As the relationship between a focal organization and its stakeholders in most cases is a two-way relationship, both the organization and the stakeholders will each have their own intermediaries (see Figure 2b). As we will see later, this is in fact the case in the small case study illustrating our theory at the end of the paper.



Figure 2b. Intermediary model (type I) from the perspective of the stakeholders.

The even more complex, five-parts model (see Figure 3) describes the relationships between a focal organisation, one or more intermediaries, the media (defined as an intermediary type II), and one or more specific stakeholder groups.

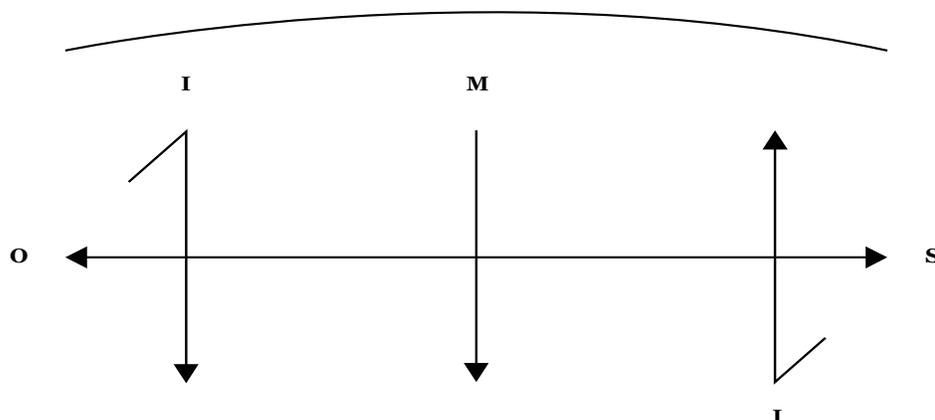


Figure 3. Media model (intermediary type II).

The network model (see Figure 4) is the most complex of all the models and includes the relationships between all the types of actors mentioned above.

Friedman and Miles review two important contributions to a network theory of stakeholders: (1) Rowley's (1997, 2000) network theory of stakeholder influences and the concepts of density (interconnectedness between stakeholders) and centrality (position in the network relative to others), and (2) Frooman's (1999) theory of stakeholder strategies, especially the idea of indirect strategies through an ally.

So far, only very few scholars have applied the network model in crisis communication research. Frandsen and Johansen (2010, 2013) developed a theory of the Rhetorical Arena (RAT). Instead of examining how a focal organization in crisis tries to protect and/or repair its reputation among key stakeholders (cf. Figure 1), this multi-vocal approach studies the multiple voices that start communicating about, to, with, against or past each other, when a crisis breaks out. Ham, Hong and Cameron (2012) examined how different competing companies belonging to the same industry handle the same crisis, and how the crisis management of one company can have an impact on the crisis management of other companies.

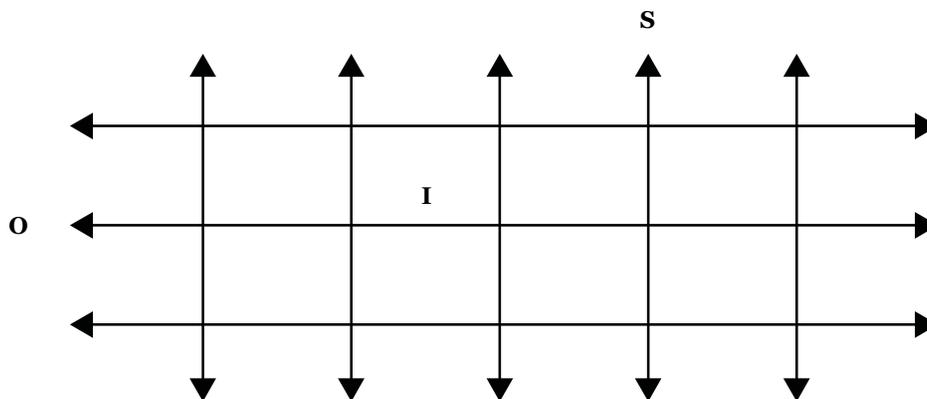


Figure 4. Network model.

A fundamental issue related to all the conceptual models presented above concerns the ontological status of relationships. Are they objective relationships “out there”, that is, relationships existing independently of how the involved organizations, stakeholders and intermediaries perceive these relationships? This is the position defended, among many others, by Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000). Or are they, on the contrary, social constructions created by the actors’ ongoing interpretations and interactions with each other inside and outside these relationships? Relationships are not only perceived by the actors, who participate in these relationships; they are also perceived from without by outsiders not participating in the relationships. Unfortunately, we do not have space enough to address this important issue in details in our paper.

We have already stressed the fact that all organizations and stakeholders can serve as intermediaries to each other (in the broad sense of the word). However, the intermediaries we are interested in are the actors whose primary function or mission is to mediate, that is, to represent and intervene in the relationship between a focal organization and its stakeholders. Thus, their stakes are strongly related to the stakes of the organization and/or its stakeholders. The competitors of a private company, for example, can be considered intermediaries, but it is not part of their primary function or mission to act as such. Therefore, the models in Figure 2a, Figure 2b and Figure 3 are the most relevant for our purpose.

We define an intermediary in the following way:

An intermediary is an actor, that is, an individual, a group of individuals, an organization, or a meta-organization, who belongs to a specific area in society (e.g., a specific industry, a specific organizational field and/or a specific sector), and whose primary function or mission is to mediate, that is, to represent an organization and/or a specific stakeholder group, and/or to intervene in the relationship between them either by furthering or by impeding the interests and activities of the organization in question and/or its stakeholders in a specific situation or over time.

Clarification of the Theoretical Underpinnings

Inspired by Friedman and Miles (2006), we apply an *analytic* approach in our theory of intermediaries. Like our two British colleagues, we claim that it is too premature to consider normative theory to be the core of stakeholder/intermediary theory. Friedman and Miles (2006) provide four arguments for choosing an analytic approach: (1) there is a lack of consistency in normative stakeholder theory; (2) descriptive stakeholder theory is at too early a stage of development; (3) the descriptive basis of much normative stakeholder theory needs to be recognized; and (4) descriptive stakeholder theory can lead to changes in normative stakeholder theory (pp. 136-139).

Which kind of ‘grand theory’ of organization, management and communication do we need to develop a theory of intermediaries? Resource dependence theory (RDT) seems to be an obvious choice. According to this theory, organizations (and stakeholder groups) depend on resources located in their environment. These resources are often in the hands of other organizations (and stakeholder groups) creating patterns of dependence. Thus, resources and power are closely linked: organization A's power over organization B is equal to organization B's dependence on organization A's resources. From this perspective, intermediaries can be seen as actors intervening directly or indirectly in the patterns of dependence.

Frooman (1999) applied RDT in his theory of stakeholder influence strategies. He defines intermediaries as *allies* or resource providers that are able to manipulate the flow of resources between organizations and stakeholders - in favor of the latter. Friedman and Miles (2006) disagree with Frooman (1999) claiming that not all intermediaries have control of the flow of resources, but have to intervene in the organization/stakeholder relationship in other ways.

Thus, resource dependence theory cannot stand alone. In order to describe and explain the behavior of intermediaries, including their strategic communication, in specific contexts, and in order to account for the emergence and development of intermediaries, we could introduce the neo-institutional theory of organizations.

Which taxonomic criteria? An attempt to classify intermediaries

Intermediaries represent a very heterogeneous group of actors. This is also clear from the concrete examples listed up by Friedman and Miles (2006), both before and after the chapter devoted to intermediaries in their book (chapter 8):

- "Intermediaries that profit from gathering, analysing, and selling information to stakeholders: stock analysts, consumer reports" (p. 108)
- "Those that exist to support stakeholder relations compared with those that exist for other reasons but become embroiled in stakeholder relations"; "Intermediaries concerned with dealing with short-term problems between corporations and stakeholders" or "long-term frameworks"; intermediaries "interested in the interests of the parties" or "interested in the relationship itself" (p. 134)
- "Intermediary organizations such as the media, activist groups, and government" (p. 189)
- "Support intermediaries, such as trade unions, ombudsman, professional associations, and the media" (p. 190)
- "Several intermediaries were formed including the United Shareholders Association, the Council of Institutional Investors (CII), Interfaith Centre for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), and Institutional Shareholder Services" (p. 202)
- "Governments as intermediaries" (p. 206)
- Foremen, elected and unelected workers, trade unions, environmental NGOs, left-wing activist groups, human rights groups, consumer rights groups, government organizations, supplier organizations, trade associations, local planning departments and action groups, lobbying and research organizations, and, finally, the media (following the order of appearance in chapter 8)

In spite of all these concrete examples, Friedman and Miles (2006) do not establish a typology of intermediaries in the proper sense of the word. Subsection 5.4.3 in their book is entitled "Categorizing intermediaries", but it doesn't contain a full-fledged typology.

In direct continuation of our definition of an intermediary we have set up a series of taxonomic criteria allowing us to classify intermediaries in empirical studies (see Table 1). It goes without mentioning that the list is not exhaustive.

Table 1

Taxonomic criteria

Areas of society in which the intermediary is active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry • Organizational field (reference)
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sector(s)
Organizational form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual • Group of individuals • Organization (of individuals) • Meta-organization (of organizations)
Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pure intermediaries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intermediary of the organization(s) ○ Intermediary of the stakeholder group(s) ○ Shared intermediaries • Intermediaries that are also stakeholders
Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plus representation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Formel representation ((s)elected by others) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plus/minus membership of the intermediary ○ Informal representation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No membership of the intermediary ○ Self (s)elected 'representation' • No representation
Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furthering the interests and activities of the organization(s) and/or the stakeholder group(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To support, facilitate, coordinate, mobilize, campaign in favor of, etc. • Impeding the interests and activities of the organization(s) and/or the stakeholder group(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To hinder, to campaign against, etc. • More neutral types of intervention
Strategic communication of the intermediaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External communication of the organization and/or the stakeholder group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategic responses to a reputation commons problem • Extra communication (meta-organizations) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To handle the balance between collaboration and competition • Internal communication of the organization and/or the stakeholder group

Areas of Society in Which the Intermediary is Active

Organizations, stakeholders and intermediaries are active in and across various societal and organizational contexts such as industries, organizational fields (Wooten and Hoffman, 2008), and sectors. These contexts are structured in specific ways forcing the actors to adopt specific behaviors. To put it differently, the areas mentioned above display different degrees of institutionalization developed over time.

In the case study conducted to illustrate our theory of intermediaries (cf. the following section), the fact that it is obligatory for organizations such as the Danish fashion company Bestseller to report the discovery of a defective product that is unfit for intended use to the Environmental Protection Agency (a governmental intermediary), is an indicator of a high degree of institutionalization across industries and organizational fields in the private sector. Similarly, the fact that, at the same time, there is disagreement among competing companies such as Bestseller, IC Companies and H&M on how to manage a product recall, is an indicator of a low degree of institutionalization in the fashion industry in Denmark.

Organizational form

Intermediaries vary in size and may consist of everything from an individual (e.g., a foreman negotiating working conditions on behalf of a team), a *group of individuals* (e.g., a committee negotiating working conditions on behalf of the employees), an *organization* (of individuals) (e.g., the individual trade unions) to a *meta-organisation* (of organizations) (e.g., LO or the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions). An intermediary can also be formal or informal, permanent or ad hoc.

As intermediaries grow bigger and bigger, it becomes necessary to study them as organizations in their own right with specific processes, structures and cultures (Friedman and Miles, 2006, p. 223). Meta-organizations are a growing group of “organizations of organizations”, which can be investigated applying the theoretical framework of Arhne and Brunsson (2008). Not only confederations of trade unions representing the internal stakeholders (employees) of an organization, but also trade associations representing groups of organizations are meta-organizations.

Status

Intermediaries can be found on both sides of the “arrow of influence”. The focal organization has its own intermediaries; and so have the stakeholders. That is the reason why we made a distinction between the two models in Figure 2a and Figure 2b in the section where we presented our definition of an intermediary. It is of course tempting to conceptualize this phenomenon as an instance of *symmetry*. However, as pointed out by Friedman and Miles, (2006), there are important structural asymmetries. Some stakeholders are organizations of the same type as the focal organization (e.g., competitors, suppliers, clients in B-to-B relationships). Other stakeholders are people, and not organizations. In general, there are important differences in “power, strategic flexibility, and strategic consistency” (p. 225) between the focal organization and its stakeholders.

Another aspect of status is the fact that intermediaries are able to shift from acting as a pure intermediary to acting as a stakeholder in its own right. One of the consequences of such a shift is that the intermediary then becomes equipped with its own stakes and its own reputation. We know very little about when, where, how and especially *why* these shifts in status happen. It is probably a question of strategic behavior triggered by the complex network of organization/stakeholder relations (cf. the network model in Figure 4).

Representation

Representation concerns the relationship between the intermediary and the focal organization. Here it seems useful to distinguish not only between representation and no representation, but also between various degrees of representation. We find the highest degree of

representation is the relationship where the focal organization is member of and formally represented by the intermediary in specific forums (such as trade associations and trade unions = intermediary type I). We find the lowest degree of representation in the relationship where there is no formal or informal connection at all between the focal organization and the intermediary (such as the media = intermediary type II). Between these two extremes, there are several other types of connection between the focal organization and the intermediary (e.g., interest groups).

Another important distinction is the distinction between intermediaries that are (s)elected by the organization and intermediaries that are not (s)elected by the organization, or that are self-(s)elected or appointed by themselves.

Intervention

We make a distinction between two basic types of intervention in the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders: an intermediary can either intervene by *furthering* the interests and activities of the organization and/or the stakeholders or it can intervene by *impeding* the interest and activities of the organization and/or the stakeholders. By furthering we mean, for example, to support, to facilitate, to coordinate, to mobilize, to campaign in favor of, etc. By impeding we mean, for example, to hinder, to campaign against, etc.

Strategic Communication

The specific status and function of intermediaries has an impact on how they communicate strategically. If we want to study meta-organizations as intermediaries we also need to introduce a new category of strategic communication called *extra communication* (inspired by the concept of extranet in ICT). Extra communication differs from the external and internal communication of organizations and refers to the communication activities taking place inside a group of organizations to which outsiders do not have access (Frandsen and Johansen, 2014b).

Illustration of the theory of intermediaries: The crisis communication of trade associations

On July 7, 2011, www.business.dk, a business news portal owned by the Danish newspaper Berlingske Tidende, released an article headlined: “Cancer-causing children’s clothes from Bestseller”. In this article, Bestseller, one of Denmark’s largest clothing and accessories companies, is accused of two types of wrongdoing. First, Bestseller is accused of selling children’s clothes (by the brand Name It) containing a too high level of AZO colors. AZO colors may cause bladder cancer and has been added into the EU list of prohibited chemicals substances. Second, Bestseller is accused of failing to disseminate information in a sufficient way about the discovery of AZO colors in its product. Instead of announcing a product recall in the mass media, as most Danish companies do, Bestseller has limited the information activities related to the product recall to putting up small notes inside the stores and on its corporate website (the web shop) informing clients about the recall.

Thus, the Danish company was facing a potential double crisis: a product crisis (hereafter named crisis I) which is overlapped by a crisis management crisis, that is, the bad handling of the product recall (hereafter named crisis II) (for a definition of a double crisis, see Johansen and Frandsen, 2007 and Grebe, 2013).

In the following weeks, the Danish news media released a large number of articles in which a series of actors start communicating. Apart from the news media and some public

relations experts commenting on the course of events, it is the Environmental Protection Agency, the Competition and Consumer Authority, trade associations such as the Danish Chamber of Commerce, Danish Fashion & Textile and Danish Fashion Institute, competitors such as IC Companies and H&M, and finally, of course, Bestseller itself.

We want to highlight three aspects of this crisis that we find particularly important in a theory of intermediaries:

(1) The Intermediaries

What is interesting about this case, is not the Bestseller crisis as such (for a more detailed study of Bestseller's double crisis, see Frandsen and Johansen, 2014b), but the many different *intermediaries* representing and/or intervening in the relationship between the organization in crisis (Bestseller) and specific stakeholder groups such as the clients.

(2) Three Different Types of Reputation

The three trade associations have to manage three different, but inter-related types of *reputation*: (a) the reputation of the organization in crisis, that is, Bestseller; (b) the reputation of the fashion industry in Denmark (in the next section, we will redefine this type of reputation as reputation commons); and (c) the reputation of the trade associations themselves. In such a complex situation, managing reputation is the same as managing *reputational interdependence* (Barnett and Hoffman, 2008). We will return to this broad approach to reputation in the last section of our paper.

(3) Strategic Ambiguity

The fact that the trade associations have to manage no less than three different types of reputation in connection with a double crisis also has an impact on the crisis response strategies applied by them. There are clear signs of the use of strategic ambiguity in their crisis communication.

At the beginning of the double crisis, Bestseller defends its corporate reputation by regretting what has happened: "We try to find the mistakes before the products reach the shops. It hasn't happen in all the cases, and we are sorry for that" (business.dk, 7.7.2011). This response strategy is clearly related to the defective product (crisis I). At the same time, Bestseller also promises to change the company's product recall procedure. This response strategy is clearly related to the bad handling of the product recall (crisis II). However, Bestseller does not change the product recall procedure, and three weeks later, the following comment from Bestseller appears in a newspaper article: "The communication department {of Bestseller} confirms that it has been decided not to publish the product recall in the press because it is not required by the law" (business.dk, 1.8.2011).

What are the reactions of the intermediaries to crisis I and II? The largest Danish trade association in the fashion industry, Danish Chamber of Commerce, is in choc emphasizing that also the producers of fashion clothes must follow the law:

- "We have received an invitation from the Minister of the Environment to a meeting concerning this problem, and we have of course accepted the invitation. We have said yes because this is problematic. The rules of the field are very, very clear and they have been clear for years. And they must of course be respected" (CEO Jens Birkelund in Børsen, 26.7.2011).

- “The law is the law, and you must follow the law. If you are only allowed to drive 50 miles per hour, you cannot drive 70 and then claim that you didn’t know it was illegal” (Berlingske Tidende, 10.8.2011).

Danish Fashion & Textile, another important trade association in the fashion industry, is a little more ambiguous in its crisis communication defending the reputation of both the industry and Bestseller:

- “It is not only a very annoying, but also a very problematic case due to the fact that we are dealing with cancer-causing chemicals” (CEO Kasper Hilligsøe Eis) (Børsen, 26.7.12)
- “Danish Fashion & Textile is not of the opinion that it is a general problem in the industry. Nevertheless, the CEO of the trade association, Kasper Hillingsøe Eis, is not completely sure. “Smaller companies have fewer suppliers, which leads to fewer mistakes. On the other hand, when such things can happen to large and professional companies such as Bestseller and IC Companys, it can also happen to other companies” (CEO Kasper Hilligsøe Eis) (Børsen, 26.7.12)
- “In this area [REACH – how to inform consumers about dangerous products] it is not evident by itself what to do, and what to say. It is clearly something that we need to sort out” (environmental manager Aage Feddersen) (Berlingske Tidende, 10.8.2011)

Finally, Danish Fashion Institute (DAFI) attacks Bestseller’s reputation concerning crisis I, but defends Bestseller concerning crisis II:

- ”I have not heard about anything similar before; as a consumer I would like to know if I have bought a bag that is going to be destroyed because it is dangerous, Eva Kruse, CEO of Danish Fashion institute, declares [...]. However, it isn’t Bestseller that needs to be checked upon, but the law, she claims” (Berlingske Tidende, 10.8.2011).

In their management of the different types of reputation, the three trade associations follow different paths. Where the Danish Chamber of Commerce is very law-oriented protecting its own reputation, the two other trade associations are more ambiguous in their crisis communication trying to defend both the reputation of the industry as such and the reputation of Bestseller. If we had applied a narrow approach to reputation (cf. the next section), focusing exclusively on the corporate level, we would not have been able to study this example of reputational interdependence. Only a broad approach to reputation, including a theory of intermediaries, makes it possible to do this.

Consequences for future research

What are the consequences of this theory of intermediaries for future research in strategic communication in general and in crisis communication in particular? We will answer this question by focusing on one of the key concepts in corporate communication and public relations: the concept of *reputation*.

As mentioned in the section on the four conceptual models, previous crisis communication research has focused on examining how a particular organization in crisis applies specific response strategies in its communication with key stakeholders. The primary function of

these crisis response strategies is to protect, repair, and/or change the reputation of the organization in crisis.

The approach to reputation applied by this type of crisis communication research can be described as a narrow approach (cf. Figure 1 in the section with the conceptual models). Based on a *temporal context* (past vs. present), reputation is defined as the stakeholders' collective judgment of a particular organization and its performance over time within selected areas. The current actions of the organization are judged relative to its prior actions (Barnett and Pollock, 2012; Barnett og Hoffman, 2008).

Recently, however, a growing number of management and organization scholars have started studying the inter-organizational dimension's impact on the creation of an organization's reputation. Based on a *comparative context* (one organization vs. other organizations), reputation is defined as an interdependent entity: "The company you keep affects the company you keep. That is, a firm's reputation depends upon more than just its own actions. The actions of surrounding firms also shape a firm's reputation" (Barnett and Hoffman, 2008, p. 1). Thus, an organization can look better by comparison with other organizations. One company's poor behavior can taint the reputation of all the companies in an industry; on the other hand, one company's exemplary behavior can ratchet up the expectations.

Some of this research is highly relevant to the study of intermediaries in strategic communication. A good example of this is the concept of *reputation commons* (King et al., 2002), that is, the understanding of reputation as a common resource shared by all the organizations operating within a specific industry; normally, these organizations will also be members of the same trade association(s). Sometimes the reputation commons of an industry are over-exploited. When together, the organizations/members of an industry/a trade association want to build up, protect, repair or change the reputation of the industry/trade association; when alone, however, each of these organizations/members often tend to over-exploit the reputation commons. A crisis involving one or more of these organizations/members can be seen as a specific type of over-exploitation.

Reputation commons turn into a *reputation commons problem* (1) when the stakeholders do not have information enough to distinguish between the individual organizations/members of the industry/trade association, and (2) when the stakeholders are able to do something to the organizations, that is, when they are able to punish or to reward. The organizations/members can try to find a solution to the reputation commons problem by responding strategically in two different ways. First, they can try to reduce the threat of stakeholder punishment by improving their collective performance, by using perception management, by creating institutional barriers (alliances), or by setting up a common code of conduct designed by their trade association (in order to avoid free riding among the members). Second, they can try to 'privatize' the reputation commons, that is, to highlight the difference between the good and the bad organizations/members of the industry/trade association.

To conclude: intermediaries challenge our understanding of OSRs and OPRs, including the concept of reputation, forcing us to include not only the corporate level, but also the inter-organizational level, in our study of strategic communication in general and crisis communication in particular.

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Telling the Untold Management: Transparent Leadership in Small Businesses

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Abstract

In response to the fast growth of the small-scale industries, this case study aims to identify the role of transparent leadership in a small business setting. The research was conducted in a small Midwestern company that works in PR industry, using two qualitative research methods: observation and interview. The aim is to assist small-business owners and employees to discover the leadership style that would maximize their company's productivity and build trust in the workplace.

Introduction

Leadership is one of the decisive factors in shaping a company's success. Previous studies of the area have shown that an organizational leader could significantly influence the followers' practice and contribute to the organization's strategic communication (Hwang & Cameron, 2008). The role of leadership in a work situation also has long been known as a determinant of organizational effectiveness, as the leadership style that a leader adopts often affects company productivity (Bowers & Seashore, 1966).

Among different organizational management styles studied in the public relations field, *transparent leadership* – an effort that establishes participatory atmosphere and offers substantial information to the employees – has been considered the more favorable leadership style compared to traditional leadership theories that emphasized one's charisma (Rawlins, 2009). Scholars have stressed the importance of transparency in company management, referring to it as the predictor of organizational reputation, PR practitioners' work engagement, as well as their willingness to adopt accommodation toward a public (Kim et al., 2012).

The area of strategic communication studies, however, has largely overlooked small-scale industries and the booming startup scene in addressing transparent leadership. According to a recent statistics, there are almost 28 million small businesses in the U.S., categorizing more than half of the American working population as small business employees. The number of small-sized enterprises in the U.S. has vastly increased over the past 30 years, and an annual business report indicated that about 543,000 new businesses are created each month. (Nazar, 2013) Despite such magnitude, however, most PR scholars have dissociated their studies from a large portion of the U.S. working population by focusing solely on some of the largest corporations (e.g. Fortune 500) or failing to consider company size as an independent variable.

The official definition of a *small company* comes from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), which defines small businesses as firms with fewer than 500 employees. Based on the SBA's definition, this study uses the number of employees to interpret company size. Because little research has been conducted regarding transparent leadership in small businesses, this study adopts a grounded theory approach, using in-depth analysis of a case to generate theory for further research. Non-participant observation and individual interviews were conducted in a small privately held company; small businesses that are seen as high-impact firms by the SBA were not taken into consideration for this study.

The study interviewed 10 small business employees working for a company where a leader has great influence on the workers. The study explores whether transparent leadership exists in small companies, and how it affects worker attitude towards the company. The theory generated by the data is compared and contrasted with previous studies that have dealt with leadership style.

A case study on small firm management will provide a rare snapshot of leadership style in employers with fewer employees, expanding the area of public relations studies by helping its transparent leadership theory become applicable to a larger working population in the U.S. The research outcomes will assist small-business owners and employees to survive and succeed in markets dominated by big brands. It will also support future business leaders in choosing ideal leadership characteristics for their entrepreneurship.

Literature Review

An overview of previous studies that looked at small businesses and their growth needs will help provide a better understanding of the nature of small businesses. Public relations

research on the importance of leadership style will also be discussed to define transparent leadership in theoretical perspectives and highlight its strengths in business settings.

Characteristics of Small Businesses

Business scholars have defined “small businesses” in a variety of ways, but the most commonly used – and perhaps the most formal – definition comes from the SBA as stated previously. In addition to its numerical definition, SBA articulates that a small business is “independently owned and operated and not dominant in its field of operation” (Small Business Administration, 2003). Some of the main competitive advantages that small businesses have over larger firms include their ability to remain flexible and responsive to the business environment (Barringer et al. 1998). During growth period, however, smaller companies face the issue of resource constraints, such as undercapitalization and less access to managerial skills (Street & Meister, 2004, p. 475). Researchers in the past have largely characterized growth of a company in terms of annual sales and number of employees (Churchill & Lewis, 1983).

Indeed, the main interest of a small business often lies in becoming a larger firm, and it goes through distinctive growth patterns. Scott and Bruce (1987) present five stages of growth in small businesses: *inception* (one operating unit operating in a single market with limited channels of distribution); *survival* (business attracting new entrants); *growth* (profitable stage where the business faces demands of expanding into new markets); *expansion* (business experiencing regular management reports and decentralized authority as it grows further) and *maturity* (business no longer considered “small”) (p. 49-51).

Scholars emphasized the importance of leadership in each stage, and some highlighted the gradual change in a leader’s role during business growth. Steinmetz’s (1969) model of small business growth focuses on the role of an entrepreneur. According to the model, leadership style in a small firm must move through four stages for survival. The first stage is *direct supervision*, which is the simplest stage where an owner acts as a manager that delegate work to others. To move on to the next stage, the manager should become an administrator, and this stage is labeled *supervised supervision* – here, an organization experiences very rapid growth (p. 30). A leader should then learn to delegate works to key managers and move on to the *indirect control* stage. Stage IV, or the final stage, is called *divisional organization*, and this is where the business is considered to have “arrived,” having considerably reduced odds of death. The final stage is characterized by total indirect control upon the part of the owner (p. 31). Steinmetz’s model of growth implies that ownership become less involved with daily matters as growth occurs, receiving more information indirectly from sources (Street & Meister, 2004, p. 476).

The classic studies on small business growth demonstrate the fundamentals of business survival and underscore the importance of adopting the right leadership style for a small company to prosper, or in other words, to move on to the next stage of growth. Compared to business scholars, public relations researchers have looked at leadership in larger companies with more emphasis on the employees, focusing on the types of company structures and information flow.

Transparent Leadership

The importance of transparency lies in an organization’s need to gain trust and loyalty of customers, employees and investors. Previous studies suggest transparency assists an organization in building reputation of being honest and open among key stakeholders. Public relations scholars provide various definitions of transparency in an institutional setting. Rawlins

(2009) defines transparency as “the opposite of secrecy” – here, secrecy means intentionally hiding one’s actions. Transparency, therefore, refers to deliberately revealing an organization’s actions, practices and policies (p. 73). Balkin’s (1999) research on mass media categorizes transparency in a political context. There are three distinct types of transparency: 1) informational; 2) participatory and; 3) accountability transparency. *Informational transparency* refers to providing knowledge about government decisions and access to government information, while *participatory transparency* allows people to participate in political decisions through fair representation. *Accountability transparency* is the third type, and it provides the ability to hold government officials accountable when they violate the law (p. 393). In organizational settings, Rawlins (2009) argues that all three types of transparency are necessary to build trust with stakeholders. For a business to be considered “transparent,” the leader/owner should provide employees the *information* that is truthful, substantial and useful; encourage *participation* of stakeholders in finding the information that they need; and have policies that holds the organization *accountable* (p. 74).

With that said, determining whether an organization is transparent often rely on communication behaviors of the leader. Some scholars define transparency as “an outcome measure of communication behaviors,” and “an exchange process between two or more entities” (Street & Meister, 2004, p. 477). Based on such definitions, Street and Meister (2004) classify transparency into two different types: external and internal. *External transparency* refers to the outcome of communication behaviors directed outside the organization, or in other words, the effort to show information flow to the customer (e.g. observability of transactions). Internal transparency, on the other hand, is described as communication behaviors within an organization (p. 477). Such behaviors include a company’s decision makers holding regular meetings to share information with employees – failing to share information with subordinates, therefore, would decrease internal transparency. Due to its intent to examine the flow of information from a business leader to the employees, and to maximize the benefits of qualitative research methods, this study mainly focuses on *internal transparency* of small businesses.

Transparency can have two directions within a company. Scholars define “upwards transparency” as the relationship where the hierarchical superior is in a position to observe the behavior and results of the subordinate, while “downwards transparency” refers to the relationship where the leader’s conduct can be observed by the subordinate (Weber, 2008).

Transparent leadership in Small Businesses

Past studies on business and management suggest that certain organizational shape or structure may help a leader to be transparent within his/her organization. Some business scholars argue that small businesses have better productivity than larger businesses because they often have a *flat organizational structure* (Garzo Jr & Yanouzas, 1969). When a company is considered to have a flat (or horizontal) structure, it implies few management layers and a broader span of authority – employees are more directly involved in the decision making process (p. 178).

The horizontal structure is known to be typical in small business settings. In terms of company productivity, the structure allows a company to respond to changing environment and customer needs faster, largely due to effective communication practices. In this structure, workers have close proximity to each other, communicating in face-to-face settings when needed rather than sharing thoughts and ideas through scheduled meetings or formalized reports (Street & Meister, 2004, p. 475).

Although there is a scant amount of research in the area of public relations that directly demonstrates the relationship between business size and transparent leadership, studies on flat organizational structure suggest that leaders of smaller firms could be more transparent (i.e. more likely to establish participatory atmosphere and offer substantial information to the employees) than those of large corporations.

Earlier studies on small businesses and transparency helped explain distinctive characteristics of smaller companies and the types of transparency in an institutional setting. Past research on growth needs of small businesses, company productivity and flat/horizontal organizational structure contribute to the understanding of small-scale industries, but they also address the need for more up-to-date research that would demonstrate the leadership style that small businesses adopt these days.

Based on the review of literature, this case study conceptualizes a “transparent leader” as the head of an organization/group who *offers substantial information to the employees, encourages participatory atmosphere, and makes every information visible to the followers for trustworthiness*. This study aims to answer the following questions concerning transparent leadership in small businesses:

- *How does transparent leadership look like in a small company?*
 - *What role does the company size play in choosing a leadership style?*
 - *How does the company structure affect transparency?*
 - *How does “growth” affect company structure and leadership style?*
 - *What is the impact of leadership style on worker attitude towards the company?*

Method

The study was conducted in a small Midwestern firm that works in the area of PR. The company was founded in 2012, and there are 23 full-time employees that create, promote and publish online articles to help content marketing programs for clients. Online news sources have recently suggested that the company is one of the most promising startup companies in the U.S., and that the founders have great influence on the employees.

Two qualitative research methods were used in this study: 1) observation of the company’s general atmosphere and regular meetings and 2) face-to-face interviews with the president and full-time employees. The researcher spent five working days for data collection (February 25th – March 3rd, 2014), with the goal of observing a typical week in a small company. Promises of anonymity were made to research participants prior to the research – for that matter, this study identifies the company simply as “S-Media,” and will use pseudonyms borrowed from an online list of the most common first names and surnames in America to identify employees (see Table 1).

A week prior to the research, the researcher was given permission by the president of S-Media, Stephanie Simpson, to attend company’s regular meetings. Stephanie then sent out an email to the entire company to explain about the research process, encouraging them to provide honest answers to the interviewer.

Observations

Observations were conducted for more than 10 hours during business hours. The researcher employed a *participant-observer* role to observe participants in their natural environment. Observations were also conducted during S-Media’s regular meetings – two Pitch Meetings and a Weekly Team Meeting were observed due to the timeframe of the study.

Table 1
Descriptions of Participants/Employees at S-Media

Pseudonyms	Title	Senior Leadership Meeting*
Stephanie Simpson	Founder / President	Yes
David O'Donnell**	Founder / CEO	Yes
Brian Davis	Vice President ***	Yes
Ashley Williams	Account Strategist	No
Rachel Moore	Account Strategist	No
Heather Thompson	Vice President***	No
Mary Harris	Director of Publications	No
Michelle Smith	Vice President***	Yes
Karen Mueller	Vice President***	Yes
Sarah Ricardo	Account Strategist	No
Amy James	Vice President***	Yes

* asks whether the person attends, or is able to attend, the senior leadership meeting

** denotes that the person was not available for an interview

*** denotes simplified job title for the confidentiality of sources (department name excluded)

Interviews

The researcher informed S-Media of the specific times that he wished to visit the company to conduct interviews, and Stephanie had a voluntary sign-up sheet for her employees to participate in research – this was to avoid the circumstances when the potential participants would be too busy, or be willing to participate in the wrong time. *Unstructured interviews* (Tracy, 2013, p. 139) were conducted, using less structured interview guide to stimulate discussion. This allowed the interviewer to adapt his questions based on the interviewee's duty at the company and to encourage further discussion when needed. To avoid asking leading questions, the interviewer did not directly ask employees about transparent leadership and horizontal structure – they were only asked as follow-up questions when the interviewees brought up the issue. 10 participants (including the president) were interviewed, and the average interview lasted 30

minutes.

Results and Discussion

The company was founded by Stephanie Simpson and David O'Donnell, who currently serve as S-Media's president and the chief executive officer respectively. The research found that David is removed from day-to-day activities within the company, and is now more focused on building partnerships; some interviewees claimed that he is moved to business development role because he is "not a great leader" who "does not have great skills dealing with [employees]." Stephanie, on the other hand, interacts with her employees on a daily basis, and is perceived as "a great young leader" and "an awesome person to work with." Observations and interviews at the company revealed that it was Stephanie's leadership (not David's) that had the most impact on the employees' daily routine at S-Media.

Being one of the most promising startup companies in the nation, S-Media was experiencing rapid growth at the time of the research. The company grew from a micro-enterprise with fewer than five employees to a business with more than 40 workers (including part-times and interns). In terms of the leader's role, Stephanie was moving to the second stage of Steinmetz's model (1969), from *direct supervision* to *supervised supervision*. She assigned those with more experience with her company as leaders of each department (there are five departments that specialize in different tasks such as Content, Account Strategy and Publication Relations), and now she is getting written reports from those leaders about team performances. Stephanie is supporting the department leaders to help those under their supervision, instead of giving direct feedback to everyone at the company on a daily basis.

The rapid growth of S-Media added a few more layers of management at the company. Some employees see a clear "pyramid structure" at S-Media – the co-founders at the top, the department leaders in the middle, and others at the bottom. During the interviews, the two co-founders and the department heads were constantly referred to as "senior leaders."

Achieving transparency during business growth

"Transparent leadership to me means that being extremely genuine and explaining the *why* behind all the decisions that you're making, and not just telling people what to do."

Stephanie Simpson, President at S-Media

Like many PR startups that aim to facilitate communication and idea flow among workers, S-Media has an open working environment. Employees are allowed to choose where to sit, and are encouraged to approach anyone at the company with ease. S-Media does not use traditional closed-door offices; instead, meetings generally take place at some highly visible areas at the company (e.g. a glass-walled meeting room near building entrance).

Modern office designs, however, only demonstrate a small portion of Stephanie's effort to achieve transparency. Employees stated that she constantly tries to spend time with them individually, and encourages them to come to her with any questions when needed. To facilitate this, Stephanie and David go out to lunch with new employees on their first day to know each of them as a person; an effort to "open up the lines of communication." A new employee is assigned a mentor at S-Media who is not in the same department, to help the newcomer feel that he/she has an advocate in the company. Even those who have not spoken with Stephanie on one-

on-one for months said they feel very comfortable with Stephanie, and that they would always be able to talk to her without arranging a meeting.

More importantly, all interviewees were confident that they were given all the information that they needed for their work at S-Media. Employees said that they *trust* Stephanie, and that she would not hide anything from them. Perhaps, their immense trust in Stephanie is the result of their previous work experiences with her. S-Media shares financial numbers with everyone in the company during its Key Performance Indicators Meeting, and decides profit sharing in an open, democratic way (it employs an employer-based rating system to evaluate, discuss and to decide who gets what amount).

According to Stephanie, employees are allowed to come up with their own titles at S-Media (at the time of the research, there were seven Vice Presidents at the company, many representing a specific department). Stephanie said that the titles at S-Media “don’t mean a lot internally, but more purpose of externally” to explain to clients and others. This is an attempt to encourage people to “respect each other for the work that they’re doing,” and not the titles that they have. During the interview, she constantly referred the department leaders as “direct support,” instead of heads or managers.

Growth changing company structure

“We’re not horizontal anymore. We used to be. [The structure] is mostly flat, but with the little bumps here and there. We try to act like they don’t exist, but they’re totally there. I can’t think of a term for any structure I’ve seen like this before. But it’s not horizontal.”

Karen Mueller, Vice President at S-Media

Interviewees said that Stephanie and David heavily promoted the term “horizontal” during the year they found S-Media. They emphasized that the company has (and will continue to have) a horizontal structure, where everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinions to anyone on any issues. Very few employees, however, still believe that the company they are working for has a completely flat structure. Rather, they see a clear division between the leaders and the rest. The department leaders, whom Stephanie referred to as “direct support,” were constantly cited as “senior leaders” by the employees.

One aspect of S-Media that a transparency advocate may find problematic is the presence of “Senior Leadership Meeting.” The meeting started around September of 2013 when there were about 15 employees at the company. It does not have an official name – some employees simply refer to it as “Six People Meeting.” The meeting involves the president herself and the leaders of each department. One of the leaders stated that Stephanie was initially against the idea of having such meeting, but inevitably decided to have it since it became harder to come up with a decision as the company hired more and more people. Although many employees believe the Senior Leadership Meeting occurs every month, Stephanie claimed that the meeting could well be cancelled when it is “unnecessary” (i.e. when there is nothing to discuss about).

The main purpose of the meeting is to give department leaders an opportunity to get together (because they do not have much chance to discuss things with each other on a daily basis), give updates on team performance, talk about new opportunities that the company sees, and then initiate a project based on the discussion. The senior leaders insisted that they are “pretty open with everything” that are discussed in the meeting. When the senior leaders initiate

a project, leaders of each department send out information to the ones that are “under the vertical.” Michelle Smith, who was the first person to join Stephanie and David to work at S-Media, said, “Nothing is really ever secretive, it may just be when is the right time to announce it.”

Senior leaders, however, do not proudly promote the presence of their meeting. Ashley Williams, who joined the company in 2013, did not know about the six people meeting until she accidentally saw her supervisor’s (department leader) calendar. Heather Thompson, who joined S-Media when it had six full-time employees, said she is curious about the discussion at the Senior Leadership Meeting, although she feels like she is getting all the information that she needs to perform better. Heather claimed that the senior leaders sometimes give “blunt explanations about things.” Indeed, not *everything* discussed in the Senior Leadership Meeting gets sent out to the employees. For instance, people’s struggles at work and the hiring processes are kept confidential.

The gradual shift in company structure is also reflected in the way employees make suggestions to the company. S-Media employees use 15Five, which is “employee feedback software” that functions like a suggestion box. Every week, all employees get a chance to share exciting things (biggest wins), challenges and ideas to improve S-Media using 15Five. The reports go to the department leaders for the review process. Then the selected ideas and suggestions are passed to Stephanie, who used to read everyone’s posts when the company had fewer employees. Employees cannot read what others wrote on 15Five; only department leaders can. With that said, 15Five could well serve as a *suggestion filtering tool* for senior leaders.

Based on the previous notion, a flat (or horizontal) structure represents a workplace where employees are more directly involved in the decision making process. The span of authority was getting narrower at S-Media.

Decreased transparency, still enough for the employees

“I still believe that it is necessary for us to continue the entrepreneurial mindset that we have here, that we keep things as horizontal as possible when *it makes sense*.”

Michelle Smith, Vice President at S-Media

The presence of Senior Leadership Meeting and the way S-Media uses 15Five today are largely affected by the rapid growth of the company, which makes it almost impossible for the growing business to have a complete flat structure. Senior leaders claim that Senior Leadership Meeting was necessary to make faster and better decisions about the company and 15Five was an attempt to get to know an employee’s opinions better without distracting others with unnecessary rumors. Karen Mueller, who serves as the Vice President at S-Media, said Senior Leadership Meeting prevents problems and “not-so-happy things about the company” from manifesting into bigger problems.

One of the aims of this study was to examine the impact of leadership style on worker attitude towards a small company. Based on the previous notion of transparent leadership, Stephanie’s leadership style could still be considered as transparent, because she *offers substantial information to the employees, encourages participatory atmosphere, and makes every information visible to the followers for trustworthiness*. One may argue that, because Stephanie and the department leaders do not share “every information,” they are not as transparent as they

wish to be. One should note, however, that the majority of research that has examined the effect of transparent leadership was mainly focused on the employees' perspectives of leadership (e.g. conducting employee satisfaction surveys).

Employees trusted Stephanie, and showed a very positive attitude toward the company.

Most participants were certain that they were given all the information about S-Media, and were confident that they would learn anything they are curious about the company if they ask Stephanie face-to-face. Employees, however, said that they often did not bother asking about certain things about S-Media simply because they were not interested or they knew that those things would not help them perform better. In other words, the workers at S-Media perceived their company to be *transparent enough*.

Although the growth of the company created a pyramid structure at S-Media, employees agree that having a supervisor, or direct support, makes their job easier. Since the company grew older, the gap between more experienced employees and newcomers increased, which made it impossible to keep the horizontal structure where everyone's opinion on a critical business issue could have the same value. In S-Media, the more experienced train beginners and give feedback on their performance. Senior leaders agreed that the current system has reduced confusion and has led to greater productivity, while some of the employees liked having "direct support" just because it became easier for them to ask work-related questions. This contradicts previous studies that stated flat organizational structure (often found in small businesses) contributes to better productivity.

Although employees at S-Media were highly optimistic about their workplace, most of the senior leaders acknowledge the fact that the internal transparency in the company has inevitably decreased and there always will be information that they will not share with those under the vertical to increase company productivity. S-Media currently has strong upwards transparency; the senior leaders work close to the workers, trying to help them succeed. The company's downwards transparency, however, is gradually decreasing, meaning that it is becoming harder for the employees to observe their supervisors' conducts and intentions behind decisions. The relationship between strong upwards transparency and worker attitude toward leadership needs further research.

Conclusion

The focus of this case study was to discover the role of transparent leadership in a small company. The study aimed to see the impact of business size on leadership style and structure that a company adopts. The results support previous notion that a leader becomes less involved with daily matters as growth occurs. They, however, contradict previous knowledge of company structure by demonstrating that although it is perhaps inevitable for a small business to change its structure from flat (horizontal) to a more vertical, traditional structure as it experiences rapid growth, it is possible for a leader to achieve transparency and maintain trust in the workplace. The goal of this study was to provide a snapshot of leadership style in small businesses, and the topic requires further research.

Limitations and Suggestions for further research

The study conducted 10 interviews with employees that volunteered to participate in the research. Voluntary response samples are always biased. Future qualitative studies need to conduct more hours of observations in multiple companies, and should employ *ethnographic*

interview method to reach participants spontaneously. Conducting a quantitative study is necessary to generate a larger amount of data and to generalize the findings.

Many of the previous research that discussed transparent leadership have focused on how employees view their presidents or supervisors. More studies need to address leaders' opinions on transparency to conceptualize "making *every* information visible." There is also a need to distinguish micro-enterprises and small businesses to extend the study on the relationship between company structure and worker attitude. And finally, public relations studies in the future should examine whether "information fatigue," or overload of information, is causing an employer to perceive their company to be transparent enough, or in other words, to become more generous about his/her leader's transparency effort.

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Responding to Negative Celebrity Endorser Publicity: The Case of Nike

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Abstract

Studies have shown that negative celebrity endorser publicity has adverse effects on brand evaluations. In spite of this, sportswear giant Nike, a company that has faced several media scandals involving its celebrity athlete endorsers, continues to maintain its stellar reputation, recently named by *Fortune Magazine* as one of the 20 most admired companies in the world. Nike is also currently one of the 25 most powerful brands in the world according to *Forbes*. These achievements suggest that there are lessons to be learned from the company's reputation management techniques. Based on Benoit's (1995) image restoration theory, this case study analyzed the press statements issued by the company during four scandals involving endorsers Tiger Woods, Kobe Bryant, Michael Vick, and Lance Armstrong. This qualitative analysis explored the manner in which Nike protects its reputation through its messaging, which offers important insights into crisis communication. It was discovered that the organization primarily aims at reducing the offensiveness of the event through the *bolstering* and *transcendence* tactics, and often uses the *separation* strategy to distance itself from the negative act. Moreover, when *denial* is used, the organization does this indirectly by either stating that it is the athlete endorser who is claiming innocence, or that the endorser should be presumed innocent until proven guilty, thereby reducing its liability and protecting its reputation if this is later proven untrue.

Introduction

A celebrity endorser is described as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken, 1989, p.310). Celebrity endorsement is prevalent in marketing communications, estimated to be used in about a quarter of all advertisements in America (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001). This strategy enables corporations to enhance their image, boost publicity, and facilitate brand introduction and repositioning (Erdogan, 1999).

However, there is also evidence to suggest that the strategy be adopted with caution due to the following risks involved: The possibility of overshadowing a brand, public controversy involving an endorser, celebrity image change, overexposure, and cost (Erdogan, 1999). These risks may have negative implications for corporations and their brands. This study focuses on negative celebrity endorser publicity, which has been linked to negative effects on consumer brand evaluations (Till & Shimp, 1998), attitudes, and purchase intent (Fong & Wyer, 2012).

In spite of these findings, sportswear giant Nike, a company that has faced several media scandals involving its celebrity athlete endorsers, manages to maintain its stellar reputation, recently named by *Fortune Magazine* as one of the 20 most admired companies in the world (CNNMoney, 2013). Nike is also currently one of the 25 most powerful brands in the world according to *Forbes* (2013). These accolades raise some questions regarding the company’s reputation management techniques.

The following research questions were posed:

RQ1: How does Nike respond to athlete endorser crises?

RQ2: What image restoration techniques does Nike use through the press to maintain its reputation during athlete endorser crises?

Through the case study approach and based on Benoit’s (1995) image restoration theory (IRT), this paper addresses these questions by examining Nike’s crisis response strategies in situations involving four of its athlete endorsers: Tiger Woods, Kobe Bryant, Michael Vick, and Lance Armstrong. This is for the purpose of extracting best practices for protecting organizations’ reputations in the incidence of negative publicity involving celebrity endorsers. Since IRT focuses on messaging strategies (Benoit, 1995), Nike’s press statements will serve as the unit of analysis in this study.

Image Restoration Theory (IRT)

Proposed by William Benoit (1995), the image restoration theory proposes that when transgressions come under public scrutiny, “our image is threatened, we feel compelled to offer explanations, defense, justifications, rationalizations, apologies, or excuses” (pp.1-2). IRT combines concepts from communication and sociology (Coombs, 2006), and primarily focuses on “the genre of defensive communication used to reduce, redress or avoid damage to a reputation” (Zhang & Benoit, 2009, p. 241). The theory can be applied to both personal and organizational crises.

IRT has two underlying assumptions. The first is that communication is goal-oriented. In other words, communication techniques are strategic. Secondly, communication is primarily concerned with maintaining a favorable image (Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002). These assumptions inform the five main image restoration strategies formulated under this theory: *denial*, *evasion of responsibility*, *reducing offensiveness of the event*, *corrective action*, and *mortification* (Benoit, 1995). *Separation*, a sixth strategy, was later added to these (Brinson & Benoit, 1999).

The *denial* strategy is used when an organization disputes its involvement in a negative event. Two tactics fall under this: *simple denial*, where the organization claims it is not guilty of the act, and *shift the blame*, where the organization blames another party for the act.

Under the *evasion of responsibility* strategy, the organization tries to diminish the extent to which it is perceived to be responsible for the crisis. Four tactics fall under this: *provocation*, where the organization claims that the crisis was due to factors outside the control of the organization; *defeasibility*, where the organization argues that it was incapable of preventing the crisis due to a lack of information or ability; *accident*, where there was an unpreventable oversight on the part of the organization; and *good intentions*, where the crisis was an unintended effect of a positive action by the organization.

In *reducing the offensiveness of the event*, the organization tries to portray the crisis in a more positive light. There are six tactics under this: *bolstering*, where the organization emphasizes the positive works it has done in the past; *minimization*, where the organization tries to mitigate the perceived severity of the crisis; *differentiation*, where the organization claims that the crisis is relatively less severe as compared to similar situations; *transcendence*, where the organization links the crisis to some important overarching goal; *attack the accuser*, where the organization refutes the accuser's story by discrediting them; and *compensation*, where the organization makes amends for the crisis through some sort of aid given to its victims.

With regards to the *corrective action* strategy, the organization tries to resolve the crisis and prevent future occurrence. *Mortification* is used when the organization accepts full responsibility for the crisis and expresses regret. Finally, with the *separation* strategy, the organization acknowledges the fact that the action went against its policies, finds a scapegoat, and takes steps to resolve the issue permanently.

Although IRT has shed light on the image restoration strategies used by famous athletes (e.g. Benoit & Hanczor, 1994; Brazeal 2008; Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2011) and organizations (e.g. Blaney et al., 2002; Weber, Erickson, & Stone, 2011; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997) in the incidence of negative publicity, the theory has not yet examined the techniques used by organizations in response to a crisis situation involving a celebrity athlete endorser.

This case study demonstrates how – through strategic messaging – image restoration techniques can effectively be used by organizations to mitigate the fallout from negative celebrity endorser publicity. The lessons gleaned from this analysis will prove useful for organizations that employ celebrity endorsement as a marketing communications tool. This study also extends IRT's scope by applying it to a novel area.

Nike and Athlete Endorsers

Headquartered near Beaverton, Oregon, Nike, Inc. was founded in January 1964 by Bill Bowerman and Phil Knight. Initially known as Blue Ribbon Sports, the company was officially renamed Nike in 1978 after the Greek goddess of victory ("Nike, Inc.," 2013). Nike designs and markets athletic footwear, sports equipment, sports and fitness apparel, and accessories for fitness activities and a wide range of sports including basketball, baseball, football, soccer, golf, swimming, tennis, and track and field (Nike, Inc., n.d.-b).

Nike is the world leader in athletic footwear and currently holds 54% of the global market (Van Riper, 2013). In 2012, the company accrued a global revenue of \$24.1 billion, making it one of the world's most profitable sports brands (Nike, Inc., n.d.-c). Moreover, it is considered the world's most valuable sports business brand with its name alone worth \$15.9 billion, accounting for more than one-third of the company's market value (Ozianian, 2012). Nike

currently has about 44,000 employees, as well as 826 stores in approximately 190 countries (United States Securities and Exchanges Commission, n.d.). In addition to the Nike brand, the company owns and markets other high performing brands such as the Jordan Brand, Hurley International, and Converse (Nike, Inc., n.d.-d). Its main competitors are Adidas, Puma, and Reebok.

Nike greatly relies on the use of endorsements as a promotional tool. In fact, according to its annual report, the sportswear giant holds endorsement deals with prominent figures worth \$3.2 billion over the next five years (Fox & Isidore, 2012). The company has contracts with many prominent athletes, coaches, college teams and sports leagues around the world (see United States Securities and Exchanges Commission, n.d.). This originated as a strategy in the 1970s and 1980s against then market leader Reebok. As Reebok had a competitive edge over Nike in terms of its innovative shoes with aerobics technology, the company decided instead to focus its promotions on its consumers (Americana Persona, n.d.).

In 1972, Nike signed its first endorsement deal with Romanian tennis player Ilie Năstase, in which the athlete agreed to wear Nike shoes on court. The company also sponsored track star Steve Prefontaine early on in its history in a bid to promote the now popular ‘swoosh’ as its new logo (Nike, Inc., n.d.-a). Subsequently, Nike went on to sign top-performing athletes Carl Lewis, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, and Sebastian Coe, among others (Xtimeline, n.d.).

In 1984, Nike signed former basketball great Michael Jordan as an endorser, and made history as one of the most successful partnerships in sports marketing. This deal earned the company 50% of the athletic footwear market share at the time, and is still proving profitable 28 years later, as Nike gained \$2.5 billion from the sale of Air Jordan shoes in 2012 (Rovell, 2013).

In 1996, Nike entered another successful partnership with professional golfer Tiger Woods. In the six-month period after signing him, Nike grew its market value from 0.9% to 4% in the golf sector (Chung, Derdenger, & Srinivasan, 2012), and it is estimated that the company gained about \$91 million from 2000 to 2010 through this endorsement deal. The company also sold \$60 million worth of golf balls, and gained about 4.5 million new customers through brand switching (Schultz, 2010). Moreover, in 2012, Woods earned Nike around \$18.1 million worth of airtime through the display of the Nike logo on his apparel and equipment (Bandenhausen, 2012).

Nike’s strategy of athlete endorsements has not all been smooth sailing, however. As mentioned previously, one of the disadvantages of adopting this strategy is that organizations run the risk of damaging their reputations and losing revenue when negative publicity about an endorser emerges through the media. Nike has certainly had its fair share of endorser scandals in recent years. Prominent sports figures associated with the brand who have recently been involved in scandals include Justin Gatlin, Kobe Bryant, Wayne Rooney, Michael Vick, Tiger Woods, Marion Jones, Joe Paterno, Lance Armstrong, and Oscar Pistorius, with incidents ranging from the use of performance-enhancing drugs and marital infidelity to child abuse and alleged murder (Eurosport, 2013).

Nike has responded to its endorser crises mainly through press statements on its website or directly to media personnel. Considering the fact that its reputation has remained largely intact through multiple crises, it is worth examining the response strategies used by this organization, as important lessons can be learned.

Method

This case study used a qualitative research approach. Press statements made by Nike during the course of negative events involving endorsers Tiger Woods, Kobe Bryant, Michael Vick, and Lance Armstrong were drawn from online media sources for assessment. These endorsers were selected based on their involvement in negative events that received massive media coverage, and for their contextual differences. This allowed for the examination of Nike's image restoration strategies in different situations.

Data analysis in case study research can be conducted via within-case and cross-case analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study utilized both approaches. First, each press statement was coded by the researcher according to the image restoration strategy used by the organization in its response, after which patterns were identified both within and across cases.

Case studies are commonly used in public relations research (Broom, Cox, Krueger, & Liebler, 1989). In fact, Cutler (2004) estimated that about a third of all published research in public relations journals used the case study method. Case studies are particularly useful in explaining and understanding phenomena by providing comprehensive information from a variety of sources (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Moreover, they are the appropriate method for analyzing real-life situations since they are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 1998). These form the basis of the choice of the case study approach for this study.

The sections that follow examine the cases of four present and former Nike endorsers: Tiger Woods, Kobe Bryant, Michael Vick, and Lance Armstrong.

Tiger Woods

Nike began its partnership with Eldrick "Tiger" Woods even before he became a professional golfer. In 1996, despite skepticism in sports marketing circles about the soundness of this business decision, Nike signed Woods on in a five-year endorsement deal worth \$5 million a year. This paid off tremendously when Woods won the Masters tournament the following year, setting new records (Nike, Inc., n.d.- e).

In 2000 and 2006, the value of Woods' five-year contracts steadily increased; first to \$100 million, then to \$200 million, making him the world's highest paid athlete at the time (Chung et al., 2012). In 2009, however, this profitable relationship was put to the test. On November 27, Woods was involved in a single car accident where he hit a fire hydrant, a tree, and some bushes, sustaining minor injuries. Speculations began to swirl as to the cause of the accident, as two days before, *The National Enquirer* had published a story about an alleged affair between the star golfer and nightclub manager Rachel Uchitel. Woods released a statement seeking privacy and acknowledging his wife's role in ensuring his safety after the accident. Subsequently, Woods was cited for careless driving and withdrew from all scheduled tournaments. The matter escalated after *US Weekly* obtained a voice message left by Woods to his mistress Jaimee Grubbs asking her to delete her name from her voicemail greeting, as his wife had got wind of their affair and may be calling her. Woods then released another statement on his website admitting to "transgressions" and asking for forgiveness from his supporters. Afterward, more than a dozen women came forward, claiming to be his mistresses. Woods' next statement once again expressed regret and announced an indefinite leave of absence from golf ("Tiger Woods," 2013).

The fallout from this scandal was tremendous, costing Woods endorsement deals with Accenture, AT&T, Gatorade, General Motors, TAG Heuer, and Gillette ("Tiger Woods," 2013) worth an estimated \$22 million (Wei, 2010). This scandal also cost his sponsors \$5 billion-\$12

billion (Knittel & Stango, 2009). In spite of this, Woods managed to hold on to his endorsement deals with Electronic Arts and Nike.

Nike remained loyal to Woods in this crisis situation, reiterating its faith in the golfer and unwavering in its support for him. In an interview with *Sports Business Journal*, Nike chairman Phil Knight stated:

“I think he’s been really great. When his career is over, you’ll look back on these indiscretions as a minor blip, but the media is making a big deal out of it right now.”

(Wu, Klayman, & Brown, 2009)

In his statement, Knight uses the *bolstering* tactic to remind people that Woods is an outstanding athlete. He also uses *minimization* to diminish the perceived offensiveness of Woods’ act. He argues that in the grand scheme of things, Woods’ sex scandal is insignificant, as the golfer’s professional accomplishments will overshadow it. Knight also *shifts the blame* on to the media for blowing the situation out of proportion.

Nike spokeswoman Beth Gast, in a statement to the press, also confirmed the company’s loyalty to Woods, sidestepping the issue and touting his achievements:

“Tiger has been part of Nike for more than a decade. He is the best golfer in the world and one of the greatest athletes of his era. We look forward to his return to golf. He and his family have Nike’s full support.”

(Dorman, 2009)

Like Knight, Gast also uses *bolstering* tactics in reaffirming the organization’s support for Woods. She does this by reminding the public about the longstanding positive relationship the organization has enjoyed with the athlete, as well as the fact that Woods is one of the world’s best golfers. Moreover, Gast uses *transcendence* in her press statement by shifting the focus away from the sex scandal. In doing so, she moves the issue past his behavior to his future in golf.

In February 2010, Woods held a press conference during which he admitted to his transgressions and announced that he was receiving treatment for his sex addiction at a rehabilitation center (“Tiger Woods,” 2013). A week later, Nike brand president Charlie Denson, in an interview with *The Associated Press*, made the following statement:

“Under the circumstances, the more he deals with the issues and the better he deals with them, the better off he’ll be when he does return. We’ve been supportive of Tiger since the story broke and we continue to be supportive. He’s got issues he needs to deal with and he’s dealing with them. We are looking forward to him getting back on the golf course. We’ve been in touch with his camp. We’re very comfortable with where he’s at, how he’s dealing with it and we’re looking forward to his return.”

(CBS News, 2010)

Denson also uses *transcendence* by linking the golfer’s indefinite leave of absence from the sport to the fact that Woods is working on himself, isolating the scandal from the rest of the conversation, and implying that his absence is linked to the greater good of Woods’ performance as a golfer.

Woods returned to golf at the 2010 Masters Tournament (“Tiger Woods,” 2013). Subsequently, Nike released an advertisement featuring the golfer and a recording of his late father’s voice asking him what lessons he had learned. Nike released the following statement in response to inquiries about the ad:

“We support Tiger and his family. As he returns to competitive golf, the ad addresses his time away from the game using the powerful words of his father.”

(Vary, 2010)

Nike, once again, uses *transcendence* by referring to Woods’ leave of absence as a result to his sex scandal as his “time away from the game,” refusing to directly acknowledge the scandal, and making the issue more about the golfer than his scandalous act.

Overall, Nike stood firm in its support for Woods through his infidelity scandal relying on *denial* and strategies geared toward *reducing the offensiveness of the event*. Despite the fact that the company parted ways with about 105,000 customers in 2009, which translates to \$1.3 million, researchers from Carnegie Mellon’s Tepper School of Business argue that Nike’s decision was correct, as terminating his contract would have cost the company another \$1.6 million in profits (Schultz, 2010).

Kobe Bryant

In 2003, Los Angeles Lakers star Kobe Bryant signed a five-year \$40 million to \$45 million endorsement deal with Nike (Teaford, 2003). Mere days later, he was hit by a sexual assault scandal threatening his image and that of the organization. Prior to this, Bryant had maintained a pristine reputation not only as a good husband and father, but as a polite and philanthropic athlete (Kennedy, 2010). An established star in the NBA league, Bryant was considered by some to be the greatest basketball player of his generation, often drawing comparisons to basketball legend Michael Jordan (see Fluellen, n.d.). In 2002, he was regarded the third most profitable athlete endorser after Jordan and Tiger Woods (Duncan, n.d.).

All this changed when he was arrested on a charge of sexual assault in Eagle, Colorado. According to records, the incident occurred on June 30, 2003 at The Lodge and Spa at Cordillera where Bryant was staying in preparation for knee surgery the following day. A 19-year-old front desk clerk, after giving the NBA star a guided tour of the hotel, accompanied him to his room where the alleged rape occurred. The hotel employee filed charges the next day (Henson & Pugmire, 2004).

On July 18, 2003, Bryant, with his wife Vanessa at his side, held a press conference maintaining his innocence of the rape charge, but admitting he was guilty of adultery. Just as the trial is about to proceed, it was however cut short when the plaintiff decided to withdraw her allegations. She however pressed civil charges, which were settled out of court. Bryant issued a public apology to his accuser, as well as his wife in an attempt to repair his tarnished image (Henson & Pugmire, 2004).

At the time of his sexual assault allegation, in addition to his contract with Nike, Bryant held lucrative endorsement deals with McDonald’s, Coca Cola, Spalding, Upper Deck, and Nutella, most of which he lost due to the scandal (Parent, 2011). Nike however decided not to terminate its contract with Bryant when the scandal first emerged, issuing the following statement through communications director Nigel Powell:

“As we have said before, we are pleased to have a relationship with Kobe Bryant. He is a great player. Kobe has stated that he is innocent of the charges today. You will understand that this is a legal matter and we cannot comment further at this time.”

(Talalay, 2003)

Like the previously discussed case, Nike utilized *denial* and *reducing the offensiveness* strategies to address this issue. Powell uses the *bolstering* tactic in this statement to show his support for Bryant by mentioning his exceptional skills as a basketball player. He also uses *simple denial* to assert Bryant's innocence. However he distances the organization from the claim by not saying directly that Nike believes him to be innocent, rather stating that Bryant claims he is innocent.

Despite this statement of support, Nike distanced itself from Bryant, halting the sale of footwear bearing his name (Kennedy, 2010). It was not until 2005, two years after the incident, that the company began featuring the NBA star in its advertisements and merchandise once again (USA Today, 2005). In 2006, Nike introduced the first edition of Bryant's signature shoe line, the Nike Zoom Kobe I, which is considered a highly sought-after classic (see All the sneakers, n.d.), as Bryant set a personal record of scoring 81 points in one game in those shoes ("Kobe Bryant," 2013).

In subsequent years, Brant has proven very profitable for the sportswear giant though his shoe line, thus justifying the company's business decision to maintain its relationship with the NBA star.

Michael Vick

NFL quarterback Michael Vick is the only athlete endorser in the history of sports marketing to be reinstated after a scandal (Bacon, 2011). Vick's relationship with Nike began in 2001 at the beginning of his football career with the Atlanta Falcons, where he enjoyed immense success for six seasons until his criminal activities came to light ("Michael Vick," 2013).

In 2007, Vick's cousin Devon Boddie was under investigation for drug-related activities. As part of the investigation, a legal search was conducted at a property near Smithfield, Virginia, which was owned by Vick. During the search, evidence of illegal dogfighting activities was uncovered, including 66 dogs, as well as some equipment used in dogfighting. Authorities claimed that Vick had owned and operated a dogfighting ring named Bad Newz Kennels for five years. Vick, after initially denying any involvement in the activities, later admitted to financing the operation, handling bets placed on dogs, and killing underperforming dogs. He pled guilty to the charge of "conspiracy to travel in interstate commerce in aid of unlawful activities and to sponsor a dog in an animal fighting venture," and was sentenced to 23 months in prison, out of which he served 19. After the charges were filed, Vick was indefinitely suspended from the NFL without pay and Vick merchandise was pulled from its stores. The disgraced quarterback also lost endorsement deals with Rawlings Sports Goods Company, Air Tran, Upper Deck, Donruss, and Nike ("Michael Vick," 2013).

Nike did not take the direct route in its termination of Vick's contract. When the allegations first surfaced, the company remained loyal to the NFL star despite protests from the national Humane Society. The only action taken was to indefinitely postpone the launch of the latest edition in Vick's highly successful shoe line, Air Zoom Vick V (Duncan, n.d.). Nike spokesman Dean Stoyer released the following statement:

"There is no change in the status of the agreement between Nike and football player Michael Vick. He is rightfully presumed innocent and afforded the same due process as any citizen, rather than be tried in the court of public opinion. Nike will continue to monitor the situation, but has nothing further to say at this time."
(The Associated Press, 2007)

Here, Stoyer uses *denial* to declare Nike's loyalty to Vick, as well as to imply his innocence. It should however be noted that the company spokesman does not directly proclaim Vick's innocence. Rather, he says that it is right to presume him innocent, as everyone who is facing criminal charges should be. Moreover, he uses *transcendence* by making this an issue of civil rights. Stoyer also *attacks the accuser* by suggesting that the public has no right to make assumptions, and that only the courts can decide whether or not Vick is guilty. Finally, the spokesman stated that the company "will continue to monitor the situation," somewhat implying the use of *corrective action* by indicating that Nike is doing something on its end.

However, Nike's tune changed eight days later when Vick was indicted. The company suspended Vick's contract amid intense scrutiny from animal rights groups, removing products bearing his name from stores ("Michael Vick," 2013). Stoyer released the following statement:

"Nike is concerned by the serious and highly disturbing allegations made against Michael Vick, and we consider any cruelty to animals inhumane and abhorrent. We do believe that Michael Vick should be afforded the same due process as any citizen in the United States. Therefore, we have not terminated our relationship."
(Newberry, 2007)

In this statement, the spokesman first uses *separation* by condemning the actions Vick was accused of and declaring the company's stance concerning cruelty to animals. Moreover, Stoyer *transcends* the issue by restating the fact that Vick's civil rights should be respected, which he provides as a logical explanation for why Vick's contract was suspended, and not terminated. These strategies portray the organization as one which respects the rule of law, as well as the function of the justice system.

Nike finally terminated Vick's contract when he agreed to a plea bargain (Newberry, 2007). The following statement was released:

"Nike has terminated our contract with Michael Vick following today's release of details of his plea. As we have said in previous statements, we consider any cruelty to animals inhumane, abhorrent and unacceptable."
(Nike, Inc., 2007)

This statement uses *separation* to distance the organization from Vick's act and reiterates the company's position on the issue at hand. *Corrective action* is also used by stating that Vick's contract has been terminated.

In May 2009, Vick was freed from a federal prison in Leavenworth, Kansas. He was released from his contract with the Falcons and went on to sign a one-year contract with the Philadelphia Eagles in August ("Michael Vick," 2013). In October, Nike began supplying Vick with sports apparel and other products, however denying that it had resumed an official contractual relationship with him. This contradicted claims by Vick's agent, Michael Principe (ESPN, 2009). Nike spokesman Kejuan Wilkins issued this statement:

"Nike does not have a contractual relationship with Michael Vick. We have agreed to supply product to Michael Vick as we do a number of athletes who are not under contract with Nike."
(ESPN, 2009)

Wilkins uses *denial*, as well as *transcendence* and *minimization*. In using *transcendence*, Wilkins links Vick's situation to the common practice of supplying athletes with sports gear, removing the focus from Vick to the larger population of athletes. In doing so, he also *minimizes* the situation by implying that it is not a serious issue.

Even though Vick played only a few games during the 2010 football season, he did

exceptionally well, setting new personal records and getting voted the 2010 NFL Comeback Player of the Year, as well as the 2011 Bert Bell Award for the American football player of the year. In an unprecedented move, Nike once again signed Vick on as an endorser in July 2011 (“Michael Vick,” 2013). The four-year contract will feature him in advertisements and involve the relaunch of his shoe line. Nike spokeswoman Megan Saalfeld released this statement:

“We have re-signed Michael Vick as a Nike athlete. Michael acknowledges his past mistakes. We do not condone those actions, but we support the positive changes he has made to better himself off the field. We don’t have any comment further than the statement.”

(Brettman, 2011)

Saalfeld uses *mortification*, *separation*, and *transcendence* in this statement. She uses *mortification* indirectly by stating that Vick has accepted responsibility for his actions and has taken corrective actions to improve himself. Moreover, *separation* is used through the declaration that the organization does not “condone those actions.” Nike moves past the issue through *transcendence* by linking Vick’s time in prison to more general attempts on his part to become a better person. The company mainly controlled its image through this negative event by utilizing the *transcendence* tactic and *separation* strategy. Nike’s decision to reinstate Vick also served to emphasize its core values. Since Vick worked hard to repair his image and relaunch his career, Nike took it as an opportunity to manifest its belief in diligence and resilience.

Today, Vick is considered to have restored his reputation as a professional footballer and has somewhat regained his status as a valuable endorser, attracting high paying endorsement deals from MusclePharm Corp. and Unequal Technologies in addition to his contract with Nike. In fact, in 2012, Vick was named the 50th highest paid athlete in the world (Forbes, n.d.).

Lance Armstrong

Nike was not so forgiving in the end when it came to former cyclist Lance Armstrong. Partners since 1996 (Rovell, 2012b), Armstrong and Nike’s collaboration went beyond marketing promotions, it helped save and improve millions of cancer patients’ lives.

Armstrong’s testicular cancer was detected in 1996 – the same the year he signed with Nike. After making a full recovery the following year, he established a foundation to support cancer patients named the Lance Armstrong Foundation (or the Livestrong Foundation) (“Lance Armstrong,” 2013).

Armstrong won his first of seven consecutive Tour de France tournaments in 1999, cementing his image as a worldwide inspirational figure. In 2004, Nike developed and marketed the symbolic yellow wristband to raise funds for Livestrong. The company also supported the foundation over time through the sale of several products, including apparel and footwear collections (“Lance Armstrong,” 2013). The Livestrong foundation stated in 2012 that Nike had raised more than \$100 million for the nonprofit, and distributed over 84 million wristbands around the world (Livestrong Foundation, n.d.).

Rumors of Armstrong’s use of performance-enhancing drugs had followed him throughout his career. He vehemently denied these claims and even took legal action against some of his accusers. Although allegations were made by his former teammate Floyd Landis, some media outlets, as well as several other people over the course of his cycling career, there was never enough evidence to fully prove these assertions. Therefore, though there were many investigations launched over the years, the cyclist was always cleared of wrongdoing (“Lance Armstrong,” 2013).

Nike remained loyal to Armstrong over the years amid these claims. In 2011, the company declared its allegiance to the cyclist after *Sports Illustrated* published a story accusing Armstrong of instigating the use of illegal substances among his teammates. In a statement, Nike spokesman Derek Kent stated:

“Our relationship with Lance remains as strong as ever. We are proud to work with him in cycling and to support his foundation. Nike does not condone the use of banned substances and Lance has been unwavering on that position as well.”
(McCarthy, 2011)

Kent uses *bolstering*, *denial*, and *separation* in this statement. First, Nike uses *bolstering* by bringing up cycling and Livestrong. In doing so, it reminds the public of Armstrong’s greatness both in his sport and through his charity work. The statement also *separates* the issue from the company, as well as its endorser, thereby *denying* that either Nike or Armstrong supports doping.

In February 2012, it would seem that Armstrong had once again escaped unscathed after the closing of yet another investigation into his alleged use of performance-enhancing drugs – this time by the Justice Department. A new investigation was however launched four months later by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA). This time, Armstrong’s luck ran out. After doping charges were filed against him, the former cyclist attempted to terminate the case through a federal lawsuit. When he failed, Armstrong decided to discontinue his defense against the doping charges brought against him. He was subsequently stripped of all seven of his Tour de France titles, and forever banned from professional sports (“Lance Armstrong,” 2013). In spite of this, Nike reconfirmed its support for Armstrong, releasing the following statement:

“We are saddened that Lance Armstrong may no longer be able to participate in certain competitions and his titles appear to be impacted. Lance has stated his innocence and has been unwavering on this position. Nike plans to continue to support Lance and the Lance Armstrong Foundation, a foundation that Lance created to serve cancer survivors.”
(Rovell, 2012a)

Here, Nike uses *denial*, *transcendence*, and *bolstering* to affirm its support for Armstrong. The organization denies the fact that Armstrong is guilty, once again doing so indirectly. The company also *transcends* the issue by, first, failing to mention the doping charges at all, and focusing instead on the impact of the situation on the former cyclist’s titles and his ability to compete. The statement is also framed to imply that the organization’s support goes beyond the athlete, as it also has implications for the Livestrong Foundation and cancer survivors. *Bolstering* is used here as well, as the organization’s mention of the foundation reminds the public of all the good that has come from its partnership with Armstrong.

After a week, Armstrong stepped down as chairman of the Livestrong Foundation (Vertuno, 2012). That same day, Nike announced the termination of its contract with the disgraced cyclist through the following statement on its corporate website:

“Due to the seemingly insurmountable evidence that Lance Armstrong participated in doping and misled Nike for more than a decade, it is with great sadness that we have terminated our contract with him. Nike does not condone the use of illegal performance enhancing drugs in any manner. Nike plans to continue support of the Livestrong initiatives created to unite, inspire and empower people affected by cancer.”
(Nike, Inc., 2012).

First, Nike uses *separation* in this statement, suggesting that doping violates the organization's core values, and singling out Armstrong as the sole perpetrator in this issue. Through the *defeasibility* tactic, Nike also evades responsibility by denying its complicity in Armstrong's actions, claiming the company was not given correct information. Furthermore, the company takes *corrective action* by dropping him as an endorser. Once again, *transcendence* is used to draw attention to Nike's work with Livestrong in an attempt to retain customer support for Livestrong merchandise by pointing out the important work it does, which is separate from what Armstrong had been accused of. *Bolstering* is also used in the same sense.

Armstrong's other sponsors – RadioShack, Anheuser-Busch, Trek Bicycles, Gyro, RadioShack, 24-Hour Fitness, FRS, and Honey Sting – also terminated their endorsement deals with him (Petchesky, 2012). This scandal cost the former cyclist between \$150 million and \$200 million in future earnings (Levinson, Novy-Williams, & Duff, 2012). Armstrong soon stepped down from his foundation's board of directors, after which the nonprofit officially changed its name from the Lance Armstrong Foundation to the LIVESTRONG foundation (CNN, 2013). These distancing acts increased donations to the foundation by 15% (Heitner, 2012).

In the end, Armstrong finally confessed that he had used performance-enhancing drugs throughout his career during a January 2013 televised interview with media mogul Oprah Winfrey. He not only faces legal implications and public disdain due to his actions, there are also demands for the refund of the estimated \$16 million he won as prize money during the course of his career (Levinson et al., 2012).

Discussion

Nike's crisis response strategies in reaction to athlete endorser scandals, on the surface, seem varied. After all, the company stood by Woods throughout his sex scandal, kept Bryant in the shadows for two years after his, terminated and reinstated Vick, and eventually terminated Armstrong after supporting him for many years. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes apparent that Nike's reactions are structured similarly and geared toward one goal: To protect the organization's reputation.

Drawing from all four cases, it is clear that Nike gives its endorsers the benefit of the doubt when a scandal first erupts. The company holds on to endorsers until there is certain proof of their guilt before releasing them. Even so, that was not the case with Woods, as his was not a criminal matter.

Nike tends to rely primarily on *bolstering* and *transcendence* in press statements when negative publicity first emerges. It is customary for the company to offer its initial support for its endorsers by touting their positive attributes. This draws attention to the good qualities the public fell in love with, thereby prompting them to keep this in perspective when evaluating the situation. *Bolstering* also explains the reason why the company is associated with the endorser, causing the audience to reflect on more positive information. Also, through the *transcendence* tactic, the company often refuses to directly address the specific situation at hand by diverting attention to other seemingly more important considerations such as 'the game of golf,' 'civil rights,' or 'philanthropy.' This also relates the scandal to the 'big picture' and removes the potentially damaging aspects of the scandal from the conversation.

When *denial* is used, the organization does this indirectly by stating that it is the endorser who is claiming innocence, or that the endorser should be presumed innocent, thereby reducing its liability if this is later proven untrue.

As it becomes apparent however that the endorser is indeed at fault, Nike's strategy is then reevaluated. With regards to criminal investigations, *corrective action* is taken through the termination of guilty endorsers' contracts. At this point also, the company relies on the *separation* strategy to dissociate itself from the socially or morally reprehensible issues involved, which further promotes the company's core values and beliefs, and strengthens its reputation. The *transcendence* tactic is also applied by skirting the issue and bringing up the more positive aspects of the company's involvement with the endorser.

In general, Nike manages to maintain its reputation amid athlete endorser scandals through tactics geared toward reducing the offensiveness of the event. Other image restoration strategies proposed by Benoit (1995) are also effectively used by Nike to control the dialogue around the various issues the organization is dealing with. Table 1 presents a summary of the image restoration strategies and tactics used by Nike in all four cases.

Conclusion

This case study reveals the image restoration techniques used by sportswear giant Nike in reaction to negative publicity involving its endorsers. It was discovered that the organization holds its endorsers in high regard, only deserting them after their guilt has been formally established in criminal cases. Through its press statements, the organization utilizes every opportunity to remind its publics of its values, as well as the positive attributes of its endorsers. Nike also dissociates itself from the socially unacceptable issues involved, and often shifts the focus from the scandal to broader, more positive issues.

As Nike has been successful at maintaining a valuable and admired brand in spite of a history of scandals involving its celebrity endorsers, it is hoped that the lessons gleaned from this case study will be of use to organizations that employ celebrity endorsement as a marketing communications tool.

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CSR Dialogue on Social Media Platforms: An Analysis of CSR Tweets

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Abstract

This paper aims to discover who the most important “CSR actors” are and what they are discussing about CSR on Twitter. Our research conducted a content analysis of 1623 public tweets from different twitter users. Cross collaboration between actors is needed in order to enrich the practice of CSR communication.

Introduction

Firms communicate different issues to stakeholders (e.g. shareholders, managers, employees, suppliers, local communities, and customers) usually through annual reports either printed or online. In recent years, the communication of CSR activities has enjoyed research attention with growing interests in the subject area. While some argued that communicating CSR activities diminishes its altruistic value, others contend that firms have constant need to manage their legitimacy which involves engaging with their various conferring publics (O'Donovan, 2000; Suchman, 1995). For this reason, studies have examined CSR communications through annual reports (printed and online) (Branco & Rodrigues, 2006) or corporate websites (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Chaudhri & Wang, 2007). However, while most of these studies are based on the management's perceptions and presentation, there is a dearth of research into the views of stakeholders regarding CSR and the effects of social media on CSR communication.

Social media have changed the way people currently receive information and interact with others, becoming one of the most important avenues for creating and sharing content and ideas instantaneously. For instance, Twitter is a powerful platform used for many reasons, from following celebrities (e.g. #JustinBieber) and organizing protests, (e.g. #occupywallstreet) to discussing a wide range of topics (e.g. #CSRChat), and overall building a community of users around an issue or idea in particular.

Different groups of stakeholders use social media platforms like Twitter to participate, share, and collaborate, revealing global interests, happenings, and attitudes in almost real time (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010). Furthermore, different groups of stakeholders are addressing issues and opinions on an extensive array of CSR subjects on Twitter, sometimes before the company discloses such issues (e.g., environmental issues). These groups of stakeholders include consultants, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, and customers, among others. Therefore, one of the key advantages of promoting stakeholder dialogue through social media is to detect trends in stakeholder's conversations, in other words to find out which are the most important issues and expectations for stakeholders about a particular company's subject (Golob & Podnar, 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore the use of social media in CSR communication and thereby gain an understanding of the key social actors and identify key CSR trends in this sphere.

Theoretical Framework

Corporate Social Responsibility Communication and Public Relations

Corporate social responsibility communication literature is heterogeneous and it comes from very different disciplines (Golob & Podnar, 2011). One of these disciplines is public relations. Particularly, public relations can help to advance CSR communication literature as both disciplines share common rationales and focus: stakeholders and ethics (Bartlett, 2011; Clark, 2000). Stakeholders considerations are central to the discourse in public relations because the discipline studies the relationships and expectations between companies, stakeholders, and society (Bartlett, 2011), in the same way that, ethics are fundamental too since it creates alignments with public expectation (Bartlett, 2011).

Bartlett (2011) argued that PR shares strong historical, theoretical, and practical relationship with CSR. This author indicates that the importance of CSR for the public relations discipline has been promoted throughout history with the work of many scholars such as Bernays (1923; 1975), Grunig (1992), Clark (2000), and Heath (2001). In fact, Bernays was reported to

have mentioned during the 1980 meeting of the Association for Education of Journalism at Boston University that “public relations is the practice of social responsibility” (Clark, 2000). Both public relations and CSR disciplines are definitely closely related; working together for improving the societal, economical, and environmental aspects of the world.

Public relations scholars and practitioners have also worked for many decades with communication issues related to public concern; in addition public relations practitioners have been involved with considerable CSR work (planning, developing, communicating, and evaluating CSR efforts) in their organizations (Bartlett, 2011). However, it is probable that public relations practitioners do not view CSR communication as simply a mechanism to transmit objectives, intentions, and activities regarding CSR, it goes beyond this and represents a continuous process of exploration, construction, negotiation, and modification among different actors (Christensen & Cheney, 2011).

The debate on CSR communication is diverse. In recent decades, the debate has extended to the presentation, content, and interactivity of CSR online communication (especially through corporate websites). Studies have concluded that in spite of the important advantages that Internet has for promoting interactive communication, many corporate websites remain static and do not use the full potential of the Internet for dialogue-based communication (Fieseler, Fleck, & Meckel, 2010; Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Branco & Rodríguez, 2006; Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Esrock & Leichty, 1998).

This lack of awareness in communicating CSR effectively adds to the problem of stakeholders’ skepticism (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). If companies and PR practitioners communicate and promote several CSR initiatives, stakeholders may question the motivation for such communication (Baron, 2001; Calveras & Ganuza, 2004). Therefore, Morsing, Schultz and Nielsen (2008) proposed that CSR should be communicated in a way that users do not perceive it as too intense. Companies and public relations practitioners can also reduce stakeholder skepticism if they acknowledge the intrinsic and extrinsic purposes of their communication (Forehand & Grier, 2003). In other words, they do CSR because they are genuinely concerned about the practice (intrinsic) or they do CSR as a way to increase profits (extrinsic). Thus, if consumers learn more about companies’ true intentions regarding CSR, they should be willing to assume a “win-win” perspective. In other words CSR presents benefits for both society and businesses (Du et al., 2010).

Surprisingly, the level of stakeholder skepticism towards CSR is still high. This could be because companies are not successful in their CSR communication or stakeholders are not paying attention to CSR (Bronn, 2011). Interestingly, research from Landor Associates (Landor Associates, 2009, as cited in Bronn, 2011), shows that companies with a high ranking on CSR indexes were rated low by consumers. Although 75% of the respondents were willing to purchase products/services from socially responsible companies, the majority were incapable of naming which companies were socially responsible.

CSR communication cannot be avoided, because it is unthinkable not to communicate with stakeholders, in the same way individuals cannot avoid to communicate with each other (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Therefore, the problems in the current CSR communication process can be reduced by the inclusion of different groups of key actors in the CSR process such as consultants, employees, customers, bloggers, journalists, politics, and economists, among others (Wehmeier & Schultz, 2011). It is also important that firms’ CSR practices are negotiated and constructed by the interplay of different actors from different backgrounds and interests in order to enrich the discourse and improve its collective ownership. For this reason, it is important that

companies and PR practitioners should promote informal but credible communication channels, like online, word-of-mouth or social media channels that are run by employees and other relevant stakeholders (Dawkins, 2005; Du et al, 2010).

Social media platforms are important vehicles for public relations practitioners in charge of CSR activities within organizations. These platforms provide great opportunities to interact with stakeholders, creating and maintaining authentic and stronger relationships, and at the same time achieving a competitive advantage (Fieseler et al., 2010; Schneider, Stieglitz & Lattemann 2007; Lattemann & Stieglitz, 2007).

Legitimacy Theory and CSR Communication

Legitimacy theory (LT) attempts to explain the basis and rationale for the interactions between corporations and the society in which they operate. Its fundamental tenet suggests that the continued operational existence of a company and its ability to explore societal resources is largely due to the philosophical and perhaps abstract permission (legitimacy) granted by the society (Branco & Rodrigues, 2006; O'Donovan, 2002). It further suggests that the society could sanction a firm for not abiding with the norms and values prescribed by it. Previous studies have used legitimacy theory to motivate their investigations. For example, Branco and Rodrigues (2006) in their study of how Portuguese banks used their website to communicate their CSR disclosure found that banks with high visibility, defined as banks with more branches and listed, with customers tend to use their website to make more CSR disclosures compared to banks with less visibility (banks with smaller branches and unlisted). They argued that consistent with LT, high visibility banks have high societal pressure and therefore disclose more social information in order to manage their legitimacy with their stakeholders.

Lindblom (1994) proposes that companies should continuously monitor their legitimacy, identify threat, and deal with such threat in order to prevent it from becoming illegitimate. This author recommends that corporations could educate, change or distract stakeholders as ways of managing legitimacy threats. In addition, Suchman (1995) argues that one of the fundamental ways of managing societal legitimacy involves engaging with the society through effective corporate communication. This author suggests that corporations should pay careful attention to the nature, content, and medium of communication with their conferring public. That is why public relations practitioners should be in charge of effectively communicating CSR practices, especially through social media platforms. This is because according to Schultz, et al (2013: p.1) "social media have further accentuated the dynamics of communication and the complexity for maintaining legitimacy".

Methods

A quantitative content analysis (Babbie, 1992) was performed to analyze tweets in English language, that appeared during a three-month period (March to May 2011) with the hashtag (#) CSR on Topsy¹⁶. Common topics on Twitter are indicated through the combination of a hashtag (#) and a keyword (e.g. #csr, #sustainability); this means that the tweet is relevant to a particular topic. Authors did not look for similar keywords such as #SR (Social Responsibility) and #CC (Corporate Citizenship), since the authors understand that Corporate Social Responsibility is the most employed and accepted definition among organizations and academics.

¹⁶ Topsy presents the most relevant tweets for any kind of particular search

A total of 1623 public tweets were encountered on Topsy and manually analyzed (541 tweets per month). In each tweet the following aspects were collected: user ID (Twitter username, e.g. @CSRWire), country (e.g. USA, users that did not indicate it were classified as others), type of hyperlink (e.g., press release) and the type of Twitter user (tends to appear in every Twitter user bio, e.g. consultant). Subsequently, the content of every CSR tweet was categorized according to the seven core subjects of ISO 26000 in Social Responsibility, which covers the following issues: organizational governance, human rights, environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues, and community involvement and development¹⁷. Tweets were also classified according to other variables pre-established for obtaining better interpretative results. Definitions of CSR and sustainability were also employed for detecting implicit content of CSR in tweets.

On the other hand, other types of tweets could not be categorized according to the CSR subjects of ISO 26000, because they were too general to be identified. For example: “*Why CSR is not a revolutionary concept? The CSR Gang Daily is out!*” or “*For engaging discussions on #sustainability in the #MENA region follow @CGRForum and visit the website #csr*”. These types of messages were classified as CSR or Sustainability.

Tweets can also include shortened hyperlinks redirecting to different websites (URLs) as a way to enforce their message. Many Twitter users included different types of hyperlinks (e.g. blogs, press releases, and reports) in their tweets as for example: “*50 Best Blogs for Green Business Students <http://3bl.me/ndw6w5> #csr #sustainability*”. In this tweet, the hyperlink redirects to a blog post. Typically users add links to augment the information, encouraging followers to read the complete story on another website, in the same way newspapers employ headlines (Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012).

Once the codification sheet was developed, the authors began by coding the first 100 tweets to judge the suitability and consistency of the categories and the coding process for the purpose of the study. The authors cross-validated each subjective assessment and solved all discrepancies. The variables were quantified by an assigned number: 1 if there is information relating to the variable or 0 if there is no information relating to the variable. In cases where a tweet appeared to serve two or more variables, codes were assigned according to what was considered the tweet’s best purpose. Table 1 below shows a sample of tweets analyzed for every core subject of ISO 26000 in Social Responsibility.

Table 1
Sample OF Tweets According to the 7 Core Subjects of the ISO 26000

Environment	Community	Labor practices	Consumer issues	Human Rights	Fair Op. Practices	Org. Governance
UK becomes first nation to set minimum carbon tax #green #csr	RT @msftc citizenship: Just 4 of 170 million stories; the importance of	"Engagement of our employees is vital to our campaigns" @macys	Patagonia, Adidas, WalMart Team Up on Sustainable	New #CSR Intel Blog Post: Want to see the	CSR and sustainability must be a foundational business element in	Companies with transparency on #CSR issues have a

¹⁷ http://www.iso.org/iso/iso_catalogue/management_standards/social_responsibility.htm

partnerships in helping communities http://bit.ly/hgjs5N #csr #tech4good	#causemarketing #csr	#Apparel Coalition #CSR #sustainability	power of educating girls? Her name is Sohka	the 21st century supply chain #CSRChat	competitive advantage
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Results and Discussion

A large number of users turn to social media platforms like Twitter to create a sense of community and awareness of CSR practices. Results show that CSR actors on Twitter include consultants, media platforms, people working in CSR areas (such as PR professionals), CSR advocates, bloggers/journalists, general public (customers and citizens), NGOs, companies, academia (professors/universities) and others, including professional organizations, forums, conference sites, city or region's website, among others.

Findings indicate that consultants and media were the most recurrent CSR actors that addressed different CSR subjects on Twitter during the three-month period. As presented in Figure 1, consultants (including consultancy firms) and media (including media companies exclusively to inform about CSR news) were the leading CSR actors on such conversations. Consultants sent an average of 125 tweets per month while media tweeted an average of 111 messages per month. It is worth noting that a high number of media accounts (e.g. @CSRWire and @justmeans) were dedicated to communicate only about the ample spectrum of CSR, keeping audience up-to-date about CSR.

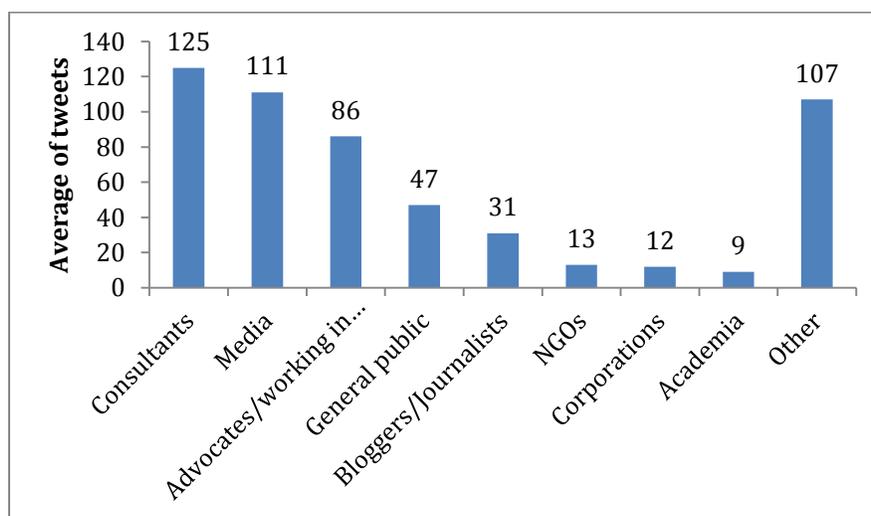


Figure 1. Average of tweets per month portrayed by CSR actors.

Consultants were also actively discussing CSR. Consultants use Twitter not only as a way to promote their services, but also for networking and creating partnerships with other Twitter users (e.g. media and other consultants). Susan McPherson (@susanmcp1) organizes and hosts bi-monthly the #CSRchat on Twitter, where different types of Twitter users can freely join the CSR discussion. McPherson moderates the hour-long chat sessions that usually attracts up to 150

participants from different backgrounds and occupations (Witkin, 2012). CSR chats have covered a wide range of topics such as the role of videos for CSR communication, CSR reporting, employee engagement, human rights, corporate philanthropy, and crisis management. Since last year, the #CSRChat has invited CEOs and corporate executives from companies such as LRN and Microsoft to discuss CSR. On May 14th 2012, the special #CSRchat with LRN's CEO Dov Seidman generated 232 tweets and an audience of 56,965 in an hour-long discussion (Miller, 2012).

Although it may seem difficult to communicate in a meaningful manner through Twitter, consultants, media, and other recurrent CSR actors (such as CSR advocates/people working in CSR departments or initiatives), are creating online communities on Twitter for discussing responsible and sustainable practices. People working in CSR-related areas (such as PR and communication practitioners) and CSR advocates sent a total of 248 tweets during the three-month period, followed by the general public (customers and citizens) which sent a total of 136 tweets. The others category also presented a high movement of tweets which include representation of professional organizations, forums, conference sites, city or region's website. Overall citizens, customers, advocates, and business persons have awakened to the importance of CSR and sustainable issues. This could be due to the emergence of recurring problems in countries and regions such as degradation of environment, poor quality and safety of products, and unsafe working conditions, among other issues (May, 2011). In addition, these users are the new brand storytellers and ambassadors, because they are broadcasting personal stories about companies and brands in the social media world (Booth & Matic, 2011).

NGOs, corporations, and academia were the most absent CSR actors on Twitter as presented in Figure 1. Only large firms, with stout CSR programs, disclosed their information through Twitter. Previous studies showed that NGOs were not using Twitter to maximize stakeholder involvement, with less than 20% of their tweets demonstrating conversations (Lovejoy et al., 2012).

The different CSR actors on Twitter were tweeting and discussing CSR from different parts of the world. The most common and recurrent countries along the three-month-period were United States (USA), United Kingdom (UK), and Canada. United States and United Kingdom can be mapped as highly developed places and it appears feasible that they are leading the CSR discussion on Twitter.

Results also showed that every actor constructed his own perception about CSR. For instance, consultants tweeted frequently about issues related to environment and community. More often, consultants are hired by companies to advise and help improve external operations (green conscious initiatives and social causes). On the other hand, environment and community issues were the most important CSR subjects to communicate among media. CSR is usually associated with social initiatives due to its name. It was not surprising that media tweeted more about community than other topics. Other CSR actors tweeted most in the following subjects: CSR advocates/people working in CSR departments or with CSR activities/programs (Environment and Community), General public (Community and Labor Practices), NGOs (Community and Labor Practices), Bloggers/Journalists (Community and Labor Practices), Corporations (Community and Consumer issues), Academia (Environment and Community) and Other (Community and Environment). Therefore, a pattern of common CSR subjects (community, environment, and labor practices) was presented on Twitter among the different CSR actors as shown in Figure 2.

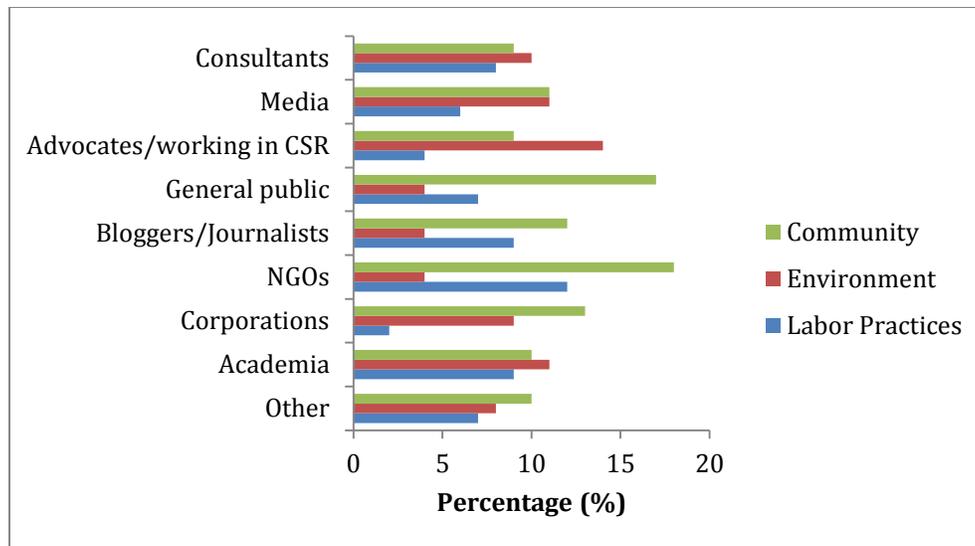


Figure 2. Average percentage of CSR core subjects disclosed per month by CSR actors.

Commonly CSR initiatives are focused on social causes for the improvement of communities (Due et al., 2010, Cohen, 2010). Additionally, these social causes can be categorized as general (where an organization contributes to a general social cause) or specific (where an organization is involved in a specific social cause) (Du et al., 2010). In addition, both community and environment are important CSR-related topics that are discussed not only on social media platforms but also on traditional media channels. A study developed by Hamilton (2003) as cited in Carroll (2011), found that journalists usually cover CSR topics related to community, environment, and health. The least common CSR areas disclosed by the different CSR actors on Twitter were fair operating practices and organizational governance. One possible explanation for this finding could be that CSR actors on Twitter have not grappled well with what CSR really entails; “if scholars and practitioners have yet to come to agreement on what constitutes CSR, it becomes difficult to communicate coherent messages” (Carroll, 2011, p.436).

On the other hand, other types of tweets could not be categorized because they were too general to be identified. These types of messages were classified as CSR or Sustainability. Consultants tweeted an average of 41% tweets per month about CSR and 14% for Sustainability, media (42% CSR and 14% Sustainability), and CSR advocates (37% CSR and 17% Sustainability). These findings indicated that CSR is the most common concept that CSR actors associated with responsible corporate operations.

As presented in Figure 3, blogs were the most common type of hyperlinks on CSR tweets. Blogs are an important resource for CSR communication and stakeholder engagement (Fieseler et al., 2010) and it has grown in acceptance and adoption by many Fortune companies (Lee, Hwang & Lee, 2006).

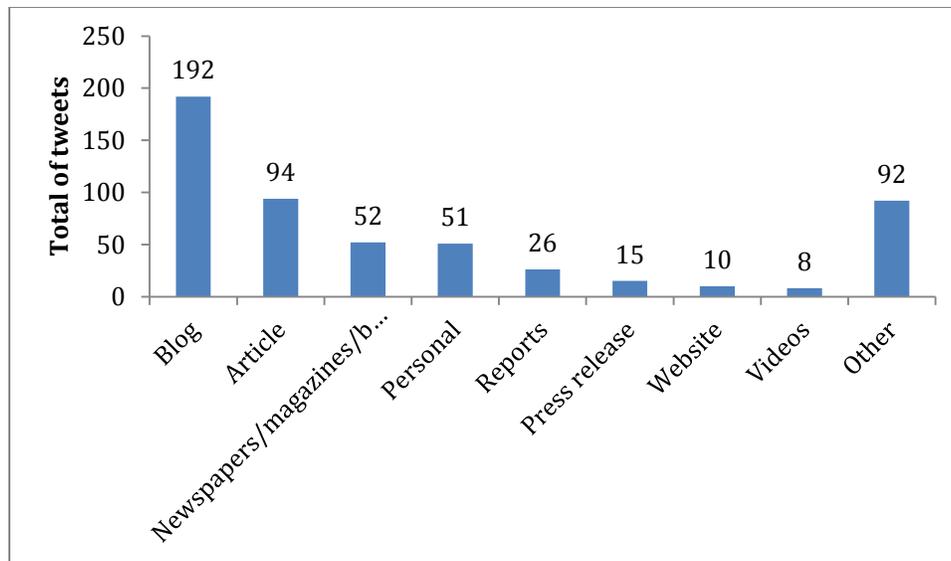


Figure 3. Types of hyperlinks per month.

Additionally, an average of 51 tweets per month did not include hyperlinks (personal). In these type of tweets actors usually expressed their ideas and opinions regarding CSR (e.g., *“Is always keen to invest in sustainable #CSR projects that secure life time income for people benefitting from it”*). Results show that hyperlinks shared by CSR actors are primarily used to disseminate information, although both informational and opinion mining tweets are fundamental for a constructive discussion of CSR on Twitter. In addition, using Twitter interactive communication tools such as retweets (RT), replies (@), hyperlinks, and hashtags (#) may help to facilitate and enrich the practice of CSR communication. The use of hashtags (e.g. #CSR) for instance, “serves to foster organization-public relationships by strengthening existing ties or broadening the community” (Saxton, 2012, p.32). According to Tim Mohin, director of corporate responsibility at AMD, monitoring keywords such as #CSR and #Sustainability is a great way to learn something new about these important subjects (Witkin, 2012).

Online CSR discussions on Twitter imply the creation and enforcement of a growing community of CSR actors. Public relations practitioners should be in charge of creating, developing, and monitoring these CSR dialogues that helps constitute stakeholder participation and ethical business practice. “Through dialogue, companies learn which issues are important, how to attach meanings to them, and how to integrate them successfully into CSR strategy” (Golob & Podnar, 2011, p.232)

In addition, a constructive storytelling perspective (Wehmeier & Schultz, 2011) on CSR should always be presented on Twitter. In other words, CSR tweets should be part of the narrative construction of social reality, where CSR actors are constructing CSR based not only in their assumptions, but taking into account other actor’s expectations. Therefore cross collaboration between different groups of CSR actors is desirable. Initiatives like #CSRChat are a starting point in promoting discussions and collaboration in the subject.

Furthermore, “low visibility” CSR actors on Twitter (i.e. NGOs, corporations, and academia) should pay attention to “high visibility” CSR actors (i.e. consultants, online media, advocates/people working in CSR, and the general public) discourse on social media platforms. “High visibility” CSR actors can help companies in identifying CSR trends, engage in discussions, and establish a sound basis for future collaboration. More importantly, if companies

create genuine dialogues and strong partnerships with “high visibility” CSR actors, they can develop trust and decrease the risk of stakeholder skepticism. “High visibility” actors are typically external communicators and are therefore not entirely controlled by organizations, making them more credible and genuine CSR ambassadors during CSR dialogue. In fact, Edelman’s (2010) study indicates that academic experts, NGOs, or any ordinary Twitter user is now more credible than CEOs and government officials.

Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, and LinkedIn) could help to overcome one of the most important drawbacks of CSR communication: stakeholder skepticism. The following formula: engaged stakeholders + interactive information and communication are the two most important benefits that social media platforms offer to a successful CSR communication process. Using this formula, organizations and stakeholders can understand each other better, shifting their relationship from competition and confrontation to cooperation (Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003 as cited by Golob & Podnar, 2011).

Conclusions

Twitter is growing as an important vehicle for the dissemination of information, and as a dialogical communication tool. Twitter not only allows the dissemination of content immediately in an interactive way, but it also involves publics in conversations, letting them participate and share content. Through the use of social media platforms like Twitter, companies can communicate and engage stakeholders about the importance of CSR. In addition, companies could reduce stakeholder skepticism through interactions with “high visibility” CSR actors on Twitter (such as media, consultants, CSR advocates/people working in CSR, customers and citizens). In addition, “high visibility” CSR actors can inform, communicate, and share content regarding a product/service/CSR initiatives immediately becoming viral. Viral videos can become either positive or negative, so they could turn beneficial or disastrous for companies. That is why companies could benefit from a deeper engagement with different groups of stakeholders, obtaining better communication, increasing accountability and trust, and overall achieving a positive contribution to CSR practice.

This paper represents the first exploratory study to analyze and classify the content of CSR discussions by stakeholders on Twitter. Further studies can focus on analyzing CSR discussions between stakeholders over a longer period of time, and including other social media platforms like Facebook, Pinterest or LinkedIn.

There is no way back. The power of social media is growing rapidly. We are witnesses of an era where collaboration and sharing are the key motivators of CSR digital actors, which portray the CSR tendencies on social media platforms. As someone said on Twitter: *How are you changing the world of business? I'd love to hear what you're up to. Please share. #csr #sustainability #socent* (Tweet by @JeffHollender- March 6, 2011)

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**From #mcdonaldsfail to #dominossucks:
An Analysis of Instagram Images about the 10 Largest Fast Food Companies**

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Abstract

The mobile app Instagram has emerged as one of the most popular social media networks with 150 million users that post millions of photos and videos every day. This study analyzed Instagram as a new emerging crisis information form. In two content analyses, more than 700 posts by Instagram users about the 10 largest fast food companies and posts by the companies themselves were evaluated for post tonalities, topics and origins over a constructed two-week period. It was found that negative content about these companies is posted by customers and employees alike and that the negative tonality primarily stems from issues with service and the work environment. The study also showed that the companies are just starting to discover Instagram and have very little engagement with users. None of the companies responded to the negative posts of customers and employees. The results of the study are a call-to-action for public relations professionals to engage with their publics on Instagram and actively use the app as a pre-crisis monitoring and crisis response tool in their social media plans.

Introduction

Whether it's a Taco Bell staffer liking a stack of taco shells, Domino's employees sneezing into the food or a Wendy's employee letting a milkshake drop straight into his mouth from the machine, disgusting food images and videos from fast food chains have caused firestorms from customers on social media and put public relations practitioners on crisis alert. The photos and videos in these incidents were easily shared on Facebook, YouTube and Reddit and reached mass audience within hours. These crises require close monitoring and immediate responses from public relations practitioners (Wonham, 2013).

As a photo and video sharing app for mobile phones and tablet computers, the social network Instagram has all of the components for causing crises for companies and organizations, but also has the potential to be used as a pre-crisis monitoring tool for public relations practitioners. Started in 2010, Instagram has grown quickly and has reached a similar popularity as Twitter with 150 million users (Dora, 2013; Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2013). Millions of photos are posted every day and users are very active on Instagram with about a third of them returning multiple times a day. Cision Navigator (2013) sees Instagram as an effective way to build brands and increase customer loyalty. Especially the food industry is seen as a sector that can benefit from visual social media messages like Instagram posts.

Due to the fact that there has been very little academic research conducted on Instagram at this point, this study analyzed Instagram as a new emerging crisis information form that has the potential to support issue monitoring and management as a critical function in pre-crisis stages or in crisis preparedness. Applying the Social-mediated crisis communication (SMCC) model (Liu et al., 2012), this study content analyzed negative photo and video posts of Instagram users about leading fast food companies as well as the Instagram engagement of the companies themselves. The findings allow to draw conclusions on the extent to which crisis emotions are conveyed by publics on Instagram and which kind of influence they have in the social network. In addition, the study provides suggestions for the improvement of the Instagram engagement by companies.

Literature Review

Role of Social Media in Organizational Crisis Communication

An organizational crisis is the "perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2007, p. 2-3). An organizational issue is a "contestable point, a difference of opinion regarding fact, value, or policy, the resolution of which has consequences for the organization's strategic plan and future success or failure" (Heath & Palenchar, 2009, p. 93). Issues emerging online can be more unpredictable than issues that emerge offline, given the rapid evolution of different types of social media available for a vast spectrum of publics to voice their opinions and emotions (Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014), which lead to new challenges facing crisis managers in terms of how to monitor issues created and disseminated via social media (Coombs, 2008).

As Coombs (2008) noted: "The rapid evolution of new media often results in the practice of public relations getting ahead of research. The practice of crisis communication is ahead of research in terms of social media" (p.1). Social media is "an umbrella term that is used to refer to a new era of Web-enabled applications that are built around user-generated or user-manipulated content, such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social networking sites" (Pew Internet & American Life, 2010). Wright and Hinson (2009) operationalized social media broadly as

various digital tools and applications that facilitate interactive communication and content exchange among and between publics and organizations. Despite a plethora of attention to the use of social media in public relations professional publications, research is still needed to provide evidence-based guidelines to make the business case for integrating social media into crisis management practices (Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014).

During crises, publics' social media usage increases (Pew Internet & American Life, 2006), leading some experts to conclude that public participation is the new norm in crisis management (Baron, 2010). Publics who are active social media users or become active during crises assign a higher level of credibility to social media coverage than to traditional mass media crisis coverage (Horrihan & Morris, 2005; Procopio & Procopio, 2007; Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007). For all publics, social media provide emotional support after crises through enabling publics to virtually band together, share information, and demand resolution (Choi & Lin, 2009; Stephens & Malone, 2009). This online participation during crises often is replicated in offline participation in crisis resolution (Dutta-Bergman, 2006). As Jin, Liu and Austin (2014) pointed out, organizations no longer have a choice about whether to integrate social media into crisis management; the only choice is how to do so.

Social-Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC) Model

In order to provide evidence-based guidelines to effectively meet publics' expectations for communication via social media, Jin and Liu (2010) proposed the blog-mediated crisis communication (BMCC) as a roadmap for deciding if and how to respond to influential blogs before, during, and after crises, which was further tested and renamed the Social-mediated crisis communication (SMCC) model to better reflect that crises can be sparked and spread online through a variety of social media platforms and offline social interactions, not just by influential bloggers (Liu et al., 2012).

One of the components the SMCC model emphasizes is the ubiquity of online and offline opinions shared among key publics affected by a crisis situation, which is manifested in form of online and offline word-of-mouth communications occurring among the organizations responding to an issue/crisis, influential social media creators, social media followers, and social media inactives.

The SMCC model further adds five considerations: crisis origin, crisis type, infrastructure, message content, and message form, specifically: *Crisis origin* refers to whether the crisis was initiated from an internal organizational issue or from an issue external of the organization, which affects attribution of responsibility and thus the available crisis response strategies. *Organizational infrastructure* indicates whether the crisis should be best handled through a centralized organizational message or localized by individual branches, affiliates, or chapters. *Content* and *form* refer to attributes of the crisis message which provide emotional support for impacted publics, similar to what Coombs (2011) calls instructing and adapting information. Content, for instance, refers to the information included in the message that helps publics respond to and make meaning of.

Instagram as an Emerging Crisis Information Form

The SMCC model indicates that selecting the appropriate crisis message strategy is a function of form and source, in addition to attribution of responsibility (Jin & Liu, 2010; Liu et al., 2012). *Form* is how the message is conveyed (e.g., via a tweet, press release, etc.) and

source is who the information is sent by (e.g., by the organization featured in the center of the SMCC model, journalists, bloggers, other organizations, etc.).

The mobile social networking platform Instagram, which was founded in 2010 and acquired by Facebook in 2012, is an emerging new form in this realm, via which organizational crisis information can be conveyed by both organizations and publics. Instagram is a photo- and video sharing platform as well as a social networking channel that allows users to take and share photos after applying a choice of digital filters to their pictures via an Instagram smartphone app. The resulting images are easily shared on other social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr.

Instagram has been growing rapidly, reaching 150 million monthly active users (Crook, 2013) who are on a daily average posting 55 million photos and contributing 1.2 billion “likes” to the platform (Dora, 2013). Instagram is only available as a mobile application and has thereby become the visual engagement platform for mobile phones and tablet computers. Based on a study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (2013), Instagram has already become as popular as Twitter with 17 percent of online users already using Instagram. According to the study, “Instagram and Twitter have a significantly smaller number of users than Facebook does, but users of these sites also tend to visit them frequently. Some 57% of Instagram users visit the site at least once a day (with 35% doing so multiple times per day), and 46% of Twitter users are daily visitors (with 29% visiting multiple times per day)” (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2013, n.p.).

Among PR professionals, Instagram is seen as an effective way to build brand personality and loyalty. In addition, using newer social media platforms often allows a brand to reach out to a different part of the public (Cision Navigator, 2013). Visual images tend to be more engaging than text alone (Abbott, Donaghey, Hare, & Hopkins, 2013), and the food industry is seen as one of the primary industries to benefit from the visual nature of Instagram (Cision Navigator, 2013) as well as one that is most likely to become subject to a social media crisis (Wonham, 2013).

The fast food industry has been plagued by a long string of recent scandals. From a YouTube video of two Domino’s Pizza employees tampering with food to a video of a Taco Bell employee licking a stack of taco shells, and from a photo of a Burger King employee stomping in lettuce to a KFC employee licking a container of mashed potatoes, social media enabled for this content to spread quickly and widely causing major online crises for the companies, their brands and reputations. (Burgess, 2013; Wonham, 2013).

As hardly any academic research on the impact and use of Instagram exists at this point, this study attempted to explore Instagram as an emerging crisis information form in the context of fast food company emerging crises. Based on the above literature, the following research questions were derived to guide the research:

RQ1: How was fast food company crisis information communicated by publics on Instagram, as evidenced in the volume of posts and topics of posts?

RQ2: What was the influence of fast food company crisis information posted by publics on Instagram, as evidenced in the number of comments and “likes”?

Crisis Emotions

Grounded in Lazarus’ (1991) cognitive appraisal theory of emotions, Jin, Pang and Cameron (2007, 2012) integrated crisis emotions in their Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model, an audience-driven, situational crisis communication framework, examining what is going on in the “black box” of communication. Jin et al. (2007, 2012) as well as other crisis

researchers (e.g., Choi & Lin, 2009; Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014) advocated that developing effective crisis responses lies in a deeper understanding of human emotions and how they work integrated with cognitive processes and crisis responsibility attribution.

Based on the above appraisal model of emotion, Jin et al. (2007) proposed understanding primary publics' crisis responses through the predominant emotions elicited by different crisis types. In a crisis, Lazarus (1991) identified that there are predominantly six negative emotions (anger, fright, anxiety, guilt, shame, and sadness) based upon different appraisals and driven by different core relational themes. For the purpose of understanding organization-public communication, Jin et al. (2012) found that four of the six negative emotions (anger, fright, anxiety, and sadness) tend to be dominant emotions experienced by publics in organizational crisis situations. In crisis situations, these four primary negative emotions were also found to play significant mediator roles between crisis responsibility and both relational trust and willingness to seek information from an organization involved in the crisis (Kim & Niederdeppe, 2013). Other negative crisis emotions examined by researchers include alarm, contempt, disgust, confusion, apprehension, embarrassment, guilt, surprise, and shame (e.g., Choi & Lin, 2009; Liu & Kim, 2011), based on the discrete emotions social psychologists identified (e.g., Frijda, Kuipers, & Schure, 1989; Izard, 1977). Confusion and alarm, along with fear and sadness, in particular, were found to be the most frequently incorporated emotions across both traditional and social media types in organizational crisis responses during the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic (Liu & Kim, 2011).

Therefore, in the context of fast food company crises and Instagram-based crisis emotion expressions, the following third research question was derived:

RQ3: How were crisis emotions conveyed by publics on Instagram, in terms of both tonality and negative emotions?

Organizational and Social Media Reputation

Previous research in crisis communication has extensively examined the associations between public perceptions of crisis responsibility and reputation. For example, Coombs and Holladay (2002) explained how publics make an interpretation of a crisis event: attribution of greater amounts of crisis responsibility influences more negative crisis reputation.

Fombrun defines a reputation as “a perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describes the firm’s overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals” (Fombrun, 1996). The schematic diagram he developed includes vision and leadership, social responsibility, emotional appeal, products and services, workplace environment and financial performance (Fombrun, 2000). Griffin (2008) identified three components of reputation management – crisis management, issues management and social responsibility – that are intertwined in a company’s reputation (p. 19). Connecting the role of media to reputation, Deephouse (2000) developed the construct of “media reputation,” which highlights the role of media coverage on reputation formation.

Deephouse (2000) developed the concept of media reputation, which is “a collective concept connecting the firm, media workers, stakeholders, sources of news about firms, and the readers of news” that “develops over time through a complex social process” (p. 1098). According to the most recent SMCC model, crisis information source, amounting to who sent out the message regarding a given crisis (Jin & Liu, 2010; Liu et al., 2012), is another important social-mediated crisis communication factor, which are associated with communication outcomes at cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels, including social media reputation.

In the context of crisis information and responses on Instagram, whether the information, as well as the comments or replies, are from the organization (official crisis information reported by the organization at the center of the crisis) or a third party (any groups or individuals outside the organization, including other publics and the media), is an essential indicator of whether and how organizations respond to crisis information and manage their reputations online (Liu et al., 2012). In addition, Lyon and Cameron (2004) found that consumers' attitudes toward companies, as well as purchasing intentions, with a good reputation were better than were attitudes toward companies with a bad reputation. Therefore, the following additional research questions were posed:

RQ4: Are there differences among fast food companies in their responses to crisis information on Instagram?

RQ5: Are there differences among fast food companies in their overall Instagram engagement?

Methodology

This study attempted to analyze the crisis information posted by publics on the social media site Instagram about leading fast food companies as well as the responses by the companies and their general use of Instagram. In two quantitative content analyses, 711 Instagram posts were identified in a two-week constructed time period that related to the 10 largest fast food chains in world, as determined by Forbes (2013). The companies in the sample were McDonald's, KFC, Subway, Pizza Hut, Starbucks, Burger King, Domino's Pizza, Dunkin Donuts, Dairy Queen, and Papa John's Pizza. 662 of these posts were from Instagram users and 49 posts were from the official Instagram accounts of these companies.

The Instagram posts by the Instagram users were identified based on negative hashtags such as #mcdonaldsfail and #dominossucks that were used within these posts. The specific hashtags were chosen through observations of hashtags used in negative messaging about the 10 fast food restaurants. The following hashtags and hashtag variations were then tracked for the study, because they appeared most frequently and directly connected with the fast food chains' names: restaurantname-FAIL, restaurantname-FAILS, restaurantname-FAILURE, restaurantname-PROBLEMS, restaurantname-PROBS, restaurantname-PROBZ, restaurantname-SUCKS, and restaurantname-SUX. The posts by the companies were collected directly from their official Instagram accounts.

The Instagram posts were collected during a constructed two-week period between October 14 and December 14, 2013. Each day of the week was randomly selected twice within this two-month period. This created a sample of the following 14 non-consecutive days: October 14, 17, 22, 27; November 2, 5, 11, 14, 17, 25, 27; and December 6, 11, 14. On each of the days in the sample, all Instagram posts containing the aforementioned negative hashtags as well as all Instagram posts by the fast food restaurants were collected.

Coding protocols for the negative hashtag posts by Instagram users and for the fast food company posts were developed, tested and implemented for the coding process. Upon collection, all Instagram posts were coded for the independent and dependent variables as listed in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1

Independent variables for posts by Instagram users

Name	Definition
Topic	The primary topic of a post
Tonality	Whether a post is positive, negative, or neutral in tone
Negative emotion	The dominant negative crisis emotion present
Poster identity	Who authored the post
Multimedia type	Did the post contain a photo or a video
Company reply	Did the company reply to the post?

Table 2

Independent variables for Instagram posts by fast food companies

Name	Definition
Topic	The primary topic of a post
Multimedia type	Did the post contain a photo or a video
Company reply	Did the company reply to comment on the post?

Table 3

Dependent variables

Name	Definition
Frequency of likes	How many likes a post received
Frequency of comments	How many comments a post received

Among the variables, the dependent variables represent the two main ways publics can engage with Instagram posts: through likes and comments. The independent variables refer to the post's tonality, its topic, its poster, and whether the post contains a photo or a video. The Instagram posts were coded for topic (food/drink, service, brand reputation, work environment, and other), tonality (positive, negative, and neutral), negative tonality (anger/frustration, fear, anxiety, sadness, and other), and poster's identity (customer/potential customer, employee, undetermined).

Two coders were trained to establish intercoder reliability. The first coder coded all of the posts (n=711), while the second coder coded approximately 10% of the posts (n=74) for the four variables. After pre-testing and subsequent changes to the coding protocol, the intercoder reliability test with the PRAM statistical software showed the following *Scott's Pi* (Scott, 1955) coefficients: Topic (.95), tonality (.92), negative tonality (.84), and poster's identity (.89). These coefficients were all considered to be reliable.

Results

The goal of this study was to research crisis information on Instagram about leading fast food companies and the use of Instagram by these companies. The data collected through content analyses of 711 Instagram posts during a two-week constructed time period was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results are presented in the order of the five research questions posed for this study in the following sections.

RQ1: How was fast food company crisis information communicated by publics on Instagram, as evidenced in the volume of posts and topics of posts?

The results showed that posts about the 10 fast food companies varied greatly, ranging from 56.3% (N=373) of the posts for Starbucks to 0.3% (N=2) for Papa John's Pizza (see Table 4). Domino's Pizza (N=5), Burger King (N=8), Dairy Queen (N=6), Dunkin' Donuts (N=10), KFC (N=12) did not see a minimum of one daily Instagram post about them with the selected hashtags, while McDonald's (N=151) and Subway (N=82) saw multiple posts every day. With 98.9% (N=655) of the posts, almost all of the content in the sample contained a photo, while only 1.1% (N=7) included a video.

Only 9.4% (N=62) of the posts in the sample focused on the topic of food. The most used topics were service and work environment with 35.0% (N=232) and 31.9% (N=211) respectively. Of the 662 posts by Instagram users, 62.8% (N=416) were made by customers, 32.8% (N=217) by employees of the fast food companies, and 4.4% (N=29) by other users. An especially high contribution of employee content was found in the Instagram posts about McDonald's of which 58.3% (N=88) were made by staff members. On the other hand, there was a high contribution of Instagram posts by Starbucks customers with 87.4% (N=326) coming from them. While 94.5% (N=205) of the posts by employees were focused on the work environment, 55.3% (N=230) of the posts by customers focused on service, 21.4% (N=89) on the brand's reputation and 14.4% (N=60) on the food (see Table 4).

Of the 662 Instagram posts in the sample, 69.3% (N=459) were found to be negative. On the other hand, 15.0% (N=99) of the posts were neutral and 15.7% (N=104) positive despite the use of negative hashtags.

Of the 459 negative Instagram posts, 71.7% (N=329) were posted by customers. Employees of the companies accounted for 25.9% (n=119) of the negative posts, while other users posted 2.4% (n=11) of them. Most of the negative content came from Starbucks customers (N=265), McDonald's employees (N=59) and customers (N=38) as well as Subway employees (N=30).

Of negative posts, 48.6% (N=223) focused on service, 25.3% (N=116) on the work environment, 15.9% (N=73) on the brand's reputation, and 5.9% (N=27) on the food. The main contributors to the negative content were customers posting about the company's service (N=221) and employees posting about their work environment (N=114) (see Table 5).

Table 4
Instagram posts by poster identity, company, and topic

		Poster Identity			Total
		customer	employee	undetermined	
Instagram posts		62.8% (N=416)	32.8% (N=217)	4.4% (N=29)	100.0% (N=662)
Company	Burger King	37.5% (N=3)	50.0% (N=4)	12.5% (N=1)	100.0% (N=8)
	Dairy Queen	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=6)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=6)
	Domino's Pizza	20.0% (N=1)	80.0% (N=4)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=5)
	Dunkin' Donuts	50.0% (N=5)	40.0% (N=4)	10.0% (N=1)	100.0% (N=10)
	KFC	58.3% (N=7)	33.3% (N=4)	8.3% (N=1)	100.0% (N=12)
	McDonald's	35.1% (N=53)	58.3% (N=88)	6.6% (N=10)	100.0% (N=151)
	Papa John's Pizza	50.0% (N=1)	50.0% (N=1)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=2)
	Pizza Hut	30.8% (N=4)	69.2% (N=9)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=13)
	Starbucks	87.4% (N=326)	9.7% (N=36)	2.9% (N=11)	100.0% (N=373)
	Subway	19.5% (N=16)	74.4% (N=61)	6.1% (N=5)	100.0% (N=82)
Topic	food	96.8% (N=60)	0.0% (N=0)	3.2% (N=2)	100.0% (N=62)
	service	99.1% (N=230)	0.4% (N=1)	0.4% (N=1)	100.0% (N=232)
	brand reputation	94.7% (N=89)	3.2% (N=3)	2.1% (N=2)	100.0% (N=94)
	work environment	1.9% (N=4)	97.2% (N=205)	0.9% (N=2)	100.0% (N=211)
	other	52.4% (N=33)	12.7% (N=8)	34.9% (N=22)	100.0% (N=63)

Table 5
Instagram posts with negative tone by poster identity, company, and topic

		Poster Identity			Total
		customer	employee	undetermined	
Instagram posts		71.7% (N=329)	25.9% (N=119)	2.4% (N=11)	100.0% (N=459)
Company	Burger King	50.0% (N=2)	50.0% (N=2)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=4)
	Dairy Queen	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=3)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=3)
	Domino's Pizza	50.0% (N=1)	50.0% (N=1)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=2)
	Dunkin' Donuts	50.0% (N=2)	50.0% (N=2)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=4)
	KFC	85.7% (N=6)	14.3% (N=1)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=7)
	McDonald's	37.3% (N=38)	57.8% (N=59)	4.9% (N=5)	100.0% (N=102)
	Papa John's Pizza	100.0% (N=1)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=1)
	Pizza Hut	42.9% (N=3)	57.1% (N=4)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=7)
	Starbucks	92.7% (N=265)	5.9% (N=17)	1.4% (N=4)	100.0% (N=286)
	Subway	25.6% (N=11)	69.8% (N=30)	4.7% (N=2)	100.0% (N=43)
Topic	food	100.0% (N=27)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=27)
	service	99.1% (N=221)	0.4% (N=1)	0.4% (N=1)	100.0% (N=223)
	brand reputation	93.2% (N=68)	4.1% (N=3)	2.7% (N=2)	100.0% (N=73)
	work environment	1.7% (N=2)	98.3% (N=114)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=116)
	other	55.0% (N=11)	5.0% (N=1)	40.0% (N=8)	100.0% (N=20)

RQ2: What was the influence of fast food company crisis information posted by publics on Instagram, as evidenced in the number of comments and "likes"?

The influence of the public's Instagram posts was measured by the number of comments and the number of "likes" they received from other users. On average, an Instagram post in the sample received 2 comments and 15 likes. However, the number of comments ranged between 0 and 93 and the number of likes between 0 and 473. The most comments were on average found with posts about the work environment, which received on average 3 comments. Posts about brand reputation received on average of 18 likes, which was the most among the topics analyzed. The results also showed more engagement with the negative posts of the employees than with the ones of customers. Negative employee posts on average received 3 comments and 17 likes, while negative customer posts received 2 comments and 13 likes.

RQ3: How were crisis emotions conveyed by publics on Instagram, in terms of both tonality and negative emotions?

Even though the hashtags with the posts were chosen for their negative connotation, not all posts were actually negative in their tone. For the sample, 15.7% (N=104) of the posts were positive, 69.3% (N=459) negative, and 15.0% (N=99) neutral. While 79.1% (N=329) of the customer posts were negative, 54.8% (N=119) of the employee posts were negative. Of all the negative posts, 77.1% (n=354) were found to express anger and frustration. None of the posts were found to express fear, anxiety or sadness. However, 22.9% (N=105) were found to express another negative emotion (see Table 6).

Table 6

Instagram posts by poster identity, tonality, and negative emotion

		Poster Identity			Total
		customer	employee	undetermined	
Tonality	positive	61.5% (N =64)	34.6% (N=36)	3.8% (N=4)	100.0% (N=104)
	negative	71.7% (N=329)	25.9% (N=119)	2.4% (N=11)	100.0% (N=459)
	neutral	23.2% (N=23)	62.6% (N=62)	14.1% (N=14)	100.0% (N=99)
	Total	62.8% (N=416)	32.8% (N=217)	4.4% (N=29)	100.0% (N=662)
Negative Emotion	anger/frustration	74.6% (N=264)	23.7% (N=84)	1.7% (N=6)	100.0% (N=354)
	fear	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)
	anxiety	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)
	sadness	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)
	other	61.9% (N=65)	33.3% (N=35)	4.8% (N=5)	100.0% (N=105)
	Total	71.7% (N=329)	25.9% (N=119)	2.4% (N=11)	100.0% (N=459)

RQ4: Are there differences among fast food companies in their responses to crisis information on Instagram?

All of the 662 Instagram posts and the 1,458 comments made on them were analyzed for responses of the 10 fast food companies in the sample of this study. However, no response was found from any of the companies. None of the companies engaged with the negative content posted about them.

RQ5: Are there differences among fast food companies in their overall Instagram engagement?

The last part of the study analyzed the use of Instagram by the fast food companies themselves. It was found that the companies are just beginning to discover Instagram at this point. Of the 10 companies, eight have an official Instagram account, but few use it consistently. Subway and Dairy Queen do not have accounts. Papa John's has an account with 931 followers, but had not posted any content, yet. For the lifetime of the Instagram accounts, Domino's Pizza had posted 48 times, Burger King 72, McDonald's 73, KFC 123, Pizza Hut 204, Dunkin Donuts 347, and Starbucks 351 times.

Starbucks' company posts often elicit tens of thousands of likes. A post on December 6, 2013, received 122,052 likes and 1,050 comments. Rival Dunkin Donuts also regularly gets several thousand likes and dozens of comments to its Instagram posts. The number of likes for posts by all companies ranged from 136 and 122,052, and the number of comments ranged from 0 to 1,050. Interestingly, the companies did not respond directly to any of the 4,336 comments on their own posts, except for one time.

During the constructed two-week time sampling period for this study, most the companies did not post on a regular daily basis. Only Dunkin' Donuts posted on average once a day (N=13) (see Table 7). Overall, the seven companies that were active on Instagram during the sampling period only posted a total of 49 times. 40.8% (N=20) of the posts were about food, 24.5% (N=12) about brand reputation, 24.5% (N=12) about contests, and 10.2% (N=5) about other topics (see Table 8).

Table 7

Mean frequency of likes and mean frequency of comments by company posts

Company	Mean frequency of likes	Mean frequency of comments
Burger King	184	4
Domino's Pizza	252	11
Dunkin Donuts	3518	43
KFC	709	38
McDonalds	2872	101
Pizza Hut	840	28
Starbucks	88103	531
Total	10519	88

Table 8
Topics by company posts

Company	Topic					Total
	food	service	brand reputation	other	contest	
Burger King	5.0% (N=1)	0.0% (N=0)	50.0% (N=6)	60.0% (N=3)	0.0% (N=0)	20.4% (N=10)
Domino's Pizza	10.0% (N=2)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	4.1% (N=2)
Dunkin Donuts	35.0% (N=7)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	50.0% (N=6)	26.5% (N=13)
KFC	5.0% (N=1)	0.0% (N=0)	25.0% (N=3)	0.0% (N=0)	50.0% (N=6)	20.4% (N=10)
McDonald's	25.0% (N=5)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	20.0% (N=1)	0.0% (N=0)	12.2% (N=6)
Pizza Hut	10.0% (N=2)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	20.0% (N=1)	0.0% (N=0)	6.1% (N=3)
Starbucks	10.0% (N=2)	0.0% (N=0)	25.0% (N=3)	0.0% (N=0)	0.0% (N=0)	10.2% (N=5)
Total	100.0% (N=20)	0.0% (N=0)	100.0% (N=12)	100.0% (N=5)	100.0% (N=12)	100.0% (N=49)

Discussion and Conclusion

This study is the first to analyze the popular mobile social media platform Instagram as a new emerging crisis information form. A content analysis of posts by Instagram users about the 10 leading fast food companies in the world over a two-week constructed time period showed that negative content is posted by customers and employees of the companies alike. Employees contributed one-fourth of all negative posts, and the posts by employees received slightly more comments and likes than the ones by customers. While customers mainly posted negative content about service issues, employees posted predominantly about their work environment. Only very few negative posts were about issues with the food. This finding is surprising in so far as most major social media crises for fast food companies were related to food. A large number of negative posts stem from service issues at Starbucks and issues with the work environment at McDonald's. These two topics were predominant in the post sample of this study. And most of the negative content consists of photos. Videos play a minor role in this context at this point.

The study also showed that Instagram users attach negative hashtags to their post even though the tonality of the post is positive. Some of the hashtags used to derive the sample for this study are already commonly used in Instagram conversations about these companies as shown by the levels of positive and neutral content used. Of the negative content, most of it was found to have been caused by anger and frustration of customers and employees.

All these findings stress the importance for public relations practitioners to monitor the postings and conversations on Instagram and include the platform in their crisis and social media plans. Nevertheless, the study shows that the 10 fast food companies are just starting to engage on Instagram. If they have an Instagram account, they barely engage on a daily basis with it and hardly ever use hashtags to direct their posts to their publics. It was surprising to find that none of the companies responded to any of the negative content analyzed in this study. It was also found that the companies did not even engage with the comments on their own posts, which led one Instagram user to ask, "Do you guys even read these comments?"

While public relations professionals clearly need to engage much more actively with their publics on Instagram, they also need to address the issue of their employees negatively posting about their work environment. They need to sensitize employees about the potential damage they can cause to a company's brand and reputation. Developing social media policies that include guidelines for using Instagram and other social media platforms will be key. Making employees

part of the brand, instilling pride in them and using their mobile and social media skills for authentic social media engagement on behalf of the company could be an opportunity. There is also potential for the company to work with its employees and address social media usage among millennials who have a very high adoption rate for Instagram. Thereby, companies could also improve their own Instagram engagement, which mainly consists of contests and promotions at this point.

Some of the negative content can also be addressed in a humorous or playful way. Many of the customers' negative posting about Starbucks, for instance, are about misspellings of their names on the coffee cups. Starbucks could evaluate whether it is even necessary to address customers by their names. Customers' negative postings about Starbucks did not address the product itself. Overall, this could be easily addressed in a response that creates satisfaction in the customer about the company's social media service.

This study demonstrates that customers and employees of fast food companies are regularly using Instagram to talk about the companies' service, work environment, food, and brands. Due to the fact that every customer and every employee can create a crisis for these companies with two clicks on their cell phones -- taking a photo and hitting share -- public relations professionals need to become much more engaged on this popular platform. Conversations about the companies need to be monitored by using Instagram as a pre-crisis tool and negative content needs to be responded to. Instagram should be part of any crisis and social media plan at these companies. The expectations for baristas, cooks and cashiers at these companies should be clearly formulated.

As with all research, this study has limitations. The analysis only evaluated posts with negative hashtags about 10 fast food companies. Future research should expand the analysis to all posts about a certain sector and expand the scope of the research beyond fast food to be able to draw conclusions for public relations in general. The study also only analyzed a two-week constructed time period. This should also be expanded in future research. Longitudinal research with a larger data set is needed.

As this study shows, more research on Instagram should be on the agenda for social media scholars. Surveys of customers and employees using Instagram as well as public relations practitioners tasked with monitoring and engaging on the platform should be conducted to establish best-practice models for the field. The findings of this study should be a call-to-action for public relations practitioners to put Instagram next to Facebook and Twitter at the center of their social media strategy.

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Publicity Under Siege: A Critique of Content Marketing, Brand Journalism, Native Advertising and Promoted User Endorsements As Challenges to Professional Practice and Transparency

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Abstract

Traditional approaches to publicity, the component of public relations communications devoted to creating public visibility, awareness and understanding, are being challenged today on multiple fronts with the advent of Internet- and mobile-communications strategies that empower marketers and others to assume roles traditionally within the province of public relations. These challenges or “hot trends” involving public relations-like communications go by a variety of names: content marketing, brand journalism, native advertising, and user-generated content in the form of prompted user endorsements.

Content Marketing

Content marketing is the broadest concept among the four ideas examined in this paper; and some would argue that brand journalism, native advertising, user endorsements are mere variations on the theme. However, these other concepts originated independently and mostly overlap with content marketing in different ways. Advertising Age summarized the trend this way:

Corporations are pushing out news stories, infographics and documentary-style videos as if they were run by a Frankenstein combo of Henrys Ford and Luce. Forget press releases and ads. What matters is straightforward, practical even nonpromotional information that plays well on social networks (Creamer, 2012)

Joe Pulizzi, a former Penton Media executive, is the leading advocate of the idea and most recently has defined the concept this way:

Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action. (Pulizzi, 2014, p. 5).

Pulizzi goes on to explain,

Content marketing is a strategy focused on the creation of a valuable experience. It is humans being helpful to each other, sharing valuable pieces of content that enrich the community and position the business as a leader in the field. It is content that is engaging, eminently shareable, and most of all, focused on helping customers discover (on their own) that your product or service is the one that will scratch their itch (Pulizzi, 2014, p. 5)

Strategy	Content Marketing	Brand Journalism	Native Advertising	Promoted User Endorsements
<i>Description</i>	Creating or curating useful information or entertainment fare to engage users, promote online click-throughs and return visits.	Hiring professional journalists and experienced media producers to craft brand stories (on staff, through agencies or through media)	Paying to embed sponsored messages within editorial or entertainment content of online publishers	Enticing users and other third parties (who appear to independent) to promote an idea to contacts via online or mobile posts or other actions
<i>Ostensible source</i>	Message sponsor	Message sponsor	Publication or media outlet	Primarily users but also paid confederates
<i>Key roles played by benefiting organization</i>	Produce, distribute message	Produce, distribute message	Pay for inclusion; Produce or approve messages	Facilitate, prompt user feedback
<i>Message Mode</i>	Feature stories, images or video	Feature stories, images or video	Mix of feature and	Brief narratives; user-produced

			entertainment content, usually indistinguishable from publisher-produced content but labeled as ad content	images or videos; and system-computed counts of user endorsements
<i>Related terms</i>	In-bound marketing; Search marketing	Corporate journalism	Hybrid messages Advertorials	Shares, comments, ratings, likes, favorites, recommendations
<i>Useful citations</i>	Lieb (2012a) Content Marketing Institute (2013) Pulizzi (2014a)	Bull (2013) Brito (2013)	Interactive Advertising Bureau (2013) Cision (2013)	Karpen (2011,2012) Carter (2013)

Figure 1. A comparison of competing publicity strategies.

Note: All four approaches purposely avoid any appearance of being display or search advertising and generally focus on information or entertainment without reading like an organizational news announcement.

Variations on this definition have been adopted by Pulizzi's Content Marketing Institute (2013a, b) as well as the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB, 2013, p. 2), a major Internet marketing trade group. A leading consultant says "Content marketing is an umbrella term for a range of tactics and techniques whereby content is used in a strategic, consistent, continuous consumer-central and connected ways fulfill various marketing goals and support other customer-facing business goals (Content Marketing Experience, 2014). Eloqua (2014), a subsidiary of Oracle that provides marketing automation services, states "Content marketing involves the creation and distribution of digital assets in ways that drive better business results." Wubben (2012, p. 4) describes content as the "currency" that allows organizations to make connections (p. xi) and defines content marketing as "the act of sharing tips, advice, and other value-added information as a means of converting prospects and customers into loyal, lifelong repeat buyers." Content marketing can take a variety of formats (Handley & Chapman, 2012), but goes beyond content strategy (James, 2014), and involves initiatives that extend beyond merely responding in real time to opportunities that arise in social media (Brito, 2013a). Lieb (2013a) describes content marketing as the "marketing of attraction," while the IAB describes content marketing primarily as a *pull* (versus push) *strategy*. The IAB explains:

Content marketing subscribes to the notion that delivering high-quality, relevant and valuable information to prospects and customers drive profitable consumer action. The originator of the content is a consumer or business-facing brand that traditionally communicates with consumers via advertising, public relations or a retail sales channel. Within this paradigm, content assets, experiences, strategies and tactics are adopted by a marketer who is ultimately pursuing the more traditional marketing goals of brand preference, brand equity and brand preference. (IAB, 2013, pp. 3-4).

Authors vary in terms of delimiting content marketing. Although many focus on CM's role in contemporary Internet communications (Content Marketing Experience, 2014), the Content Marketing Institute (2014) and others point out that content marketing is nothing new. Content marketers trace the origins of the new field to the late 1800s and cite pre-Internet examples such as sponsored customer magazines, buyers' guides, recipe booklets and educational comic books (Gordon, 2011; Lewtan, 2012; Pulizzi, 2014a, pp. 13-17). Yet these are some of the very same tools cited as innovations in early public relations (Lamme & Russell, 2010). Today, content marketing flourishes offline through custom publishing (Custom Content Council, 2014), sponsored films and videos (Dobrow, 2014; Rossier, 2014), sponsored events, sponsored educational materials in schools, and sponsored electronic games used for educational purposes (Serious Games Association, 2014).

In the Internet arena, content marketing takes an *indirect approach* that differs from other earlier forms of internet marketing (social media marketing, organic search engine listings, paid online ads, and hyperlinks on websites) where the primary tactic was to use short, pithy blurbs solely to drive traffic to website or landing page where the sponsoring entity can sell products, services or event tickets, seek contributions or enlist volunteers in a cause.

By contrast to questionable techniques such as articles marketing (Hallahan, 2013a), content marketing goes beyond providing "click bait," and places an emphasis on quality, often longer messages that more fully engage users in the message itself. "Content marketing is about creating interesting information your customers are passionate about so they actually pay attention to you," says Pulizzi (2014a, p. 6). Sherik (2014) suggests the good content must create visibility, but Lieb (2013) states that CM contributes to brand recognition, trust, credibility, loyalty and authenticity. Similarly, Pulizzi (2014a, p. 10) argues good content marketing "makes a person stop, read, think and behave differently" and "must inform, engage or amuse with the objective of driving profitable customer action."

The common argument found in the content marketing literature is that quality content can start fostering and nurturing *relationships* or building upon relationships with existing customers over the relationship's life cycle, and can lead to brand preference (IAB, 2013, p. 3), conversion or purchase (Pulizzi, 2014a, p. 9), and loyalty and willingness to make recommendations or endorsements to others. Importantly, relationship building is the focus of both content marketing and public relations, and most public relations practitioners or clients would concur that the ultimate goal any type of relationship building is to "drive profitable action" (Hallahan, 2014, *forthcoming*).

Under the new content marketing regimen, direct, hard-hitting persuasive messages are abandoned in favor of an indirect, more subtle "soft sell" or "no sell" approach, which is consistent with the approach commonly employed in public relations (Strong, 2014). In so doing the aim is to create a conducive environment that still has promotion as its purpose. In this regard, content marketing is no different from the fundamental strategy used for nearly a century various arenas of public relations, including product publicity (Hallahan, 1996; 1999a, b; 2013b). Whereas online marketing *sells*, content marketing (similar to traditional publicity) *tells*. In this regard, Robbins (2014) suggests the good content is educational, entertaining or emotionally engaging. Because much content marketing material is searched for or sought based on referrals from friends of others, content marketing might enjoy some of the same advantages as traditional publicity vis-à-vis advertising -- less reactance to persuasion attempts, less message avoidance, less discounting of the source, and less counter-arguing about the message (Hallahan, 1999a). As the IAB explains,

When brands put the consumer first with the focus on relevancy versus selling, consumers feel they are in the driver's seat on what content they consumer. Consumers value the less

intrusive nature of content marketing which, ideally, leads to a more positive association with the brand and a higher inclination to take action. Action can be in the form of interaction (clicks) and, importantly, the sharing of information of branded messages on social networks. Successful content that consumers receive is targeted, of high quality, is informational, relevant, and is typically free. By engaging with brands through social media channels, consumers can also experience reputable customer service and a two-way conversation with advertisers with whom they could not otherwise directly communicate. (IAB, 2013, p. 4)

Importantly, content marketing makes no arbitrary distinctions about the types of online (or offline) media that be deployed. In the online arena, these can include earned, owned, paid or shared paid outlets (Hoffman, 2012a; Narvaez, 2013), although the IAB notes that content marketing always *starts* with owned media. The full range of internet communication tools can be deployed, including websites, blogs, e-newsletter, social networking sites, etc., although purely messaging tools such as texting and microblogging limit the depth of the content that can be shared. Content marketing includes the *creation* of original material of interest to audiences, the *repurposing* of historic and previously published materials, and the *curation* of informative, education or entertaining materials from third-party sources where the marketer is not necessarily the source (Rosenbaum, 2011).

Content marketing offers a variety of benefits to publishers, advertising and consumers (IAB, 2013). Players include traditional advertising, public relations, social marketing and digital marketing agencies, media and creative boutiques, and newly formed production studios and talent agencies that primarily work with agencies. A primary example of the latter is Contently (Carr, 2013; Contently, 2014a; Delo, 2014; Sebastian, 2013a). Others include custom content producers and digital-media owners who have embraced native advertising as a special paid form of content marketing (Zmuda & Bruell, 2013, esp. p. 30).

Evidence of the viability of content marketing can be seen in the publication of books (Brito, 2013b; Handley & Chapman, 2012; Lieb, 2012a; Odden, 2012; Leroux Miller, 2013; Pulizzi, 2014a; Wuebben, 2012) and online magazines (*Content Marketing Today* and *Content Strategic*) devoted to the topic, as well as extensive white papers by trade groups (IAB, 2013) and leading vendors (Contently, 2013a; Eloqua, 2013). Content marketing is also the subject of professional competitions and numerous recent articles in marketing and communications trade publications and blog posts, including special issues (Direct Marketing News in February 2014. Topics include descriptive overviews (Lieb, 2012b; Marketer's don't..., 2013, Nicholson & Aiello, 2009; Ostrickoff, 2014; Zmuda, 2013a), discussions of content marketing belongs in the organization (Dugan, 2013), and predictions of future trends (Chandler, 2013; Contently, 2014b; Covello, 2014; Creamer, 2012; DeMers, 2013; L. Green, 2012; Kuenn, 2013; Pulizzi (2012b). Authors offer best practices guidelines (Defren, 2012; Duncan, 2013; Fritsche, 2012; Jubson, 2013, McAlister, 2012; Pulizzi, 2014) and warnings about practices that can impede effectiveness (Benady, 2012; Crenshaw, 2014; Cretella, 2013a; Mendenhall, 2014; Pulizzi 2009, Wrightman, 2013). Case studies abound (Contently, 2014c; Silver, 2013; Swartz, 2013). Various articles include tips for both effective content creation (Atkins & Matson, 2012; Brier, 2014; Content marketing a struggle..., 2014; Jobson, 2013; McCoy, 2014; Zmuda, 2012b) and curation (Hill+Knowlton Strategies, 2010; Holtz, 2012; Murray, 2014; Vincenzini, 2013).

In the public relations arena, agencies already had been heavily involved in digital operations (Brito, 2012; Creamer, 2012) when, in February 2013, the largest independent PR consultancy, Edelman, named Steve Rubel executive vice president and *chief content strategist*

responsible for maximizing the benefits to clients of content appearing in various forms of media (Elliott, 2013; see also Coffee, 2013; A month later, Weber Shandwick announced a major content marketing initiative under the leadership of Jason Wellcome, the executive vice president for digital. Mediaco was charged with orchestrating the firm's content strategy, including native advertising (Bruell, 2013). Meanwhile various agencies took the content marketing mantra as evidenced in their blog posts (Bridge Global Strategies, 2013) and e-books (March Communications, 2013). Not surprisingly, based on a survey of its members, the Council of Public Relations Firms reported that most new business in late 2013 was derived from integrated campaigns as opposed to traditional public relations (Cripps, 2014).

During 2013, various professional groups addressed the trend, including sessions at both the IABC and PRSA national conferences. Major vendors joined the litany: Ragan Communications actively promoted the idea that every organization should become a publisher and launched a series of training programs and publications to support the content marketing (Working, 2013a). PR Newswire entered into a cooperative arrangement with the Content Marketing Institute to issue a daily newsletter and maintains a resources section on its website devoted to content marketing (PR Newswire, 2014). Cision (2013) issued a comprehensive e-book that outlined a five-part formula for success: content creation, curation, optimization, amplification (promotion) and analysis. In its introduction to *Power Your Story*, the vendor explained, "Content marketing is to 2013 what social media marketing was to 2007. ... Don't get left in the dust; begin exploring how to get started in content marketing now" (Cision, 2013, p. 4).

Ken Dowell of PR Newswire (2013a) explained that content marketing reflects several changes in the communications business: the ability of anyone to be a publisher, the shrinkage of traditional media, the questionable effectiveness of online advertising, and changes in online search. Dowell wrote, "But ultimately it is about producing content that is exactly what your audience wants to read. Exactly what they are looking for. The answer to their search for information," The PRN executive suggested good content can come from either a marketing or PR department and can equal the quality of material produced by a journalist. "Good writers aren't that hard to find, and neither the number of the opportunities nor the salaries paid by the media are going to make them inaccessible. Photos, videos and other types of images are easier to produce than ever."

Content marketing is clearly a hot topic (Ricci, 2014), largely because spending is expected to mushroom (O'Malley, 2013). The content marketing trend is so pervasive that a *Forbes* blogger recently described "director of content" as the top marketing job for 2014 (DeMers, 2013). Meanwhile Coville (2013) predicted that 2014 will be the year of relevant content.

Brand Journalism

Brand journalism, a specific form of content marketing, generally calls for using journalistic *storytelling* skills (Pulizzi, 2012b) but more narrowly involves hiring former reporters, editors and media production specialists to produce for brands the same kind of materials they created while employed as journalists. Importantly, practicing brand journalism does not have to be limited for former media personnel.

A leading advocate of this model of brand content explains, "Brand journalism is a hybrid form of traditional journalism, marketing and public relations. ... and is a response to the fact that any organization can now use journalistic techniques to tell its story direct to the public"

(Bull, 2013, p. 1; see also Bull, 2014). Accordingly, brand journalism is “an integrated brand journalism-driven communication strategy” that involves “visionary planning, research, incisive messages, a defined purpose and a requirement to quantify what has been achieved through it” (Bull, 2013a, p. 1).

Importantly, brand journalism began independently of the content marketing movement.

Bull (2013, pp. 7-20) traces the origins of the modern concept to efforts by McDonald’s marketing director, Larry Light, to reposition the then struggling company in 2002-2004 (see also Light & Kiddon, 2009). In particular, Light transformed McDonald’s mass marketing approach to recognize that brands such as McDonalds appealed to many different markets and in many different ways – and had a many compelling stories to tell on matters such as nutrition, procurement, employee development, and community involvement. Light’s model of marketing a brand was modeled on how an editor edits a magazine where “a wide range of topics is covered, which chime with the interests of a wide range of readers” (Bull, 2013, p. 12)

Light first used the term *brand journalism* publicly in 2004. In a speech to a New York advertising group, Light explained:

Brand journalism is a chronicle of the varied things that happen in our brand world, throughout our day, throughout the years. Our brand means different things to different people. It does not have one brand position. It is positioned differently in the minds of kids, teens, young adults, parents and seniors. It is positioned differently at breakfast, lunch, dinner, snack, weekday, weekend, with kids or on a business trip.

“Brand Journalism allows us to be a witness to the multi-faceted aspects of a brand story.

...

No one communication alone tells the whole brand story. Each communication provides a different insight into our brand. It all adds up to a McDonald’s journalistic brand chronicle,” he declared. (Light cited in BurrellesLuce, 2012; see also Brito, 2013a)

Challenging gurus such as Ries and Trout (1972), who exhorted marketers to be single-minded in their approach, Light told the group:

“Beware of the so-called “positionistas.” They say that a brand can only stand for one thing in the mind of the market. This may make some sense for small brands. But for big bands – like McDonald’s – it’s nonsense.

...

Identifying one brand position, communicating it in a repetitive manner is old-fashioned, out-of-date, out-of-touch brand communication. Simplifying a brand to a single position is not simplification, it is simplistic. Simplistic marketing is marketing suicide. (Light quoted in Ringer, 2011).

Interestingly, brand journalism is not the first effort to superimpose a journalistic model on organizational communications. In 1999, three former journalists advocated principles of societal journalism to orchestrate internal communication in large corporations – what they termed the power of *strategic corporate journalism* (Kounalakis, Banks & Daus, 1999). This short-lived initiative accompanied a swell of efforts over a period of two decades to promote the importance of *narrative* and *storytelling* in business (Nishi, 2013; Smith, 2012) as well as transmedia storytelling (Engleman, 2013; Ford, 2013)

Notably, many of the tools used by brand journalists are identical to techniques embraced by content marketers. Bull's (2013) book, for example, discusses how to use video, social media, media, e-publications, forums and websites. Bull's "storytelling paths" include launching a new product, promoting events, and publicizing destinations, among others. Clearly a notable exception is the emphasis on *quality* news and feature stories -- tools that can and should on par with the content found in quality journalistic venues.

Similar to content marketing, brand journalism stresses the notion that brands are publishers, or as digital marketing consultant David Meerman Scott (2013) states it, "You are what you publish."

In pursuing a brand journalism strategy, marketers have essentially three options. One is to empower current employees to be effective storytellers or brand journalists. Brito (2013d) explains, "Brand journalism is much more than employees tweeting or sharing company news on Facebook. It's about finding good stories about the brand, its products or employees and using long-form content to tell a story. There is no real difference between an employee brand advocate and a brand journalist. One just has superior writing skills and can tell better stories."

A second strategy is to directly hire journalists and former journalists to work for the brand. Hill (2013) suggests that journalists have a skill sets that lend themselves to creating content that educates, entertain, nurtures and is highly shared on social media. This is the approach used by a growing number of digital agencies that have set up editorial divisions (Contently, 2014d; McDermott, 2013).

This has led to the creation of brand newsrooms in many large corporations and organizations (J. Bernstein, 2014; Contently, 2014f; Moses, 2014; Sinkinson, 2014; Wasserman, 2013). An excellent example of the influence of journalistic approaches can be found in recently overhauled Coca-Cola company website www.coca-colacompany.com, which now appears like a consumer online magazine, with a combination of branded and non-branded content, but with the trace elements typically found on a corporate website. (Hanson, 2013; JSH&A, 2013). Other examples are the newsrooms of Nissan Motors (Sinkinson, 2014) and of Cleveland Clinic, which has more than 1 million monthly visitors (Working 2014b).

In part, the success of this approach is because journalists are used to thinking in audience-centric terms. Journalists are also well accustomed to writing about topics noncommercial terms. Journalists similarly are comfortable in producing content for branded blogs and websites and in many cases what they write is no different from what they might have been on media-sponsored websites and blogs devoted to products. As Bloomgarden-Smoke (2013) observed, the fact that many branded-sponsored sites are modeled on media sites makes it easier to attract writing talent. "But once people realize it's still journalism, they become more okay with it." Another factor is that the definition of journalist is changing – and the requirement that a journalist be "employed" by a media organization is being challenged (Wilson, 2013). The availability of journalists to perform this kind of work has been prompted, in part, by the loss of some 17,000 editorial jobs in the United States since 2007 (Odden, 2013a). Responses by journalists have been positive; brand journalists are a growing source for reporters (Simon, 2014), many of whom complain that their needs are not being met by organizational sources (Working 2014c).

A third strategy is to buy brand journalism services from one or more of a growing number of agencies that are now players in the brand journalism (and content marketing and native advertising) game. Examples include Contently (Carr, 2013), NewsCred (Wasserman, 2013) MediaSource, Brand Journalists, and NewsCred. The business plans of these firms vary

considerably. Some serve as brokers between content marketers and media organizations that will sell repurposed content for private use. Others serve as employment agents between media organizations and journalists seeking freelance work and between content marketers and journalists seeking brand-promotion based assignments.

Similar to content marketing, brand journalism is a concept embraced by several major PR vendors. In particular, Ragan Communications has promoted the idea through presentations (Ragan Communications, 2013a, b), workshops and online articles (Working, 2013a). An executive of Edelman Digital says, “It’s about combining the core tenets of journalism with brand storytelling” and usually involves fashioning long-form content formats (Brito, 2013). Importantly, similar to content marketing, brand journalism involves both content creation and curation (Rosenbaum, 2011).

Native Advertising

Native advertising is the trend initiated and facilitated by publishers to create content appearing within their editorial or entertainment product that is paid for by sponsors. Native advertising is the current rage within publishing and advertising circles (Kahn, 2013; Kolah, 2013; Montini, 2014; Pozin, 2013; Pulizzi, 2014b) and has been labeled “the new social marketing” (Choi, 2014). In part, the buzz is fueled by expectations that spending on native advertising will double to \$4.51 billion by 2017 (Blue Fountain Media, 2013). eMarketer (2014) places the figure at \$5 billion for just social media. An array of entities have positioned themselves to take advantage of the trend (Luma Partners, 2014). Within public relations, native advertising has been acknowledged as a trend that will impact PR communications (DuPost, 2014; McCauley, 2013; Vocus, 2014a, b).

Definitions of native advertising vary widely, with the term use synonymously with *custom content*, *sponsored content*, *branded content* and *content marketing* (Joel, 2013). Practitioner Lou Hoffman (2014a) refers to it as *pearned media*, a blend of paid and earned media. PRWeb lauds native ads advertising because it “feels natural” (Native Wisdom, 2014). Similarly, within public relations circles, Vocus (2014a, p. 2) describes native advertising as “the purchasing of sponsored content on social networks and online websites.” Edelman executive Steve Rubel says “I’d define native advertising as taking what which is organic and flipping it around into advertising (Rubel quoted in Vocus, 2014a, p. 3).

The *New York Times*’ advertising columnist characterizes native advertising as “digital pitches styled to look like the editorial content in which they run” and where the “message tries to blend in” (Elliott, 2013). Meanwhile, Skinner (2013) defined native advertising as “Any form of paid or sponsored content that directly and transparently contributes to the experience of the site or the platform where it appears, by aligning with the format, context or purpose of that site or platform’s editorial content.” Whereas Joel (2013) suggested that a native ad must be unique to a specific channel for which it is created (and can’t be used in another context), others envision the commodification of native ads through the use of ad networks and associated technologies to achieve standardization and scale required for efficiency (Choi, 2013; Kahn, 2013; Kantrowitz, 2013; Kisseberth, 2013; Nativo, 2014; J. Payne, 2013).

Although traditional advertising agencies are yet to embrace native advertising (Moses, 2013b), publishers are attracted to the idea because of stagnant or declining click-through rates on banner ads and their potential use in mobile sites (Native Wisdom, 2014). Indeed, 80% of Americans are reported to ignore banner ads—a higher percentage than traditional media

(Loechner, 2014c; Yarow, 2014). A potential benefit for consumers is that native advertising thus could eliminate the need for paywalls (Bell, 2014).

Similar to content marketing, native advertising is not new. Newspaper and magazine publishers have engaged in custom advertising activities by producing special sections for nearly a century (LaFrance, 2014, Online Publishers Association, 2014a, b). Consistent with the approach used in content marketing more generally (see previous discussion), native ads excel when they deliver content users find useful, important or critical to know (Social Media Today, 2013).

Among contemporary publishers, *Forbes* was a leader in developing alternative ad formats, beginning with its use of in-text ads in 2004 and its creation of sponsored *Forbes* Blogs following its acquisition of blogging startup True/Slant (Learmonth, 2010). Also notable is *The Atlantic*, which received sharp criticism for a January 2013 sponsored article that was clearly unbalanced in extolling the Church of Scientology (Choi, 2014; Kuchinskis, 2014; Sherbin, 2014). The magazine later published one of the most extensive and rigorous publishing guidelines for native advertising (The Atlantic, 2013).

Other pioneering publishers included The Huffington Post, the *Washington Post*, Mashable, BuzzFeed and Business Insider and others (Moses, 2014a; Vega, 2013a, b). Among all publishers, BuzzFeed is considered the most noteworthy for its success in using native ads to displace banner advertising (Salmon, 2013) and for innovations in producing “clickable” content (Clark, 2014). But native advertising’s stature was really elevated in January 2014, when the venerable *New York Times* announced it would enter the field, later signing a six-month contract with Dell to publish links to the computer manufacturer’s sponsored content (Ad Age, 2013, 2014; Edmonds, 2014; Kaufman, 2013). The *Wall Street Journal* soon followed (Bilton, 2014; Moses 2014b).

In the digital arena but outside publishing, native advertising began with Yahoo’s use of paid inclusion where organizations paid to have their results displayed within organic (unpaid) results on Yahoo’s search engine results page (Rodnitzky, 2014a). Within social media, native advertising is the principle behind Facebook Pages, where organizations can become members of the community and send status updates to members – essentially commercial messages -- that appear in followers’ News Feeds. In recent months, Facebook has altered the algorithms used to limit the amount of commercial messages that appear in members News Feed and has advised organizations to rely on Facebook (native) advertising to assure exposure in News Feeds. Meanwhile Twitter feeds from organizations stand as yet another example of native ads in social media, with the messaging service adding Promoted Tweet and Promoted Accounts as paid tools to help organizations receive attention. Consultants peddle various tips on how to optimize results (Peggs, 2014).

The Interactive Advertising Bureau (2013), an industry trade group, describes native advertising by explaining that advertisers aspire to deliver “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.” IAB notes that native ads can vary based on their form, function, integration with other website content, how they are bought and targeted, and how their effectiveness is measured. Based in part on concerns expressed by the Federal Trade Commission (see Discussion), IAB mandates that all native advertising includes a disclosure that clearly indicates the content has been paid for. The notice must be sufficiently prominent relative to the device where the native ad appears so that a reasonable consumer can distinguish between paid advertising versus a publisher’s editorial content.

The IAB presently identifies six classifications of native ads. *In-feed unit* is the generic term used to describe the seamless inclusion of editorial matter – articles, images, videos and other content -- within a website. In one variation of this idea, endemic in-feed ads represent content written or produced with a publisher’s team on an exclusive basis in order to match surrounding stories. Such content is arranged as a guaranteed placement. This is the approach pioneered by *Forbes*, BuzzFeed and others. Notably, divisions within several other major publishing concerns, including Viacom and Yahoo!, have been created to supply content to be paid for by clients (Goel, 2014; Thielman, 2014). Several agencies engaged in brand journalism help publishers and advertisers to create original content, while others curate content (Kafka, 2014a).

A variation of this idea is content that does not appear on the publisher’s website but is displayed as soon as a user clicks on a paid link which is included on the website on a guaranteed basis. Alternatively, in-feed units might be provided to publishers for inclusion on a particular topical editorial section (such as sports or automobiles). Stories appear on a rotating basis without exposure to every visitor being guaranteed. Meanwhile, several small ad networks, such as Sharethrough and Nativio (2014), have begun working with publishers on a non-exclusive basis.

Other native advertising formats recognized by IAB include the following:

- *Paid search ads* involve search engines and directory publishers that list paid search entries intermixed with organic search results. The listing is sold on a guaranteed basis. Native search ads are akin to paid inclusion ads found in directories and specialized (vertical) product shopping search engines. Goldman (2013) describes this as the best native ad format ever.
- *Recommendation widgets* are devices or boxes integrated into the design of a website that provide links to other content. Links connect users to pages off the site but there is no guaranteed placement. Widgets are commonly indicated with slug lines such as “You might also like...,” “Elsewhere from around the web...,” or “Recommended for you...” Some recommendation widgets can contain a visual and the name of the sponsor to indicate the content is not from the website. Major vendors include Taboola, Disquis, Outbrain, AddThis, and Songza (which specializes in sponsored musical playlists)
- *Promoted listings* are found on shopping sites that feature multiple products where advertisers are charged to have their products among various products featured in a category. Unlike an e-commerce site, which directly sells exhibited products, promoted listings involve the user clicking on an image or link and being delivered to a brand or product page maintained by the advertiser. Promoted listings are commonly purchased through an auction conducted directly by the publisher.
- *In-ad editorial content* appears adjacent to a website editorial content and within IAB-standard ad containers. Instead of a display or text ad, the ad might feature editorial matter or an image or video that is contextually relevant to the site and looks like the accompanying content. Placement is guaranteed by the publisher so the advertiser knows exactly what content will surround it. Such ad content is clearly labelled and commonly set off through use of a border or other device to distinguish it from regular editorial content.

- *Custom ad formats* are created in by a publisher in cooperation with an advertiser and don't fit into one of the above categories. Formats continue to evolve, such as the incorporation of ads in CAPTCHA verification boxes (J. Sullivan, 2013).

Alternatively, the Online Publishers Association (2013a, b), representing website and other platform operators, defined native advertising by using descriptive elements agreed upon by their members in a 2013. The top three characteristics of native advertising agreed upon by OPA members included: 1) integration into the design of the publisher's site and lives on the same domain, 2) content either provided by, produced in conjunction with, or created on behalf of advertisers and that runs within the editorial stream, and 3) clear delineation and labeling as advertising content. Less agreed-upon elements included: 4) editorial value to the reader and conforms to readers' expectations, 5) contextually relevant, non-standard advertising units, 6) content marketing such as sponsored sites, games, infographics, etc., and 7) highly automated advertising content such as sponsored stories, publisher tweets, etc.

Separately, Glick and Neckes (2013) outlined a four-party typology of native ads they label *tourist ad*, *resident ad*, *citizen ad* and *truly native ad*, based on the degree to which they vary from traditional banner advertising and meet the requirement for being truly engaging, fully disclosing sponsorship, and taking advantage of the site's functionality.

Promoted User Endorsements

Finally, traditional publicity is coming under challenge through efforts by organizations of all types that attempt to encourage user engagement -- but in many cases wind up manipulating users so that their feelings, opinions or feedback are used for online promotion. Promoted user endorsements represent promotional messages ostensibly created by audience members to express support for a product, service, candidate or cause (Christodoulides, Jevons & Bonhomme, 2012; Jaffe, 2005). Examples include comments, reviews, ratings, rankings, shares, "likes" and similar actions (including blog responses, forum posts, and user-created endorsements in the form of videos and images). Indeed organizations bombard audiences with pleas to engage in such activities in a way that can distort actual sentiment. The ultimate goal of many promotional programs is to become *likeable* (Carter, 2013; Karpen, 2011, 2012).

Endorsements are a promotional value-added provided by a source other than a product promoter or a message sponsors and thus are believed to add credibility to a proposition based on the identity, expertise, trustworthiness or charisma of the source. The most visible examples are celebrity endorsements in advertising (Seagrave, 2005; Wang & Muehling, 2012). Theoretically, endorsements reduce the information imbalance in markets and contribute to brand equity or the social capital that brands enjoy. Endorsements by users are both expressions of brand loyalty and social integration and ingratiation tools used by social media operators.

Obtaining and promoting endorsements from media organizations and opinion leaders in society has been a public relations strategy for decades. Hallahan (2013c, p. 292) defined an endorsement as "an expression of approval from a third party, usually on behalf of a product, service, cause or candidate." Examples of mediated endorsements orchestrated through public relations include editorial page endorsements, critic's endorsements, editorial product endorsements, and advertising endorsements (often involving celebrities or other opinion leaders). All of these typically carry an *explicit* statement of recommendation. Non-mediated endorsements can be engineered through the formation of alliances, ratings and designations, obtaining testimonials from experts and dignitaries, and philanthropy (where giving money to a cause serves as an indication of approval).

Third-party endorsement is a specific form of endorsement recognized within public relations for decades, wherein publicists argue that merely getting a product, service or caused featured in tradition editorial or entertainment fare is an *implicit* expression of approval, whether or not an explicit recommendation is stated (Hallahan, 2013d). The mere fact that space or time is devoted to a particular topic suggests it is worthy of consideration and has been used as argument for the superiority of publicity over advertising (Hallahan, 1999a, b; 2013d; Wang, 2005; Wang & Muehling, 2012).

Direct person-to-person endorsements similarly have been prized by advertisers and others. Word-of-mouth advertising, where people tell their friends about positive (or negative) experience with a product, is arguably the most effective form of promotion in the minds of many marketers (Ferris-Costa, 2011; McConnell & Huba, 1997a, b; Raging Creations, 2014). In the online environment, WOM is referred to variously as *buzz*, *viral marketing* and *eWOM* or *electronic word of mouth* (East, Wright & Vanhuele, 2008; Kirby & Marsden, 2006; Thorne, 2008). Indeed information seeking and information are the fundamental underlying processes in public relations (Hallahan, 2013e).

Operators of Internet venues have good reasons for soliciting feedback from users. One purpose is to gauge user satisfaction and thus improve the experience of using the site. In this instance, feedback can be used for the site's own purposes and might never be released publicly. A second purpose is to engage the user in lively discussions of topics. The users' ideas or opinions are intended to further understanding or to share valuable information and thus create value for users. The third form of feedback serves neither of these purposes, but is primarily for promotional purposes to help advance the viability of the web property or the interests of entities that participate in the site. Website operators view such endorsements as a way to provide value, not to the user, but to the entities that might be supporting the site by providing content (whether on a paid or unpaid basis). A critical component in the process is the use of counters that tabulate and display numbers about the level of activity – the number of comments, likes, shares, etc.

Figure 2 suggests ways that online endorsements are commonly promoted. These involve *soliciting general or specific comments* using either *passive or purposeful prompts*.

	Passive Prompts	Purposeful Prompts
General	Comment boxes on blogs and websites Open-ended questions posed on forums (chats and bulletin boards) Review sites	Requests to endorse a friend on LinkedIn Intercept surveys measuring user satisfaction Invitations to enter contests
Specific	Social buttons to repost content to other social media sites or share it with others	Solicitations to like, favorite, check in, or rate content or a product or service Check-ins at retail locations Appeals to retweet messages on Twitter

Figure 2. A typology of online endorsement tools.

Passive prompts. As Fig. 2 suggests, some endorsements are solicited in a passive manner through devices such as comment boxes on blogs and open-ended questions posed on forums. Opportunities for users to make positive (or negative) comments about a product or services are provided when users visit product review websites or make purchases on e-commerce sites that enable consumers to share their experiences with others. These are passive because involvement is not directly requested and general because the comments that can be about anything on the mind of the user.

Probably the most widely used endorsement devices are “social buttons” (also known as “share buttons”) that allow users to share specific content and comments with others on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, StumbleUpon, etc. Social buttons (and the accompanying HTML code required for them to function) can be easily downloaded at no charge from sites such as AddThis.com and serve as an important element in today’s social web. Social buttons first appeared in 2006 to enable web users to refer items to news aggregation sites such as Reddit.com and Digg.com and to facilitate social bookmarking on sites such as Delicious.com. Facebook added a share icon in 2006 to enable the sharing of comments among Facebook friends and unveiled its now-ubiquitous Like button in 2009. Originally a short-cut for sharing sentiments within Facebook, Like buttons later allowed Facebook users to like external content via Facebook’s Open Graph protocol (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013, pp. 1351-1352).

Purposeful Prompts. Whereas passive prompts rely on *structural* components found on websites and apps, purposeful prompts involve *expressed requests* for users to endorse a product, service, organization, person or cause. Among the most straightforward examples is when a LinkedIn member asked others to endorse the member based on the specific skills listed on the requestor’s LinkedIn profile. The number of endorsements in each category and the thumbnail photos of the endorsers actually appear next to the member’s list of skills. Various tips are provided for how LinkedIn users can maximize the number of endorsements received (B. Bernstein, 2014; Breger, 2013; Correia, 2013; Donston-Miller, 2012).

Intercept surveys using pop-up windows are a popular ways that organizations prompt endorsements, with the data collected primarily to determine interest in particular content or satisfaction with a product or service (Queenan, 2014). Such surveys usually involve only a few questions and sometimes allow for open-ended responses and are thus not limited to a singular, specific action. Invitations for users to create their own content and to submit it in contests in order to win a prize are yet another example. User-created original videos and video mashups are especially popular ways to enable consumers to extol the virtues of products, services candidates or causes. Contents are general appeals for endorsements because entrants are free to express their creativity with only general guidelines for how a testimonial might be created (Duffy, 2010; Shimp, Wood & Smarandescu, 2007).

Solicitations to like or rate particular content using accompanying social buttons are examples of specific purposeful prompts, where users are nudged to indicate their favorable disposition. Likes can be viewed alternatively as a marketing strategy in its own right (Pardee, 2012), as an online loyalty program (Patel, 2010), or as a form of social capital (Stevens Aubrey, Chattopadhyay & Poll, 2008). Such explicit endorsements are also actively sought by retailers participating in location marketing programs such as Foursquare and Facebook Place by asking visitors to “check in” (Yap, Bessho, Kodhizuka, & Sakamura, 2012). Reminders are posted in point-of-sales decals and posters or the spiel of trained staff members. Every like is shared with the visitors’ friends, and the counts are tallied to suggest the retailer’s popularity. Yet another example are appeals within Twitter messages for users to retweet messages to others—an action that is systematically counted.

In varying degrees each of these four categories of endorsements assume that the user feedback will or can be made public to all users. Likes, ratings and comments, by definition, are intended to be public except to the extent that website or blog operators might opt to moderate comments to exclude posts that are in inflammatory, discriminatory or in poor taste. Share buttons are tools where the expressed purpose is to extend the reach of content. So when a post is forwarded to another site or other people, the identity of the person forwarding it is made public (or at least the number of people forwarding it is reported). Only in the case of a proprietary survey conducted to evaluate a particular venue or to measure public sentiment are the results necessarily private. But many surveys are conducted so the results are released in real time, as the voting continues, or are released immediately after the poll closes to provide instantaneous feedback and potentially promote the results.

Online endorsements vary by the degree to which they are independent assessments by the users.

- *Authentic endorsements* are opinions, recommendations and evaluations are entirely those of the users, unswayed in any way by economic or social concerns.
- *Incented endorsements* involve the endorser receiving some kind of benefit, such as a discount or other reward for liking a business on Facebook, receiving a prize for entering a contest, or feeling social incentives to recommend a friend on LinkedIn. Although many users endorse products because they wish to help others or for validation from others, a portion of some endorsers do it for the perks they can receive (Kucharski, 2013).
- *Fake endorsements* are contrived comments on websites and blogs posted by paid confederates (“trolls”) who run up large counts of likes, shares, visits or comments on sites such as Facebook (Domino, 2012; Folkenflik, 2013). Such fraudulent activity is not necessarily illegal (Goldstein, 2011; Sachdev, 2010; Weiss, 2013; Wright, 2010) and has led some blogs, social media and news media sites to eliminate comments altogether (Beck, 2014a) or require that commenters verify their identity (Kirkland, 2014).

Marketers are largely convinced of the value of social media as a marketing tool, and online endorsements can be found in various online contexts such as online forums (Mayzlin, 2006) and social networking sites (Smith, Coyle, Lightfoot & Scott, 2007). A recent study by CrowdTap, for example, showed that user-generated content was *preferred* and more *trusted* than traditional media among millennials (Barakat, 2014; Loechner, 2014a, b). Conventional wisdom is that user recommendations are more *effective* than traditional online advertising, especially among younger online users (Eby, 2013; Raising Creations, 2014; Young, 2011). A Harris Poll in January 2014 revealed that the majority of posts on social networks about new products and services come from women, especially those 44 and younger. Among 18-34 year-olds, 68% said they were somewhat likely, fairly likely or very likely to make a purchase based on friends’ social media posts. The figure decreases by age, with 33% of people 55-64 and 22% of people age 65 or older saying they would act in a similar way (Loechner, 2014a,b). Moreover, recommendations from distant peers can be equally effective with those from closer peers under certain circumstances (Zhao & Xie, 2011).

Still, the proportion of people who actually post formal reviews remains small. One study by Millward/Mindshare found that, with the exception of Amazon.com, fewer than one in seven users have actually posted reviews on sites such as Google, Yahoo, Yelp or TripAdvisor (Moses, 2014c). A similar study by Adobe Systems showed that after seeing that a friend “liked” a product on social media, users often checked out the product (29%), but only 14% visited the

product's website while only 11% visited the product's social media page. In turn, only 5% "liked" the product themselves (Guynn, 2013). These small proportions suggest that the influence of reviews and likes might be overstated, or that a small number of people exert extraordinary influence.

Discussion

Clearly, the publicity landscape is changing, particularly as more and more emphasis is placed on online communications in public relations and marketing communications, which traditionally incorporates marketing public relations and product publicity.

The four promotional strategies identified in this paper are already transforming the rules under which publicity is conducted. Yet the more fundamental issue is the conspicuous absence of any recognition of "public relations" or "publicity" as the frameworks in which to describe these activities. For whatever reason -- whether a lack of insight or initiative, or complacent inattention -- these fundamental innovations in public relations communications are being driven from outside -- not within -- the field.

As Kuhn (1970) might describe the change, a critical *paradigm shift* is under way wherein these activities are being subsumed within marketing, not public relations. Some people in the public relations are unfazed, particularly if each of these trends is considered separately and not within a larger sea of change. For some, preservation the public relations moniker is not important. Many of the largest public relations firms, for example, have dropped "public relations" from their names because the term unnecessarily limits the scope of services they might offer, despite the preference specified in some RFPs or requests for proposals (Hoffman, 2012b). Many large corporations similarly use other terms to describe their work: corporate communications, corporate relations, public affairs, etc. However for those concerned about preserving public relations as a distinct profession or practice, the confluence of these various trends should serve as a wake-up call that the identity of public relations being eroded and the field's standards for ethical practice are being challenged. The changes portend a potential *paradigm crisis* wherein both the field's basic assumptions, the questions addressed, and the methods for conducting professional activities are subject to re-examination.

These emerging trends can be seen as challenging the current publicity paradigm in at least five ways. These trends, alternatively, can be viewed as forms of *encroachment and marginalization*, as an *undermining of professionalism*, as a *devaluation of relationship building* as a fundamental goal of public relations, as the *obfuscation of the transparency* that is essential to effective relationships, and as a *confounding of effective measurement and assessment*.

Encroachment and marginalization

All four trends might be cited as examples of the inevitability of integrated marketing communication (IMC; Hallahan, 2007; 2013f; Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn. 1993). Indeed, product publicity has always been conceived as a legitimate lead- or query-generating tool that plays a valuable role in marketing (Rotman, 1972). Any suggestion that public relations has no role to play in marketing or promotion simply is unfounded.

All four trends are 21st century forms of encroachment on public relations by marketers -- an issue first identified in the early 1990s (Lauzen, 1991). Content marketers engage in providing feature material, information and entertainment fare using tools and techniques essentially no different from classic product publicity. But this activity masquerades as *marketing*, not *publicity*.

Nowhere have digital marketers explicitly described their work as an effort to displace traditional publicity or what has emerged as online public relations (Hallahan, 2010a), although Ecker (2013) suggests that public relations should be “part of the content marketing workflow.” Public relations is simply not on their radar, despite the fact they are using tools (with some variations created for deployment in the online environment) already in the publicist’s arsenal (Bradley, 2014; O’Donovan, 2014; A. Green, 2012). Although some experts argue that content marketing is only a passing fad and just the latest form of marketing hype (Brito, 2013; Creamer, 2012), others dismiss content marketing because they think that consumers will become less accepting of such content because of information overload (“content shock”) and/or poor quality (“content schlock”) (Feldman, 2014; Simone, 2014). Others staunchly disagree (March, 2013; Pulizzi, 2014c).

Promotional efforts by content marketing evangelists in large measure play on the ignorance of clients and marketers who are more familiar with marketing (mostly because of their business school training) and less knowledgeable about the many potential ways that public relations can support marketing – beyond issuing news releases, staging special events and responding to crises. Indeed, public relations has failed to educate marketers about its capabilities. The problem (if there really is one) is exacerbated by the fact that many public relations firms have embraced content marketing and readily acknowledge the importance of marketing. Richard Edelman (2013), for example, foretold a convergence of marketing with corporate reputation. Meanwhile, vendors that previously positioned themselves as serving the public relations profession have become content marketing advocates – Cision, Ragan, Vocus, and PRWeb, among others – because they foresee the changes the marketplace (Edgecliff-Johnson, 2012)

Although purists argue that content marketing and publicity are separate pursuits (Kim, 2013; Wynne, 2013) or should be separate (Watson, 2013; Gombita, 2013), content marketing’s is being seen in publicity activities in various ways (Regan, 2013; Siegel, 2013). Some commentators emphasize similarities (Cline, 2012; Cowlin, 2013; Lucey, 2013) and opine that content marketing actually is a big opportunity for public relations (Foremski, 2014; Strong 2013). Others suggest that PR enjoys advantages over advertising agencies and other firms in conducting content marketing programs (Loic, 2011; March Communications, 2013; Odden, 2013c). More specifically, content marketing techniques can enhance the effectiveness of online publicity, including press releases (Garrett, 2013; Gaskell, 2014; March Communications, 2013) and Internet-based stunts (Vilensky, 2011).

Robert Rose, a lead strategist at the Content Marketing Institute, described public relations as

A core practice that is undergoing fundamental disruption. I’m a HUGE passionate fan of public relations. But I think the practice of public relations has lost its way a bit – especially as it pertains to being the corporate “storyteller.” If there’s one group that should be embracing the ideas of content marketing—it’s PR. And, sadly, because in many cases it has lost its strategic seat at the table (save for crisis management) PR is one of the last departments to actually get to embrace content marketing (Content marketing & PR, 2013).

The emergence of in-house “newsrooms” that are charged with churning out branded product stories is clearly an example of *structural* (versus merely *functional*) encroachment. These units typically operate independently of public relations departments (with varying levels of actual public relations expertise), but produce material no different from content that could be produced by experienced product publicists. As a result, it is inevitable that some organizations will (rightfully) question the

duplication and ask whether two publicity operations are really necessary. This is particularly true as corporate public relations departments and brand newsrooms begin to overlap in their efforts to work with the same journalists or bloggers. Another unintended consequence of this duplication could be competition for resources and authority, which would have a dysfunctional effect on the organization. Such competition is unnecessary. For example, Anthony (2011) contends that effective content marketing involves collaboration, not competition. Meanwhile, Greenfield (2010) has stressed the need for a single enterprise-level social media center involving cross-functional teams that integrate public relations and marketing expertise.

One argument in support of the notion of the branded newsroom is the imperative for quality content, epitomized in the Contently agency's manifesto "Original storytelling wins" (Contently, 2014e). Enhancing the quality of publicity content can enhance search engine optimization and address the concerns expressed by Google in its recent efforts to purge low-quality content from search engine results (Bradley, 2014; Levanto, 2013; Penn, 2014; Quigley, 2014). But the challenge for marketing departments charged with overseeing branded newsrooms will be to maintain high quality standards when marketing managers might not possess the personal expertise to judge or direct the creation of quality content. Similarly, although marketers focus on the storytelling skills that journalists can bring to producing materials, virtually no attention has been paid to how brand newsroom staffs also will need to interact with journalists, bloggers and others who use their materials. Writing and producing materials is one thing, but engaging in successful media relations - a critical element in publicity work -- is quite another. Not all journalists are adept that that role.

Encroachment in the case of native advertising is self-evident and problematic as advertisers now begin to pay to insert editorial matter created by content marketers or brand journalists - material previously provided *free* by publicists (although without any guarantee of use or treatment). Although the future of native advertising is not at all certain (especially whether the delivery of large scale "in-feed units" via automated networks will be accepted), any widespread adoption of native advertising as the preferred protocol for accepting materials from news sources would fundamentally transform how modern publicity works, including the future acceptance of news releases, bylined and exclusive feature stories, handout photos and videos from for-profit or other deep-pocketed organizations.

Publicity materials have been conceptualized as *information subsidies* (Gandy, 1992; VanSlyke Turk, 1986; Zoch and Molleda, 2006) that are accepted by media because they facilitate production and reduce the costs of gathering news or producing entertainment fare. Native advertising would encroach on the ability of publicists to provide free content in many situations, although possibly not all. Importantly, the concern is not merely preservation of the once-sacred principle of always relying on free exposure and avoiding paid exposure. After all, public relations people today routinely use a combination of *earned*, *owned*, *paid* and *shared* media (Hoffman, 2012a; Narvaez, 2013).

Finally, prompted user endorsements clearly encroach on the endorsement-solicitation function commonly associated with publicity. Promoted endorsements in the form of short, pitchy reviews and comments and software-generated counts of likes, shares, favorites, and followers are now used by audiences as simplistic and superficial *heuristics* to make judgments about the popularity of various ideas without having to exert much effort. "Likes" and fragmentary, decontextualized and typically one-sided comments from users are essentially replacing thoughtful endorsements from experts and reasonably balanced assessments by independent third parties such as journalists. Previously audiences talked directly with friends or read or saw endorsements in the

media and drew their own conclusions based on often more in-depth *explicit recommendations* or *implicit third-party endorsements* that were facilitated by traditional publicity efforts.

Undermining professionalism in journalism and public relations

An unintended consequence of these trends is an undermining of professional values and standards, as well as the stature of professionals trained in both journalism and public relations.

The issue of professionalism is perhaps best epitomized by the title of an e-book published by Openview Labs: *It takes a content factory!* Reminiscent of the Frankfurt School's condemnation of media and advertising practices in the 1920s and 1930s (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972), the title suggests producing content is a matter of mass production comparable to manufacturing widgets. In this regard, practitioner Heather Yaxley (2012) laments the commodification of content through the branded newsrooms, such that the one operated by the Ford Motor Company:

Public relations practitioners claim to be producing content (not building relationships with publics). Journalists have been reinvented as content producers – with many migrating inside organisations where they are creating content instead of internal communications, or acting as ‘journalist in residence’ to dig up stories for those PR folk to promote. Ford has set up a content factory, where like communicative Oompa Loompas, words and images are the output of a production process worthy of old Henry himself.

...

My call is for less babble and more intelligent and informed narrative. Fueled by the loss of newsroom jobs stemming from declining ad revenues, a growing number of journalists have embraced brand journalism -- either by going to work for marketers or by joining the branded content divisions of online publishers. Some journalists take comfort in the fact that they continue to be referred to as “journalists,” even though their task is no different from an advertising copywriter -- to produce catchy, shareable or clickable content, often curated (repurposed) from other sources. Some receive solace by the fact that can be recognized through the Google Authorship program (Coleman, 2014).

The scale of the brand journalism trend has led to calls to redefine what it means to be a “journalist” (Wilson, 2013) and could result in a diminution of the common professional standards upon which all journalists can agree. The debate has already begun. In 2012, the Ethics Advisory Committee of the Canadian Association of Journalists drew a line in the sand by issuing a report in which it declared “Journalists draw their own conclusions about the necessity and direction of a story...independently of consideration of the effect, for good or ill, of the coverage provided.” Under this definition, brand journalists need not apply (Basen, 2012).

Snow (2012) observed there is no professional society nor established standards for content marketing or brand journalism. According to Snow, “New players and new forms are coming to the content industry. As journalists, we need to promote a framework for ethics in these new industries if we want to maintain the integrity of our craft. Her suggestion for handling branded content included: 1) understand the difference between objective journalism and brand content, 2) make honesty the top priority, 3) never allow readers to be deceived, and 4) disclose anything that resembles a conflict (Snow, 2012).

In a similar fashion, the professional stature, credibility, and professional self-identity of PR practitioners, are undermined whenever organizations think that trained PR people lack the talent required to produce media-quality content or that is necessary to hire a “journalist.” The trend clearly compromises the standing of public relations. It stands as a possible *prima facie* indictment of the PR profession for failing to promote understanding of the practice and to demonstrate its

value. A related question for public relations educators to ponder is: Are public relations students today receiving a sufficient training in journalistic skills to compete in this changing environment? .

Devaluation of relationship building

If public relations involves creating and maintaining mutually beneficial organizational-public relationships (Ferguson, 1984; Ledingham, 2003), an important question is whether content marketers, brand journalists and even native advertising advocates are merely paying lip service to the notions of relationships and conversation. Despite claims to the contrary, it can be argued that focus of all three strategies fundamentally still remains to engage visitors simply so they will click through to a website and be sold products. Such a cynical approach, if true, suggests a lack of understanding and appreciation for of the potential value of online communications for public relations purposes.

Elsewhere Hallahan (2008, 2010b) has addressed the importance and potential for building organizational and public relationships in cyberspace. The slavish attention to “content” and journalistic-quality editorial materials virtually ignores the potential for organizations to engage in authentic and two-way communications online. If public relations is to preserve its focus as facilitators of such dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002), public relations theorists and practitioners must press the case for not abandoning this important element of public relations work. Fortunately, this point is not completely lost on some practitioners. Cohen (2013) observes:

The public relations profession’s roots are not in just creating stories, but creating stories people want to share and discuss. Social agencies that are more advertising centric tend to focus much more on marketing oriented shareable content with creating memes being a win. A meme is a great indicator of interest in content but it’s not a conversation. In other words, the PR profession sees sharing or creating shareable high quality content (images, brand journalist articles, earned media articles) simply as means to an end. The sharing is not the end, or the conversation.

Mark Ragan (2012) similarly recognizes the importance of interaction and dialogue when he says that role of an organization’s chief content officer is content producer, reporter, *conversation starter* and community manager [emphasis added].

Native advertising similarly will recast one of the most important forms of relationships found in public relations, namely the symbiotic (albeit sometimes contentious) relationships that can emerge as journalists and sources work together. Instead of building relationships on principles such as trust and reliability (the interpersonal relationships that were the foundation of traditional publicity (Hallahan, 2010b, p. 528), the negotiations surrounding native advertising inevitably will be become no different than advertising media buying, and the buyer-seller relationship now found in publicity actually will be reversed: The story source will become the buyer, and the media outlet will become the seller. Story placement will become a purely economic exchange transaction based on price, meeting minimum standards, and the particulars of a placement.

Promoted user endorsements similarly trivialize the entire notion of relationships by reducing endorsements to terse, superficial expressions of support that are easily manipulated and are too frequently characterized and analyzed using statistics. An unintended consequence might be to create a *tyranny of numbers*, where impressions about content or topics are shaped entirely based on whether the user perceives his or her views to be consistent or inconsistent with a large number of other people. Too often the numbers and meanings of a “like” or “+1” will be left to the imagination and presented with no context. Unlike a public opinion poll, where it is at least possible to gain some

sense of being in the majority or minority, users can develop false perceptions about the popularity of particular topics and might make faulty decisions or become reticent to express opinions that might be perceived as unpopular – online’s own spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Thus, instead of promoting dialogue and sharing, the effect could be just the opposite.

Challenges to organizational and communication transparency

Several of these trends are fraught with ethical issues pertaining to ethics and responsible online communications (Hallahan, 2006). Among all of these is a lack of *transparency* that enables users to become fully knowledgeable about the nature and origins of the content they consume. The persuasion knowledge model suggests that the persuasiveness of any communication is moderated by the recipient’s knowledge about the persuasion agent’s goals and tactics and about how to skillfully cope with them (Friedstad & Wright, 1974).

Two forms of transparency are relevant here: organizational transparency and communication transparency.

Rawlins (2008) suggests that *organizational transparency* deals with accessibility of information about business practices and argues that transparency is tied to trust, openness and corporate social responsibility—critical factors in effective organizational-public relationships. Drawing upon J.M. Balkin’s distinction between three forms of transparency (informational, participatory and accountability), Rawlins argues “Transparency is the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced and unequivocal, for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of publics and holding organizations *accountable* for their actions, policies and practices” (Rawlins, 2008, p. 75).

Plaisance (2014) argues that *communication transparency* requires people to think about the form and nature of their interactions with others. He defines transparent behavior as “conduct that presumes openness in communication and deserves a reasonable expectation of forthright exchange when parties have a *legitimate stake* in the possible outcomes or effects of sending or of receiving the message” [emphasis in original] (p. 75). Thus, according to Plaisance, transparency involves *what* we say, *why* we say it, and even *how* we say it. Transparency connotes honest exchanges, forthrightness and being aboveboard. Society as we know would not be possible without such trust and a spirit of openness and transparent behavior. Plaisance traces the roots of transparency to Immanuel Kant’s theory of human dignity (pp. 83-84) and principle of humanity (pp. 76-80).

Notably, the American Marketing Association’s Statement of Ethics explicitly calls for marketers to “create transparency” in their operations and “to be truthful and forthright” (AMA, 2014). The PRSA Member Code of Ethics similarly states a member shall “Preserve the integrity of the process of communication,” “Be Honest and accurate in all communications,” “Reveal the sponsors for causes and interests represented” and “Avoid deceptive practices” (PRSA, 2013). Meanwhile the Society of Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics specifically says journalists should “Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two” (cited in Plaisance, 2014, p.73). More generally, journalists have recognized the importance of transparency in reporting – including the need to tell the public “how it gets its stories” (Deggans, 2006) and embedding in news reports “a sense of how the story came to be and how it was presented the way it was” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001, p. 83). Such an approach obviously would be problematic for brand journalists.

Although content marketers and brand journalists emphasize the importance of quality content, the motive behind many content marketing and brand journalism practices is

fundamentally no different from other forms of inbound or search engine marketing (Content Marketing Experience, 2014; Cretella, 2013b; Marketo, 2013; Siegel, 2014): *to generate website traffic*. This fact remains mostly veiled from the public. In this regard, content marketing and brand journalism are no different from public relations and publicity – but explicit calls to action are more commonly embedded in the content and the connection between the promotional message and the mechanism for action is shorter and more direct. All the user has to do is click. Helpful information or entertainment fare often is not provided to serve audience needs or interests, but is carefully crafted to encourage click-throughs and then sell products.

Despite the fact that quality is a prerequisite for success (Gupta, 2014), native advertising entails publication of *hybrid messages* (Balasubramanian, 1994) under schemes that closely parallel paid advertorials, product placements or unpaid VNRs in traditional media. Native ads are yet another form of *stealth marketing* (Goodman, 2006-2007) where the lines between editorial and advertising are deliberately blurred (Kutsch, 2014; Synder, 2011). Rodnitzky (2014b) contends that native advertising actually might violate the FTC's rules on deceptive advertising and, at minimum, involves a game of regulatory arbitrage by promoting a business model that skirts existing regulations.

Native advertising has been aptly described as “the marketing trend that dare not speak its name (unless required)” (Bednarski, 2014). The deception underlying native advertising is illustrated by Amerland (2013) who claims “Native advertising is not advertising” – a contradiction in nomenclature, at best. He explains, “Because native advertising, in the best chameleon fashion, closely resembles the form and function of the environment in which it appears, it succeeds in capturing the viewer's attention in a fashion that is harder to bypass or ignore than any traditional means of advertising.” The author goes on to rationalize the practice by stating, “The focus here is not on telling the reader how great a product or a trend is, but in delivering value in what the reader finds to be useful, important or critical to know, in order to get something else done. The power of the approach comes from the most human thing of all: conversation.” (Amerland, 2013, paragraphs 5-6).

After more than 30 years of use, many members of the public still remain unaware of the workings of *advertorials* and *product placements*, and thus it is not surprising that most people are entirely ignorant of native advertising as the newest form of paid content. At least for now, the public is clearly vulnerable to deception. In the context of social media, Brown (2014) observed that the best posts on Facebook are not those from commercial entries and posed the provocative question, “On Facebook, shouldn't native ads be made by the natives?”

One of the key requirements for ethical native advertising is clear labeling. Since 2002, the Federal Trade Commission has required unambiguous disclosure whenever third parties receive compensation for promoting or endorsing a product or service. This rule was reiterated seven years later (FTC, 2009). In Fall 2013, the FTC conducted a workshop on native advertising where it warned against failures to provide adequate disclosures (Nashed, 2013; Wyatt, 2013). Separately, the National Advertising division, a unit of the Advertising Self-Regulatory Council (administered by the Better Business Bureau) issued two rulings dealing with the practice (Vega, 2013c, d). The American Society of Magazine editors had already issued guidelines for its members in 2013 (Sebastian, 2013b). The FTC workshop was quickly followed up by the issue of the IAB's *Native Advertising Playbook* (2013) that detailed how to label each major category of native advertising.

Advertisers entered the native advertising arena with trepidation about possible consumer backlash (Sebastian, 2013c), and public opinion has not yet coalesced. Although the FTC and trade groups implore publishers to vigilantly disclose that native ads are editorial placements paid for by sponsors, examples have already emerged where labeling guidelines have failed.

Case in point: Video producers paid by Microsoft failed never disclosed their relationship when laudatory videos about the Xbox One appeared on YouTube (Microsoft, Machina ‘native Ad, 2014). Overall, empirical studies suggest that native ads can lead to higher purchase intent when compared to online banners (Kuchinskas, 2014). However other research suggests that bigger, more traditional ads that “take over” the screen might actually be preferred by users (Center for Media Research, 2014). What’s more, earlier research about the effectiveness of labeling advertorials suggests that labels are not effective in alerting consumers (Kim, Pasdeos & Barban, 2001).

Advocates suggest that native advertising will grow but that stronger self-regulation is inevitable (Kisseberth, 2014). Indeed, native advertising is just another reason why IAB President Randall Rothenberg argued earlier this year for the need to “close up the wide-open digital ad supply chain.” The trade group executive wrote, “We must create an all-inclusive program that identifies qualified participants and commits them to good actions, guaranteed by continual monitoring and sanctions for non-compliance” (Rothenberg cited in Sturdivant, 2014). Various other industry authors speak to the importance of preserving user trust (Archer, 2014; Miller, 2013; Skinner, 2014). Perhaps the importance of transparency was best expressed by Procter and Gamble marketing director Chris Laird at the FTC’s Fall 2013 workshop: “If it not transparent, and it erodes consumer trust, the ROI fails, and we won’t invest in it any more (cited in Skinner, 2014).

Despite the prospect that the industry will continue to be plagued by bottom feeders, Dowell (2013b) observed that there always will be a place for the elite group of native advertisers who provide excellent content and buys space for it on premium properties. Similarly, native advertising has a place on niche sites, while many content marketers will create their own content and use social media, search, release distribution and media to drive to traffic to their sites without ever having to buy native ads.

Finally, transparency is largely absent in terms of the inner-workings of prompted user endorsements. Many social media users do not fully comprehend how endorsements work on social networking sites such as Facebook or Google+, nor how they and their friends are being manipulated through innocuous social buttons and incentives to engage in simple actions such as “liking” a Facebook Page. A failure to provide transparency can only lead to public distrust, witnessed by Facebook’s ongoing problems with its privacy disclosures.

A case in point was Facebook’s disastrous attempt in 2007 to notify a user’s friends whenever the user bought an item on a website. Once users became aware of the dubious practice, a firestorm of controversy ensued and Facebook was forced to cease. Similarly, Facebook faced lawsuits when it began Sponsored Stories, an ad program in which a users’ name and profile picture were used in ads promoting Pages or topics they had “liked” or on which they had taken some other action. As *the Los Angeles Times* described it, Sponsored Stories (and the comparable program launched for members in the Google+ social networking site) turned users into “unwitting endorsers” (Guynn, 2013). Facebook dropped Sponsored Stories in early 2014 (Brown, 2014; Hendricks, 2014), but Google’s program continues (Google, 2013; Miller & Goel, 2013; Sterling, 2013).

Importantly, the FTC recognized the potential lack of transparency in social media endorsements in a warning letter in 2014 where Cole Haan shoes was admonished for conducting a contest where consumers were asked to post five pictures of their favorite models of the popular shoe brand on Pinterest and to tag each pin with a #WanderingSole tag in order to compete for a \$1,000 prize to be awarded for the most creative photo. The FTC argued that entry

into a contest in order to receive a significant prize represented a material connection that would not reasonably be expected by viewers. In effect, the reason so many Cole Haan shoes were featured on the site was not transparent (Bachman, 2014). Yet, despite the FTC's clear signal that paid endorsements are unacceptable, commentators actually continue discuss whether paying social media operatives for endorsements might actually be an attractive option (Barai, 2012)

Confounding of measurement and evaluation

Despite the ready availability of metrics to track page views and click throughs, the measurement of online communications activities and interpreting their meaning remains a challenge. In large measure, the advent of these new strategies confounds the problem and can lead to misleading understanding of the results obtained.

Although the public relations has made great strides in identifying key performance indicators for public relations activities in general (Institute for Public Relations, n.d.) and social media in particular (Social Media Measurement Coalition, 2013), measurement is still in its infancy. The deluge of metrics of associated with particular content tools (Google analytics for websites, Facebook Insights for that social networking sites, etc.) can generate a dizzying array of data. NewsCred, a leading content marketing advocate emphasizes "The process of quantifying your content marketing efforts can be daunting to a creative type, especially if you're not regularly using spreadsheets and forecasting tools. Even if your content goes viral, your CMO, CEO and CFO will want to see results in terms of cost, revenue and margins" (NewsCred, 2013, p. 3). Whereas the Social Media Measurement Coalition (2013) identified five key area for measurement (content; reach and impressions; engagement; influence and relevance; and impact and value—K. Payne, 2012), NewsCred (2013) suggests a similar yet distinct list of measures (reach, brand, awareness and virality; loyalty and engagement; leads; opportunity and mobility; and revenue). Despite all the choices, half of small businesses using content marketing are not sure that they are being effective (Clark, 2014).

The assessment of native advertising is compounded by the assumption is that consume native advertising content as regular editorial format using cognitive schemas that classify it as editorial matter, not advertising (Hallahan, 1999a). Yet, evidence already suggests lower attention rates for native ads (based on labeling) compared to traditional editorial matter. This might preclude creators from reaching their goals (Kafka, 2014b). Malik (2014) contends that while native advertising might work in social media (such as Sponsored Posts on Facebook or Promoted Tweets on Twitter), native advertising won't work for anyone else. A study of Twitter users by Deutsche-Bank found that nearly half of respondents thought that Promoted Tweets were "at random" while only 34% found them useful and only 17% said they were relevant to them (Beck, 2014b). Moreover, native advertising might be best for achieving outcomes that might differ from other content marketing activities. Results can also be expected to vary based on the personal situations in which users view ads and the device used (PC, tablet or mobile). Sharethrough, an ad network specializing in native advertising, surveyed brand marketers in 2013. Respondents reported that awareness was the top objective for *mobile* native ads, followed by branding, brand affinity. Purchase intent, customer acceptance, lead generation and loyalty trailed far behind (eMarketer, 2014).

In addition to the problem of less attention, research needs to be conducted to understand the degree to which people discount native ad information or actually engage in counter-arguing behaviors. Consumer acceptance is critical. If consumers believe native ads are not authentic, it

is probable they will begin to disregard them as mere advertising (Brafton, 2014, Kafka, 2014; Sargent, 2014).

The rise of native advertising similarly adds an entirely new angle to the continuing debate within public relations about *advertising value equivalency* (AVE)(Watson, 2013). Native advertising suggests the need to compare results obtained through *paid* editorial versus *unpaid* editorial placements (and, in turn, how paid text stories might compare in their effectiveness to paid image and video placements).

Early research suggests that user-generated reviews can have a positive impact on brands (Dennhardt, 2014). In a study of online female purchasers, online consumer reviews outperformed celebrity endorsements in the case of experience goods, based on scales measuring memory, search and share attitudes, although celebrity endorsers generated more attention, desire and action for search goods (Wei & Lu, 2013). However, other research suggests that social media users are skeptical about their peers (Sass, 2014) and that 68% of Facebook users actually don't pay attention to brands they "like" (Kentico, 2014). A Nielsen study similarly suggested that while 85% of online users sought third-party information on prospective purchases, expert editorial content outperformed both branded content and user reviews on measures such as purchase consideration, affinity and familiarity (Coffee, 2014). Queenan (2014) argues that being asked to review and rate content and products is annoying and squanders the time of users who are lulled into participating without receiving compensation. As a result, the validity and reliability of many recommendations completed in a hurry are dubious.

The value of comments, likes, favorites, forwards and shares needs to be better understood. The mere fact that these data can be compiled programmatically does not necessarily mean they are appropriate or useful – and they could represent faulty (or potentially fraudulent) measures of success. Critics argue that the meaning of a "like" remains problematic (Gardner, 2011), especially since marketers cannot know the identity of those endorsers whose personal private settings inhibit sharing their identity. Also, evidence suggests people endorse products and ideas for many different reasons. Some like the product; some like just the message; some simply know or like the poster; some like the item because of a special affinity that not might be shared by the public at large; and some are incented to do so in order to receive a coupon or discount or to be eligible for a contest. Such endorsements don't necessarily mean the user approves, wants, recommends or intends to purchase a product.

Much attention has been focused on how marketers and other organizations can increase their number of likes on Facebook (Carter, 2013; Karpen, 2011, 2012). In fact, likes might actually be valid indicators of the popularity when members use Facebook's Open Graph (DejanSEO, 2013). Yet there is no concurrence about the value of a "like" despite the publication of formulae from reputable management consulting firms (Hodson, Ayetkin & Crawford, 2011), a proposal appearing on the blogs of the prestigious Harvard Business Review (Zarella, 2012), and the development of an online value calculator (ValueofaLike.com, n.d.). The problem is complicated by the growing recognition of fraudulent likes and followers on Facebook. This is a complicated issue that includes – but is not limited to do – the operation of "click farms" in third world countries where workers paid to like or follow thousands of Facebook Pages on a daily basis. Pages are chosen on targeted basis, based on customers seeking to increase the likes on their pages, but also are liked and followed on a random basis to avoid detection of the scam (Muller, 2014; Slegg, 2014; D. Sullivan, 2014; Wolverton, 2014). Not surprisingly, many pages with large numbers of likes enjoy low levels of engagement. Thus

experts suggest that marketers should focus on other reach, engagement and referrer metrics (Bendor, 2013; Belosic, 2014). Yet the users' and marketers' infatuation with "likes" continues.

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Change is inevitable, and there is nothing inherently good or bad with any of the practices identified here, *depending on how they are conducted*. However, in light of these and other changes, public relations professionals need to consider thoughtfully how publicity and other forms of traditional public relations communications can remain relevant in today's online environment. Clearly if publicity is considered from the perspective of how an organization establishes and maintains its public presence (Hallahan, 2010b), broadening our understanding and definition of publicity processes is critical.

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**Risk Communication and Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs):
Longitudinal Analysis of Emergency Response Awareness and Practices**

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Abstract

This study (*N=400 survey interviews*) replicates and longitudinally compares research (Heath, Palenchar, Abel, Lee) on community risk perceptions, providing insights about efforts that have been made to affect positive behavioral change between industry and area residents whose lives can be positively and negatively affected by the presence of hazardous manufacturing facilities.

Heath and his colleagues (Heath & Abel, 1996; Heath, Lee, & Ni, 2009; Heath & Palenchar, 2000; Palenchar & Heath, 2002) have advocated an infrastructure approach to risk communication. Their essential claim is that fully functioning risk infrastructures assist residents to make informed positive behavioral decisions. Communication related to hazardous manufacturing is a key part of a community and a nation's risk management infrastructure. Effectively designed and implemented risk communication can enhance people's desire to make positive behavioral decisions within a community even though specialized information about specific risks themselves is often difficult to acquire, to evaluate, and to draw consensual understanding. Where there are substantial amounts of chemical manufacturing and transportation, for instance, community residents need to appropriately manage their sense of apprehension about potential health and safety threats so as to remain prudently vigilant to the extent that they are capable to decide and act to reduce their risk. This is especially true for community emergency management protocols.

Such communication can be improved through research and monitoring. Rarely, however, such tracking research is conducted or if so it is often tightly held by industry for fear of litigation. Longitudinal data can track the progress, success, regress, and modification in efforts and effects of public communication emergency response campaigns.

In 2012, the fourth tracking and monitoring research project was conducted to replicate, expand and compare conclusions drawn by Heath and Abel (1996), Heath and Palenchar (2000), and Palenchar and Heath's (2002) research on community risk perceptions and emergency response communication. This 2012 longitudinal study is based on professionally conducted phone interviews to replicate these previous studied in Deer Park, Texas, a community surrounded by hazardous manufacturing facilities. This research project reaches back to the early 1990s when the chemical manufacturing industry was mandated to design and implement community outreach programs as part of the national Risk Management Project. Such planning and communication matured into the signature Responsible Care Program adopted as a standard by the U.S. petrochemical industry at all levels.

That project and related community survey research were designed under the premise that analysis of community members' knowledge of emergency responses should begin by understanding how they perceive the risks and emergency responses related to living and working near chemical manufacturing, refining and transport facilities as part of an infrastructural approach to risk communication over a long-term period of time.

Findings suggest: (1) that sustained risk communication efforts translate into a reasonable and manageable sense of risk; (2) that sustained emergency response outreach measures promote higher levels of awareness, knowledge, and behavioral emergency response intentions on the part of community residents; and (3) that organizations receive more support or experience less opposition from residents when they engage in long-term emergency response planning and communication with the community. Overall, this paper provides specific insights into risk communication strategies and tools in communities that over time make concerted efforts to build relationships among industries and area residents whose lives can be affected, positively and negatively, by the presence of hazardous manufacturing operations.

Risk Communication

Risk is an inescapable attribute and fundamental element of human communication, and in particular public relations, especially as it relates to contemporary health, safety and environmental challenges (Coombs, 1998). Drawing from the seminal research of Mary Douglas

(1992) and other anthropologists and sociologists, the rationale for an industrialized and evolving technological society is the collective management of risk. Some risk and crisis communication scholars have embraced this underlying paradigm of risk discourse and ideally enlightened community decision making to manage and alleviate such risks as part of the social construction of a modern risk society (See for instance, Heath & O’Hair, 2009).

According to Palenchar (2013b) and others, concepts of emergency risk communication have a common element; the distinction between preferable emergency responses planned and coordinated by professionals versus intuitive and uncoordinated, even dysfunctional responses by lay members of a community. As risk bearers, “humans learn to live in varying degrees of comfort with ambiguity, contradiction, and imperfection” (p. 805). Community planning by professional emergency response personnel is crucial to community public safety.

Such planning reflects definitions of risk communication, including that by Covello (1992) who depicted it as the "process of exchanging information among interested parties about the nature, magnitude, significance, or control of a risk" (p. 359). Dunwoody and Neuwirth (1991) suggested that the field studies the role of communication in aiding the public with risk determination: “the relaying of any interpersonal or mediated message that contains information about the existence, nature, severity, or acceptability of a risk” (p. 12).

Taking a specific emergency response point of view, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2008) emphasized that risk communication is "the exchange of information with the goal of improving risk understanding, affecting risk perception, and/or equipping people or groups to act appropriately in response to an identified risk" (p. 26). According to Palenchar (2013b):

Risk communication provides the opportunity to understand and appreciate risk bearers and other stakeholders’ concerns related to risks generated by organizations and nature, engage in dialogue to address differences and concerns, carry out appropriate actions that can mitigate perceived risks, and create a climate of participatory and effective discourse as a rationale for collaborative decision-making for a more fully functioning society. (pp. 804-805)

From this perspective, risk communication efforts include developing strategies and tactics to help potential risk bearers recognize and comprehend the facts, values and policies so that they can make informed decisions about risk. These communicative efforts also work to parcel out the particular meanings of risk that are socially constructed and the unique individual and community decision heuristics derived from a communities’ discourse on risk decisions.

Infrastructural Approach to Risk Communication

The infrastructural risk communication perspective features discourse-based agentic and structural aspects of risk perceptions and meaning that are essential for creating long-term, ongoing relationships with companies that create risks, with community government that partner in emergency management, and the stakeholders and risk bearers in each community. The essence of planning and execution of such communication and action structures depends on shared meanings amid eclectic and multiple constituencies over the relevant issues, facts, policies and multi-levels of understanding. “A fully functioning society is aware of risk or at least does its best to be aware of, assess, and discuss, and develops plans tailored to particular risk-bearing communities, and their individual and group unique risk decision heuristics” (Palenchar, 2013a, p. 453).

Such community based risks communication is the foundation of risk democracy. It is the central theme within infrastructural risk communication that advocates for a myriad of stakeholder voices, and in particular risk bearers, being brought together to create systems and shared perspectives that appropriately assess, mitigate and respond to risks that are often unequally and unfairly faced by various members and geographical regions of communities. In all, the challenge is to have infrastructures that are sufficiently robust and collaborative so as to achieve the level of deliberative democracy needed to achieve maximal individual, expert and community efficacy that can help make society more fully functioning regarding risk and crisis (Heath et al., 2009; Heath & Palenchar, in press).

A prominent part of this infrastructure, for example, is local emergency planning committees (LEPCs), which are required under the Emergency Planning and Community-Right-to-Know Act of 1986 (EPCRA), section three of The Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA Title III). LEPCs serve as monthly community forums where residents, government officials, industry representatives, health and safety officials, and any other concerned individuals and organizations could request information and voice concerns.

From this perspective on risk communication, the following research questions (RQs) were asked to generate data on which to report a longitudinal perspective of communication and management efforts:

- RQ1: How do sustained risk and emergency communication efforts affect the sense of risk?
- RQ2: How do sustained risk and emergency communication efforts affect awareness, knowledge, and behavioral intentions?
- RQ3: How do sustained risk and emergency communication efforts affect support (or opposition) toward industrial companies?

Method

Nearly 20 years ago, in 1995, Deer Park, Texas's, LEPC along with Heath and Abel (1996) began to survey its community residents to determine the strengths and weaknesses of its community awareness/community relations program. Heath and Palenchar conducted a second and third similar study in 1998 and 2002. The key similarities of these studies were the repeated use of questions that allowed longitudinal tracking and new questions that allowed for assessment of changes and improvements.

The fourth such study was conducted in 2012 (all four studies funded by the LEPC of Deer Park). A professional survey company was contracted to conduct 400 telephone interviews. The survey was conducted so that men and women were nearly equally represented and respondents needed to be at least 18 years of age. The survey instrument primarily used a 4-point Likert scale for most questions, with strongly disagree = 1, somewhat disagree = 2, somewhat agree = 3, and strongly agree = 4. Other questions tested top-of-kind knowledge by asking respondents what they knew about emergency protocols and what they would do in specific events. Analysis includes descriptive statistics for comparison of studies.

Sense of Risk

This longitudinal study was designed under the premise that analysis of community members' knowledge of emergency responses should begin by understanding how they perceive the risks of living and working near chemical manufacturing, refining and transport facilities. One way to assess that concern is to ask community residents how likely are specific hazardous

events. RQ1 asked how do sustained risk and emergency communication efforts affect the sense of risk? One analytic option is to compare the perceived level of concern in these communities against the instrument mean of 2.50 (the average of the four response items). Because all of the means regarding the likelihood of these chemical releases are at or higher than 2.5, ranging from 2.83 to 3.23 with an average mean of 3.02, we conclude that in the first three survey periods community residents predicted that unfavorable events will occur related to the chemical manufacturing, refining and transport facilities in or going through their community (see Table 1). In 2012, however, residents witnessed the lowest set of means, most being at the 2.5 levels. This continues to suggest concern but less concern than in previous years.

Table 1: Means of Perceived Likelihood of Safety Problem

<i>Variable</i>	1995 (N=400)	1998 (N=400)	2002 (N=403)	2012 (N=400)
A pipeline is like to rupture and leak chemicals	3.00	2.93	2.83	2.50
A tanker ruck is likely to overturn and leak chemicals	3.11	3.31	3.13	2.60
A train is likely to derail and leak chemicals	2.93	3.19	2.89	2.49
A chemical plant is likely to explode and leak chemicals	3.08	3.27	3.23	2.48

Note: A low mean is preferred.

A second analytic option is to compare the residents' perceptions in the 2002 survey to those in the 1995-baseline study and the 1998 and 2002 studies – and then compare to the 2012 data. Using this same logic, we compared the 2012 levels and found that the trend continues to show lower concern: pipeline (50% strongly and somewhat agree), truck (59.8%), train (49.8%), and chemical plant (51%). The 2012 data were 10 or more percentage points lower than previous years; the level of concern seems to be substantially lower.

Plant Operations and Its Effects

Relevant to safety and long-term health concerns, residents were asked for their opinions of plant operations and its effects. In 2012, more than half indicated that they believe odors to be harmful to their health (see Table 2). Comparing 2012 to the other years suggests a slight drop in concern regarding flares, air quality, and water quality. Overall, results suggest that although community members are concerned that unfavorable health events will occur from odor and emissions from chemical plants, the vast majority believe that safeguards are in place to prevent chemical plants from harming the air and water quality in their community. Out of this data, we will next discuss the residents' knowledge, perception and evaluation of the emergency response practices in the community.

Relevant to the belief that a hazardous event will occur is the concern that it will have immediate consequences on community safety or on long-term health through continued exposure to chemicals. Both of these possibilities constitute a concern higher than the instrument mean of 2.50. The data for 2012, suggest that today residents are less concerned that such events are likely. That, however, does not suggest that citizens are unconcerned.

Table 2
Means of Perceived Health and Safety Problems

<i>Variable</i>	1995 (N=400)	1998 (N=400)	2002 (N=403)	2012 (N=400)
Chemical leaks in this community are likely to affect my immediate safety (1995 & 1998) or immediate health (2002, 2012)	3.18	3.14	2.83	2.71
Chemical leaks in this community are likely to affect my long-term health	3.22	3.25	3.22	2.95
The odor from the chemical plants is harmful to my health	N/A	2.83	2.56	2.59
The emissions from the chemical plants are harmful to my health	N/A	3.29	2.82	3.13
The flare (flame coming out from a plant's stack) is dangerous to my safety	N/A	2.09	1.99	1.94
Safeguards are in place to prevent chemical plants from harming air quality in my community	N/A	3.05	3.32	3.17
Safeguards are in place to prevent chemical plants from harming water quality in my community	N/A	3.14	3.35	3.29

Note: A low mean is preferred. Note: Data on some questions were not collected during all studies.

Impact of Sustained Outreach Effort

RQ2 asked how do sustained risk and emergency communication efforts affect awareness, knowledge, and behavioral intentions? If unfavorable health and safety situations appear likely or even inevitable to members of a community, one focal point of analysis is the community residents' sense of the training and responsiveness of the fire and police personnel, as well as the emergency response personnel of the chemical industry. Although community members are concerned that unfavorable events will occur, nearly all believe that emergency response personnel from both the city and the chemical industry are prepared to respond properly (see Table 3). On this point, the 2012 mean regarding fire and police department response is lower than the previous three reporting years. However, in 2012, residents showed nearly as high a level of confidence in the industry as in previous reporting periods (3.63 versus 3.55, 3.65, and 3.76). The differences may suggest, however, that the community is not concerned that either entity will not respond properly. One key finding when comparing 2012 to the other years suggests a drop in confidence that they would be quickly notified of what to do in the event of a chemical leak.

Table 3
Means of Likelihood of Emergency Response

<i>Variable</i>	1995 (N=400)	1998 (N=400)	2002 (N=403)	2012 (N=400)
Local fire or police departments are prepared to respond properly	3.69	3.59	3.56	3.46
The chemical industry is prepared to respond properly	3.55	3.65	3.76	3.63

If a chemical leak occurred nearby, it's likely I would be quickly notified what to do 3.55 3.46 3.43 3.11
 Note: A high mean is preferred.

Risks exist in a community that includes chemical manufacturing, refining and transport facilities. As such, consideration is focused on the community's emergency response preparedness. Part of that response is the notification system that should operate in the event of an emergency. The following table (see Table 4) reports the public's sense of how they would be notified if an emergency occurred. These data should be interpreted based on the factuality or appropriateness of the expectation of the respondents surveyed and the desirability of those expectations in the opinion of persons who are expert in emergency response procedures. Despite the finding that in 2012 residents seem slightly less convinced they would be notified in a timely way, they remain confident they will be notified by outside alarm or siren system.

Other interesting data include that in 2012, residents expect to be notified by a loudspeaker or PA system; 60 percent don't expect to be notified by a police officer or fireperson coming to their door; most (67.1%) disagree that they will be notified by a chemical company; and belief remains high they will be notified by news media on radio or television. It is important to note that in 2012 residents exhibit the highest level of agreement that they will be warned by a telephone system as compared to previous years. This study is the first time that mass email or text message has been included as a survey item. About 35% believe they will be notified by this method.

Table 4
Means of Likely Methods of Emergency Notification

<i>Variable</i>	1995 (N=400)	1998 (N=400)	2002 (N=403)	2012 (N=400)
Outside alarm or siren system	3.88	3.92	3.88	3.80
Loudspeaker or public address system	3.77	3.81	3.83	3.68
Police or fire personnel at door*	2.32	1.99	2.30	2.28
Chemical company involved*	1.88	1.86	2.08	2.05
News media on radio or television	3.52	3.73	3.84	3.26
Official telephone warning system	3.06	3.06	3.05	3.63
Mass email or text messages	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.14

Note: Data on some questions were not collected during all studies.

Note: A high mean is typically preferred.

Shelter in Place (SIP)

Shelter in place (SIP) is a term for emergency management short-term, non-evacuation strategies to protect community residents' health and safety. More and more residents are aware of the concept, but do not know all the components of the essential message (see Table 5). People may have more of an intuitive sense of the emergency responses they would take rather than know of those emergency measures because of information they have received. The survey asked people to explain what it means to them. The specific practices of SIP are not particularly well known, except for go inside/stay inside, but the situation is improving.

Table 5
What Does the Phrase “Shelter in Place” Mean to You?

<i>Options</i>	1995 (N=400)	1998 (N=400)	2002 (N=403)	2012 (N=400)
Go Inside/Stay Inside	10.8	52.8	83.9	83.5
Close Windows/Doors	6.3	14.0	17.4	49.3
Turn Off AC/Heat	4.5	14.8	16.9	56.8
Turn On Radio	0.3	3.5	< 2.0	4.0
Turn On TV	0.0	1.0	< 2.0	2.3
Stay Off Phone	0.0	0.0	<1.0	<2.0
Go to LEPC website	N/A	N/A	N/A	<1.0
Other	46.5	23.0	4.7	23.0
Don't Know	44.5	25.75	3.7	2.8

The surveys continue to report mixed results regarding whether people know what protective actions to take at home (see Table 6). For this aspect of the survey, 1998 may still be the gold standard year. The willingness to leave/evacuate is low for both 2002 and 2012, but shows a rise in 2012. But the use of radio and television is also low. Mention of SIP remains at the 2002 level. Residents also seem willing to stay off the phone so they can receive information by that medium.

Table 6
 Percentage of Agreement for Emergency Response Actions – Shelter in Place at Home

<i>Variable</i>	1995 (N=400)	1998 (N=400)	2002 (N=403)	2012 (N=400)
Shelter in place	2.0	10.8	51.1	35.8
Go/stay inside	55.3	73.3	29.5	45.5
Close windows/doors	50.8	60.8	13.6	40.0
Turn off air conditioning/heat	57.3	65.5	16.9	59.3
Turn on the radio	12.0	19.0	2.5	5.8
Turn on the television	7.0	17.3	3.2	7.8
Call someone on the phone	3.0	< 1.0	< 1.0	2.0
Go outside to see emergency	< 1.0	< 1.0	< 1.0	< 1.0
Leave/evacuate	20.8	26.8	6.0	13.3
Don't know	5.0	< 1.0	< 1.0	< 2.0
Other	30.3	11.3	4.7	21.3

Note: data reported in the next four tables were unprompted. The individual had to recall or intuit a response rather than select one from a list provided by the telephone survey professional.

Respondents were asked to think of themselves as shopping or in a business when a chemical emergency occurs (see Table 7). In the 1995 and 1998 surveys, residents appeared reluctant (less however in 1998) to ask the manager or store operator to perform SIP practices, such as shut windows and doors and turn off the AC/heat. The analysis suggested that if the response is not motivated by reluctance, it may indicate that citizens believe the manager or operator knows the correct emergency responses and would properly engage in them. The analysis also indicated that perhaps people lack confidence in the response actions or are timid to make such requests of the persons in charge of business.

The 2002 survey results are different when compared to the previous two surveys in two

ways. First, there was a decrease in specific emergency response measures to protect yourself and family while in a store or at a business. For example, there was a 67 percent reduction of residents identifying go/stay inside as a proper course of action. However, and more importantly, there was a dramatic increase in SIP as a protective action. Residents in 2002, unprompted, who indicated SIP as an emergency response action in a business or store, increased 671 percent from the 1998 survey and increased more than 2000 percent from 1995. The data suggest that residents are more likely to SIP while at a store or business. The number of preferred responses for SIP dropped from 2002. However, for several responses, 2012 showed a return toward 1998 numbers. The combination of SIP and go/stay inside for 2012 was strong and proactive activities returned toward the highs of 1998.

Table 7

Percentage of Agreement for Emergency Response Actions – Shelter in Place in Business

<i>Variable</i>	1995 (N=400)	1998 (N=400)	2002 (N=403)	2012 (N=400)
Shelter in place	2.3	7.3	56.3	32.0
Go/stay inside	58.5	76.8	25.6	46.8
Close or ask to close windows/doors	3.5	15.3	1.5	5.8
Turn off or ask to turn off air conditioning/heat	4.3	14.0	< 1.0	6.0
Turn on or ask to turn on the radio	1.5	1.5	< 1.0	<1.0
Turn on or ask to turn on the television	< 1.0	< 1.0	< 1.0	< 1.0
Call someone on the phone	1.3	2.0	0.0	<2.0
Go outside to see emergency	0.0	< 1.0	< 1.0	< 2.0
Leave/evacuate	22.5	19.8	7.7	11.8
Don't know	< 1.0	1.3	3.0	4.5
Other	31.3	7.3	6.0	28.0

Note: data reported in the next four tables were unprompted. The individual had to recall or intuit a response rather than select one from a list provided by the telephone survey professional.

Emergency Responses while Children are at School

Emergencies may occur that affect children at schools. This does not mean that the school creates the emergency but that the chemical industry suffers an event that affects a school. Personnel in the schools are trained to SIP. School districts work to inform parents that this procedure is the wisest. How well does the message get across? The surveys ascertained whether the respondent had school-aged children living at home and if so proceeded to find out what the respondent would do if an emergency affected the school (see Table 8).

Most parents, and in increasing amounts from 82 percent in 1995 to 93 percent in 2002, expressed confidence in local school officials. However, there is a small increase in the number of parents who are not confident in school officials, up from five to seven percent since 1998. There also have been positive movements in the number of parents who would not telephone the school and not go to school to check on the children in case of an emergency – both requested responses of the shelter-in-place protocol. Forty-six percent of parents would not telephone the school to check on their children, a 180 percent increase since 1998, which is also a reversal of pattern from 1995 to 1998. Seventy-six percent of parents would not go to school to check on the children, an 88 percent increase from 1998. Careful consideration of the 2012 data suggest an increase in confidence that schools will respond properly to protect students. Residents, however,

exhibited a strong motivation to call the schools about students' safety.

Table 8

Percentages of Emergency Responses While Children are at School

Variable	1995 (N=159)	1998 (N=158)	2002 (N=147)	2012 (N=100)
Children in Public or Private Schools Confident School Officials Would Protect Children	39.8	39.5	36.5	25.0
Not Confident School Officials Would Protect Children	9.5	1	8	2.0
Telephone School to Check on Children	70.4	62.3	61.7	65.0
Would Not Telephone School to Check on Children	20.1	35.5	35.3	33.0
Go to School to Check on Children	25.1	33.1	35.6	30.0
Would Not Go to School to Check on Children	39.0	66.5	65.2	57.0

Trusted Sources of Information

The most trusted sources of information continue to be local police and fire officials and city officials, followed by technical "experts" e.g. doctors, university chemists and plant managers (see Table 9). In 2012, chemical plant as a source and various types of spokespersons reached the highest level of trust.

Table 9

Percentage of Agreement for Credible Sources in the Event of an Emergency

	1995 (N=400)			1998 (N=400)			2002 (N=403)			2012 (N=400)		
	Yes	Maybe	No	Yes	Maybe	No	Yes	Maybe	No	Yes	Maybe	No
Radio/TV reporter	22.5	28.3	49.0	35.3	22.2	42.5	28.0	25.6	46.4	45.5	7.2	47.3
Police officer/fireperson	57.8	20.0	22.0	65.0	13.2	21.8	57.8	16.9	25.3	70.8	3.0	26.3
Mayor or city official	51.0	19.0	29.8	48.3	18.2	33.5	51.9	21.3	26.8	64.0	4.3	31.8
Chemical plant manager	49.3	19.8	30.8	47.5	19.0	33.5	49.6	18.4	32.0	54.8	5.0	40.3
Police/fire chief	64.0	16.0	19.8	67.8	13.2	19.0	62.3	15.1	22.6	72.3	3.3	24.5

Medical doctor	52.8	20.3	26.3	68.5	13.5	18.0	50.6	26.6	22.8	64.8	6.3	29.0
Chemical plant env. Manager	N/A	N/A	N/A	58.3	15.5	26.2	51.6	19.9	28.5	63.2	6.8	30.0
University chemical expert	53.8	26.8	19.0	66.3	15.0	18.7	50.4	27.5	22.1	60.8	7.5	31.8
Chemical plant PR officer	N/A	N/A	N/A	32.8	15.2	52.0	35.7	20.1	44.2	50.5	6.5	43.0
Neighbor	9.5	22.3	67.8	6.0	14.5	79.5	5.2	17.9	76.9	13.0	5.5	81.5
Chemical plant rep	N/A	N/A	N/A	36.5	20.2	43.3	39.5	24.1	36.5	52.3	5.5	42.3

Note: Data on some questions were not collected during all studies.

We highlight with bold type the number for each response that seems particularly important for that category. It seems that levels for trust for nearly all categories of spokesperson is the highest in 2012 compared to the other years. Neighbors remain low. Third-party experts are a bit lower than other years, such as medical doctor and university chemical expert. Media reporters are higher in 2012.

Support and Opposition

RQ3 asked whether sustained risk and emergency communication efforts affect support (or opposition) toward industrial companies? Most residents believe that chemical companies study the worst outcomes that could occur during a major release of hazardous chemicals (see Table 10). The percentage of agreement for 2012 was 87.8 versus 90.1 percent for 2002 and 85 percent for 1998. Although the 2012 mean was the lowest of the three years, the level of agreement is still high. Most residents (93 percent) believe this preparation will help increase the safety of citizens, although there was a four percent decrease from 1998 to 2002. Again, the mean for 2012 was the lowest of the three years (3.53 versus 3.86 and 3.72). The percentage agreeing in 2012 was 89.6 versus 97.1 and 93.

Table 10

Means of Support or Opposition of Industry

<i>Variable</i>	1995 (N=400)	1998 (N=400)	2002 (N=403)	2012 (N=400)
Chemical industry companies study the worst outcomes that could occur during a major release of hazardous chemicals	3.46	3.64	3.36	3.46

Studying the worst outcomes that could occur during a major release of hazardous materials will help the industry increase the safety of citizens in the community	3.86	3.72	3.53	3.86
The chemical industry is a positive economic force in the community	N/A	3.89	3.91	3.87
The chemical industry is a positive community impact	N/A	3.79	3.81	3.71

Note: A high mean is preferred.

Note: Data on some questions were not collected during all studies.

Community residents were also asked their perceptions of the impact of the chemical industry on their community. Most residents (98 percent) perceive the industry as a positive economic force in the community. Most residents (96 percent) also perceive the industry as a positive community impact. There was no significant difference between 1998 and 2002. Residents in 2012 were still strongly in agreement about the economic impact of the industry on the community, although marginally less so. Worth noting is the fact that despite the lower level (percentage) of agreement regarding the positive community impact of the industry, the “somewhat agree” option brings the 2012 data up to 95.1 percent agreement.

Analysis of Key Variables Regarding Crucial Issues

Several survey items were subjected to statistical scrutiny to seek additional insights into the emergency response and communication patterns. In contrast to the findings presented so far, this considers variables created by combining two or more response items. Whereas presentations of data based on respondents' answers to individual questions can be revealing, statistical analysis increases the understanding of citizen's thoughts, preferences, motivations, conclusions, and communication patterns.

The analysis that follows is divided into two sections. The first explains the variables that were used in the analysis. The second section examines correlations between variables to look for patterns that achieve statistical significance.

The survey asked respondents to rate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding the likelihood of *chemical releases from pipelines, tanker trucks, trains, and chemical plants*. Combined into a single variable, these four questionnaire items were used to create a variable, *sense of risk*, with a modest reliability coefficient (2012 alpha = .61; 2002 alpha = .68; 1998 alpha = .64; 1995 alpha = .67). This variable operationalized respondents' sense of the likely occurrence of hazards in their community. The response by each respondent could fall at one of four points: disagree/agree and strongly/somewhat. A key factor in risk studies is the expectation that something unfortunate can and will occur.

A variable called *cognitive involvement* was created by combining items that measured respondents' predictions that living in the community could affect their (a) safety and (b) long-term health. Combined into a single variable, these two survey items produced a weak reliability coefficient (2012 alpha = .68; 2002 = .48; 1998 alpha = .57; 1995 alpha = .50). Previous research has used this variable to predict the likelihood that people would seek or receive communication, such as read newspapers, attend meetings, watch television programs, and talk to friends and acquaintances on topics related to some issue. The variable assumes that if people believe that an issue affects their self-interest, they become more thoughtful, are more likely to

engage in communication about the topic, and tend to take actions regarding the issue.

In addition to estimating the respondents' sense of industry performance, a variable was formed to operationalize their *trust in government*. Three items were combined to form this variable; those related to opinions toward elected city officials and fire/police officials regarding the danger or safety associated with a release. The items asked how much trust respondents would have for the opinion of these officials. These survey items produced a variable with a strong reliability coefficient (2012 alpha = .88; 2002 alpha = .85; 1998 alpha = .84; 1995 alpha = .84). Persons who score high on this variable would seem to believe those key officials in the community will exert appropriate control over emergency situations on their behalf. Such persons believe in community control rather than feel that they must exert personal control (such as evacuating) in the event of an emergency.

Two items were combined to operationalize residents' *trust in third-party experts*, those related to opinions toward a medical doctor or university chemical expert regarding the danger or safety associated with a release. The items asked how much trust respondents would have for the opinion of these experts. These survey items produced a variable with an adequate reliability coefficient (2012 alpha = .58; 2002 alpha = .66; 1998 alpha = .60). Persons who score high on this variable would seem to be ones who believe those key experts in the community will exert intelligent professional control over emergency situations on their behalf. Similar to those people who have a sense of trust in government officials, such persons tend to believe in community control rather than think that they must exert personal control in the event of an emergency.

Another variable was formed to operationalize residents' *trust in chemical industry officials*. Four items were combined to form this variable, those related to opinions of plant managers, environmental managers, public relations officers and plant representatives regarding the danger or safety associated with a release. The items asked how much trust respondents would have for the opinion of these experts. These survey items produced a variable with a strong reliability coefficient (2012 alpha = .89; 2002 alpha = .83; 1998 alpha = .81). Persons who score high on this variable would seem to be ones who believe those key industry officials in the community will exert control over emergency situations on their behalf. Similar to those people who have a sense of trust in government officials or third-party experts, we would define such persons as believing the chemical industry will control rather than assuming that they must exert personal control in the event of an emergency.

The petrochemical industry wants to know whether or not persons perceive it to be a positive economic and community presence. These survey items produced a new variable with an adequate reliability coefficient (2012 = .51; 2002 alpha = .69; 1998 alpha = .76). Persons who score high on this variable would seem to be ones who *support the chemical industry* in their community.

The 2002 and 2012 studies operationalized residents' *Awareness of the Responsible Care Program*. This variable was formed by combining responses to two questions about hearing and receiving information about this program. These two items formed a moderate reliability coefficient alpha = .66 (2002 alpha = .81). For 2012, a new variable *LEPC Exposure* combines all the activities was created. This variable is about how many LEPC activities a respondent has seen in the community. This variable is generally reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .75). Out of the 10 activities, respondents typically have seen 3 activities (Mean = 3.25, SD = 2.37).

This table reveals several results (see Table 11). First, residents with higher levels of apprehension about safety/health (sense of risk) are more cognitively involved, tend not to trust in government, chemical industry officials, or support the industry. They are also less aware of

the responsible care program. Second, those who are more cognitively involved tend not to trust government or industry officials. They are less aware of responsible care and tend not to support the industry.

Table 11
Correlations of Key Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Sense of risk	(.61)						
2. Cognitive involvement	.47**	(.68)					
3. Trust in government	-.18**	-.24**	(.88)				
4. Trust in third-party experts	.01	-.03	.42**	(.58)			
5. Trust in chemical industry officials	-.21**	-.31**	.63**	.32**	(.89)		
6. Aware of responsible care program	-.11*	-.14**	.04	.04	.15**	(.66)	
7. Support for chemical industry	-.14**	-.14**	.19**	.13**	.18**	.09	(.51)

N = 400

* = Significant at the .05 level of probability (of being wrong) = 5% chance of being wrong

** = Significant at the .01 level of probability (of being wrong) = 1% chance of being wrong

Numbers in the parenthesis are Cronbach's reliability scores.

Third, those who trust third-party experts exhibit lowered sense of risk and cognitive involvement. They tend to trust industry officials and support the industry, but are not aware of responsible care. Fourth, those who trust chemical industry officials show lowered sense of risk and lower cognitive involvement. They trust government and third parties. They are aware of responsible care and support the industry.

Fifth, those who are aware of the responsible care program show lowered sense of risk and cognitive involvement. They trust industry officials and support the industry. Last, those who support industry show lowered sense of risk and cognitive involvement. They are more likely to trust in government, third-party experts, industry officials, but are not aware of responsible care.

Discussion

Community members continue to have high levels of concern that some event could harm their safety or that over time their health could be affected. This concern is counterbalanced by the strong belief that industry and local government are prepared and willing to respond properly in the event of an emergency and to reduce these risks. The community has a high level of confidence that the industry and city are prepared to respond properly in the event that an emergency occurs. The 2012 data suggest that confidence is high that industry is responsive to the community, but awareness of what the City/LEPC do has declined. Based on other research we have done, it is important to community efficacy and resilience that residents know about and trust that a strong working relationship exists between industry and government in such matters.

Comparing 2012 to the other years suggests a drop in confidence that residents would be quickly notified what to do in the event of a chemical leak. Also, the community continues to be

concerned about odors and emissions, including a worry that they harm health. This concern is offset by its perception that safeguards are in place to protect citizens' health. It believes that industry studies the worst-case scenarios of emissions and works to increase citizens' safety.

In balance to the potential hazards of living in this community, citizens perceive the industry to have a positive impact on the local economy and to have a positive impact on the community.

For the most part, the community residents continue to demonstrate increased awareness and understanding of emergency response protocols. The awareness campaign, for the most part, is highly successful. Residents believe they will be notified by a loudspeaker or PA system, the media, and the telephone warning system, while they are less likely to expect to be notified directly by the chemical company involved or a fireperson or police officer coming to their door. It is important to note that in 2012, citizens were less convinced they would be properly warned. But, in 2012, the telephone system was known to exist and it seems to be readily trusted. Also, for the first time, the survey asked about text/email alerts. A good baseline was established for the awareness of this method.

Nearly all residents know of the warning siren, with little significant change in either direction during the stages of this study. By 2010, the public may be coming to take the siren for granted because it seems less aware of when it is tested. But they have high confidence that it will be used as notification in the event of an emergency.

Awareness of SIP as a concept continues to improve, but continued efforts are needed to remind citizens of the actions to be taken in order to SIP. Residents are also becoming more aware of the need to SIP if an emergency occurs while they are shopping. Although that set of actions remains high, they don't seem likely to proactively ask store or shop managers to implement SIP.

Residents are steadily becoming more willing to believe that school officials will properly protect children while at school. The level of confidence has achieved 98%, but still a large number are prone to want to contact schools during such events. That incentive, at least for some, may be too great to ever bring down significantly. Along with that, the most credible sources during an emergency (especially one that actually is not as bad as it seems) are fire/police personnel as well as the police or fire chief. Worth noting is the amount of confidence the public places in the opinions of the plant manager and the company environmental manager and even the public relations/community relations person under these circumstances.

Conclusion

In 1995, this communities' LEPC began to survey its local community to determine the strengths and weaknesses of its community emergency response awareness/community relations program. A second study was conducted in 1998, and a third was completed in 2002. A fourth was performed in 2012. Overall, this research project demonstrated that residents are concerned that an emergency which poses health and safety risks could result from chemical manufacturing, refining and transportation. The public believes that community and industry emergency response personnel are well trained and responsive. Members of the communities have different perceptions about whether and how they would learn that a chemical related emergency was occurring in their community, though they were consistent in their belief that they would learn it from both a loudspeaker or PA system and the media. The public is aware of and believes that studying worst-case scenarios increases the safety of community residents. The community residents believe that the chemical industry has a positive economic and community impact.

Results of these surveys suggest that the communication and planning efforts of the LEPC show steady progress toward increasing the likelihood that members of the community know the actions and policies of industry and government regarding safety and health in community. These findings should reinforce the continuing effort of the LEPC rather than convince it that its work has been done. More work can be performed to increase community knowledge and responsiveness. This observation is especially important given the fact that the population is not static and that citizens tend to forget what they have been told. Some of the findings for 2012 show improvement, while others suggest that more work is needed, and that conditions and communication tools change over time.

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**Is Awareness Bullsh*t?:
A Case-Study of Reactions to Childhood Cancer Awareness Month**

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Abstract

“Awareness” is a common goal of public relations campaigns. In fact, awareness is often seemingly the main goal of some communication campaigns as can be seen through the proliferation of “awareness months” for various health and medical conditions. However, a sentiment has also developed that awareness is setting the bar too low. A growing chorus is lamenting “slactivism” and saying campaigns should include more definitive action steps. The purpose of this research was to analyze reactions to Childhood Cancer Awareness Month through feedback to an article published September 10, 2013, in *Huffington Post* entitled “Awareness...What a Bullsh*t Word.” The qualitative study found two themes emerged from responses to the article: “Action is Needed” and “Slactivism and Misinformation as a Barrier to Action.” An additional finding was that “Personal Experience Motivates Action.” The results indicated that perhaps awareness as an end goal in cancer campaigns is misdirected. The researchers recommended that “awareness months” might better be advocated as “action campaigns” and noted the need for an earnest scholarly and practically driven conversation regarding the role of awareness in public health campaigns.

Introduction

Awareness has long been a primary element of public relations and communications campaigns. For example, Rodgers (2003) discussed awareness, defined as exposure to an idea, as the first step toward adoption of a new concept in the diffusion of innovation model. Grunig and Hunt (1984) classified publics as latent, aware, and active, with an aware public being described as recognizing there is a problem. Scholars and educators have incorporated awareness into the public relations lexicon as, at a minimum, a gateway into other activities, but also, increasingly, an outcome in its own right. For example, Lattimore, Basin, Heiman, and Toth (2012) list “increasing awareness” as an example objective in a public relations textbook.

The emphasis on awareness in public relations circles coincided with an increase in education initiatives in the health and medical fields. For example, *Media Advocacy and Public Health: Power for Prevention* outlines strategies and “the skills public health advocates need to amplify the voice of public health and ensure that the stories being told reflect basic public health goals and values” (Wallack, Dorfman, Jernigan, Themba-Nixon, 1993, p. 2-3.) Perhaps the most prominent of the initiatives are related to cancer, such as Georgia’s Cancer Awareness and Education Campaign featured on the National Institute of Health website (Parker, 2004). The intersection of public relations and health initiatives has also occurred as social media has proliferated, giving rise to discussions of “slactivism” – a criticism that people interact on social media but do not take actual action.

Breast Cancer Awareness, which was the initial focus of the Georgia initiative, is arguably the most visible campaign, but it is far from the only one. More than 1,000 Facebook pages include the word “awareness” in the page name. A limited amount of research exists on the effectiveness of the awareness campaigns. Of course, studying “effectiveness” presumes that the campaign will have some effect in increasing awareness. Even less studied is the possibility that campaigns could have an unintended or even negative impact in the creation of “counter publics” (Pezzullo, 2003).

The *Huffington Post*’s publication of stories related to Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, sponsored by the American Childhood Cancer Organization in September, provides a case-study of awareness and potential backlash of awareness campaigns. *Huffington Post* published an article on September 26, 2013, featuring seven children with the title “It’s Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, and These Kids’ Stories Will Touch You in a Way No Statistic Can.” More than two weeks earlier, on Sept. 10, the site had posted a blog by Erin Santos, whose daughter died of cancer at age 7.

The purpose of this research was to analyze reactions to Childhood Cancer Awareness Month through feedback to the article published September 10, 2013, in *Huffington Post* entitled “Awareness... What a Bullsh*t Word.” Researchers collected data on social media interactions and conducted a textual analysis on comments made to Santos’ article.

Literature Review

“Awareness” is a common goal of public relations campaigns. In fact, awareness is often seemingly the main goal of some communication campaigns as can be seen through the proliferation of “awareness months” for various health and medical conditions, particularly cancer. However, a sentiment has also developed that awareness is setting the bar too low. A growing chorus is lamenting “slactivism” and saying campaigns should include more definitive action steps. The traditional importance placed on awareness can be seen in the fact that awareness is a first step in some theories of persuasion including diffusion of innovations. In

fact, critical paths in diffusion of innovations theory hold that mass media are best at creating awareness. Additionally, Grunig and Hunt (1984) describe publics as latent, aware, and active. The awareness months are attempting to move people from latent, or unknowing, publics to an aware category, but the effectiveness could be suspect in that an aware public is one that recognizes a situation but is not necessarily going to take action.

The *Huffington Post* article “Awareness – what a Bullsh*t Word” (Santos, 2013) provides a launching point for a case study of reactions to an awareness campaign. As a basis of the study, researchers considered the role of awareness in persuasion, the background of health initiatives awareness campaigns, and potential benefits as well as fallout from the campaigns.

Awareness and Persuasion

Scholars and educators have identified awareness as an important, arguably essential, element in persuasion. Common sense seems to indicate that a person or public must be aware of an issue before forming an attitude or taking action. Early in their education, public relations students could learn from a textbook that “awareness: accepting information for the first time” (p. 56) is one of four terms used to discuss persuasion, with the others being attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. Three different theories/models – diffusion of innovation, Grunig’s situation, and AIDA -- provide examples of how awareness can be the gateway to enable changes of the other factors.

Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 1972) provides an explication of how people accept new ideas by going through five separate steps: Awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. Diffusion describes awareness as being exposed to an idea, which is not necessarily easy or automatic to achieve given all the factors competing for attention. Mass media is identified as a “critical path” in being effective at awareness, but mass media are less effective at adoption, which is best accomplished through interaction. In diffusion, awareness is not an end in itself, but a requisite step to lead to interest, evaluation, trial, and, finally, adoption.

In the Situational Theory, Grunig (1979) identified publics based on level of involvement. Grunig and Hunt (1984) classified people into four publics based on their awareness of and involvement in an issue: Nonpublic, latent public, aware public, and active public. They proposed that an organization tailor messages to better address a particular public. While with a nonpublic, no problem exists, with a latent public, a problem exists but isn’t recognized. An aware public recognizes that a problem exists but does not take action, while an active public both recognizes the problem and organizes to address it. Although there is only one more category of public after the aware public, awareness can still be viewed as an essential gateway step toward an active public.

A consideration of the Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action – or AIDA – model borrowed from the advertising and marketing fields is appropriate given that awareness campaigns can include paid media tactics such as advertisements in traditional and new media. AIDA is a hierarchical model, which has caused it to be criticized for being too lock-step and not taking into account that sometimes action can be taken for other reasons than interest or desire (Moriarty, Mitchell, Wells, 2012). Still, it provides a useful model in considering health education initiatives in the emphasis placed on awareness as an initial step leading to subsequent steps. In the AIDA model, which is often viewed as the first formal advertising model, awareness is an essential first step in getting a product or cause noticed (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). Any action that would follow would be based on this initial awareness that led to desire and finally taking action.

Background of Cancer Awareness Campaigns

Cancer awareness campaigns have proliferated in recent years, but their history can be traced back more than a century. In 1913, the American Society for the Control of Cancer, precursor to the American Cancer Society, was established to promote educational efforts concerning cancer surgery (Aronowitz, 2007.) The group began with an initial focus on breast cancer education but broadened its approach. Subsequently, groups dedicated to specific cancer types were established and proliferated. One hundred years later, more than 1,000 pages on the social media site Facebook include the term “cancer awareness” in their name.

In *Unnatural History: Breast Cancer and American Society*, Aronowitz (2007) provides details of the development of cancer education in the United States from a time where it was not discussed to the seemingly ubiquitous awareness months and promotions for screenings. In the early years of the 20th Century, some surgeons were beginning to advocate seeking surgery without delay when cancer signs or symptoms were spotted. “Spreading this educational message was the *raison detre* for the establishment of the American Society for the Control of Cancer (ASCC) in 1913, the organization that would become the American Cancer Society in the 1940s” (Aronowitz, 2007, p. 144). The ASCC established a Women’s Field Army of more than 100,00 that went door-to-door in joint fund-raising and education efforts, encouraging women to be prompt in seeking immediate medial attention for ‘suspicious symptoms,’ like lumps or irregular bleeding” (Orenstein, 2013), p. 1). The emphasis on not delaying in seeking medical attention or surgery has been a staple in cancer awareness programs (Aronowitz, 2007.)

The current landscape of cancer awareness initiatives, particularly related to breast cancer, was arguably launched with the Susan G. Komen for the Cure, a foundation established by Nancy G. Brinker in 1982 to honor her sister who had died of cancer at the age of 36 (Orenstein, 2013). The organization credits the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure as helping to raise almost \$2 billion toward “working to end breast cancer in the U.S. and throughout the world through ground-breaking research, community health outreach, advocacy, and programs in more than 50 countries (komen.org., 2014, p. 1). In 1984, Breast Cancer Awareness Week was instituted in October, and the signature color of pink came to dominate the landscape of all sorts of products (Orenstein, 2013). Orenstein also noted that whereas in the early years of the ASCC, women were “khaki-clad ‘soldiers’” going door-to-door in educational efforts, now there were “millions of pink-garbed racers ‘for the cure’” (p. 1).

While pink in support of breast cancer awareness might be the most visible, it is far from the only color associated with cancer awareness months. For example, the American Cancer Society includes a list of 26 different colored ribbons associated with corresponding cancers in materials for its Relay for Life fundraising event. Similarly, the American Association for Cancer Research lists 27 “Support and Advocacy Groups in the United States and Canada.” According to the Calendar of Cancer Awareness Months compiled by Choose Hope, there are 26 cancer-specific awareness months spread out over nine months. In addition, June is National Survivors Month, leaving only August and September without a cancer awareness month.

By far, the fullest month on the calendar is September, with nine cancer awareness months, including Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. A presidential proclamation naming September as National Childhood Awareness Month noted that “Every September, America renews our commitment to curing childhood cancer and offers our support to the brave young people who are fighting this disease” (Presidential Proclamation, 2013, p. 1). The proclamation added that cancer is the “leading cause of death by disease for American children under 15.”

Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, whose color is gold, is sponsored by the American Childhood Cancer Organization. The ACCO website includes a section on “Awareness and Advocacy,” saying “The objective of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month is to put a spotlight on the types of cancer that largely affect children, survivorship issues, and –importantly – to help raise funds for research and family support,” (ACCO, 2012). *Huffington Post* was among those organizations participating in the Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. The site posted dozens of articles dealing with a range of issues related to childhood cancer, including one near the end of the month with the partial title “These 7 Kids’ Stories Will Touch You in a Way No Statistic Can.” By far, however, the article that received the most attention, including going “viral,” was an article by the mother of a child who died at age six from cancer. That article, entitled “Awareness: What a Bulls*t Word,” points to a growing chorus questioning the benefits of the awareness initiatives (Santos, 2013).

Benefits of and Challenges to Cancer Awareness Months and Initiatives

Success of the cancer awareness campaigns seems undeniable in that there is discussion where there was once silence and treatment with hope of survival where there once were few options. However, the awareness, while well-established, is not without critics. On one hand there is an increasing body of literature assessing the evidence of effectiveness of awareness campaigns, but on the other hand, some scholars and advocated question the amount of resources spent on the campaigns for the payoff – and even argue that the campaigns can be counter-productive. Additionally, there is concern that the explosion of social media has led to what is called slactivism, where with a click followers can indicate support without investment.

Evaluating Effectiveness of Health Campaigns

Campaigns undertaken by health organizations can have a variety of purposes ranging from “simply to raise general awareness of a particular disease...to more specific goals” (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2011, p. 55). While empirical assessment has lagged behind the proliferation of the awareness campaigns, there is a growing body of literature evaluated the effectiveness of the campaigns.

Much of the assessment of health campaigns focuses on breast cancer awareness due to its far-reaching and well-publicized nature. In fact, its prominence is something of a sign of success in terms of entering public consciousness. But, beyond that, the data is somewhat mixed. As recently as 2003, a full generation after the establishment of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Catalano, Winett, Wallack, and Satariano (2003) noted that “the scholarly literature includes no assessments of the effect on the program on the actual detection of early stage breast tumors” (p. 545). Their subsequent research found an increase in the detection of tumors during quarters that corresponded to the awareness month, but, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section, they also caution and unintended costs. Somewhat similarly, in a 2011 study of diagnoses made in November, the month following Breast Cancer Awareness Month, there was an increase in diagnoses from 1993-1995 but not in other years.

Broadening out from only looking at breast cancer, a team of researchers studied the effectiveness of multiple cancer awareness initiatives (Austoker, Bankhead, Forbes, Atkins, Martin, Robb, Wardle, Ramirez, 2009). Their results included evidence of a modest increase in short-term awareness but not enough evidence to conclude that the awareness programs resulted in early presentation. Their results were summarized as “limited evidence” related to the effectiveness of public education campaigns. In a study of ten-years of health mass media

campaigns, Noar (2006) noted that health campaigns when targeted and executed properly can have “small-to-moderate” effects.

Challenging Awareness

While the cancer awareness movements have taken hold even with limited empirical evidence of their success, some researchers and advocates have begun to challenge their benefits and even point out some drawbacks. For example, Catalano, Winett, Wallack, and Satariano (2003) noted, along with some limited positive outcomes, unintended consequences and the emotional and psychological impact that can come from false positives. Other critics go further in calling for a resistance to the awareness movements because they distract attention from causes or have become too commercialized.

Pezzullo (2003) pointed out that resistance to National Breast Cancer Awareness Month is difficult precisely because of how popular the initiative is. “Because opposition to NBCAM is rarely heard, the discourse promoted by NBCAM arguably has become institutionalized as hegemonic ‘common sense’ in the current approach to breast cancer in the U.S.” (p. 346). Pezzullo credits NBCAM with raising public awareness so that breast cancer can be discussed publically but says that it has also shifted attention to screening and support rather than looking at potential causes, such as environmental toxins, which is described as “greenwashing” and “pinkwashing.”

The title of Sulik’s 2012 book, *Pink Ribbon Blues: How Breast Cancer Culture Undermines Women’s Health*, makes a strong claim that the awareness month is not just limited in effectiveness but also counterproductive. Sulik (2013a) took issue with the public announcement that an on-air mammogram on Good Morning America had saved a correspondent’s life. In a *Psychology Today* article, she called the phrase “That mammogram just saved your life” a “false narrative.” In a subsequent article, Sulik (2013b) said the GMA story spread “Heartfelt Misinformation” and that rather than looking at the complexities of the range of types of breast cancer and responses to treatments, the coverage reinforced the notion that breast cancer progresses in a linear fashion.

While breast cancer awareness is the most prominent of the initiatives, there are a multitude of awareness campaigns that could also be viewed as distracting from substance of treating the disease while trying on the surface to bring attention to it. Orenstein (2013) summarized a range of issues for these movements in a cover story for the *New York Times Magazine*:

“Before the pink ribbon, awareness as an end in itself was not the default goal for health-related causes. Now you’d be hard-pressed to find a major illness without a logo, a wearable ornament and a roster of consumer-product tie-ins. Heart disease has its red dress, testicular cancer its yellow bracelet. During “Movember” — a portmanteau of “mustache” and “November” — men are urged to grow their facial hair to “spark conversation and raise awareness” of prostate cancer (another illness for which early detection has led to large-scale overtreatment) and testicular cancer. “These campaigns all have a similar superficiality in terms of the response they require from the public,” said Samantha King, associate professor of kinesiology and health at Queen’s University in Ontario and author of “Pink Ribbons, Inc.” “They’re divorced from any critique of health care policy or the politics of funding biomedical research. They reinforce a single-issue competitive model of fund-raising. And they whitewash illness: we’re made ‘aware’

of a disease yet totally removed from the challenging and often devastating realities of its sufferers.”

With its gold wristbands, Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, though far from as ubiquitous as some of the other campaigns, fits some of the criteria Orenstein (2013) mentions.

Social Media: Social Currency or Slacktivism

Social media has provided awareness campaigns with a convenient medium for communicating with publics. As previously noted, there are more than 1,000 pages on Facebook that include the term “awareness” in the page name. Increasing the number of “likes” on a Facebook page and followers on sites such as Twitter are obvious goals of organizations trying to reach the most people. These “likes” and “followers” can be seen as a form of social status increasingly the popularity of the campaign. *Forbes* stated that “social currency” is a term used to define how involved users are in sharing information about a brand or organization with others (Badenhausen, 2013). The *Forbes* article, however, reported a study by the marketing research firm Vivaldi that said there was more to social currency than Facebook likes. In other words, generating “likes” or “followers” would make for a suspect goal of an awareness campaign.

While references to slacktivism predate social media, it has taken on a growing role in scholarly research with the ability to hit “Like” on Facebook and similarly all but effortless activities. Kristofferson, White, and Pelozo (2014) reference Davis (2011) and Morozov (2009) in defining slacktivism, a merging of the words “slacker” and “activism,” as a “willingness to perform a relatively costless, token display of support for a social cause, with an accompanying lack of willingness to devote significant effort to enact meaningful change” (000). In a five part study, the researchers found evidence of slacktivism – to the point that some who publicly showed token support for a cause were LESS likely to donate money than those whose token support was private - and recommended that charitable organizations align values between a supporter and a cause to combat slacktivism.

The profile of a “slacktivist” is often seen as young people, in part because they have traditionally been the most Internet savvy (Skoric, 2012). Some have criticized the slacktivists as a “lazy generation,” while others have compared clicking “like” with putting a bumper sticker on a car. The Breast Cancer Action group has argued that organizations such as Komen that have extensive corporate and commercial tie-ins are promoting “slacktivism and pinkwashing tactics” (Sellek, 2010, p. 132). Even with acknowledging the limits of slacktivism, there are benefits to online awareness movements. “One of the key advantages of digital campaigns is their ability reach a large number of people with minimal effort and at low cost, hence potentially increasing public awareness of a social or political issue/movement,” (Skoric, 2012, p. 83). One on hand, as was mentioned earlier, awareness can be a gateway to action. On the other, as has been discussed, this kind of minimal if not nonexistent involvement can be pointless.

There appears to be confusion as to the role of awareness in persuasive health campaigns in terms of whether or not awareness is an end goal of campaigns or actually translates into action, given that slactivism may occur instead of action. In other words, in the awareness campaigns, does awareness actually lead to action or function as an end in and of itself?

The present research attempts to shed a first light on this confusion through a case study of reactions to an article published September 10, 2013, in *Huffington Post* entitled “Awareness... What a Bullsh*t Word” by Erin Santos, who, as stated previously, is a mother of a child who died of cancer at age six. Santos created quite a stir with her article/blog post which

went viral - liked on Facebook more than 16,000 times, shared more than 4,500 times, Tweeted 49 times, pinned on Pinterest 12 times, and emailed 45 times - as it challenged the efficacy of awareness as an end result of public awareness health campaigns. The analysis focused specifically on the comments posted on the *Huffington Post* blog site in reaction to Santos' article. The following research questions are posed: (1) What are the reactions to the claim Santos' claim that awareness is bullsh*t word? (2) How do the reactions to the Santos' article illuminate perceptions of cancer awareness campaigns?

Method

The focus of this study is on capturing the meanings that participants have for a concept, i.e. awareness. Thus, qualitative methods are most suitable (Creswell, 2013.) The authors selected an instrumental case study to investigate the issue. An instrumental case study focuses on an issue through one bounded case, i.e., the Santos article and reactions to it (Yin, 2009).

In order to answer the research questions, the second author analyzed the comments posted in reaction to Santos' argument that awareness is a bullsh*t word using common techniques to identify themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). First, the data were read and reread to get a sense of the main ideas. Then, the researcher looked for words and ideas that were repeated across comments in the data. Next, the researcher looked for areas of similarities and differences among the comments using the "constant comparison" method. Constant comparison involves comparing emerging categories to earlier categories in order to find similarities and differences (Charmaz, 2006).

The dataset was comprised of the comments to Santos' article. The *Huffington Post* blog site indicated that there were 33 people discussing Santos' blog post with 41 total comments. However, only 38 comments could be found and retrieved for analysis by the researcher. The length of reaction comments ranged from 2 words ("thank you") to 250 words with the average comment length being 89 words. The entire dataset of comments was comprised of approximately 6 pages, 3,500 words, and 265 lines.

Results

Regarding RQ1 (What are the reactions to the claim Santos' claim that awareness is bullsh*t word?) two themes emerged: Action is Needed and Slacktivism and Misinformation as a Barrier to Action

Theme I: Action is Needed

Nineteen posts offered agreement with Santos in that 'action' is what is necessary to combat childhood cancer. The majority of these 19 posts offered direct agreement with Santos and used the word "action" specifically while some comments contained the same sentiment but did not use the specific word "action." In contrast, a limited number of comments emphasized the value of awareness.

Several (13) comments directly agreed with Santos and spoke of needing "action." Comments include:

Your words brought me to action.

I agree with what you say and will always continue to fight Childhood Cancer with "ACTION."

Action is what's necessary and standing up for change with cancer research.

I LUVed your post-we need more ACTION!

Awesome post! We need more ACTION! ... We started an organization before he [my brother] passed...it started out as a t-shirt company that donated part of its proceeds to purchase ipads for oncology floors and cancer treatment centers...

During the first two sentences and talking about “awareness” I thought to myself, they need to change that word from Awareness to Action. Then toward the end of the article that was actually the suggestion.

From this day forward, it is “Childhood Cancer Action” month for me.

I promise to act.

My first ACTION IS GOING TO BE TO VISIT YOUR SITE, Find out what I CAN DO to help change ‘AWARENESS INTO ACTIONS’

Great post! Action is what we all need to do to take on cancer!

So yes I agree, action not awareness.

Making a donation now. Thanks for asking us to take action. It is the right thing to do.

I’ve liked dozens of pediatric cancer posts and thought about doing the St. Jude 5K, but never got around to signing up...[that picture of your daughter] spurred me into action and we just registered.

Several (6) comments offered agreement with Santos but did not specifically use the word action.

I’ve had many, many discussions about getting people to stop being sheep and do something, but it never seems to make a difference. Hopefully your post does.

I promise to DO SOMETHING other than read articles...

I’ve always considered “awareness” to be a BS word too. (OK-I’m aware. Now what?)

Yes we need more effort on cancer prevention.

Awareness is a bullshit word... We are aware of everything but knowledgeable of nothing.

There needs to be more funding, research, and treatment options for children with cancer.

In contrast, two comments acknowledged the value of awareness.

Awareness and Action and BOTH needed.

Do not underestimate the power of going gold for awareness... Awareness is not bullshit, it is important in many ways.

Theme Two: Slacktivism and Misinformation as a Barrier to Action

Several comments indicated the bumperstickers and “likes” are not enough “action.” Furthermore, awareness campaigns may not provide the “right” type of awareness in that people may not know how much their efforts make a difference in curing cancer.

Several comments (6) indicated that

Our awareness and activism is limited to magnetic ribbon “for the cause” bumper stickers on our cars.

Simply “like” a picture on Facebook isn’t enough... Write a check. Go to Relay for Life. Do something now...

I hear things about how a charity or funds are really being spent and I get angry, frustrated, and overwhelmed with it all, knowing that NO ONE is really getting the help they need.

I post on FB and blog at work. We hold a 5k. You learn, once “inducted” into the childhood cancer club, there are A LOT of fundraisers and awareness being spread. Yet so few results.

People think they are doing something but they are not checking to make sure how much “part of the proceeds” are going and to where...

I think what we may need awareness of is just how evil our budgetary priorities are in this country. ..We spend about 700 billion dollars a year on “defense” and around 30 billion dollars a year, total, on the NIH [National Institute of Health].

Thus, the results of the analysis indicate that the persons commenting on Santos’ blog perceive that “awareness” does not necessarily lead to action and that action should follow awareness. Furthermore, even when people engage in activities that they feel make a difference, such as running in a race, they may not be informed of the results of their efforts and may not understand how their donations are spent.

Regarding RQ2 (How do the reactions to the Santos’ article illuminate perceptions of cancer awareness campaigns?) one clear theme emerged: Personal Experience Motivates Involvement

Theme: Personal Experience Motivates Involvement

Eight people indicated that someone close to them had died of or was diagnosed with cancer or another terminal disease/disorder. These people seemed to feel that unless people are affected directly by a disease/disorder, they simply do not get involved enough.

We lost our three year old granddaughter...I agree with what you say and will always continue to fight childhood cancer with action.

I lost my brother this year at age 26...We started an organization before he passed called United Luv.

We need more effort on cancer prevention...I lost my father, when I was 15, to prostate cancer...

My wife has a rare form of breast cancer...All too often, people don’t get passionate about these causes until they are directly affected by it.

My son Austin was diagnosed with an anaplastic ependymoma...I agree with you 100% on this...

We lost a daughter to mito...I’ve had many conversations about getting people to stop being sheep and do something...people are too self-absorbed to care for longer than five minutes in general

My son was diagnosed at 22 mos. With rhabdomyosarcoma...You learn once inducted into the childhood cancer club there are A LOT of fundraisers and awareness being spread. Yet so few results...

Awareness is a bullsh*t word...There are things we should be very aware of...Let’s start with childhood cancers, deadly food allergies, and epilepsy (my son’s disease) and how about rare genetic disorders (my son’s disease)...diseases we can prevent by not living like complete fools should get kicked off the awareness list.

Another parent indicated her child died of an overdose on prescription medication but expressed the same feeling that awareness is not preventing death.

I have a son, John...he lost his life to PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION, that was NOT his and he overdosed while trying to get high. People are AWARE of all the deaths due to prescription drugs, yet many people keep losing their lives from it.

Conversely, one parent who lost a child indicated that awareness means a great deal to her and that it should not be discounted.

As far as going gold and what it means to parents such as myself who lost children to this monster...I cried [during a gold ceremony] I felt that people were understanding that my son and all those who were taken by cancer should be honored and recognized.

Discussion

Regarding the first RQ (What are the reactions to the claim Santos' claim that awareness is bullsh*t word?) two themes emerged in the analysis: Action is Needed and Slacktivism and Misinformation is a Barrier to Action. Regarding RQ 2 (How do the reactions to the Santos' article illuminate perceptions of cancer awareness campaigns?) one clear theme emerged: Personal Experience Motivates Involvement.

Taken together, these results indicate that perhaps awareness as an end goal in cancer campaigns is misdirected. An analysis of the comments in response to the Santos article demonstrated that for the responders, awareness does not necessarily translate into action and the end result of a campaign should, indeed, be action. Moreover, respondents to the Santos article felt that any awareness generated from a campaign may result in incomplete information or misinformation. For example, donors to a cancer campaign may not realize how much of their contribution actually goes to research or treatment. In this case analysis, many of the respondents to Santos' article had been touched by cancer or disease in some way. There was a perception among respondents that people who are not personally affected may not be motivated to be involved. There was also a perception that "slacktivism" (although the words "slacktivism" was not used) has a negative impact action. In other words, there was a perception that people may sport a bumpersticker or click "like" on Facebook and feel that they have done something positive for a cause, but, in reality, they have not. Thus, the responses to the Santos' article are consistent offer some support for the literature on "slacktivism" (Davis, 2011; Kristofferson, White, and Peloza, 2012; Morozov, 2009.)

A greater understanding of what constitutes awareness and how it functions is needed. Awareness is the first step in popular models of persuasion such as diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1972), situational theory (Gruning, 1979), or AIDA (Moriarity, Mitchell, & Wells, 2012; Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). So why is awareness an end goal in so many public health awareness campaigns? Is there an assumption among campaign planners that awareness will automatically lead to action? The respondents to the Santos' article concurred with persuasion scholars in that they felt that action should be the ultimate goal in a campaign rather than awareness. Perhaps instead of "awareness" months, "action" months would be better.

Through this case study, researchers explored reactions to the idea that awareness is bullsh*t and that "slacktivism" may result from "awareness" rather than actual action, which is the end goal of persuasion. More qualitative data should be collected and analyzed to get a sense of how to define awareness and whether or not there are different types of awareness and how

such types may affect action. The dataset for this study was limited but offered a starting point for an earnest scholarly and practically driven conversation regarding the role of awareness in public health campaigns.

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Event Planning as Connection, Collaboration, and Community Building

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Abstract

This public relations event planning class incorporated service learning and theories spanning leadership to relationship development and maintenance to conflict resolution that were applied to the client-event planner relationship. Twenty-eight students grouped into seven teams and designed and executed events for organizations in the community. The mixed methods study used results from client depth interviews, student reflection journals, and students' pre/post-test surveys to generate a Best Practices for Event Planners typology.

Review of Literature

An event requires considerable planning of details big and small—from choosing a venue and reviewing contracts to juggling guest lists and issuing [name badges](#). Meeting, event, and conference planners will have to figure out their sponsoring organization's needs and requirements in terms of exhibit space, lodging, transportation, telecommunications, audio-visual requirements, print- and Web-based materials, and food and beverages, among other necessities. A lot of time will be dedicated to reviewing proposals and contracts, and negotiating with facilities and suppliers (<http://money.usnews.com/careers/best-jobs/meeting-convention-and-event-planner>).

While the aforementioned job description details the complexity of event planning, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects a meeting, convention, and event planner employment growth of 43.7 percent between 2010 and 2020, adding 31,300 more jobs. Favorable job prospects help this profession rank 66th (<http://money.usnews.com/careers/best-jobs/meeting-convention-and-event-planner>). Event planning encapsulates the following event types: (1) commemorative or celebrative, (2) educational activities, (3) meal functions, and, (4) contests or competitions (Bobbitt & Sullivan, 2014, p.137). Coursework in event planning is often identified with tourism or business curricula (Robinson, Barron, Solnet, 2008). More recently, event planning has become an elective in communications programs, specifically in the area of public relations, due to the plethora of events planned, coordinated and evaluated by practitioners.

Event planning is also considered a form of strategic communication. Communication can be defined as strategic if its development and/or dissemination are driven by an expected outcome. These outcomes can be attitudinal, behavioral, persuasive or knowledge-related; they can lead to change or engagement, or they can miss their mark entirely. Strategic communication is a keyword that runs through volumes of research produced under the masthead of communication. Research on strategic communication is published in journals related to advertising, communication studies, film, journalism, interpersonal communication, and public relations. Event planners' skills include strategic communication, juggling myriad tasks, adaptability, flexibility, and ability to solve problems. With the plethora of input parameters and the inability to control most of them, event planners are liaisons between myriad vendors and customers. Because of their “in the middle” position, they are scrambling to ensure details are executed to perfection and customers and guests are having a phenomenal experience at the event. Jabro (2009) identified key communication theories that describe and explain the event planner-client relationship. She concluded the need for event planners and clients to establish and maintain healthy relationships marked by mutuality or mutual understanding as paramount (p.147). Event planning courses are appropriate vehicles to engage students in service learning projects or projects designed to apply theory to practice. According to the National Service Learning Clearinghouse,

Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Through service-learning, young people—from kindergarteners to college students—use what they learn in the classroom to solve real-life problems. They not only learn the practical applications of their studies, they become actively contributing citizens and community members through the service they perform...Community members, students, and educators everywhere are discovering that service-learning offers all its participants a chance to take part in the active education of

youth while simultaneously addressing the concerns, needs, and hopes of communities (<http://www.servicelearning.org/what-is-service-learning>).

This pedagogic research project explored the strengths and weaknesses associated with the formation of event planning communities for the purpose of connecting with an external client/community to experience collaboration on the design, implementation and execution of an event. What follows is a description of the course, the specific task of planning an event for a non-profit entity and pre-and post-event survey results. A mixed methods approach was utilized to understand clients and students' needs and reflections of the process: in-depth interviews were conducted with clients who worked with student teams and pre- and post-test surveys were administered to students to understand student engagement experiences, perceptions of event planning and working in teams and desire to coordinate an event for a client. Students also responded to weekly reflection journal prompts that were content analyzed. The reflection logs, survey responses and client in-depth interviews were analyzed to generate a "Best Practices for Effective Event Planning".

Connection

A strong number of research studies support students learn more when doing. The application of theory to the practical setting motivates the link that connects abstract to concrete. All students enrolled in the class opted to coordinate an event for the class project. "I won't understand how all this information comes together if I don't actually execute the event" (A4-7). Event Planning was a 4000-level elective course in the public relations concentration. The first sessions focused on meeting with sports, hotel, and corporate event planners to understand job components, activities and requisite skills. They described how teamwork and leadership/followership drove their experiences. Students heard about how to lead, follow, collaborate, solve problems and make effective decisions in the group setting and lecture content covered the theoretical to practical aspects of the aforementioned areas. The practical application of the theories emerged through students' observations and experiences with real-time clients in need of event planning. Students were asked to select a non-profit entity for which they wanted to raise funds and/or promote. Twenty eight students created seven groups, one of which had one member who was aligned with the Special Olympics held on campus. This discussion focuses on the six teams composed of three to five event planners and who selected the following community partners: Coraopolis Community Development, YMCA, RMU Career Focus, PR Club Recruitment, RMU Journalism Symposium, and the RMU chapter of Kappa Delta Rho Awards Banquet. The majority of students had not worked together in the past and chose group membership based on interest in an organization. After students exchanged contact information and performed a cost-benefit analysis of their individual and group skills, the next phase of the project was pre-event planning.

Pre-Event Planning

The majority of students reported being excited about working on a real event and had performed limited community service in the past. Conversely, the majority of students expressed concern about the amount of time, commitment and work the class would involve because they would need to scout locations for their events, work with a community partner and collaborate with other team members. "I'm worried that we'll do all this work and our event won't be a success. There's a lot riding on our performance that I find exciting and terrifying." D2-7. The instructor sent a letter describing the course and the expectation that the event would be executed

within 15 weeks. The instructor met with each student event planning team and their clients to ensure clarification of service-learning requirements and outcomes. Clients were invited to participate in the grading process using a rubric provided by the instructor. Once the client approved the event plan, students worked to schedule their event and seek additional assistance for execution and media planning. Table 1 details the specific activities performed to plan the event in conjunction with the client.

Table 1

Pre-Event Planning Activities

Event overview	Event type, goals, strategies, tactics	Demographics, primary audience, theme, colors and visuals
Event specifics	Budgets, Planning Stages, Path Analysis and function	Location, transportation, guests, invitations, media contact sheet, promotion materials
Event Post-analysis	Evaluations and completion of notebooks on the event. Generation of reflection logs.	Completion of feedback loop wherein the students explained what they would do differently and how they became more oriented to the client's needs.

Event Execution

The instructor participated in four of the six events; one event executed during an academic conference while one team's event was not able to be executed due to legal problems encountered shortly before the event was to be executed. Students were required to take photographs of key aspects of the event and prepare oral presentations on the event that included the following areas: event motive (purpose and goal); event atmosphere (who, how, what, when, where and why); Budget; and Evaluation. One team's event wasn't executed due to legal issues the client was encountering. "I never felt so committed to something. I am going to come back and make this event happen. My team was the best group of people I ever worked with while in college and we bonded with each other and our client. I totally get this collaboration and community thing." (F2-11). The common theme in this team's reflection journals was suspense: how would it have turned out and how many people would have participated. The client opted to wait to have the celebration event the team planned and promised to invite them when the event was executed.

Community and Collaboration

Students struggled with generating ideas and learning to collaborate to a conclusion mainly due to the diverse levels of commitment by team members. Four of the six groups' members evaluated team members as highly committed. However, the two groups that struggled with committed members experienced difficulties shortly after they teamed. "I wished I had fired my team members early on. I struggled to keep a positive attitude because they always had an excuse about why they didn't have their work done. It got old." (B2-5)

In-depth interviews with the seven clients revealed the following themes with respect to student strengths: students were professional, enthusiastic, driven and respectful. When asked about ways students could improve their event planning skills, communication practices and approach to the relationship, the following themes emerged: punctuality, realistic budgeting

process and ability to better understand the community in which the event would occur. Ways to improve communication practices included more effective writing and attention to grammar. Clients were impressed with students' willingness to work with their schedules and revise and resubmit work. Table 2 is a synthesis of students' reflection logs, pre-post-test surveys, and client interviews. Each source was reviewed and then analyzed for themes which created the information to suggest pedagogy for event planning.

Table 2

Best Practices for Effective Event Planning Projects

1. Time	Introduce project during first session so students have time to think about clients, teams, and time management issues
2. Audition	Allow students to audition one another and perform small tasks in teams before grouping. These activities will empower students to become familiar with the other students' work ethic, skills, dependability and quality of deliverables.
3. Community	More importantly, the overall goal of a service learning project is to apply theory to practical settings. Clients need to be aware that learning is not consistent for all students; some groups will produce professional grade work with other groups may not. The instructor must reinforce the overall goal is learning for the students and the client.
4. Collaboration	Students need time and practice to understand collaboration and how to use interpersonal dynamics to achieve collaboration. Distribute mini-tasks that require a collaborative response. Students should have to explain how they reached a decision. Role plays would be another effective means to link theory and practice.
5. Coordination	Plan to have extra office hours during the semester. Students want to run ideas and plans by a professional. They also come to discuss how to deal with ineffective or uncooperative group members or zealous clients.
6. Conflict	Working in teams is a daunting task when individual members have diverse expectations and skills. Create a mechanism to empower team members to fire an unproductive or non-contributing member earlier in the project to ensure effective outcomes.
7. Mutuality	Students and Clients balance professional and academic demands which prohibit poor use of time and effort. Prior to meeting with clients, students should present their work to the instructor for feedback and approval. Nothing should leave the classroom before it is vetted by several colleagues and the instructor.
8. Money Matters:	Students benefit from being held accountable for the figures they use in budgets. Require students to reconcile their budgets by keeping receipts and letters to acknowledge in-kind contributions.

Conclusion

Student reflection logs, survey results and general discussion indicated coordinating and executing an event for a community partner was an exhilarating experience that afforded numerous opportunities to incorporate and explore group dynamics, conflict resolution and general communication skills. Students expressed great excitement about the design and

planning components of the events and were generally pleased with the attendance and outcome of their events. The team that wasn't able to execute their event's oral presentation focused on the concept. They invited their community partner to their presentation to discuss how the experience enriched their lives and ability to maintain a relationship. The event planning course is a perfect opportunity for service learning projects that impact students' appreciation for community and provide practical application of theory to practice.

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**Campus Health Inhibitors Could Harm the University/Student Relationship:
A Relationship Management Case Study**

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Abstract

Scholars have established a correlation between learning environment and health; however, often health communication between campus administration and college students criticizes particular behaviors, uses control and punishment as deterrents, or sensationalizes some of the health issues affecting college students. In this campus case study, the author contends that health inhibitors might harm the university/student relationship. Triangulation of direct observation, informant interviews, and thematic analysis of health brochures revealed that access to fitness facilities and fattening foods conveys a contradictory health message; health scholarship is largely nonexistent, and students must be self-guided to encounter health messages. Insights from Relationship Management Theory are discussed to ascertain strategies to enhance the university/student relationship.

Introduction

Scholars have established a correlation between learning environment and health (e.g., MacGeorge, Samter, & Gillihan, 2005; Ruthig, Marrone, Hladkyj, & Robinson-Epp, 2011). Unfortunately, health communication between college administration and students often criticizes particular behaviors, uses control, punishment (Keeling, 2001), and fear as deterrents (Becker, McMahan, Etnier, & Nelson, 2002; Hastings, Stead, & Webb, 2004), or sensationalizes potential health concerns (Sherman, Nelson, & Steele, 2000). Research has also indicated that campus health facilities are not always conducive to health (Satterfield, 2007).

In this case study, the author contends that campus health inhibitors could harm the university/student relationship. Potential implications of this line of study for public relations are covered in the next section.

Relational implications of student health

The present study holds value for communications scholars, practitioners, and educators. An unfulfilling university/student relationship might lead some students to transfer to a campus community that demonstrates concern for its students. Enrollment patterns and retention rates at their original school will be adversely affected. According to Bruning and Lambe (2002), college students and the campus can benefit from retention when the university engages in activities that maintain and enhance the living and learning environment. The reputation of the university could also suffer without an intact university/student relationship. Sung and Yang (2009) examined the factors that affect supportive behavioral intentions students have toward the university. Their research findings indicated that, in order to obtain a favorable reputation, universities can cultivate relationships with their students through open communication and a quality educational experience. Bruning and Lambe (2002) stated that the university should engage students in a way that builds a sense of trust. The scholars suggested investment of time, effort, and energy into university-student interactions in order to build personal relationships.

The university/student relationship is central to the phenomenon of study, so the author applied Relationship Management as a theoretical lens. Details about the theory are covered in the next section.

Theoretical Framework

Relationship management theory holds that organization-public relationships are goal oriented and driven by perceived expectations (Ledingham, 2003). "Public relations balances the interests of organizations and publics through the management of organization-public relationships" (p. 181). The organization and its publics share expectations about their relationship, and those expectations must be met to maintain it. Organizations and publics can nurture their relationship through interactions and communication.

In a university setting, the organization-public relationship is between the campus administration and the students who attend. The university should deliver education and/or services in a way that meets student needs, thus building the professional relationship. Scholarship about the role college student relationship attitudes play in university retention (e.g., Bruning & Lambe, 2002) lends support for applying Relationship Management theory to the university/student relationship. Research indicates that students who identify themselves as in relationship with the university were much more likely to return. According to Bruning and Lambe (2002), colleges that build relationships with students should structure interactive and

ongoing communication. Interactive communication facilitates relational exchange rather than information transfer.

In order to situate the present study in the academic body of knowledge, relevant scholarship is reviewed in the next section. The literature is arranged thematically.

Literature Review

One stream of research has focused on how college students respond to health messages they encounter. Research about how undergraduates process health messages revealed the power of statistics (Campo, Cameron, Brossard, & Frazer, 2004). When the health message contained a statistic, the majority of college students moved their judgments toward the statistic. Student involvement has been found to play a role in some health message encounters. Research by Marshall, Reinhart, Feeley, Tutzhauer, and Anker (2008) suggested that outcome-involvement and value-involvement were predictors of student behaviors when they encounter health messages. Health messages via social norms campaigns have yielded mixed research results. Cameron and Campo (2006) assessed the relationships among perceptions, demographics, and attitudes on three health behaviors. Regardless of the health behavior, the scholars found that whether the student liked participating in the particular behavior accounted for the greatest variance. The first research question follows:

RQ1: What health messages do students encounter at The University?

The significance of communication has also been the focus of college health scholarship. MacGeorge et al. studied whether supportive communication could buffer the association between academic stress and health. Results indicated that when students received more informational support from family and friends, the positive association between academic stress and depression decreased. Additionally, students who received emotional support from family and friends were less depressed. Satterfield (2007) conducted pilot research to improve communication and health related outcomes between providers and students at the Iowa State University health centre. The second research question follows:

RQ2: How does The University communicate about student health?

Research has also been conducted about college student perceptions of health. A study about perceptions and experiences of burnout revealed five precursors to student burnout: Assignment overload, outside influences, lack of personal motivation, mental and physical health, and instructor attitude and behavior (Cushman & West, 2006). Ruthig et al. studied the associations of health perceptions and behaviors with subsequent academic performance. Findings indicated increased binge drinking among female students negatively predicted how they felt about success and how they performed academically. Among male student-participants, increased tobacco use negatively predicted their academic performance. The third and final research question follows:

RQ3: How does The University determine student perceptions of health?

A qualitative mode of inquiry is appropriate for the research questions and the phenomenon of study. In the next section, the author explains the specific method.

Method

Case study was employed as the methodological approach for the present study. As defined by Yin (2008), the case study method enables a researcher to investigate phenomenon in context. The phenomenon of the present study was the health environment of *The University* campus, a public university in the southern region of the United States (U.S.). The context of the

case was the year 2008. To maintain confidentiality of study participants, identifying information has been redacted from this study. The University hosts health fairs, sponsors faculty and staff-focused health workshops, and provides student health brochures. The case study method of inquiry was appropriate for the intersecting nature of the campus and its health environment. Good qualitative case studies present in-depth understanding of the case of inquiry through many forms of qualitative data (Creswell, 2013). Methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative methods to study a phenomenon (See e.g., Tracy, 2013). The author triangulated direct observation, thematic analysis of health brochures (See Table 1), and *informant interviews* (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011) with people whose insider knowledge about the research phenomenon informed the research study (See Table 2).

Findings

Campus Geography

The University campus comprises 220 buildings stretching across more than 500 acres of land. One notable aspect of the layout is *The Hill*, a rising bank above the shore of the state river. Students with classes on The Hill report that they need extra time between classes to make the trek. Students who prefer not to walk take The University transportation system. The system provides free bus service to students, faculty, and staff across campus on weekdays when courses are in session. The bus stops every five-to-10 minutes at several locations including the campus library and The Hill. The system also provides late-night service, designated buses for disabled passengers, and limited off-campus service. University-student relationships are driven by perceived expectations (e.g., Ledingham, 2003). By offering service on late nights and for those with disabilities, The University does appear to meet student expectations for safety and security.

Nearby Neighborhood

Students residing on and off campus at The University socialize in a neighborhood just west of the campus. The neighborhood has three bars which are often frequented by students on game nights. “Through the years, the street has been home to filling stations, grocery stores, clothiers, restaurants, clubs, drugstores, an automobile dealership, and other neighborhood enterprises” (The University website, 2008). These days, the neighborhood is known for unhealthy food options including fast-food, pizza, and delis.

Eating Establishments

On campus food options are strictly regulated by The University. Undergraduate students who live in residence halls are required to purchase *Meal Plan* accounts. Meal plans are tracked through student identification cards to purchase a designated number of buffet-style meals in residential dining halls (The University, 2008). Meal plans can be supplemented with *Meal Equivalencies*, a specific dollar amount allotted per meal to exchange a residential meal for a meal at select restaurants on campus. Students can also supplement their meal plan accounts with *Dining Dollars*. Dining Dollars enable students to purchase food in The University-based retail restaurants (e.g., Burger King, Chick-fil-A, KFC Express, and Pizza Hut Express), designated campus convenience stores during lunch or dinner hours, or residential dining halls. According to Relationship Management Theory, (Ledingham, 2003) expectations must be met to maintain a relationship. The University does not meet expectations students might have about nutritional food options. The University/student relationship might suffer as a result.

Health Centers

Students with physical health concerns at The University can visit the student health clinic, which provides services free to insured students and for a moderate charge to those without insurance (The University, 2008). Clinic services include primary care, immunizations, gynecological care, counseling, and psychiatric evaluation. Mental health assistance is also available to students through the stand-alone counseling centre. Free individual, group, and couples counseling is available at the counseling centre. University-student relationships are goal-oriented, according to Ledingham (2003). Services available at the health clinic and counseling centre are designed to meet the goals students have to improve their health. Thus, the health facilities appear beneficial to the relationship between students and The University.

Wellness Options

Students can attend to their physical fitness through the recreational sports department at The University (The University, 2008). The department operates a fitness centre where students, faculty, and staff can attend exercise classes, lift weights, or go swimming. Students can also participate in intramural sports through the fitness centre, or one of 20 varsity intercollegiate teams fielded at The University. Some students can work out at their dorms. Select residence halls feature small gym rooms with (Informant One, personal communication, April 28, 2008). Students and universities can nurture their relationship through interactions, according to Relationship Management theory (Ledingham, 2003). The variety of physical fitness facilities allows the student to come into regular contact with The University. Wellness options bode well for the university/student relationship.

Health Education

The University does not offer health as a major, nor is health among the mandatory general education courses (Informant Two, personal communication, February 22, 2008); however, The University does offer a major in nutrition as well as courses in health, nutrition, and related disciplines. Opportunities exist for students interested in applied health projects as well. The Panhellenic [*sic*] council, which represents the 19 sororities at The University, hosts health workshops for women with gynecologists and healthy eating seminars with nutritionists. Some sororities participate in chapter-specific health efforts (Informant One, personal communication, February 21, 2008), addressing drug abuse prevention, domestic violence awareness, and breast health education programs (The University website, 2008). Students who expect to study health or nutrition will have unmet expectations at The University. Relationships are driven by perceived expectations (Ledingham, 2003), so health education at The University could hinder the university-student relationship.

Health Research

Sorority and fraternity members are part of the target population for the *Student Centre*, The University facility that addresses student health, safety, and security (Informant Three, personal communication, February 1, 2008). The Student Centre utilizes government and scholarly research to facilitate safety and security among students (The University website, 2008). It works in collaboration with the student health clinic, student housing, and The University police department. The Student Centre previously conducted research to correct misperceptions about student drinking at The University. Today, Student Centre no longer conducts such research (Informant Three, personal communication, October 26, 2013). The

University should deliver services in a way that meets student needs, according to Ledingham (2002). Evidenced-based research initially met student health needs, thereby helping to build the university-student relationship. By discontinuing the research, the University is no longer meeting the tenets of Relationship Management theory.

Health Promotions

Various venues address student health at The University, but only one full-time staff person is dedicated to health promotion. The Wellness Coordinator conducts most health promotions through partnerships with the Student Centre, student housing, and the Panhellenic [*sic*] council (Informant Four, personal communication, January 25, 2008). Health promotion ideas might originate from the Wellness Coordinator or the U.S. Healthy People initiatives (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013). Employees from multiple sites at The University have begun collaborating more often on programs to promote student health (Informant Four, personal communication, February 1, 2008). Health promotions include health fairs, faculty and staff-focused health workshops, and student health brochures. Interactions and communication enable campus administrators and students to stay in relationship. One wellness coordinator restricts interactive communication opportunities. The university-student relationship could be neglected as a result.

Health Materials

Health brochures are on display at select dining halls, the student health clinic, the fitness centre, and the counseling centre. Cobwebs were noticeable on some of the brochures in the student health clinic. The author collected and analyzed 66 brochures for classification purposes. Brochure topics covered healthy eating; physical health and fitness; mental health; personal care, and safety and security (See Table 1). Nearly one-third of the brochures were not directly targeted to The University student population. Student-relevant topics included The University meal plans, student health insurance, sexual assault prevention, the student health clinic, and the counseling centre. As with health promotion ideas, brochure topics are decided by the Wellness Coordinator and information from the U. S. Healthy People initiatives (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013) according to Informant Four (personal communication, January 25, 2008). According Relationship Management theory (Ledingham, 2003), students and universities can nurture their relationship through communication. The health brochure topics do not adequately communicate messages of concern to students. These brochures do not enhance the university-student relationship.

Discussion

In response to the first research question, study findings indicate that students must be self-guided to encounter health messages at The University. The lack of a health or nutrition major and discontinued student centre research means health scholarship is all but nonexistent. Students could encounter practical health information through brochures at the health clinic, the counseling centre, and the fitness recreational centre.

The response of the second research question reveals that The University communicates about health intermittently, through the Wellness Coordinator as well as occasional workshops and fairs. Its communication could be expanded with a larger staff dedicated to wellness promotion. A required general education course in health would also enhance the campus health messaging.

Now that The University no longer conducts evidence-based health research, the response to the third research question remains unknown. It is unclear how student perceptions of health are ascertained at The University. Employees from the multiple sites at The University that address student health would do well to include evaluation in their programming.

The University geography and its transportation system embody contradictions in health. Students who choose to walk or bike benefit from the hilly terrain. Unfortunately, accessibility of the transportation system might preclude students from doing so. Hence, The University campus layout is a health inhibitor and enabler for college students. The access to fitness facilities and fattening foods at The University also convey a contradictory health message. Campus administration appears to care more about student choice than student health when it comes to nutritional issues.

Rather than ignore the mixed health messages, the University should convey a clear commitment to student health. Campus administrators could replicate research by Cushman and West (2006) to identify and eliminate some of the common precursors to student burnout. Administrators could also expand the capabilities that currently exist for students to communicate with long-distance loved ones. Supportive communication from family and friends might reduce depression and alleviate academic stress (MacGeorge et al.).

Considering the budgetary constraints under which public institutions must function, operating multiple health facilities indicates that applied health is a valuable commodity at The University. In this sense, The University appears to value the physical and mental wellness of its students. Campus administration should conduct pilot research as Satterfield (2007) did to evaluate the communication and provider-patient relationship at one of its health facilities. Research results could aid The University in targeting the emotional, social and behavioral needs of its students.

Sororities at The University should be commended for providing health workshops, but their work is not without flaws. Workshops could be improved if planners ascertain how involved students are in a particular health issue, according to Marshall et al. The subject matter of the workshops appeals to female students, thereby diminishing the perceived import of male student health. Findings from Ruthig et al., suggest that the female focus at The University could be merited. Results suggested that female students faced a greater number of health consequences than their male counterparts. Service credit for sororities that develop health workshops incentivizes resources rather than fostering the inherent value of health information.

It is heartening to note that The University operated a centre for health-related research. The University demonstrated concern about an important college health issue when it conducted campus research about drinking norms. The discontinuation of the centre seems at first to suggest that campus-based research could no longer hold the same value it once did.

Results from social norms research Cameron and Campo (2006) conducted suggests otherwise. Participant liking of health behavior accounted for the greatest variance among participants. The scholars said success in some social norms campaigns might not occur across diverse health topics. Health scholarship does not appear to be a priority at The University considering the lack of a health or nutrition major.

Health brochure topics revealed an unfortunate disconnect between student needs and campus perceptions. It should come as no surprise that some brochures are unread, as the presence of cobwebs suggests. Research by Campo et al., indicates that using statistics in health messages could be effective in changing student judgments. The University should tailor its

messaging to the college student population rather rely on public health information from U.S. Healthy People Initiatives.

Limitations/Future Studies

A context-related limitation of this research study was the single-campus setting, chosen based on accessibility to the author, which precludes generalizing results. Constructivist qualitative researchers contend that immersion and dialogue within the setting yields the truest form of knowledge (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), hence, the campus setting was appropriate as the natural setting in which students encountered the phenomenon of study. Generalizeability [*sic*] is not a goal of qualitative research (e.g. Belgrave, Zablotzky, & Guadagno, 2002), so the author suggests *transferability*, transferring the findings from this study to another context (Daymon & Holloway, 2011), for future scholars. Researchers could employ comparative analysis to explore The University and other college that vary in size or public status. Results might reveal additional insights about campus health inhibitors and university/student relationships.

The timeframe of the case study restricted the size of the data. Although technology was utilized by students near the study timeframe for health information-seeking (e.g., Brashers, Goldsmith, & Hsieh, 2002; Escoffery, Miner, Adame, Butler, McCormick, & Mendell, 2005, and Hanauer, Dibble, Fortin, & Col, 2004), The University was in its early stages of electronic health messages. Health information was primarily limited to website announcements at the time of the case study. Scholars today could replicate the method of inquiry at a college campus. The inclusion of electronic and social media channels for health information would enhance a case study analysis.

Conclusion

The present study suggests that campus health inhibitors could harm the university/student relationship. Relationship management theory informed the study by revealing issues in the university/student relationship that might occur as a result of health inhibitors. To build and sustain a relationship with students, The University needs to ensure that its health messages correspond to the needs of its students: “Uncovering the mechanisms driving the effectiveness of health communications will provide principles for developing maximally persuasive educational interventions across populations” (Schneider, 2006, p. 820). The University cannot sustain a mutually beneficial relationship with its students when its health policies and programs are not fully aligned with student health concerns.

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Table 1
Brochure Topics

Student-centric topics	Moderately student-centric topics	Non-student-centric topics
Physical health (meningococcal meningitis exercise, nutritious eating, common cold antibiotics)	Diabetes, Breast/cervical cancer detection	Heart conditions
Student services (academic support, The University meal plans, student health clinic, counseling centre, student health insurance)	Short-term medical insurance, Non-traditional students, City of The University	
Mental health (depression, anxiety, stress, suicide prevention)		
Personal care (cosmetics, hair care, sunscreen/tanning)		
Sexual health/safety (sexual assault prevention, HIV, self-defense)		

Table 2
Informant Profiles

Informant Number	Position at The University
Informant One	Graduate student/ Sorority advisor
Informant Two	Public health professor
Informant Three	Graduate Student Centre researcher
Informant Four	Wellness Coordinator

**A Meta-Analysis of Effects of Attributed Responsibility
And SCCT-Recommended Responses on Organizations' Reputation**

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Abstract

Crisis communication researchers have frequently used situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) as their framework to examine how to protect organizational reputation. However, the shown effects of attributed responsibility and match of response strategies with crisis types on organizational reputation are inconsistent across studies. To make the picture clearer for crisis communication scholars and practitioners, we conducted a meta-analysis of SCCT research on the effects of attributed responsibility and the recommended response strategies on the organizations' reputation. To collect data, we searched exhaustively for relevant publications on major public relations journals and in the major databases of communication field. The results indicated that both attributed responsibility and current commended response strategies have fairly substantial effects on organizational reputation in crisis. Although matching responses with crisis types cannot fully eliminate the reputation threat to organizations caused by the attribution of responsibility, it can effectively mitigate the threat. This research provided multiple insights: it confirms the considerable effects of two predictor variables in SCCT; public relations scholars should also examine other strategies that can potentially protect the organizations' reputation, such as inoculation, to optimize strategic crisis communication.

Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 1995) is one of the two dominant paradigms inspiring much research on crisis communication in public relations, the other one being Benoit's theory of image restoration (Avery, Lariscy, Kim, & Hocke, 2010). An increasing number of published crisis communication research have used SCCT as their theoretical framework over the years (Avery et al., 2010).

Attributed responsibility jeopardizes organizational reputation, whereas the match of response strategies with level of attributed responsibility and reputation threats protect organizational reputation. When a crisis happens, the public tends to look for cause(s) of the crisis and attribute responsibility accordingly. SCCT argues that the more responsibility the public attribute to an organization and blame it for the crisis, the more reputation threat or potential reputation damage that the organization faces (Coombs, 2004). Consequently, an organization in crisis needs to choose its response strategies based on the level of attributed responsibility or crisis type it is handling. The more responsibility assigned to the organization, the more apologetic their responses should be (Coombs, 2004).

Although the effects of attributed responsibility and current SCCT-recommended response strategies on organizational reputation have received much empirical support, the results across studies are inconsistent. The observed correlation between the attributed responsibility and organization reputation varies from $-.19$ (Griffin, Babin, & Attaway, 1991) to $-.72$ (Dean, 2004). Relatedly, a positive relationship between attributed responsibility and organization-public relationship outcomes was reported (Ki & Brown, 2013). More importantly, some research have reported that compared to mismatching response strategies, the current SCCT-recommended response strategies have not statistically significantly buffer the crisis impact on the publics' perceptions of or attitude toward organizations (Choi & Chung, 2013; Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010).

Based on the inconsistent results, it seems to public relations practitioners and researchers that the impact of the attributed responsibilities and SCCT-recommended response strategies on organizational reputation depends on circumstances. However, the inconsistency may largely due to sampling error. Equally importantly, the results of individual studies usually are distorted by artifacts, such as imperfect reliabilities of variable measurements. Those artifacts also play a role in the inconsistency across SCCT-related study results (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004).

In this study, the researchers conducted a meta-analysis on the SCCT-related research to examine the effects of attributed responsibility and current recommended response strategies on organizational reputation in crisis. Traditional narrative review of literatures, with or without the consideration of significance tests, usually fails to reveal the true relationships among variables, because the selection process of the literature are subjective to some extent (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). Meta-analysis, a quantitative review of the literature, is more objective at inclusion of the relevant literature. At the same time, individual studies usually have unsatisfactory statistically power, and meta-analysis is also a solution to this problem (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). The findings in this study answered these questions: Does the effects of attributed responsibility and current SCCT recommended-response strategies on organizational reputation vary drastically in different circumstances? Or the observed effect sizes are driven away from the actual effect sizes by the artifacts and sampling errors?

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) is one of the primary social scientific theories in strategic crisis communication (Coombs, 2010). This approach uses quantitative

methodology to examine the publics' perceptions and attitudes on crises and organizations involved, and the research purpose is to mitigate the reputation threat to organizations involved in crises (Coombs, 2010).

Built from the attribution theory and Benoit's theory of image restoration, SCCT examines how attribution of responsibility by the public threatens an organization's reputation, and suggests organization match its response strategies with the level of attributed responsibility or crisis types (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). An organization's reputation is defined as "how the organization is perceived by its publics" (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 167), and it influences publics' affects and behaviors toward the organization (Coombs, 2010). The more responsibility that the public attribute to the organization in crisis, the stronger the threat to organization's reputation is, and the more accommodative strategies that the organization should choose as responses. The public attribute different amount of responsibility to organizations based on crisis types. Crises types fall into three clusters: victim cluster where the organizations are victims of the crises; accidental cluster where the incidents are unintentional; and preventable clusters where the crises are caused by "either purposefully placing stakeholders at risk, or knowingly taking inappropriate actions, or human error that might have or could have been avoided" (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 179).

In addition, crisis perceived severity and organization's performance history (including an organization's crisis history and relationship history with its stakeholders) act as intensifiers in the reputation threat to the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, 2005). The more harm to the public a crisis causes and the more similar crises the organization had in the past, the lower quality of relationship the organization built with its public prior to the crisis and the more reputation threat the organization faces and the more apologetic its response strategies should be (Coombs, 2004).

Besides attributed responsibility of the crisis, how organizations respond to the crisis also impacts public's attitude and perception of the organizations. SCCT identifies four groups of strategies: denial strategies, diminish strategies, rebuild strategies, and bolstering strategies. Those response strategies range from being defensive of the organization's interests to being accommodative to the victims' concerns (Coombs, 2010). Matching between response strategies and crisis types is more effective than blindly adopting apologetic strategies: apologetic strategies do not always provide the best protection to organization's reputation in crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, 2005) For example, a defensive response can be as acceptable to stakeholders as an apologetic response when the CEO is visible in immediate response to a crisis and the company has positive prior reputation (Turk, Jin, Stewart, Kim, & Hipple, 2010).

The SCCT-related research has been presenting inconsistent picture to the crisis communication researchers and practitioners. Although the power of recommended strategies on reputation protection has received much empirical support (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Dean, 2004; Lyon & Cameron, 2004), some researchers in their studies reported that the SCCT-recommended response strategies based on crisis types have no effects on organizational reputation, or their effects are partially supported (Choi & Chung, 2013; Claeys, Cauberghe, & Vyncke, 2010; Sisco, 2012). The inconsistency may not because the effects truly vary, but the true effect sizes are distorted by a variety of artifacts, such as imperfect reliability, and sampling error across studies. Meta-analysis, or quantitative review of the literature, has the potential to eliminate those artifacts and reveal the true relationships and its variability, if there is any true variability. In this study the researchers answered two research questions with meta-analysis technique:

RQ1: Does publics' attribution of crisis responsibility to the organization have negative effects on the organizational reputation? If so, what's the magnitude of this relationship?

RQ2: Do the SCCT-recommended response strategies based on attributed responsibility have positive effects on organizational reputation? If so, what's the magnitude of this relationship?

Method

Search Process

Using the key terms “situational crisis communication theory”, “SCCT”, or “crisis response strategy”, the researchers looked for original research published from 1990 to 2013 in the following databases: Communication & Mass Media Complete, PsycArticles, and Business Source Complete. The researchers also used *Google Scholar* to identify more articles with the same key terms. Besides the articles that were identified directly, the research that cited those directly identified articles (e.g., Coombs, 1995; Coombs, 2004) were also examined, using the “cited by” function of Google Scholar for potential hit. Furthermore, the reference list of identified articles and the *Handbook of Crisis Communication* (Coombs & Holladay, 2011) were examined for potential samples. The researchers also relied on their personal knowledge of the literature as well as that of our colleagues whose research area is crisis communication.

Inclusion Criteria

The included studies meet the following criteria: 1). the study quantitatively examined the relationships stated in either/both of our research questions, 2). the study reported *Pearson cross-product correlation* r , or other statistics, such as t and F statistics, that can be converted into r , and 3). The study must have measured attribution or manipulated the match between crisis types and crisis response strategies, and have measured organizational reputation or participants' attitude toward the organization. Experimental designs, surveys and content analysis were included. The analysis on the effects of attributed responsibility on organizational reputation is based on 13 samples from 11 studies, and the analysis on the effects of recommended strategies on organizational reputation is based on 10 samples from 8 studies.

Some SCCT-related studies were excluded from the analysis because: 1) they did not measure the relationships stated in our research questions (e.g., Coombs, 2007); or 2) the conceptualizations of key concepts, such as crisis types or organizational reputation, are not compatible with those in SCCT (e.g., Bradford, 1995; Ki & Brown, 2013).

Unit of Analysis

Zero order correlation r was used as the effect size statistic. Other reported statistics, such as F and t statistics, were converted into r . Different formulas of effect size and sampling error variance were used for repeated-measure experimental design, in order to combine their results with those of between-subject design (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004; Morris & DeShon, 2002).

Correction for Artifacts

The purpose of meta-analysis is to estimate construct-level relationship as accurately as possible. In order to do this, the distorting effects of artifacts need to be corrected (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). The effects of measurement error on correlation are systematic and multiplicative, and it is present in every study and attenuates the observed relationship (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). The researchers corrected the measurement error on r of each individual

investigation, and the missing reliability values were estimated by calculating the mean *Cronbach's alpha* across the studies where information was available (Hunt & Schmidt, 2004). Although other kinds of artifacts, such as construct validity of the independent variable and of dependent variable may also distort the effect size, the information needed for correction of those artifacts are rarely available in public relations and communication published research, therefore those artifacts were left uncorrected.

Based on the procedures recommended by Hunter and Schmidt (2004), the measurement error in both independent variable and dependent variable for each investigation was corrected by using this formula¹⁸:

$$\rho_0 = ab\rho$$

Where ρ_0 denotes the observed correlation, ρ the actual correlation, a the square root of the reliability of independent variable, and b the square root of the reliability of dependent variable.

Analysis

Following Hunter and Schmidt's (2004) random-effect model, the researchers conducted this meta-analysis in three steps to answer each research question. For step one, the corrected correlation r_{ci} , the compound attenuation factor A_i , and the sampling error variance v_{ei} were computed for each individual investigation i . For step two, sample-weighted disattenuated correlation was calculated for each individual investigation. In the final meta-analysis estimation step, the average corrected correlation \bar{r}_C , the variance of corrected correlation $Var(r_C)$, the average sampling error variance $Ave(ve)$, and the corrected variance of corrected correlation $Var(\rho)$ were computed.

Results

Characteristics of the Investigations

Sample sizes ranged from 66 to 385 participants, with a mean of 199 and a total sample size of 5,182. The majority of the included studies used between-participant design, with a few used repeated-measure design and one content analysis.

Analysis Results

The first research question asked whether publics' attribution of responsibility to the organization have negative effects on the organizational reputation and the magnitude of this relationship. To answer this research question, a three-step meta-analysis was run with 13 investigations from 11 studies (see Table 1). The uncorrected attribution-reputation correlations ranged from -.72 to -.19 with 100% (13/13) of them being negative. The results were as follows (the slight difference is due to rounding error):

$$\begin{aligned}\bar{r}_C &= -.52 \\ Var(r_C) &= 0.023 \\ Ave(ve) &= 0.004 \\ Var(\rho) &= 0.020\end{aligned}$$

The average corrected correlation between the attribution and organizational reputation across all the studies is -.52: the more responsibility that the publics attribute to the organization for the happening of the crisis, the more negative the organizational reputation becomes. The corrected variance of the corrected correlation is 0.020. Because the estimated real correlation variance far exceeds 25% of the variance of the corrected correlation ($0.020/0.023 = 87.0\%$), we can conclude that there are some moderators for this attribution-reputation relationship based on

¹⁸ All the formula notations follow those used in Hunter and Schmidt (2004).

Hunter and Schmidt's (2004) "75% rule".

The second research question asked whether the recommended crisis response strategies by SCCT have positive effects on organizational reputation and the magnitude of this relationship. A three-step meta-analysis was run with 10 investigations from 8 studies (see Table 2). The uncorrected correlations between the recommended strategies and organizational reputation ranged from 0 to .41 with 90% (9/10) of them being positive and none being negative. The results were as follows (the slight difference is due to rounding error):

$$\begin{aligned}\bar{r}_C &= .25 \\ \text{Var}(r_C) &= 0.024 \\ \text{Ave}(ve) &= 0.005 \\ \text{Var}(\rho) &= 0.018\end{aligned}$$

The average corrected correlation between the recommended response strategies by SCCT and organizational reputation is 0.250. Although some individual investigations concluded that there is no relationship between the recommended strategies and organizational reputation (Choi & Chung 2013; Verhoeven, Van Hoof, Ter Keurs, & Van Vuuren, 2012), this misleading conclusion may be due to sampling variance of the correlation effect size. If the organization uses the recommended response strategies matching their crisis type, their reputation will be protected to some extent. The corrected variance of the corrected correlation is 0.018. Again, in our case the estimate of real correlation variance far exceeds 25% of the variance of the corrected correlation ($0.018/0.024=0.75$), and therefore there may be some moderators influencing this relationship.

Discussion

The primary findings of this study can be summarized as follows: the attribution of responsibility is negatively correlated with organizational reputation in crisis, and the match of response strategies with crisis types recommended by SCCT is positively correlated with organizational reputation. Both of the effect sizes are fairly substantial.¹⁹ Using the recommended strategies by SCCT may not fully eliminate the reputation threat caused by the attribution of responsibility in crisis, but it will protect organizational reputation to some extent. Perceived severity of crises, crisis history of the organization, and other crisis-specific and organization-specific factors may be important moderators of the effects examined here, and these potential moderators deserve more attention from public relations scholars.

Implications

The attributed responsibility has much stronger effects on organizational reputation in crisis, compared to the effects of recommended response strategies on organizational reputation. Public relations scholars should examine other elements of crisis communication and tap their potential to further buffer the reputational threat caused by attributed responsibility. Some response strategies excluded from SCCT deserve more attention, such as inoculation (Pfau & Wan, 2006) or "stealing the thunder" (Wrigley, 2011). These strategies might be more effective in some crisis situations than the recommended strategies by SCCT. More importantly, crisis communication scholars need to go beyond the response strategies in theory-building efforts. For example, what types of prior organization-public relationship is most stable and beneficial for organizations to handle crises? Will dissemination of more directing and adjusting information

¹⁹ The Cohen's effect size standard may not be appropriate for many social scientific settings.

help to protect the organizational reputation?

Crisis communication scholars should also closely examine the factors that potentially moderate the effects of attributed responsibility and recommended strategies on organizational reputation. According to SCCT, perceived severity of crisis, crisis history and relationship history of the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, 2005) are intensifiers for the effects of attributed responsibility on organizational reputation. While we search for our sample individual studies, we realized that only a handful of studies have examined these moderators stated in SCCT (Coombs, 2004), let alone the potential moderators not stated in the SCCT, such as crisis predictability and controllability (Jin, 2010) and CEO's likability.

For crisis communication practitioners, the recommended strategies based on crisis types give them some guidance on responding to the crisis situations. But in order to communicate more effectively, practitioners should go beyond the recommended strategies. For example, they should account for crisis history if there is any, because it will intensify the reputational threat.

Limitations

First of all, the researchers did not run moderator analysis due to our limited sample size, although the results showed that there is real variance of both corrected correlations. For example, do different experimental design (between-subject design vs. repeated-measure design) or the participant types (college students vs. general population) influence the effect size? Replication studies often do not receive as much attention as original studies from the field, and thus researchers prefer original studies to replication studies (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). Meta-analysis is more accurate than individual studies via correcting the distorting effects of artifacts and sampling error, but a large number of replication studies are necessary for high-quality meta-analysis and its moderator analysis.

Secondly, This meta-analysis corrected measurement errors of independent variables and dependent variables. Other artifacts may also have distorted the effect sizes, such as the construct validity of the independent variables and the dependent variables. However, as far as the researchers are aware, none of the empirical studies that we have examined reported information that is needed for correction of those artifacts. The missing information makes it impossible to correct other artifacts. It is highly possible that there was some variance caused by other artifacts remained in the corrected variance of the corrected correlation. In addition, due to our limited sample size of individual studies, our results may be distorted by "second-order" sampling error (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004).

Conclusion

The attribution of responsibility and recommended response strategies are the most important determinants of organizational reputation in crisis, according to SCCT. The results supported the theory-stated effects. The SCCT-recommended response strategies protect organizational reputation to some extent. However, in order to further mitigate the reputation threat, the crisis communication scholars and practitioners need to examine other types of response strategies and other aspects of organizational communicative behaviors. Meanwhile, scholars and practitioners should pay more attention to factors that can moderate the effects of attributed responsibility and response strategies on organizational reputation.

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Table 1
Studies Examining the Relationship between Attribution and Organizational Reputation

Study	Topic	Subgroups	N	r	95% CI of r
Brown and White (2011)	University budget cuts		275	-.31	-.42
Coombs and Holladay (2002)	13 crisis types	Victim cluster	130	-.51	-.64
		Accidental		-.32	-.48
		Preventable		-.46	-.60
Dean (2004)	Product harm		291	-.72	-.66
Griffin, Babin, and Attaway (1991)	salmonella poisoning in fried chicken		188	-.19	-.32
Jeong (2009)	Samsung oil spill	Internal attribution	180	-.49	-.60
Jorgensen (1996)	Airline accident/OTC illness		129	-.48	-.61
Kim (2009)	Food poisoning/laptop battery explosion		162	-.49	-.61
Lee (2005)	Airline crash		385	-.59	-.66
Park and Reber (2011)	Unethical football player recruiting		262	-.27	-.39
Schwarz (2012)	Love parade		942	-.41	-.46
Verhoevena et al. (2012)	Hospital power breakdown		84	-.29	-.49

Table 2
Studies Examining the Relationship between Match and Organizational Reputation

Study	Topic	Subgroups	N	r	95% CI of r
Choi and Chung (2013)	Toyota recall		252	0	-.12 .12
Claeys, Cauberghe, and Vyncke (2010)	Product tampering		316	.18	.07 .29
Coombs and Holladay (1996)	Accidental/transgression		232	.28	.16 .40
Dean (2004)	Product harm		291	.41	.32 .51
Lyon and Cameron (2004)	Clothing company internal problem		66	.41	.20 .61
Sheldon and Sallot (2009)	Racial remarks		352	.37	.28 .46
Sisco (2012)	NPO	victim*deny/diminish Accidental*diminish/rebuild Intentional*rebuild/diminish	305	.19	.01 .38
Verhoevena et al. (2012)	Hospital power breakdown		84	.01	-.21 .22

Introducing Cross-Impact Analysis as a Methodology to Understand Stakeholders' Reciprocal Influences

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Abstract

One of the key factors for successful public relations programs is the correct definition and segmentation of stakeholders. Over the years, scholars and practitioners have developed a series of approaches to segment stakeholders and publics. One of the main limitations of such models is that they do not allow for the assessment of the way in which stakeholders influence one another—an aspect recognized as central by many scholars. Using an illustration, we introduce cross-impact analysis (CIA) as a methodology that can be applied to the understanding of stakeholders' likelihood to influence one another. We argue that CIA can be used by public relations practitioners together with traditional segmentation techniques and represents a useful and novel way of understanding the complexity of organizations' environment.

Introduction

Organizations operate in complex environments composed of a multitude of stakeholders. One of the key factors for successful public relations programs is the understanding of such an environment. In this regards, over the years scholars and practitioners have developed a series of models and techniques to segment stakeholders and publics in order to understand who should be given attention (Bryson, 2004; Kim et al., 2008; Rawlins, 2006). Used together, these models allow for a well-informed understanding of stakeholder environments (Kim et al., 2008). However, such segmentation techniques also have one main limitation: They do not allow for assessing the way in which stakeholders influence one another.

As pointed out by scholars in a variety of disciplines, we should go beyond a “dyadic” understanding of stakeholder–firm relationships and better understand how stakeholders influence one another (Rowley, 1997). In this regards, various scholars have investigated the ways in which stakeholders influence one another and how in turn such interdependence is likely to influence firms and the way in which they respond to often conflicting stakeholder pressures (Frooman, 1999; Neville & Menguc, 2006; Rowley, 1997). Together, these contributions have highlighted the importance of understanding stakeholders’ reciprocal influences.

In this paper, we introduce cross-impact analysis (CIA) as a method that can be used to understand stakeholders’ likelihood of influencing one another. CIA was initially developed by T. Gordon and O. Helmer in 1966 as a technique in order to understand the likelihood of a variety of events influencing one another (Gordon, 1994; Gordon & Hayward, 1968). Today, the technique is applied in a variety of subjects and contexts. Through an illustration, we explain how CIA represents a useful tool that can be used at various levels of sophistication in order to capture stakeholders’ influences both in terms of direction and strength of the relationships. Such a technique can also be adopted to understand how issues influence one another and how stakeholders are related to such issues. We argue that CIA can be used by public relations practitioners together with traditional segmentation techniques and represents a new and valuable way of understanding the complexity of organizations’ environment.

We start the paper by providing an overview of existing models for stakeholder analysis. We then review the literature that has highlighted the importance of understanding stakeholders’ interdependence and influence. After this, we introduce CIA, give a brief overview of the methodology and its application, and explain—through an illustration—how it could be applied to understand stakeholder influence and the relationship between issues and stakeholders. We conclude the paper by discussing the main implications for practitioners interested in the use of the methodology.

Review of the Dominant Approaches to Stakeholders’ Analysis

Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) is a very broad field of research that spans across many disciplines including strategy, management, organization theory, finance, accounting, corporate social responsibility, business ethics, marketing, and public relations (e.g., Laplume et al., 2008; Parmar et al., 2010). The topic related to “identification and prioritization” of stakeholders is one of the main ones within such a broader area (e.g., Laplume et al., 2008). The aim of this section is to provide an overview of the dominant methodologies to define, segment, and prioritize stakeholders in order to highlight the logic behind such methodologies as well as their limitations (for other reviews of segmentation approaches, see Bryson, 2004; Kim et al., 2008; Rawlins, 2006).

Organizations face highly complex environments, comprising a myriad of groups that can—at least potentially—influence and be influenced by organizational interests. Scholars and practitioners agree that the understanding of an organization stakeholder's environment is a critical aspect for the successful implementation of organizational plans (Ackerman & Eden, 2011; Kim et al., 2008). Methods for stakeholder identification and prioritization vary greatly in their level of analysis, flexibility, and applicability. Organizations face a series of related issues when they have to decide how to segment the stakeholder environment: They have to select the appropriate level of analysis as well as decide whether to adopt already existing categorizations or create specific ones contingent on the specific situation they are facing. Scholars who have reviewed approaches to define stakeholders usually talk about broad and narrow approaches (e.g., Mitchell et al., 1997). Broad approaches generally take the perspective that potentially everyone can affect or be affected by organizations, whereas narrow approaches attempt to define only a limited number of stakeholders as being relevant for organizations. Other authors (Illia & Lurati, 2006) further divided narrow approaches into a priori and situational ones, depending on whether stakeholder groups are defined ex-ante or based on the specific context.

In this regard, organizations face a trade-off in terms of cost versus precision when deciding which segmentation approach to use (Grunig & Repper, 1992): Although data on macro-categories are usually easy/readily available at little cost (e.g., demographic data), such data might be of little use to design specifically tailored programs. On the other hand, data regarding specific publics collected ad-hoc are more costly to obtain, but are likely to give much greater insights for the successful implementation of programs. As some authors have pointed out, the different approaches vary greatly in their usefulness depending on the specific stage of a program. For instance, broad, a priori segmentations are useful for gaining an initial appreciation of the stakeholder environment, whereas more narrow and situational approaches are necessary when managing specific publics, issues, or crises (Grunig & Repper, 1992; Illia & Lurati, 2006; Kim et al., 2008).

A series of stakeholders can generally be described as critical for organizations. For instance, Clarkson (1995) divided stakeholders into primary and secondary ones. Primary stakeholders are those whose support is needed in order for the organization to survive (e.g., shareholders, customers, employees) whereas secondary stakeholders (e.g., media, special interest groups) are those who can have an influence or be influenced by the organization, but are not directly necessary for its survival. However, secondary stakeholders can have a certain influence on the organization, such as by influencing public opinion about it. Another model often described in public relations (e.g., Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Rawlins, 2006) is the linkage model (Esman, 1972). According to such a model, relevant stakeholders are characterized by four types of possible linkages with an organization: enabling, functional, normative, and diffused. Yet such models do not say much about the importance of the various stakeholder groups and assume that all stakeholder groups are relevant for all organizations and in all situations. Because of this, a series of models were developed in order to prioritize stakeholders based on certain attributes.

One seminal model for stakeholder segmentation is represented by Mitchell et al.'s (1997) identification and salience framework. The model suggests that managers prioritize stakeholders on the basis of their power, legitimacy, and urgency. Stakeholders possessing all three attributes are more likely to receive attention from managers. Mitchell et al.'s model has been tested on a number of occasions. For instance, Agle et al. (1999) surveyed a number of CEOs and found support for the model. Parent and Deephouse (2007), through a case study of two event organizing committees, found that the attribute of power has the greatest effect on stakeholders' salience, followed by urgency and legitimacy. Some authors have also suggested modifying the model by adding other dimensions (Driscoll & Starik, 2004; Jonker

& Foster, 2004) or by making more fundamental changes (Neville et al., 2011). Another model building on the same idea of the previous one and often encountered in manuals (e.g., Ackerman & Eden, 2011; Cornelissen, 2011) is the power–interest matrix. According to this model, stakeholders should be subdivided into two dimensions (i.e., interest and power); those who have a high level of both interest and power are those organizations that need to be focused on most. Different stakeholder segmentation strategies have also been suggested based on whether stakeholders are likely to cooperate or represent a threat for the organization (Savage et al., 1991).

Other authors have suggested that approaches to segmentation should be contingent on the specific situation and allow the prediction of publics' (communication) behavior. According to the situational theory of publics (Grunig, 1968; Grunig & Hunt, 1984), publics are likely to have an active or passive communication behavior (i.e., tendency to seek information actively or process it passively), depending on their levels of problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement in relation to a certain issue. Grunig's situational theory has been widely applied and tested in a variety of contexts (Grunig & Repper, 1992). Some authors (e.g., Illia et al., 2013) have recently suggested extensions of the situational model by adding ethnocentrism as another variable influencing publics' situational behavior. Other scholars have developed typologies of publics based on partially different variables (i.e., knowledge and involvement) and advocated for more attention to inactive publics (Hallahan, 2000) as these, among other things, might become active (Hallahan, 2001).

The models briefly reviewed thus far can be used together and provide great insights into organizational stakeholders (for suggestions on how to integrate the various models, see Kim et al., 2008; Rawlins, 2006). However, such models also have one main limitation: They do not allow for the assessment of the degree to which stakeholders influence one another, directly or indirectly, or the strength of such influence. Surely, stakeholders who have a high level of power are more likely to be those who have the most influence on other stakeholders; however, things might be more complicated (Ackermann & Eden, 2011). Furthermore, such models also tend to view stakeholders as being in a dyadic relationship with organizations; although this is often the case, stakeholders are also connected between them and organizations are part of the complex networks of related stakeholders (e.g., Frooman, 1999; Neville & Menguc, 2006; Rowley, 1997). In the next section we review the literature that has highlighted the importance of understanding stakeholders' reciprocal influences.

Importance of Understanding Stakeholders' Reciprocal Influences

Stakeholder theorists long ago acknowledged the importance of understanding how stakeholders influence one another and how firms respond to such pressures (e.g., Rowley, 1997). However, such theoretical development was not followed by practical tools to analyze such mutual influences.

Adopting insights from resource-dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), in her seminal article, Oliver (1991) argued that organizations are often subject to conflicting pressures from multiple and interconnected stakeholder groups. Complementing Oliver's contribution, in 1997 Rowley criticized the dominant dyadic approach to stakeholders' identification and management. Based on concepts drawn from network analysis, the author developed a framework on how firms respond to pressures coming from multiple and interconnected stakeholder groups, using the density of the stakeholder network and the focal firm's centrality in such networks (building on Rowley's contribution, other scholars such as Coombs [1998] and Sedereviciute and Valentini [2011] have used concepts of social network analysis applied to stakeholder environments online). Frooman (1999), also building on resource-dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), developed a classification of

stakeholder influence strategies, arguing that—when a firm depends on a stakeholder group for resources—such a group is likely to use direct influence strategies; however, when the firm does not depend on a stakeholder group for resources, such a group is likely to use indirect influence strategies (i.e., working through other groups). In addition, a series of authors have elaborated on the specific—both direct and indirect—influence mechanisms used by stakeholders to influence firms (e.g., Neville & Menguc, 2006; O’Connell et al., 2005; Zietsma & Winn, 2006). For instance, Neville and Menguc (2006), building on the work of Oliver (1991) and Rowley (1997), developed the notion of stakeholder multiplicity and detailed a series of ways in which various interacting stakeholders’ claims might influence firms’ actions. Zietsma and Winn (2008), in their inductive longitudinal study of stakeholder conflicts, highlighted how stakeholders use a series of influence tactics, often involving multilinked chains of influence, to reach their targets. In public relations, Wilson (2000) highlighted how some publics act as opinion leaders and how some others act as links between publics (see also Rawley, 2006; Wilson & Ogden, 2004). The overall insight gleaned from all these readings is that it is important to understand the interactions between stakeholders and not only those happening directly between a firm and a single stakeholder group (dyadic approach).

However, despite scholars’ strong acknowledgment of the importance of understanding stakeholders’ reciprocal influences, practitioners still lack a tool that allows for a good understanding of such influences.²⁰ In the next section we introduce CIA and examine how it can be applied to the understanding of stakeholders’ influences.

Introducing Cross-Impact Analysis as a Methodology to Understand Stakeholders’ Reciprocal Influences

CIA’s specific focus is to understand how a series of predetermined variables are likely to influence one another. Initially, CIA was developed by T. Gordon and O. Helmer in 1966 (Gordon & Hayward, 1968) as a game called *Future* for the Kaiser Aluminum Chemical Company’s 100th anniversary (Gordon, 1994). Since then, CIA has developed in many forms and has been applied in a variety of domains (Asan & Asan, 2007; Chao, 2008), becoming part of a wider array of techniques used in futures research. The aim of futures research is to “systematically explore, create, and test both possible and desirable futures to improve decisions” (Glenn, 2003, p. 3). Other well-known techniques used in this research field include the Delphi method, simulation, and scenario writing (Asan & Asan, 2007). CIA is seen as being related to the Delphi method (e.g., Okoli et al., 2003) as it often relies on the use of experts’ judgments (Gordon, 1994). In the next subsections, we use an illustration to explain how CIA can be used to better understand how stakeholders influence one another.

Applying CIA

When applying CIA, depending on the specific need for which the method is being used, a series of choices can be made (see Figure 1). First, CIA can be used to understand how stakeholders influence one another (as explained here) as well as potentially how a series of issues are likely to influence one another, as we will explain later on in the paper. Second, when applying CIA, data can be gathered by interviewing either experts or different groups of stakeholders separately (for instance, those related to the issue of interest or who identify with other segmentation methods). Finally, data can be integrated by putting all the answers from the different respondents together or analyzed by comparing answers provided

²⁰ To our knowledge, Ackermann and Eden (2011) are the only researchers thus far who have suggested a way of mapping stakeholders’ interactions.

at the individual level by the various groups interviewed. In this paper, we will also discuss some of the implications deriving from the possible choices outlined.

Illustrative Example

Let us assume, for illustrative purposes, that we are dealing with the case of a bank interested in understanding how a series of publics in the financial world are influencing each other in relation to the issue of socially responsible investments. For instance, the objective of such a company might be to design a communication strategy targeting the financial market.

The process starts with the generation of the relevant items to be used for the analysis (see Figure 1)—in our case, stakeholder groups. Although general stakeholder categories can be used, depending on the need, it might be useful to look at specific organizations even at individual opinion leaders. It is important to reach the right level of aggregation in order to achieve actually manageable groups and not abstract aggregates (Ackerman & Eden, 2011). Let us imagine, for our example, that the final list comprises seven stakeholder groups (if deemed relevant, one might also include one's own organization in the analysis): institutional investors, private investors, financial media, financial activists, banks, credit rating agencies, and insurance companies. At this point, a table should be created in which all groups appear in both columns and rows (see Figure 2).

Once the table has been created, for each stakeholder dyad one should ask the following question: How much is the stakeholder group in the top row influenced by the stakeholder group in the left column? Although no exact scale has been defined, the following one is often used: 3 = strong influence; 2 = medium influence; 1 = low influence; 0 = no influence. For example, one may ask: How much are institutional investors influenced by private investors? How much are institutional investors influenced by the financial media? The objective of this step is to complete the table with numbers representing the amount of influence (note that the numbers for this example should only be considered for illustrative purposes). Once the table is completed, totals for columns and rows should be computed (see Figure 3).

Looking at the table, each stakeholder group should now have two numbers given by the sum of the columns and rows (e.g., institutional investors: 9, 7; private investors: 6, 2). These numbers should become the coordinates for plotting the influence-dependence chart shown in Figure 4. Such a diagram can be easily drawn either by hand or by using software (e.g., Microsoft Excel): The right column should become the Y-axis (degree of influence), and the bottom rows should become the X-axis (degree of dependence) in the diagram.

At this point the scatter diagram is ready. It is convenient to divide the diagram into four quadrants (the dividing lines can be drawn by calculating the average dependence/influence [sum of influence or dependence divided by number of stakeholders]; in our case $41/7 = 5.9$). The stakeholders belonging to the upper left square can be called driving; these are the ones that influence other stakeholder groups. In our case, credit rating agencies are those likely to have the most influence. In fact, in our example, these stakeholders have a high level of influence on other groups and are only a little influenced by others. The upper right square contains stakeholders that can be called linking; these stakeholders are also particularly interesting as they are influenced by other groups, but in turn also influence others. In our example, linking stakeholders are the financial media, institutional investors, and insurance companies. The groups in the lower right quadrant, dependent stakeholders, are those influenced by other groups, but have little or no influence over other groups. In our example, these are the banks and private investors. Finally, in the lower left quadrant we find the autonomous stakeholders, referring to those who are not influenced by any other group and do not influence anyone themselves as they are relatively unconnected to the system. In our example, these would be financial activists. At this point,

we start to have a coherent overview of how the listed stakeholder groups influence each other. For instance, we know that credit rating agencies have the most influence over other publics, whereas financial activists are relatively marginal.

An additional step is to create a visualization of the influence dynamics based on the information obtained in the matrix in Figure 4. This step helps get an even better overview of how groups influence one another. In order not to make the picture overly complicated, it is advisable at this step to select from the matrix only medium (i.e., 2) and strong (i.e., 3) influences (depending on the number of listed groups, one could use all degrees of influence or only the strongest ones). Such diagrams are known with the name of influence diagrams (see Figure 5).

At this point, having concluded the analysis, we are able to gain an appreciation of the direction and strength of mutual influences in a given system of stakeholders. A further possibility is to analyze how a given set of stakeholders think that a series of issues influence one another. In this way it is possible to benefit from CIA by understanding how a set of issues influence one another and the degree to which stakeholders agree on such an aspect (see Figure 1). In order to take such a step, CIA can be integrated with social network analysis (e.g., Scott, 2012).

Applying CIA in Combination with Social Network Analysis to Analyze Issue–Stakeholder Relationships

The process to follow in order to understand how issues influence one another is equal to the one previously described to understand how stakeholders influence one another; the only difference is that the starting point is issues instead of stakeholders (see Figure 1). By interviewing different stakeholders and asking them how a given set of issues is likely to influence one another, it is possible to obtain the matrix of reciprocal influences (similar to the one in Figure 3, but for issues) and the scatter diagram to classify issues based on how much they influence or are dependent on other issues (see Figure 6).

At this point, it is possible to use the data collected through the different stakeholders to determine how a series of issues influence one another and analyze the results using social network analysis (SNA). SNA is particularly useful for understanding the degree to which stakeholders agree with one another on how issues influence one another; this allows for the creation of an additional segmentation of stakeholders, based on which they share the same view on how issues influence one another. For instance, Figure 7 represents a two-mode network²¹ graph with clusters of issues and stakeholders, taking into consideration only the degree to which issues are dependent on other issues (the same type of visualization can be obtained by looking at only the degree to which issues influence other issues). In Figure 7, issues 1, 2, 3, and 4 appear to be central because they are considered by most stakeholders to be influenced by other issues; meanwhile, issues 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 are peripheral ones because only a few respondents consider them to be influenced by other issues.²² In terms of stakeholders, four groups are identified, each group being formed by stakeholders connected to more issues with members of their group than with members outside the group.

Two-mode datasets (issues and stakeholders) allow for the assessment of the level of consensus among stakeholders regarding which issues influence and are influenced by other issues. This analysis enhances the understanding of stakeholders' role and actual influence by

²¹ Two-mode networks are networks in which there are two possible types of nodes—in our case, stakeholders and issues.

²² A tie between a stakeholder and an issue represents the fact that a stakeholder considers that issue to be influenced by other issues at a level above the average he or she has estimated for all the other influences.

going beyond the previous analysis (i.e., positioning of each stakeholder toward the issues). Correlations between the matrices of reciprocal influences (similar to the one in Figure 3 for stakeholders) among issues can be used.²³ Figure 8 illustrates a possible visual representation of these correlations. The ties between two stakeholders show that a significant correlation between their matrices of issues and the size of these ties representing the level of agreement (i.e., the size of the correlation) in terms of which issues influence and are influenced by other issues. In Figure 8, stakeholders 1 and 3 emerge as being central (i.e., having the most shared opinion concerning the role of the issues considered in the analysis).

These additional analyses enable us to map stakeholders in a more sophisticated way, thereby understanding the degree to which they can be considered opinion leaders in relation to the considered set of issues as well as determining which of these issues most stakeholders consider to be most central.

We now discuss some of the implications for stakeholder management regarding the use of CIA in terms of its main advantages and limitations.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, after reviewing the literature on stakeholders' segmentation and their reciprocal influences, we introduced CIA as a methodology that can be applied to the understanding of the degree to which stakeholders influence one another. In our main example, we used an illustrative case to demonstrate how different stakeholders influence one another. Yet it is also possible to use CIA to analyze how a set of issues influence one another; the procedure to adopt remains the same. In the latter case, it is possible to also integrate CIA with SNA in order to understand how stakeholders and issues are related (which issues stakeholders considered to be central) and the extent to which stakeholders agree on how issues influence one another.

The main advantage of using CIA is that it allows us to assess, in a structured way, both the direction and the strength of relationships while understanding long chains of connection (i.e., both direct and indirect linkages). Furthermore, it allows for the classification of publics based on their amount of dependence from and influence on others. Consequently—and most obviously—CIA allows for the designing of more focused programs that target or involve influential stakeholders. However, CIA can also provide less obvious insights. For instance, once results are analyzed, managers might realize that a certain stakeholder group has much more power to influence others than originally thought (Ackermann & Eden, 2011); such power might be of an indirect nature and might not be detected when using, for instance, Mitchell et al.'s (1997) identification and salience technique. Furthermore, by mapping both direct and indirect influences, managers will be able to better understand how stakeholders' indirect influence strategies might work (Frooman, 1999; Zietsma & Winn, 2008). By understanding such chains of connection, managers will also be able to understand possible ways to reach stakeholders to which the firm is not directly connected and, in this way, design more sophisticated programs. Given these reasons, CIA can be used to complement the benefits of existing segmentation techniques that consider stakeholder groups to be in a dyadic relationship with the organization.

The power of CIA—as discussed here—is also related to its relative simplicity. As we have seen, CIA can quickly become more complicated and can be used in combination with

²³ To this aim, quadratic assignment procedure (QAP) correlations can be used. The QAP is a nonparametric technique for statistical significance testing often used with social network data; here it is used to test whether the correlations between the values of issue dependence/influence indicated by stakeholders are significantly correlated.

more complex statistical methods, such as SNA. The advantage of using CIA in combination with SNA is that it is possible to map stakeholders in a more sophisticated way and, thus, understand the extent to which they can be considered opinion leaders in relation to a specific set of issues and which of these issues are considered by most stakeholders to be central. This enables us to design programs that not only target specific stakeholders, but also explain which issues to target in relation to specific stakeholders. Ideally, if resources allow it, one could use CIA following both paths represented in Figure 1 (i.e., stakeholders and issues).

One potential limitation of CIA is related to the fact that it relies on subjective judgments and, as a result, the quality of the results will be dependent on the degree of expertise of the people interviewed. Another limitation is that, if a high number of stakeholders are considered, the complexity of the results can escalate relatively quickly. Finally, CIA allows us to consider mediated relationships ($X \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$). Understanding moderated relationships using the method is possible, but more complex ($X \rightarrow Y$, if Z). Considering even more complex relationships such as moderated mediations or mediated moderations is beyond the scope of the method; however, these more complex relationships exist in the real world. Still, the idea is to gain an overview—even if simplified—of relationships of influence/dependence.

CIA can be used in combination with other methods of stakeholder segmentation, as previously mentioned. For instance, one could consider only specific stakeholder groups or publics already identified using methodologies such as Grunig's situational theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) or Mitchell et al.'s (1997) identification and salience framework. Similarly, Ackermann and Eden (2011) suggested mapping stakeholders' reciprocal influences once they were placed on a power-interest matrix. As mentioned by various authors (Ackermann & Eden, 2011; Bryson, 2004; Kim et al., 2008; Rawlins, 2006), the power of such segmentation techniques is likely to result mostly from their integration. We think that using CIA in combination with existing methods of stakeholder segmentation can help design more effective and more efficient communication programs and, more generally, better stakeholder management programs.

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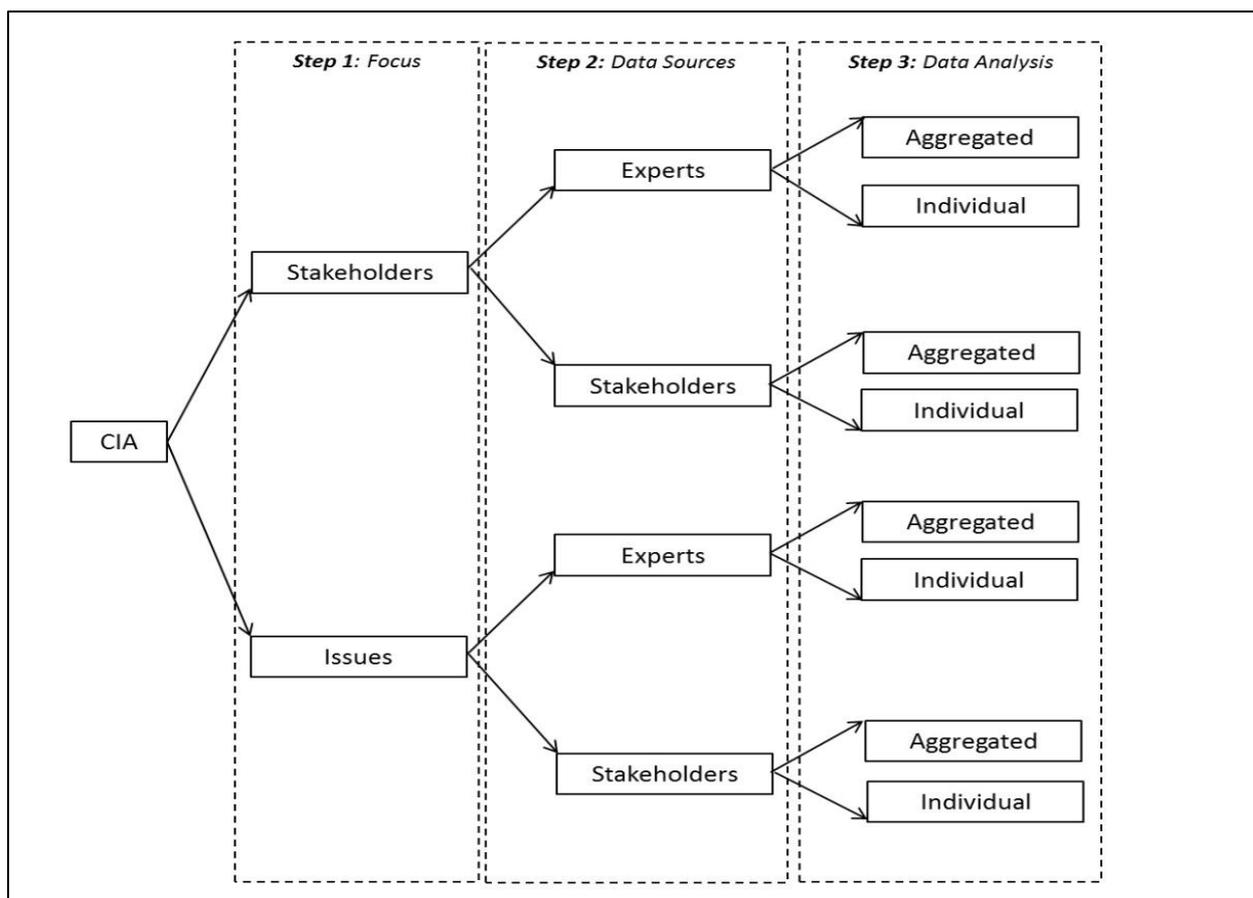


Figure 1. Flowchart of possible ways to use CIA.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Institutional investors	1	x							
Private investors	2		x						
Financial media	3			x					
Financial activists	4				x				
Banks	5					x			
Credit rating agencies	6						x		
Insurance companies	7							x	

Figure 2. Matrix to evaluate reciprocal influences.

Institutional investors	1	x	2	0	0	2	0	3	7
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Private investors	2	0	x	0	0	1	0	1	2
Financial media	3	3	1	x	0	3	0	2	9
Financial activists	4	1	0	0	x	0	0	0	1
Banks	5	0	1	2	0	x	1	0	4
Credit rating agencies	6	3	2	3	0	1	x	2	11
Insurance companies	7	2	0	1	0	3	1	x	7
		9	6	6	0	10	2	8	41

Figure 3. Completed matrix.

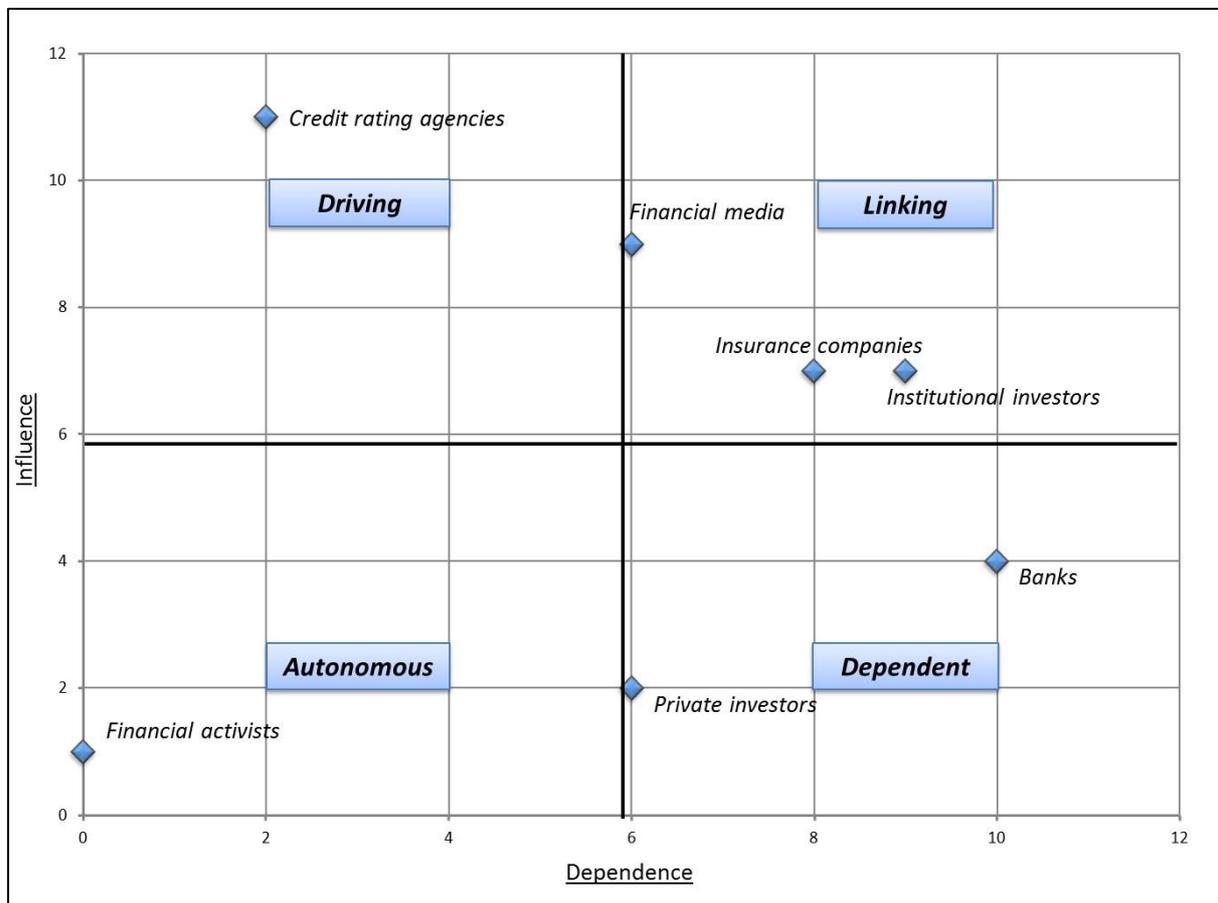


Figure 4. Influence-dependence chart for stakeholders.

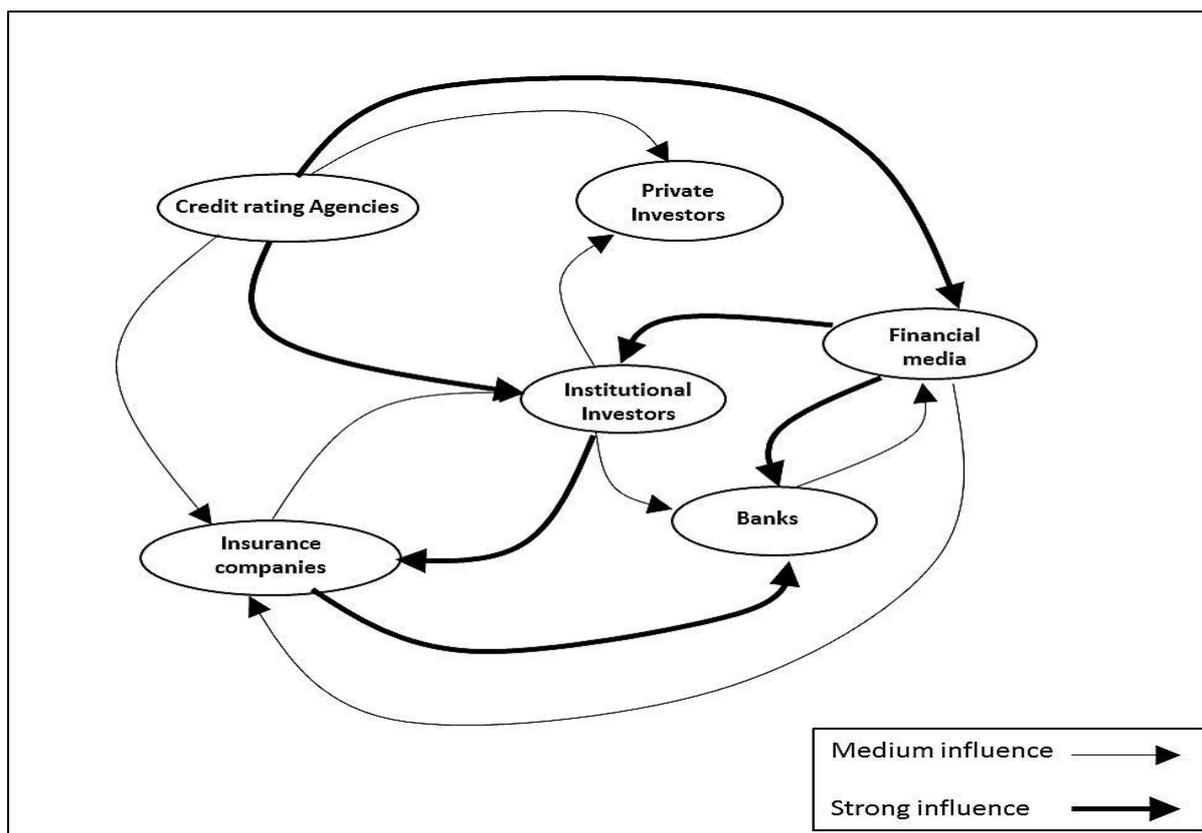


Figure 5. Influence diagram.

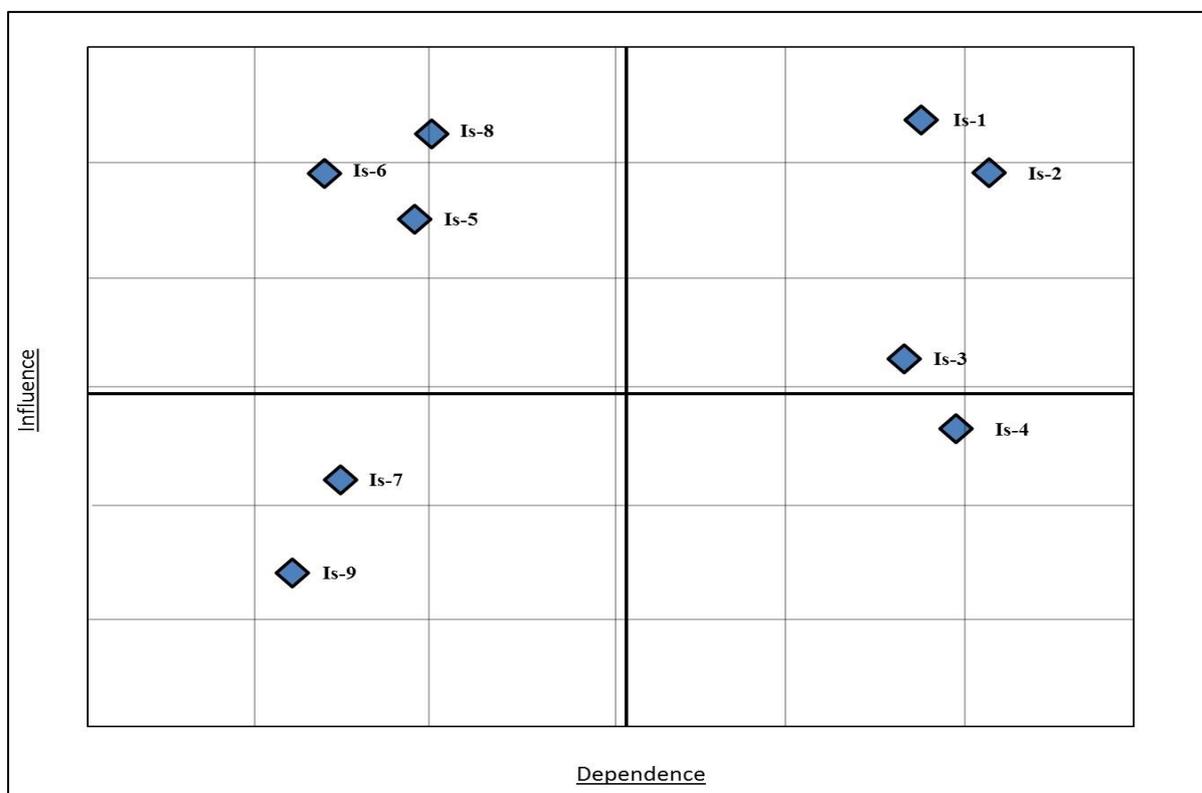


Figure 6. Influence-dependence chart for issues.

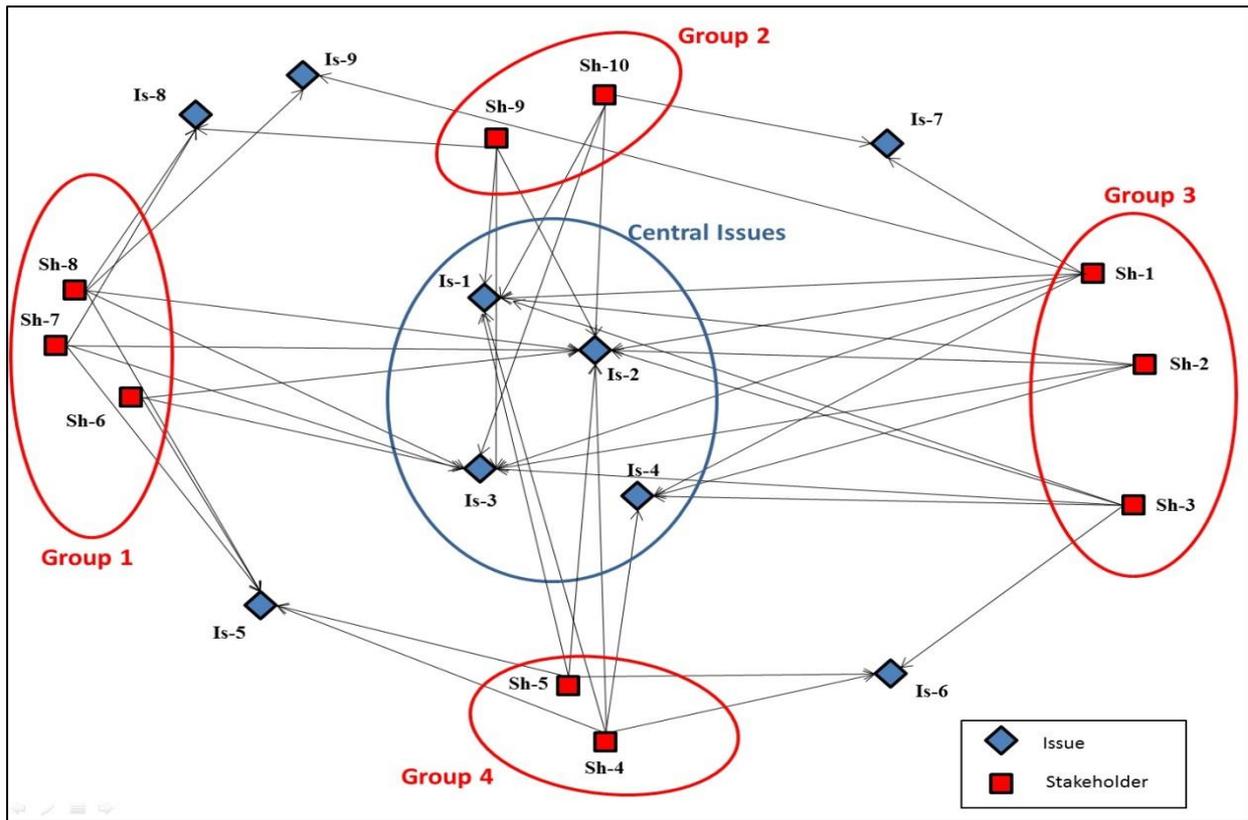


Figure 7. Two-mode network graph: Stakeholder–issues relationships.

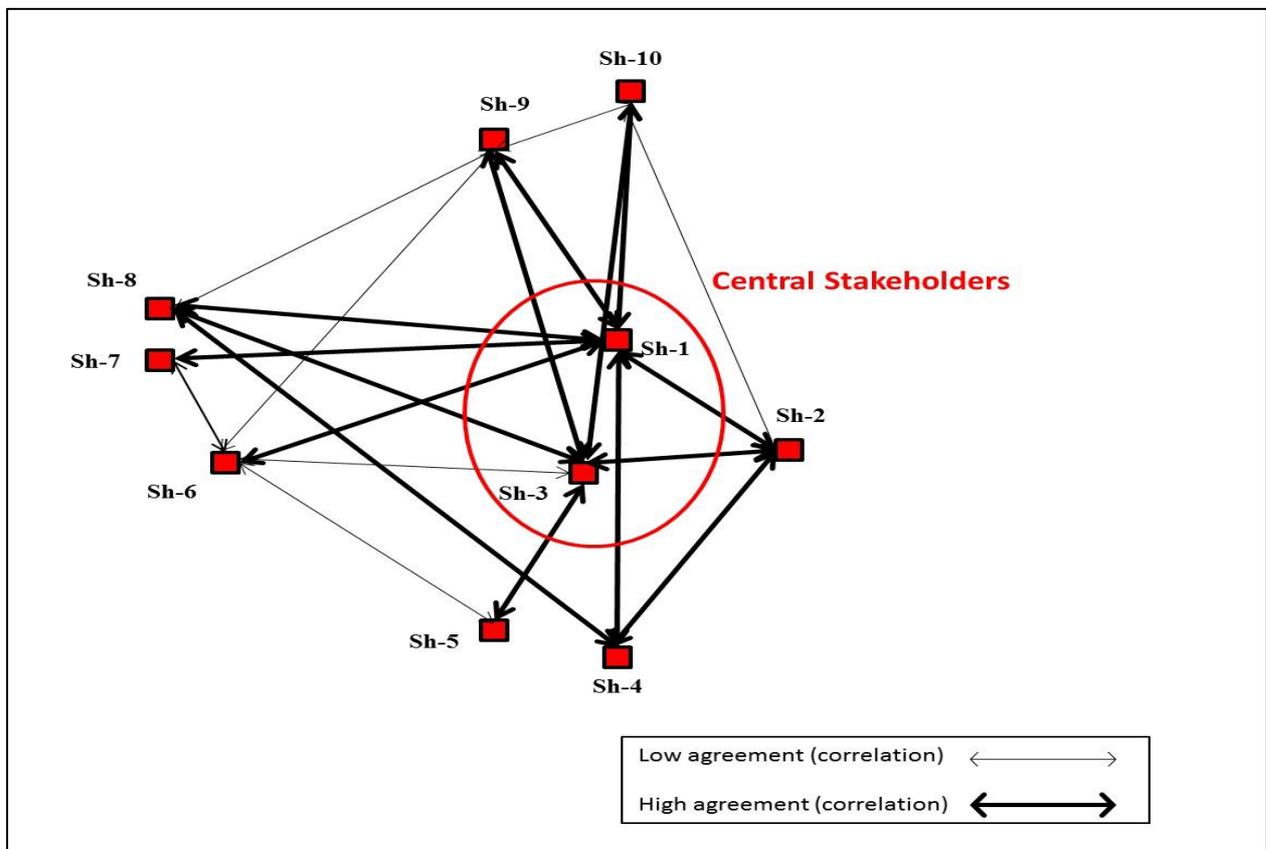


Figure 8. Visualization of central stakeholders.

Why Does Social Media Engagement Matter? Perceptual, Attitudinal, and Behavioral Outcomes of Organization–Public Engagement on Social Networking Sites

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Abstract

This study proposes and tests a conceptual model that not only measures public engagement with corporate pages on social networking sites, but also evaluates the influence of such engagement on important perceptual, relational, and behavioral outcomes. Study results provide empirical evidence of the positive effects of public engagement on perceived corporate authenticity, organizational transparency, organization–public relationships, and public advocacy. Findings underscore the importance of public engagement via social media on enhancing perceived corporate transparency and authenticity, and thereby cultivating strong relationships. Additionally, organization–public relationships emerged as a deciding factor driving the effects of public engagement on advocacy behaviors.

With the ubiquity and popularity of social media platforms, various organizations including government agencies, nonprofits, and businesses are striving to adopt social media as a strategic communication channel to engage digital-savvy publics (Rooksby & Sommerville, 2012; Waters et al., 2009). Trade publications have reported that publics now use social media more frequently than corporate websites when searching for information on a company, brand, or product (Dei Worldwide, 2008). Yet, scholars point out that the open and user-centric environment of social media also constitutes a critical challenge for communication management and control (Macnamara & Zerfass 2012). Unlike the traditional corporate “controlled” media, user-centered social media platforms allow individual users to become media gatekeepers and content-creators who collaboratively shape corporate image and reputation through “likes,” “posts,” and “shares” within their personal networks (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; Segerberg & Bennett, 2011). Social media have thus changed how organization-related content is created, distributed, and used, transferring the power to define corporate images from corporate communicators to stakeholders’ online networks (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit 2011).

Recognizing that social media has sparked a revolution within the communication industry, Edelman (2008) called for a paradigm shift from public relations to public *engagement* to emphasize the complex process of debate, discussion, and interaction between publics and organizations (Saks & Rotman, 2006). The engagement construct involves behavioral dimensions such as participation as well as psychological aspects like efficacy and dedication (Saks & Rotman, 2006). Specifically, in contrast to the one-way communication model associated with traditional media, social media communication is not only interactive but also participatory, collaborative, personal, and simultaneously communal, thus allowing organizations to engage publics in constant conversations, supportive behaviors, and meaningful relationships. In other words, social media serve as more than a communication channel; they constitute a powerful relationship building and public engagement tool.

There exist various types of social media, including blogs, cooperative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), content communities (e.g., YouTube), and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life). In particular, social networking sites (SNSs; e.g., Facebook) have been considered to be the main drivers of the new media landscape (Vogt & Knapman, 2008). Recent media surveys also report that online publics spent most time on SNSs, followed by checking email, watching videos, and using search engines (Fox, 2013). Clearly, SNSs have become the primary source of information in publics’ media-centered lifestyle (Fuscaldo, 2011). The dominance of SNSs makes it imperative to understand organization–public engagement in the SNS context and the resulting outcomes.

Earlier SNS studies examined the common communication strategies employed by corporate communicators via content analyses (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Men & Tsai, 2011; Smith, 2010; Waters et al., 2009). Based on dimensions of connectivity and shared content, different social media stakeholders were also identified (Sedereviciute & Valentini, 2011). Research has focused on identifying users’ motivations, including information, entertainment, and empowerment, to interact with organizations on SNSs (e.g., Men & Tsai, 2011; Muntinga et al., 2011; Tsai & Men, 2012a). Recent studies have adopted various theoretical frameworks to understand the underlying mechanisms that drive users’ response to various SNS communications. For instance, Lee, Kim, and Kim (2011) examined the roles of social identification and intrinsic motives of altruism in driving consumers’ engagement with consumer-initiated brand communities on SNSs. Focusing on electronic word-of-mouth communications, Chu and Choi (2011) identified social capital, tie strength, trust, and interpersonal influence as the key predictors of the publics’ behavior on SNSs. Antecedents contributing to organization–public engagement have also been analyzed (Men & Tsai, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013). However, existing research has yet to achieve a holistic understanding of

the process and, more importantly, the consequences of public engagement with organizations on SNSs. Despite hype and speculations in trade publications, there is little evidence regarding why and how user engagement on SNSs is crucial for organizations. Notably, Agozzino's (2012) study with millennial students reports that users' increased interactions with a company across multiple social media platforms do not necessarily translate into greater satisfaction with the company. Such an unexpected result demands further research to illuminate the connection between publics' social media engagement and their relationship with the organizations they interact with on social media. The current study, one of the earliest, not only measures organization–public engagement in the SNS context but also evaluates the key perceptual, relational, and behavioral outcomes of such engagement. Because Facebook is the leading SNS in the United States, with over 158 million active American users (Sherman, 2012), this study focuses on public engagement with corporate pages on Facebook.

Moreover, scholars suggest that an organization's perceived transparency and authenticity are crucial for cultivating quality relationships with its stakeholders and boosting public trust (Rawlins, 2009). In the Web 2.0 era, when any individual user can be a media gatekeeper and content-creator who actively monitors and publicizes corporate action, policy, and communications, there is unprecedented demand for corporate transparency (Shen & Kim, 2012; Molleda & Roberts, 2008). The Arthur W. Page Society (2007) coined the term “authentic enterprise” to emphasize the new public relations model. By the same token, perceived authenticity that addresses an organization's central, enduring, and distinctive character (Albert & Whetten, 1985) may be particularly important in relationship-oriented SNS communications. However, it remains unknown how publics' interactions with an organization may contribute to its perceived authenticity and transparency and in turn improve relationship quality and induce positive behavioral response in the social media context. This study thus aimed to advance social engagement research in public relations by linking perceived transparency and authenticity, two emerging trends that drive communications on social media (Shen & Kim, 2012), to public engagement behavior and relationship and advocacy outcomes. In short, the study purpose was to (a) examine how public engagement may improve the perceived transparency and authenticity of corporate communication; and (b) explore how public engagement and transparent and authentic communication on SNSs may lead to positive relational and behavioral outcomes of organization–public relationships (OPRs) and public advocacy.

Theoretical Framework

Public Engagement

With the growth of the relationship management field in public relations, engagement has been proposed as a new public relations paradigm (Edelman, 2008; Stoker & Tusinski, 2006). In particular, recent studies have recognized public engagement via social media as an important and influential factor in cultivating and reinforcing relationships (Sashi, 2012). As a result of the relationship-oriented nature of SNS communications, user engagement with strategically managed corporate SNS pages can naturally lead to the formation and maintenance of relationships with an organization. By joining in the conversations embedded in a company's SNS pages (e.g., commenting on the organization and its products or services, raising questions, expressing support, making suggestions, and sharing the corporate posts with one's online contacts), online stakeholders can directly engage the organization and each other on a more personal and social level. The proposed study adopts Men and Tsai's conceptualization of public engagement on social media as a behavioral construct with hierarchical activity levels, from passive message consumption to active two-way

conversation and participation and online recommendation (Men & Tsai, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013).

Bortree's (2011) study on OPRs in a nonprofit setting indicated that greater involvement or engagement with an organization leads to more satisfactory relationships. Also focusing on nonprofits, Smitko's (2012) qualitative textual analysis suggested that social media like Twitter are effective tools for engaging stakeholders to build and strengthen relationships. In their study on newspaper readership, Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder (2012) argued that reader engagement with the news organization is more important than satisfaction in predicting readership because engagement induces and enhances prosocial relationships between the newspaper and its readers. Through qualitative interviews, Bruce and Shelly (2010) also suggested stakeholder engagement contributes to constructive relationships. Yet, the connection between users' engagement with organizations on SNSs and the resulting relationship quality has not been empirically explored. To expand the theoretical understanding of SNS engagement, this study paid special attention to how users' reactive and proactive engagement behaviors on corporate SNS pages are connected to OPRs, and how the connection is influenced by the perceptual factors of corporate authenticity and transparency.

Perceived Authenticity and Transparency

In the midst of various emerging communication trends driven by social media, authenticity is considered to be the most important trend in the 21st century (Gilmore & Pine 2007). In "an era where people want authentic stories about authentic people" (Cook, 2007, p. 33), authenticity has been advocated as a novel communication model (Molleda & Roberts, 2008). Scholars have theorized about different types of authenticity in various settings. For instance, in the marketing and strategic communication literature, Molleda and Roberts (2008) discussed five types of brand authenticity, including natural, original, exceptional, referential, and influential, that are associated with economic offerings such as product, service, and experience. Based on an analysis of a wine company, Camilleri (2008) reported nine types of authenticity, including existential, exceptional, iconic, and symbolic, for strategic communication purposes.

An organization's perceived authenticity is particularly crucial to today's relationship-centric public relations paradigm and social media communications. From the perspective of corporate authenticity, Shen and Kim (2012) identified three components of perceived authentic organizational behavior—truthfulness, transparency, and consistency. Being truthful to an organization itself and its publics is at the core of organizational authenticity (Henderson & Brookhart, 1996; Shen & Kim, 2012). To construct an authentic identity, organizations should act genuine and not manipulate their publics, which suggests another key component of authenticity—consistency. In other words, an organization's conduct should be congruent with its values, beliefs, mission, principles, and rhetoric (Molleda, 2010; Shen & Kim, 2012). Authenticity thus requires ongoing efforts by an organization to recognize and evaluate its own motives, beliefs, feelings, and aspirations as well as those of its publics.

Similar to corporate authenticity, the related construct of perceived organizational transparency has drawn much academic and professional interest in recent years (DiStaso & Bortree, 2012). While authenticity and transparency are closely related in theoretical considerations and both involve trust as a defining element, authenticity is grounded in truthfulness and the essence of transparency is openness and visibility. Particularly relevant to the study focus of SNS engagement, the open and user-empowered model of social media communication has increased both users' expectations and organizations' opportunities to share information and knowledge, and in turn, reinforce organizational transparency.

Rawlins (2009) theorized that organizational transparency has three aspects—substantial information, participation, and accountability. The informational aspect requires organizations to “make available publicly all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner which is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal” (Heise, 1985, p. 209, cited in Rawlins, 2009). Yet, providing information alone does not constitute transparency. Instead, the ultimate goal of distributing and communicating information should be to enhance understanding. As Cotterrell (2000) astutely argued, “Transparency as a process involves not just availability of information but active participation in acquiring, distributing and creating knowledge” (p. 419). Consequently, it is imperative to understand what publics need to know through participation—stakeholder involvement in identifying the information is needed for decision-making. The third element of organizational transparency involves accountability, which centers on organizations being held accountable for their words, actions, and decisions, which are readily seen and judged by the netizens empowered by new media technologies. To generate theoretical insights on organizations’ social media character, this study applied corporate transparency along with organizational authenticity in the corporate SNS setting and examines its connections to public engagement and relational and behavioral outcomes among online stakeholders.

Organization–Public Relationships

Prior studies have identified OPRs as a major outcome of effective public relations (L. Grunig et al., 2002). The concept has been studied in a variety of contexts, including businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government sectors, as well as in cross-cultural, offline, and online communities (e.g., Brunig, Castle, & Schrepfer, 2003; Hung, 2006; Ni & Wang, 2011; Seltzer & Zhang, 2011). Broom, Casey, and Richey (2000) defined OPRs as “the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics” (p. 18). In particular, Hon and Grunig (1999) noted that a relationship begins when consequences created by an organization affect the publics or vice versa. Such an interdependent state serves as the foundation and requirement for forming meaningful OPRs. As an ongoing, dynamic, dialogic process, OPRs should be managed through continuous communication and evaluated as an important outcome that can be cultivated over time with reciprocal consequences for both parties in the relationship (i.e., organizations and publics).

Strategies for building and maintaining quality relationships with the publics have been evaluated by practitioners and theorists for several decades (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Components and measurements of OPRs have also been widely studied. For instance, L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, and Ehling (1992) identified six OPR dimensions, including reciprocity, trust, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction, and mutual understanding. Hon and J. E. Grunig (1999) later developed a widely adopted measurement scale of relationship quality based on six dimensions of trust, commitment, satisfaction, control mutuality, communal relationship, and exchange relationship. To be specific, Hon and J. E. Grunig (1999) defined trust as “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (p. 19). Commitment refers to the extent to which the public feels their relationship with an organization is worth maintaining. Satisfaction addresses the degree to which one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are fulfilled and strengthened. Control mutuality indicates “the degree to which parties agree on who has rightful power to influence one another” (Hon and J. E. Grunig, 1999, p. 19). A communal relationship refers to a mutually beneficial relationship in which both parties are concerned with the welfare of the other. Finally, an exchange relationship addresses reciprocating a benefit received from the other party. However, the crucial connection between public engagement and OPRs has not been sufficiently analyzed in the social media context, despite the importance of social media for relationship management. Additionally, research linking

perceived authenticity and transparency with relationship quality remains sparse in general (e.g., Shen and Kim, 2012) and has not specifically explored the relationship-centered social media platforms. This study was thus intended to fill the research void by examining the quality of OPRs arising from perceived corporate transparency and authenticity as well as public engagement with organizations on SNSs.

Public Advocacy

In order to enrich the theoretical understanding of public engagement outcomes, this study went a step beyond OPRs and explored the important behavioral outcome of public advocacy. Recognizing the growth of consumer power in the era of “consumer advocacy” (Urban, 2005, p. 155), marketing researchers have proposed a new business model that emphasizes a partnership relationship with customers that will transform them into advocates for the company. In the public relations field, public advocacy has also been recognized as one of the most important outcomes of public engagement and strong OPRs (Walz & Celuch, 2010). Advocacy is characterized by publics’ active promotion of an organization through such behaviors as positive word-of-mouth and defense against critics (Walz & Celuch, 2010). As an ultimate test of the bond between an organization and its public, advocacy significantly extends the effectiveness and efficacy of the organization’s communication efforts (Reicheld, 2003; Walz & Celuch, 2010). In particular, the communal and collaborative environment of social media naturally and readily contributes to publics’ awareness that their advocacy or criticism behavior can have a rapid and broad impact, and thereby increases the likelihood that they will engage in advocacy activities (Pinar Özdemir, 2012).

Given the potential effectiveness of social media in inducing public advocacy, recent studies have analyzed advocacy campaigns on social media (e.g., Pinar Özdemir, 2012). The effects of communication quality, company trust, and source credibility on public advocacy in various settings such as organization and marketplace have also been assessed (Krapfel, 1985; Walz & Celuch, 2010). Urban (2005) argued that a company must provide open, honest, and complete information to encourage consumer advocacy, suggesting the importance of perceived corporate authenticity and transparency. However, the connection between these important constructs has not been empirically examined. Therefore, public advocacy was examined as a crucial outcome of transparent and authentic communication, public engagement, and OPRs. Following Walz and Celuch’s approach (2010), this study defined public advocacy as a behavioral construct—*the voluntary promotion or defense of a company, its products, or its brands by a member of the organizational publics*. Based on the literature, the following hypotheses were examined and a conceptual model linking public engagement on corporate SNS pages with perceived transparency and authenticity, OPRs, and public advocacy was empirically tested (see Figure 1).

H1: Public engagement with organizations on corporate SNS pages positively influences the perceived transparency (H1a) and authenticity (H1b) of the company.

H2: Public engagement with organizations on corporate SNS pages positively influences the quality of OPRs.

H3: Perceived transparency (H3a) and authenticity (H3b) positively influences the quality of OPRs.

H4: Public engagement with organizations on corporate SNS pages positively influences public advocacy.

H5: Perceived transparency (H5a) and authenticity (H5b) positively influence public advocacy.

H6: The quality of OPRs positively influences public advocacy behavior.

Method

To test the proposed model, a Web-based survey was conducted. The study population comprised active American SNS users who have liked or followed at least one company's Facebook page. According to the Pew Research Center (2011), SNSs are most popular with young adults under the age of 30 years. Specifically, research suggests that people between the ages of 18 and 24 years are the most active social media users (Akar & Topçu, 2011). For a generation of individuals growing up with digital media, use of SNSs has been an integral part of their social lives. Additionally, with their attractive demographic background of being young and well-educated and their early adopter attitudes (Tufte, 2003), college students represent an important group of online targeting for corporate communications campaigns. Therefore, college students were included as the first stratum of the sample. Further, recognizing that SNSs are increasingly used among young professionals and other demographic groups, we also solicited nonstudent participants via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to provide a more complete picture of publics' social engagement. Prior research suggests that this online panel provides more demographically diverse samples than standard Internet samples. In addition, MTurk subjects are considered more representative of the U.S. population than convenience samples often used in social science research (Buhmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012).

A total of 250 respondents were recruited in September 2013. The sample included 170 college students from two private universities in the southern and southeastern United States who volunteered to participate in the survey study for extra credit. An additional 80 nonstudent adult users were recruited from MTurk²⁴. The average age of the respondents surveyed was 24 years. Among the respondents, 69% were women and 31% were men. Anglo Americans comprised 71.9% of the sample, followed by Latino/Hispanic (12.9%), Asian (8.0%), African Americans (10.4%), and Black (4.4%). In terms of SNS usage, over 96% of the respondents had used Facebook for more than 3 years, and approximately 68% spent more than 1 hour per day on Facebook. Prior to the main survey, a pretest was conducted in May 2013 with 100 students to ensure the reliability and validity of the measures.

Measures

All measurements used in this study were adopted from prior studies and adapted to fit the SNS context. Specifically, six items measuring users' levels and types of engagement (i.e., consuming and contributing) with corporate SNS pages were adapted from Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit's (2011) typology and Tsai and Men's (2012) social media study ($\alpha = .87$). Specifically, the respondents were asked how often they participate in the various activities on the company's Facebook page, such as "reading company posts, user comments, or product reviews," "engaging in conversations by commenting or asking and answering questions," and "uploading product-related pictures, videos, or audio."²⁵ Four items from Rawlins' study (2009) were used to measure the perceived transparency of the company ($\alpha =$

²⁴ A series of t-test were conducted to examine the difference between student and nonstudent respondent in terms of SNSs usage, engagement level, and their evaluations of the dependent variables in the proposed model. Results showed that students (average aged 19) are more likely to consume messages on companies' SNSs pages and advocate for the company offline as compared to those non-student respondents (average aged 33). No significant difference was found in terms of SNSs usage, contributing engagement activities, perceived authenticity, transparency, or the quality of organization-public relationships.

²⁵ Before answering these questions, respondents were directed to their Facebook profile and locate the company that had the most recent post under "Page Feeds."

0.73), including statements such as “The company wants to understand how its decisions affect people like me.” The measure of perceived authenticity was adapted from Shen and Kim’s study (2012), which included six items ($\alpha = .91$) such as “I believe that this company’s behavior matches its core values.” To measure the perceived quality of OPRs, Hon and J. Grunig’s (1999) scale with 20 items was adopted ($\alpha = .92$) to measure relational trust ($\alpha = .74$; “I feel very confident about this company’s skills”), control mutuality ($\alpha = .92$; “The management of this company gives me enough say in the decision-making process”), commitment ($\alpha = .81$; “I can see that this company wants to maintain a relationship with me”), and satisfaction ($\alpha = .89$; “I am happy with this company.”). Finally, the measure of public advocacy was adapted from Walz and Celuch (2010), whose study included four items ($\alpha = .91$; “I say positive things about this company to people I know”). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

The hypotheses were tested with structural equation modeling (SEM)²⁶. A two-step latent variable modeling approach was used. 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) indices, which are a minimal set of fit indexes that should be reported and interpreted when reporting the results of SEM analyses (Kline, 2005)^{27, 28}.

Results

Preliminary Data Analysis

The results of the descriptive analysis (Table 1) showed that the surveyed SNS users had a medium level of corporate SNS engagement. The respondents engaged more in message-consuming activities ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.47$, $n = 250$) than contributing activities ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 2.03$, $n = 250$). On average, respondents perceived a high level of transparency ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.03$, $n = 250$) and authenticity ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.01$, $n = 250$) of the companies whose Facebook pages they followed. In terms of specific relationship variables, respondents reported medium to high level of trust ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.06$, $n = 250$), control mutuality ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.38$, $n = 250$), commitment ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.34$, $n = 250$), and satisfaction ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.04$, $n = 250$). Moreover, respondents reported a high level of advocacy ($M = 5.44$, $SD = 1.36$, $n = 250$), indicating that they are likely to speak favorably or defend the companies they followed on Facebook. Correlations between the observed variables in the study ranged from .17 to .66.

²⁶ According to Kline (2005), SEM is a technique that can be applied to both non-experimental and experimental data to verify a priori models comprised of latent variables or a mix of latent and observable variables. Thus, in the present study, structural SEM was used as the primary statistical method to test the hypothesized model.

²⁷ According to Hu and Bentler (1999), a cutoff value close to 0.95 for CFI and Tucker-Lewis index (TLI); a cutoff value close to 0.08 for standardized root mean square residual (SRMR); and a cutoff value close to 0.06 for RMSEA indicate good fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data. Additionally, according to Hu and Bentler’s (1999) joint cutoff criteria, an SEM model with CFI, TLI ≥ 0.95 and SRMR < 0.10 or RMSEA ≤ 0.06 and SRMR ≤ 0.10 suggests that the fit between the data and the proposed model is reasonable.

²⁸ According to Kline (2005), a single-fit index reflects only a particular aspect of model fit and a favorable value of that index does not by itself indicate good fit. There is no single “magic index” that provides a gold standard for all models. The chi-square is the most commonly reported measure of model-data fit. However, it is strongly dependent on the sample size.

Analysis of Structural Equation Modeling

The analysis of the proposed model involved a two-stage process: (a) an assessment of the construct validity of the measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis, and (b) an assessment of the structural model. Public engagement and OPRs in the structural model were considered latent variables, and perceived transparency, authenticity, and public advocacy were treated as observed variables. The maximum likelihood method was employed for model estimation. The test of the initial measurement model indicated inadequate fit to the data, thus it was modified accordingly. Byrne (2010, p. 111) argues that “forcing large error terms to be uncorrelated is rarely appropriate with real data.” Allowing error covariance within the same construct can also explain content redundancy. Following this line of thinking and based on model modification indices, five error covariances were added²⁹. The modified model demonstrated satisfactory fit with the data: $\chi^2(15) = 43.18, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 2.88, RMSEA = .08$ (90% confidence interval: .05–.10), SRMR = .04, TLI = .94, and CFI = .97. Thus, it was retained as the final CFA model. The standardized factor loadings between latent variables and their indicators ranged from .63 (consuming→engagement) to .93 (contributing→engagement), indicating that the proposed model demonstrated good validity.

The multivariate normality assumption of SEM was evaluated in AMOS before the hypothesized model was estimated. Results indicated that the sample data showed a significant positive multivariate kurtosis. Therefore, bootstrapping ($N = 2,000$ samples) using the maximum likelihood method was performed to address the multivariate nonnormality of the data. The bootstrap parameter estimations did not deviate from those based on normal theory, indicating that the significant results in Figure 2 remained significant in the bootstrapping³⁰ process. The hypothesized structural model displayed in Figure 2 demonstrated satisfactory fit to the data: $\chi^2(15) = 43.18, p < .001, \chi^2/df = 2.88, RMSEA = .08$ (90% confidence interval: .05–.10), SRMR = .04, TLI = .94, and CFI = .97. Seven structural paths demonstrated significant results.

Hypothesis Testing

H1 predicted positive effects of public engagement with corporate SNS pages on perceived organizational transparency and authenticity. As depicted in Figure 2, results supported H1 and showed that public engagement has large positive effects on organizational transparency ($\beta = .26, p < .001$) and authenticity ($\beta = .32, p < .001$). These results suggest that respondents who are more engaged with organizations on the corporate SNS pages tend to perceive the organizations as being more transparent and authentic³¹. Those who were more engaged also tended to perceive a better relationship with the organizations they

²⁹ The error covariance between trust and control mutuality was .39. The error covariance between control mutuality and commitment was .36. The error covariance between trust and commitment was .21. The error covariance between engagement-contributing and control mutuality was .20. The error covariance between contributing and trust was .18.

³⁰ According to Byrne (2010), bootstrapping is a procedure in which one takes repeated, smaller random samples of an existing sample to develop empirical estimates of standard errors of any parameter. Bootstrapping is a common procedure used to address multivariate non-normality issues.

³¹ According to Keith (2006), a standardized coefficient (\hat{a}) of less than 0.05 suggests a negligible effect; a standardized coefficient of 0.05–0.10 suggests a small but meaningful effect; a standardized coefficient of 0.10–0.25 suggests a moderate effect; and a standardized coefficient of above 0.25 suggests a large effect.

followed on SNSs ($\beta = .37, p < .001$), thus supporting H2. In addition, H3, which proposed positive effects of perceived organizational transparency and authenticity on the quality of OPRs, was confirmed; organizational transparency demonstrated a medium-sized positive effect on OPRs ($\beta = .19, p < .001$) and authenticity demonstrated a large positive effect ($\beta = .50, p < .001$). To be specific, when the company's social media presence is perceived as transparent and authentic, the publics tend to develop stronger trust in the organization, agree on the mutual influence, and be more committed to and satisfied with the organization.

Hypotheses 4 to 6 center on the positive effects of public engagement (H4), perceived organizational transparency (H5a) and authenticity (H5b), and the quality of OPRs (H6) on public advocacy behavior. Results provided support for H4 and H6, but failed to support H5a and H5b. Specifically, public engagement demonstrated a small positive effect on public advocacy ($\beta = .13, p < .05$), meaning that the more the publics consume messages and interact with a company on its Facebook page, the more likely they are to publicly advocate and defend the organization. The quality of organization–employee relationships demonstrated a large positive effect on public advocacy ($\beta = .73, p < .05$). The results thus indicate that when the publics are trusting of, committed to, and satisfied with a company and are empowered in the relationship, they are more likely to become an advocate who speaks favorably of the company, supports it, and defends it against criticism.

Moreover, a test of indirect effects using a bootstrap procedure ($N = 2,000$ samples) revealed that the indirect effect in paths from public engagement to advocacy behavior through perceived organizational transparency, authenticity, and OPRs was significant, $\beta = .39, p = .001$ (95% CI: .29–.52). Likewise, the indirect effect in paths from public engagement to OPRs through perceived organizational transparency and authenticity was significant, $\beta = .21, p = 0.001$ (95% CI: .11–.32). OPRs also significantly mediated the positive effects of organizational transparency, $\beta = .13, p = .001$ (95% CI: .04–.36), and authenticity, $\beta = .38, p = .02$ (95% CI: .32–.86), on public advocacy behavior.

Discussion and Conclusion

With the interactive, collaborative, communal, relational, and social characteristics (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; Tsai & Men, 2012), SNSs have fundamentally changed how organizations and brands engage with today's digital-savvy publics. Regardless of their knowledge of the value or effects of social media engagement, increasingly more organizations are including SNS channels in their corporate communication plans. Meanwhile, academic research has explored the sundry factors that drive social media engagement (e.g., Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; Men & Tsai, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013) and the strategies that effectively utilize these new media tools. However, little empirical evidence exists regarding why social media are key to an organization's success and why public engagement via social media matters (Gummerus et al., 2012). The purpose of this study was to systematically assess the influences of public engagement with corporate SNSs on publics' perceptual, attitudinal, and behavioral consequences to provide an integrated model on public engagement outcomes. Specially, the model focused on the positive effects of social media engagement on publics' evaluation of organizational transparency, authenticity, relational outcomes (i.e., trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction), and public advocacy behavior.

Effects of Public Engagement on Perceived Organizational Authenticity and Transparency

Transparency and authenticity are invaluable attributes of organizational reputation and character (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004). While the importance of social media engagement in boosting organizational transparency and authenticity among strategic stakeholders has been recognized (Pronschinske, Groza, & Walker, 2012; Bryer, 2013), few

empirical investigations have explored the linkage. The current study addressed the research void by demonstrating the positive effects of public engagement with corporate SNSs pages on perceived organizational transparency and authenticity. Results showed that respondents who were more deeply engaged with the company's Facebook page tended to perceive the corporation as a more transparent entity. Indeed, corporate SNS pages provide companies an easily accessible tool to disseminate detailed and up-to-date information in a timely manner. The viral nature of social networking allows messages to rapidly reach a wider range of publics and audiences. Most importantly, constructed with two-way interactive features, corporate SNS pages allow companies to listen closely to their fans and incorporate their voice in deciding what information is truly needed by the publics. Disseminating detailed, complete, timely, and substantial information on a needed basis could gradually contribute to greater organizational transparency. Therefore, the more the publics engage in message consumption activities (e.g., reading posts, watching videos, viewing pictures) and two-way conversations with an organization, the more likely they tend to view it as transparent.

By the same token, public engagement with corporate SNSs pages was found to positively influence public evaluation of organizational authenticity. Constructing an authentic corporate character requires an organization to truthfully and genuinely present themselves (Shen & Kim, 2012). Corporate SNSs allow companies to be embedded in the publics' personal networks and communicate in a personal, intimate, genuine, and friendly manner (Men & Tsai, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013). Organizations can be imbued with a unique character and a genuine personality, and in turn be perceived as a corporate person. In the corporate SNS community, fans and followers can experience parasocial interactions and develop intimate interpersonal relationships with an organization's SNS page representative, which further enhances organization–public engagement (Men & Tsai, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013). As a consequence, when publics are highly engaged with a company on the corporate SNS pages, they tend to perceive the organization as a personal friend (Men & Tsai, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013) and as an authentic corporate character.

Effects of Public Engagement on OPRs

Recent public relations and marketing studies have recognized the growing importance of public engagement via social media as an influential factor in cultivating and reinforcing public relationships (Bruce & Shelly, 2010; Bortree, 2011; Sashi, 2012). Findings of this study provide empirical evidence for this notion. Results showed that respondents who were more deeply engaged with corporate SNS pages tended to be more trusting of, more satisfied with, and more committed to the organization. In addition, these users also felt more empowered in the relationship. When respondents were engaged, they paid more attention and were more receptive to the messages distributed on the company's SNS pages. Furthermore, by participating in the conversations embedded in corporate SNS pages (e.g., responding to the organizations' posts, expressing support, making suggestions and criticisms, sharing corporate messages with one's social connections), online stakeholders could directly engage the company and fellow corporate community members on a more personal level—a mechanism that would gradually reinforce their relationships with the organizations. Through engagement with an organization's SNS pages, users become an integral part of the company's SNS community, fostering a sense of involvement and identification with the organization, which again contributes to the formation of lasting and committed relationships (Pronschinske, Groza, & Walker, 2012). Therefore, as noted by Gummerus et al. (2012), even though users who participate in corporate SNS communities are believed to already have a baseline relationship with the organization, such a relationship can be enhanced via engagement with corporate SNS communities.

Furthermore, the study results show that perceived organizational transparency and

authenticity significantly and largely contribute to the relationships between an organization and its online publics. Engaged respondents who perceived a company as being more transparent and authentic also perceived a better quality relationship with the organization and reported higher trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction levels. Interestingly, perceived authenticity demonstrated a larger impact on the quality of OPRs than perceived transparency. Although corporate transparency realized in accessible, detailed, complete, substantial, and timely information (Rawlins, 2009) via corporate SNSs pages contributes to perceived relationship quality, an authentic corporate identity with genuine, consistent, and personable communication plays an even more crucial role in relationship formation and maintenance. The particular importance of perceived authenticity in cultivating meaningful relationships directly points to the power of social media for relationship management beyond information dissemination functions. This study thus supports Shen and Kim's (2012) conclusion that "organizations must supplement their communication endeavors with authentic behavior to sustain long-term quality relationships with their publics" (p. 384), particularly in the social media environment. The way social media revolutionize public relations is not through technologies, but through the manner in which authentic organizations can act as authentic people to instill spirit and emotions in the communication messages to generate public resonance, understanding, and identification.

Effects of Public Engagement on Public Advocacy Behavior

This study further demonstrated the value of public social media engagement in encouraging publics' advocacy behavior that goes beyond conventional word-of-mouth. Results showed that the more the publics are engaged with corporate SNS pages, the more likely they are to become advocates of a company who support, protect, and defend the organization, and to recommend it and its product or services within their personal networks. More importantly, public engagement with corporate SNS pages was found to nurture a positive OPR through fostering transparency and authenticity. Such long-term, positive relationships could stimulate supportive public behavior while preventing destructive behavior (L. Grunig et al., 2002). Kim and Rhee (2011) report that employees with good relationships with an organization engage in microboundary-spanning activities (i.e., self-propelled information seeking, selecting, forwarding, and sharing) to support the organization. Shen and Kim (2012) found that publics in a positive relationship with an organization are more likely to engage in positive messaging and less likely to participate in negative messaging. In a similar vein, the current study found that publics who trust an organization, are satisfied with and committed to it, and agree on mutual influence are likely to become valuable corporate advocates.

Contrary to our hypothesis, neither perceived authenticity nor perceived transparency exerted a direct influence on public advocacy due to the strong mediation effect of OPRs. However, the indirect effect of public engagement on public advocacy through perceived transparency, authenticity, and OPRs was indeed significant. In other words, OPRs emerged as a deciding factor in the conceptual model that drives the effects of public SNS engagement. This finding suggests that the effects of consumer engagement are not necessarily straightforward and readily observable. Further research exploring the underlying process connecting public engagement and behavioral outcomes such as advocacy is thus called for.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The study findings provide important guidelines and implications for public relations scholars and professionals. Theoretically, this study advances the growing literature on public engagement by defining engagement from a behavioral perspective in the social media

context. Second, by establishing the linkage between online engagement activities, perceptual factors of organizational transparency and authenticity, relationship outcome, and advocacy behavior, the conceptual model presented in this study highlights the importance of social media engagement and illuminates the underlying mechanisms of how public engagement could affect various key public relations outcomes. As a pioneering investigation focusing on the effects of organization–public engagements on SNSs, this study provides much-needed evidence that confirms the value of social media engagement that was merely speculated about and assumed in the professional literature. Third, the current study enriches the understanding of public engagement by addressing the growing concerns of corporate authenticity and transparency, two overused yet under-researched constructs in the professional literature, and documents their impacts on public relational and behavioral outcomes. Finally, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on relationship management, particularly via social media platforms. It establishes connections between corporate SNS engagement and OPRs and empirically validates the impact of OPRs on public advocacy.

In terms of strategic implications, the study findings underscore the effectiveness of corporate SNS communications to foster corporate transparency and authenticity and thereby, develop lasting and quality relationships with online stakeholders. Embedded in online publics' personal social networks, corporate SNSs pages should be utilized to communicate with publics with informative, genuine, truthful, and personable messages to influence public attitudes and behavior. The results attest to the value of social media engagement in nurturing positive public attitudes and behaviors toward organizations, providing evidence on why social media communications are worth organizations' investment. The conceptual model of public engagement on SNSs also provides guidelines for public relations professionals and social media strategists to measure the effectiveness of social media engagement efforts, which goes beyond evaluating descriptive and superficial outputs (e.g., number of followers, likes, posts/comments). For best practices, companies need to create up-to-date content tailored to meet and gratify publics' needs, constantly manage their social media presence, and engage publics in conversations, communities, and activities. Recent studies have provided multiple solutions in driving public engagement on social media (e.g., Gummerus et al., 2012; Men & Tsai, 2013; Tsai & Men, 2013). For instance, providing information of economic rewards (e.g., coupons, sweepstakes, prizes) and entertainment benefits (e.g., videos, pictures, jokes, stories, comic strips, gaming) could help attract fans and boost user engagement (Gummerus et al., 2012; Tsai & Men, 2013). With regard to communication strategies, corporate SNS representatives could act like a caring friend and communicate in a genuine and authentic manner to improve parasocial interactions (i.e., intimate interpersonal relationships) with the publics. Similarly, strategies like "peer linking" that promote member-to-member interactions and community identification could induce proactive engagement (i.e., Men & Tsai, 2013). In sum, social media have become an indispensable public relations tool to cultivate relationships with online stakeholders. To address the hype, guesswork, confusion, and frustrations arising from the social media revolution, more empirical research explicating the underlying process of organization–public engagement on social media is critically needed.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This pioneering study has several limitations that should be noted and addressed in future research. Although the sample covered both college students and working professionals from multiple age groups to improve the representativeness, the generalizability of the findings might be limited due to the nonprobability of the sampling approach. This study focused only on one leading social network site, Facebook, in the American context.

Given that the features, purposes, and community dynamics of many SNSs around the globe vary (Men and Tsai, 2011; Tsai and Men, 2012), future studies should explore other major SNS sites such as Twitter and LinkedIn, as well as popular SNSs in different cultural contexts, to gain a broader understanding of the effects of public engagement with companies on SNSs. Additionally, the current study focused on examining the perceptual, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes of public engagement with corporate SNS pages. Future endeavors should connect social media engagement efforts to business objectives to understand its business value on ROI. Other important outcomes of public engagement, such as public empowerment (L. Grunig et al., 2012), should be considered in future studies to establish a holistic model of public social media engagement.

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Table 1

Descriptive of Level of Public Engagement with Corporate SNS Pages, Perceived Corporate Transparency and Authenticity, Relational Outcomes, and Public Advocacy (Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlations)

	Alpha	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Consuming	.76	4.15	1.47	1.00								
2. Contributing	.87	3.17	2.03	.59**	1.00							
3. Transparency	.73	5.20	1.03	.23**	.23**	1.00						
4. Authenticity	.91	5.38	1.01	.30**	.17**	.56**	1.00					
5. Trust	.74	4.73	1.06	.42**	.37**	.45**	.63**	1.00				
6. Control mutuality	.92	4.17	1.38	.29**	.37**	.34**	.40**	.64**	1.00			
7. Commitment	.81	4.61	1.34	.30**	.23**	.40**	.41**	.60**	.58**	1.00		
8. Satisfaction	.89	5.65	1.04	.45**	.32**	.46**	.60**	.64**	.49**	.60**	1.00	
9. Advocacy	.91	5.44	1.36	.48**	.29**	.39**	.48**	.54**	.32**	.46**	.66**	1.00

** Correlation is significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

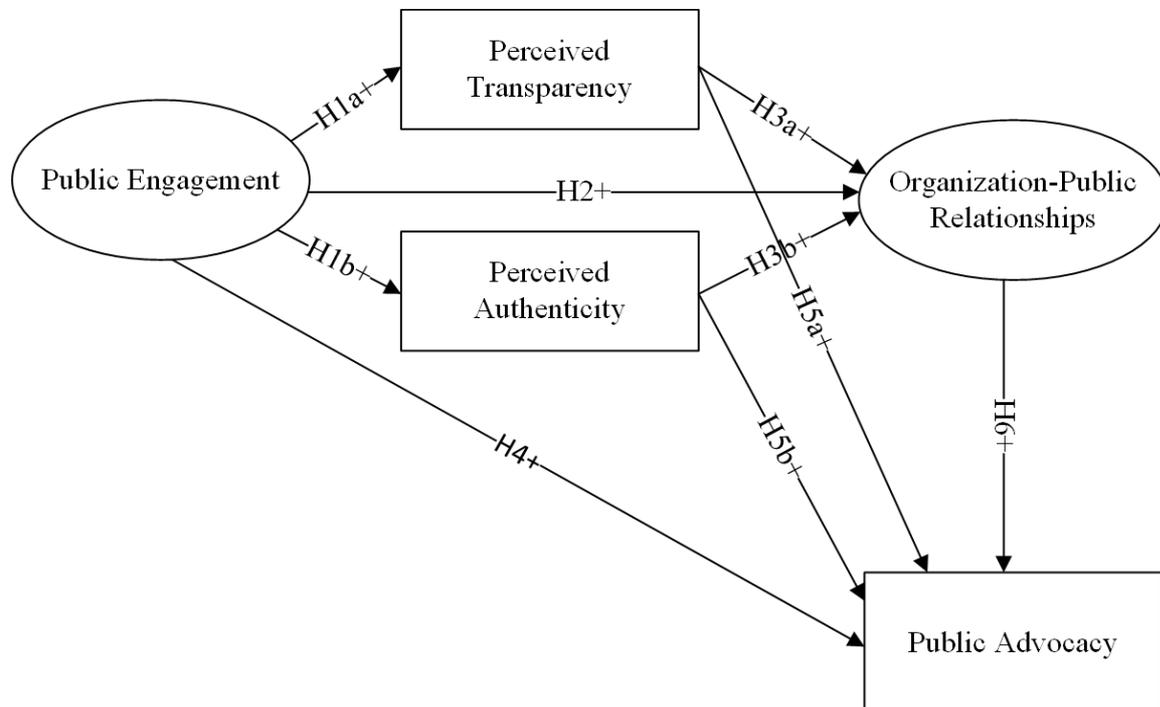


Figure 1. Conceptual model of outcomes of public engagement with companies on social media.

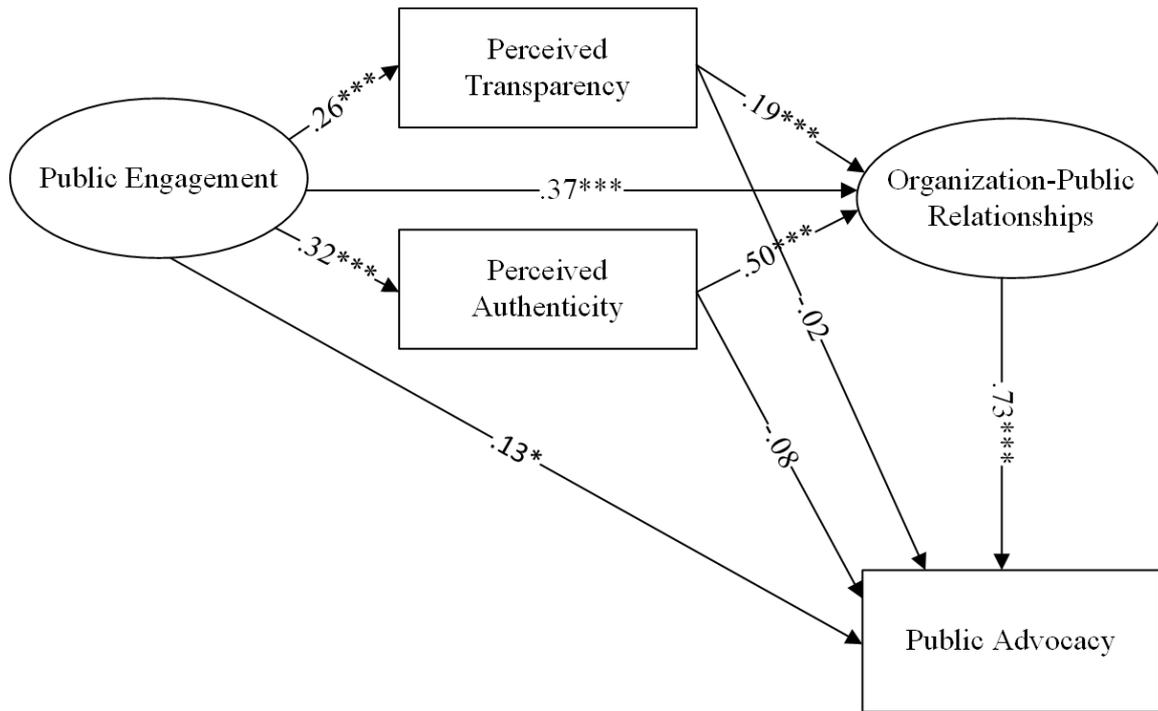


Figure 2. Results of SEM analysis. For the sake of brevity, only the path model is demonstrated. The CFA model pattern coefficients, error terms of indicators, and disturbances of endogenous variables were omitted from the figure. Coefficients are standardized regression weights. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Banning Lifestyle Propaganda: Public Relations, Crisis Communication and Activism in the Wake of the Russian Homosexual Propaganda Ban

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Abstract

Public relations has emerged in Russia as a growing field of influence. Many practitioners are actively involved in publicity, special events, media relations and social media in their practice. Activism, which has been cited as an important facet of excellence in the practice of public relations, however, is not widespread in Russia. Thus, public relations practitioners are not experts in initiating or responding to activism.

A recent bill in Russia that proposed a ban on targeting and spreading information about homosexuality to underage publics passed unanimously in the Russia Duma. Response to the bill included widespread international outrage with calls to boycott the 2014 Olympics in Sochi and travel to Russia in general. International outcry focused on perceived discrimination and the banning of homosexuality, as did some limited internal dissent in Russia. However, in many cases the objective of the bill was not effectively conveyed in media coverage. The Russian Duma and other government responses to this activism were ineffective and defensive at best. What has resulted has been activism opposing the Russian Duma's decision, and a situation that calls for effective management of a crisis and communication with publics opposed to the ban.

This paper examines the crisis communications tactics surrounding the national and international public reactions to the bill, through the lens of Excellence Theory and research on activism best practices, focusing on the cultural, political and social values and trends that influence strategic communication in Russia. As someone who has lived and worked in Russia for five years, and has researched many aspects of Russian culture, business and communication, the first author is able to frame the issue from a Russian-centric perspective. Surveying practitioners in Russia on this topic in addition to content and rhetorical analysis of media coverage, blogs, and social media dialogue provides insight into the growing activist culture in Russia.

Introduction

Russian Federation Duma Member, Elena Mizulina, who also heads the Russian Federation Duma Committee on Family, Women and Children, recently introduced a controversial federal law to ban spreading information or propaganda about homosexuality to children in Russia which would “(1) create non-traditional sexual attitudes among children, (2) make non-traditional sexual relations seem attractive, (3) give *“a distorted perception about the social equality between traditional and non-traditional sexual relations,”* or (4) enforce information about non-traditional sexual relations that evokes interest in such relations” (Kiryukhina, 2013, p.1). The law was passed, with 436 deputies voting for the resolution and one abstaining (Osharov & Mozgovaya, 2013).

Deputy Mizulina has a Ph.D. in law and was a law professor at Yaroslavl State University. Mizulina is currently a member of the Spravedlivo or Fair Russia party, which is a party combined from the former Motherland, Pensioners, Social Fairness, and Life parties. Its platform is based on justice, freedom and solidarity. Fair Russia seeks to build a safe and just society, a strong Russia that is socially oriented and embraces spirituality and social democracy (Spravedlivo, 2013). Mizulina represents the Kirovsky District of Yaroslavl. She is the Chair of the Duma Committee on Family, Women and Children and historically has presented numerous legislative bills protecting women, children and families in Russia.

While Mizulina has been widely criticized for her bill and the nearly 100 percent support in the Duma which passed the bill almost unanimously, her objectives were to build the population and strengthen families in Russia, something many Russians believe is sorely needed to maintain the Russian nation and culture. Not widely discussed in the international media is the fact that similar laws had been passed in several oblasts (states) in Russia, perhaps indicating that the Russian people support the law. This paper does not advocate for or against the law, but addresses the public relations aspect of activism and crisis communication surrounding the reactions to the law, through the understanding of the Russian framing and perspective of the law.

Analysis of the Issue

As noted previously the bill, RFL N-436-FZ is designed to ban spreading information on homosexuality to children in Russia that would potentially create for them an acceptance of non-traditional sexual relations (Kiryukhina, 2013). The punishment for infractions against the law includes administrative fines of 4,000 to 5,000 rubles to Russian citizens, 40,000 to 50,000 rubles for officials, 800,000 to 1 million rubles to legal entities and suspension of activities for up to 90 days. Infractions include the transmission of propaganda through the media, information and telecommunication networks and the Internet. Foreign nationals found guilty of violating the law may be fined 4,000 to 5,000 rubles and deported (Rossiskaya Gazeta, 2013).

The regions of Ryazan, Arkhangelisk, Kostroma, Novosibirsk, St. Petersburg, Kirov-Chepetsk, Moscow and Vladivostok all enacted similar bans on homosexual propaganda before the Federal law was passed (Fugenfirova, 2012; VTsIOM, 2012). An April 2012 poll by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) found that 86% of the respondents (N=1,600) aged 18 and older, polled from 46 different sites across Russia, supported the proposed ban on homosexual propaganda and 6% opposed the ban (VTsIOM, 2012). Additionally, 47% of the respondents perceived that the media was the most important factor in the transmission of homosexual propaganda, with 35% believing that belonging to certain social, life-style circles was influential and 33% indicating that education was influential.

While dissent historically has been in Russia, activism has not (Nikitin, 2010; Tsetsura, 2003). However, since the end of the Soviet Union activism has slowly emerged as

a tool for the public to communicate their support for or opposition to actions by government, organizations, business and industry in Russia. In 2012, Russian anti-corruption blogger, Alexei Navalny was accused of embezzlement, theorized by some as a government response to his growing popularity in speaking out on political, environmental and nationalist issues (Antonova, 2012). Navalny hosts several websites (fbk.info, rospil.info, rosyama.ru, roszkh.ru, rosvybory.org, mashina.org and sochi.fbk.info) where Russians can voice complaints, report corruption and where Navalny reports on corruption across Russia. Additionally the Russian Orthodox Church has come under scrutiny and the target of consumer groups and activists, most notably by the Russia punk-rock group Pussy Riot, for what they consider an evasion of taxes, claiming the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow is not a church but a business center (Russian Life, 2012).

The legislation banning homosexual propaganda in Russia has mobilized activists across Russia in response to this narrative. Narratives during the Soviet period were strictly constructed and controlled by the government. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the absence of these narratives allowed for the mushrooming of activism. Propaganda was no longer solely in the control of the government.

Propaganda

Historically, propaganda may be defined as planned, systematic, information tactics and techniques designed to persuade, influence or change opinions, ideas or behavior (Bernays, 1928; Jowett & O'Donnell, 2006; Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001). However, both the term and practice of propaganda were marred by negative manipulation, most notably by the Nazi party in Germany before and during World War II and the Communists in the Soviet Union, China, Korea and Vietnam.

There are numerous techniques and tactics of propaganda. For example, government-controlled media messages can be consistently included in news, reports, commentaries, commercials, and through visual messaging that may use manipulated or selected images. The narratives reminding audiences to get immunizations, promoting literacy, or emergency preparedness produced by the Ad Council are examples of propaganda based public service messages to promote awareness or change behavior.

Films and television series can be embedded with storylines or ideologies to repeat certain messages or ideologies to influence opinion and behavior, most notably content that has been designed for entertainment education programming with the assistance of the CDC (Center for Disease Control) or WHO (World Health Organization). In the United States these programs were similar to the "The More You Know" series on NBC and labeled as public service announcements. In Central and South America the series *Simplemente Maria* was an extremely effective example of entertainment education programming targeting women with narratives of health initiatives, self-reliance, domestic violence awareness and other issues. Most recently, the Norman Lear Center at USC was awarded a \$500,000 grant to help television writers develop scripts with messages supporting and explaining the Affordable Care Act (Hollywood Health & Society, 2013).

Public relations professional standards have emerged over time in the West, and public relations practitioners often avoid what might be considered the most obvious and offensive forms of propaganda. However, certain interest groups, organizations, professional firms, and practitioners still may use these techniques today to promote specific agendas and philosophies. Groups supporting global warming or climate change, the homosexual agenda, class warfare, and particular political campaigns are many times framed in a certain way through integrated, widespread, highly mediated campaigns, which may be considered propaganda. For example, the controversial documentary "Gasland" was promoted by environmental organizations as factually portraying the dangers of hydraulic fracturing

(Soraghan, 2011). “Spin” or twisting information, facts and persuasive messages toward a particular interest or point of view has become such a common practice that it is a permanent fixture in popular vocabulary, regardless of nation, culture or communication system (Andrews, 2006; Greenberg, Knight & Westersund, 2011; Moloney, 2000).

Scholars interested in propaganda have identified many techniques or appeals that have been used historically and today. These include, but are not limited to, ad hominem, ad nauseam, appeal to authority, appeal to fear, bandwagon, beautiful people, the lie, cognitive dissonance, cult of personality, demonizing the enemy, dictate, disinformation, euphoria, fear, flag-waving, glittering generalities, labeling, managing the news, milieu control, name-calling, obfuscation, repetition, scapegoating, slogans, stereo-typing, and transfer (Clews, 1964; Uudelepp, 2008; Yourman, 1939). Taithe and Thornton (1999) propose that propaganda exists around a point of truth and represents a perspective of that truth. Propaganda is put into play to make an audience believe and accept a certain truth. Taithe and Thornton (1999) suggest that “truth comes with specific aspects that make it acceptable, such as nostalgia or sentimentalism, a sense of community or belonging but with a slightly varied message to appeal to all members in a community” (p. 3).

Propaganda efforts in the past have often been rooted in a mass communication theory that suggests that human communication is somehow a collective consciousness that is facilitated through social interaction (Casmir, 1994). The concept emphasizes that as society progresses; state authority and bureaucracy manipulate social interaction and, therefore, communication.

Soviet Ideology

Perhaps Mizulina and the Russian Duma understand more thoroughly the power of propaganda in shaping opinions and beliefs based on their experience in Soviet Russia. The power and influence of planned propaganda maintained the existence of Soviet ideology for decades:

The morality that serves the interests of the ruling class becomes the morality that is preached, taught and backed up by the power of the state and by religion. Morality became in the hands of the rulers, a device for social control and stability, for protecting their interests and the status quo. (DeGeorge, 1969, p. 19)

The party leadership determined the single morality, which was disseminated to society.

Soviet morality was one in which individual and social interests merged and focused on the good or development of society as seen through the Soviet perspective. DeGeorge (1969) asserts that it was an “objectivist ethical position, claiming that the moral norms for each society were the objective norms necessary for its social development” (p. 27). Converging with the objectivist position, Soviet ethical theory was also “utilitarian, judging the rightness or wrongness of an act based on its consequences” (p. 28).

DeGeorge (1969) also contends there were three steps to establish Soviet ethical theory: (1) a technique describing man’s actual condition, (2) an ideal view of what man should be in terms of which man’s actual condition at any given time in history can be measured, and (3) a justification of this ideal view as the moral end of mankind (p. 29). These steps were used by the Supreme Soviet to develop moral theories. However, the Soviet leadership felt imposing morals on the people would be counterproductive. The Soviets determined that “the obligations of morality come not from the state but from society as a whole. They are backed up not by the force of the state but by public opinion and individual conscience” (DeGeorge, 1969, p. 107). Using public opinion and propaganda to shape and control morality instead of force would influence society to adopt the new norms being presented, Soviet leaders reasoned. The Soviets understood that “the aim was to educate the Soviet people by every available means in the norms of communist morality and law so that

they would all eventually and as a matter of course act in accordance with these norms” (DeGeorge, 1969, p. 108).

For the masses to adopt the moral principles required that “the scheme of moral education consist of first teaching moral principles, explaining the source of duty, and emphasizing the necessity of doing one’s duty. This takes place on the level of conscious instruction” (DeGeorge, 1969, p. 112). The Soviets disseminated their moral education in schools, factories, the family, social organizations and collectives, the press, television, cinema, in the arts and literature. It was an organized, comprehensive effort.

Morals and ethics essentially were tools of social control in Soviet life. By demeaning and refuting other theories considered bourgeois and revisionist, the Soviets elevated their own communist-building theories. DeGeorge (1969) states that these social control theories were to “increase productivity, by making work for the good of society a moral obligation, and for fostering public support for internal and external government policies which were justified as moral as well as politically necessary or expedient” (p. 6). There was no room for consumer or political choice in this case. There also was no need to build relationships through public relations or researching and responding to varied public opinion because all members of society were to have the same opinion. Self-governing societies with open media systems, Grunig and Grunig (2001) argue, offer conditions for shaping opinions through two-way symmetrical communication and understanding, which is the basis for effective public relations.

The Soviets determined that communism would have to be tolerable, popularly accepted, and offer stability. Stability could only be achieved if citizens lived according to the Soviet moral code. DeGeorge (1969) states, “Adopting a moral code could replace coercion and law to maintain order in society. Construction and disseminating the moral code was the task of sociologists, social psychologists and pedagogues” (p. 7). In this system the influence and importance of the media and education systems in disseminating information for social change were vital.

Without the tactical expediency of the media outlets and education systems, the moral code would never have been adopted by the people. Disseminating information and persuasive messages through public opinion leaders has long been used as a public relations strategy in many parts of the world. The Soviets incorporated this public relations strategy, among others, in disseminating their ethical and moral codes for the nation, albeit in a propagandist format. For analysis of public relations practice in the former Soviet Union since the fall of communism, we turn to excellence theory.

Grunig’s Excellence Theory

Grunig’s excellence theory appears to be a particularly useful framework for evaluating the profession and practices of public relations in present-day Russia, and for investigating the extent to which, and how, this has been a departure from Soviet-era organizational communication perspectives and practices. Grunig and Grunig (2002) posit that a participative, organic, corporate culture fosters the most symmetrical, two-way type of communication. Authoritarian culture limits freedom of expression and counters the ability for change agents to communicate the organization’s goals effectively.

Grunig’s excellence theory (Grunig, Grunig & Vercic, 1989; Grunig & Grunig, 2000; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002) evaluates practices and standards from a practitioner’s perspective. Excellence theory zeroes in on the overall value of public relations for any organization. It moves beyond fundamental, effective two-way symmetrical communication to establishing and framing social responsibility and quality relationships for an organization and its stakeholder publics.

Operating from excellence theory, an organization can maximize its value by strategically planning, implementing, and evaluating its public relations efforts (Grunig, Grunig & Vercic, 1989; Grunig & Grunig, 2000; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). That value is measured through quality, long-term relationships with publics, reduced litigation costs, reduced negative publicity, reduced risk in decision-making, and increased revenue or, in the case of a non-commercial enterprise, increased goodwill. Grunig and associates advocate the concept of a duality and balance between the organization and the public that is being addressed as part of the public relations strategy as a tool of measurement. In-depth discussion of the measuring technique will be addressed below.

To establish the premise of excellence within an organization, the public relations practitioner must be in a top-level executive position to participate in strategic planning and implementation (Grunig, Grunig & Vercic, 1989; Grunig & Grunig, 2000; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). In addition, the practitioner should have direct access to key decision makers in an organization. Previous practice has been to combine public relations with marketing or advertising. With excellence theory, doing so limits public relations to addressing the publics associated with marketing or advertising strategies, traditionally focusing narrowly on a consumer base. When the limits of public relations are removed, all stakeholders inside and outside an organization are included in strategic planning and communication goals. Excellence theory also modifies the approaches and tactics for implementing communication goals.

In applying excellence theory, public relations should be a part of the planning and decision-making (a management function) and help the organization to realize its strategic plan. The core of excellence theory (Heath & Coombs 2006) is to build long-term positive and mutually beneficial relationships with strategic publics. There are eight variables in excellence theory: (1) value of communication, (2) contribute to strategic organizational functions, (3) perform the management role, (4) use the two-way symmetrical model of public relations, (5) potential to practice the ideal model, (6) activism as positive energy, (7) organizational culture and structure, and (8) diversity as strength (Grunig & Grunig, 2000; Heath & Coombs, 2006). The first five variables relate to how much a CEO values public relations and communication in the organization and how it contributes to strategic planning, not simply with public relations, but with the organization as a whole. Grunig and Grunig (2000) determined that the senior public relations practitioner in an organization must be a decision-maker at the executive level, and that the organization must use two-way symmetrical communication to be effective in its mission. The final three are responsive or action variables.

In their conclusions drawn from the IABC Excellence Project, J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1997) claimed that “Activist pressure stimulates organizations to develop excellent public relations departments” (p. 25). Activism, in this sense, creates a situation for an organization to manage public relations, as a responsive or action variable, when there is protest against the organization through activism. L. Grunig (1992) argued that an “activist group is a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action... Its members are committed and organized... to reach their goals – which could be political, economic or social” (p. 504). Often activists are viewed as problems for organizations (see L. Grunig, 1992). Smith (1997) argued that activists are often treated as threats to other organizations because they may disrupt an organization’s routine, influence the development of issues that may be threatening to an organization, use tactics that may appear threatening, and are perceived as being made up of members whose commitment to a “cause” is threatening. When an activist public emerges, an organization must have a crisis communication plan in place and be ready to initiate it.

Public Relations, Activism and Crisis Communication

According to scholars of Russian culture and communication, the concept of activism in Russia is relatively foreign or has been thwarted (Custodio, 2011; Nikitin, 2010; Tsetsura, 2003). Activism, as an expression of public discourse and displeasure in nations that have democracy and freedom of speech as core values, was not allowed during the Soviet period in Russia. Therefore, it is not a significant characteristic of Russian public relations. As the Soviet Union ended, public relations observers and scholars determined that certain criteria were needed for public relations to develop and expand. Ferguson (1998) suggested that public relations and activism would develop gradually when Russia was a free and democratic nation. Activism is only just starting to increase and have influence 20 years after the end of the Soviet Union. Recent news reports of activism in Russia emerging against certain political and social issues suggest that it may become a greater part of the public relations practice in the future.

Activism, while growing in use in Russia in political and some environmental venues, does not have widespread support nationally (Nikitin 2010; Tsetsura, 2003). However, with the advent of the Internet and the ability to reach millions globally, dissent and activism are now emerging through the Internet in Russia as a tool to share information, opinion, and beliefs as well as to generate activists in Russia. Blogs, especially those on servers outside of Russia, are popular with political, environmental, social, anti-war and other social issues-based individuals and groups. According to Asmolov (2009), “A blog is not a waste of time. It is a place for thinking and analysis. We share our opinion and develop our strategy online...the blogosphere is much more useful for deep analysis and thinking” (p.1). Asmolov (2009) suggests the Russian blogosphere is a wider communication sphere, populated with high quality contributors such as governors, oligarchs, journalists and opinion leaders. There have been few instances of success in using social networking sites and blogs to motivate civic action. Asmolov believes more social and political activists would use weblogs and social networking sites to influence activism if there were suitable Russian-based web platforms.

Discussion

Russian Rhetoric for and against the Bill

Support for and against the law in Russia has emerged through many channels. Opinion leaders such as athletes, actors, musicians, artists, politicians, religious leaders and media pundits have posted their views in the mass media. Internet coverage of the issue has allowed Russians to respond to the issue through blogs, comment boards on news articles, and social media.

High-profile Russian athletes Ilya Kovalchuk and Yelena Isinbayeva came out publicly in support of the bill, while celebrities such as Ksenia Sobchak spoke against the law. Opera star and Duma Deputy Maria Maksakova is against the law because it has had a negative financial impact on Russian artists performing in Europe. Maksakova would prefer banning all propaganda surrounding the topic of sex, not just homosexual sex, to children (RT, 2013).

Aside from opinion leaders such as Russian athletes and celebrities, the topic has been debated among scholars, political leaders, therapists, religious leaders, media pundits, business leaders and others. A roundtable discussion on the bill in Novosibirsk in February 2012, hosted by Komsomolskaya Pravda (Fugenfirova, 2012), presented a petition against the bill and vigorous debate among the participants. Participants suggested the “bill went too far and needed amendments,” and that “morality must be clearly promoted to be determined as propaganda” (p. 1).

A pro and con debate presented on the website Diletant (2012) between Communist Party Duma Deputy Nina Ostanina and radio producer Mikhail Kozyrev offered other perspectives. Deputy Ostanina suggested that the morality of public figures influences society and if that morality does not conform to norms of society it could be negative. Ostanina stated the moral code of the builders of communism provided a set of norms that no longer exist and that Russia is on the brink of adopting a set of morals, either looking to the West or relying on Russian Orthodox morals, a Christian morality. Ostanina posits that children are influenced by public figures and their positions as gay public figures present a type of propaganda because of their power as public figures. Ostanina's position can be supported by numerous studies on celebrity influence on children as well as on adults (Boon & Lomore, 2001; Brown, Basil & Bocarnea, 2003; Fraser & Brown, 2002). The concept behind celebrity influence is that the audience may develop an affinity to celebrities or public figures and determine that they "know" them personally and have a relationship with them.

Kozyrev (2012) argued that positions of public figures could lead them or the media organizations they represent to be sanctioned. He notes that Russian law enforcement does not focus on "how the law was adopted, but how it is interpreted" (p. 1). Kozyrev does not believe one's sexuality is determined by propaganda but feels that "everyone should behave under the general rules adopted by society." Kozyrev's argument brings many challenges as to the determination of what is or is not lifestyle propaganda. Russia has experienced a vacuum in standards for a moral or social code since the end of the Soviet Union and the inculcation of Communist/Soviet morals and standards (Kimmo, 1997; Kliucharev & Muckle, 2005). This vacuum allows for varied moral standards and propaganda to become influential in Russia.

Members of the Russian Orthodox Church have also weighed in on the law. Vsevolod Chaplin, Head of the Synod of Government Relations for the Russian Orthodox Church stated, "We have every right to preserve the purity of society and protect our children from all kinds of sinful manifestations. And that homosexuality – it is not a normal phenomenon deeply, according to the Church and the majority of society" (Lenta.ru, 2012).

Human rights activists oppose the law. Lev Ponomaryev, Chairman of the All Russian Movement For Human Rights believes the law denies their rights and will increase the rate of intolerance to homosexuals in Russia and (Osharov & Mozgovaya, 2013).

The Kremlin's response to media inquiries was embedded into transcripts of several press conferences held by President Putin. At an April 2013 press conference with President Putin and the Dutch Prime Minister, Mr. Putin stated the following in regards to human rights and the homosexual propaganda legislation:

There is no infringement of the rights of sexual minorities. These people are just like everyone else and enjoy full rights and freedoms. I, as President of the Russian Federation, believe that they do not have any other President, as citizens of Russia, and it is my duty to protect their interests and their rights... The law that has been adopted in Russia prohibits the promotion of homosexuality, it is above all banning promotion of homosexuality in schools... This is an attitude of the society, not the government... Gay marriage does not produce children. We are faced with the problem of demographics. (The Kremlin, 2013, p. 3)

At a second press conference in June 2013, President Putin made similar statements:

The legislation is not about the introduction of any sanctions for homosexuality... We are talking about how to protect children from the relevant information... The rights of sexual minorities are not infringed up on in any way. They are full-fledged members of our society. (The Kremlin, 2013, p. 3)

Putin is consistent in his discourse on the legislation. He reminds the audience that there is no law against homosexuality; homosexuals have the same rights as any other Russian citizen, and the law is in place to protect children. He allows for discussion and questions, but maintains the same position on the topic.

International Response to the Bill

Perhaps the most prevalent foreign opposition and activism in response to the bill is the call to boycott the 2014 Sochi Olympics. Social media have been used to promote the boycott; for example, Facebook hosts a page with more than 59,000 supporters (Facebook, 2013). Change.org has a petition requesting Canada to boycott the Sochi Olympics. In August 2013, British actor Stephen Fry met with British Prime Minister David Cameron and asked Britain to boycott the 2014 Sochi Olympics (RIA Novosti, 2013). The U.S. is sending former Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano and tennis champion Billie Jean King to lead the U.S. Olympic delegation—not boycotting the games and not sending a head of state, but “leading by example” (Waldron, 2013).

U.S.-based Human Rights Campaign started a “Love Conquers Hate” (written in Russian) T-shirt campaign opposing the bill. Numerous celebrities are seen wearing the t-shirt and advocate repeal of the law. The organization will also be monitoring NBC’s coverage of the legislation during the Olympic broadcasts (Human Rights Campaign, 2014). The International Olympic Committee, however, has determined that the legislation does not violate any IOC rules regarding anti-discrimination (ESPN, 2013). While there are other international responses for and against the bill, there is limited space for this study to analyze all of them. The activism is evident; how public relations practitioners determine how to address the activism is important to understanding the effectiveness of the activism.

Public Relations / Crisis Communication Response

A small sample of public relations practitioners working in Russia responded to an online survey of this issue. Some professionals responded that “The law is so absurd, no strategy can be addressed” or that “The situation is an internal matter for each country, and not a public or international debate.” Others provided lengthy strategies to address the activism surrounding the legislation. One practitioner, a non-Russian who has lived and worked in Russia for several years, responded:

Externally, you should allude to the fact that Russia has a certain moral code. This code is very similar to that adhered to in the so-called Bible belt in the US and in other conservative regions of the world. The idea that the entire world is in favor of homosexualization of society is simply a misrepresentation of the facts. Internally, you should take quiet action against the so-called NGOs (which are often a cover for covert war by US and other foundations against Russia).

Another practitioner, self-identified as Russian, noted that, “Russia is a country that lives in an environment of other states, but acts in the interests of their people. That this may be one of the main arguments in favor of banning propaganda of homosexuality. I am sure that the overwhelming majority of Russians support the law.” This respondent also stated, “If a person wants to express their sexuality, let him do so quietly.”

When asked if practitioners should defer criticism of Russia by presenting other countries with similar or more severe legislation, one respondent suggested that it would be best to “ignore the issue.” Another determined that “the country should be unified, support the position of the legislation and clarify the position of the government.”

Two respondents provided thorough crisis communication plans. One respondent strategized that surveying the population and presenting the results to the media in addition to

rates of suicide, homicide and other negative population causes, combined with emphasizing the importance of family values and the safety of children and morals as the basis of the legislation, would be the best approach to interact with the media and activists. Another respondent suggested emphasizing Russia's sovereignty and maintaining the laws of the country as the Duma and people establish them. The respondent also determined that foreign agitation and interference impede constructive foreign relations between nations. This respondent also felt the Olympics are about sports and not politics, and that practitioners should advise clients not to be drawn into the subject.

Limitations and Future Directions

The ban on homosexual propaganda in Russian is quite controversial inside the country and globally. Previous studies on public relations in Russia have noted that many practitioners deal mostly with press relations, publicity, internal relations and employee relations (Golitsinski, 2000; Ragozina & Marshall, 2009; Tsetsura, 2003). Public relations practitioners in Russia were contacted to identify and understand their perceptions of the issue and the approaches they would advise involved parties to take in addressing the activism surrounding it, with few responding to the survey. Additionally, little was discussed on professional forums targeted to public relations practitioners. The Russian Association of Consultants of Public Relations (AKOS) had only slight mention of the ban. The Russian Association of Public Relations (RASO) had one online conference interview with content related to the ban.

On a national scale a public relations response to activism surrounding this issue would come from the Russian government and the Russian Olympic Committee, in relationship to the Olympic boycott movement. There was no mention of the ban on the official Olympic committee website or on the 2014 Sochi Winter Games website. The Kremlin website posted four documents related to the ban, which were transcripts of interviews with President Putin and the media. No press releases or official statements addressing the ban were presented on either website. While rhetoric for both sides of the ban was prevalent in Russia and globally, few official statements or responses to positioning or defending the legislation and clearly outlining its implementation and enforcement were available, although President Putin was consistent in his responses during each press conference.

Activism surrounding the legislation seemed to be increasing in the run-up to the 2014 Olympics. Future research could address the activism and public relations responses that may or may not occur during and after the Olympics. It's quite possible a large international audience descending on Russia may perceive other issues as more relevant or activist-worthy.

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Corporate Social Responsibility: Perceptions and Practices among SMES in Colombia

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Abstract

This study sought to understand the perceptions and practices of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) among a sample of Colombian SMEs. The data were collected using a self-administered online questionnaire (54 SMEs), and from interviews with five opinion leaders and two representatives of SMEs permitted to assess the activities, motivations, stakeholders, decision-making processes, communication processes, resource allocation, evaluation, and the benefits of CSR among Colombian SMEs. Colombian SMEs practice informal internal and external CSR characterized by being influenced by cultural and contextual aspects of the country's society. *Customers, employees and shareholders* are the most important stakeholders for SMEs in Colombia. Colombian culture places importance on interpersonal relationships and these were displayed in the evidence gathered for this study. The perceived benefits of CSR practices by SMEs such as improved organizational culture, attracting and maintaining best employees, improving image and reputation and improve customer loyalty, also reflect the importance SMEs give to satisfying their most relevant stakeholders.

Introduction

The awareness of Corporate Social Responsibility has increased over the past decades and although its definition still generates debate, a great deal of attention is being paid to this concept. However, most of the focus has remained on large corporations such as Fortune 100 or Fortune 500 companies. Even when the Global Compact was launched in 2000, the focus was on large multinational corporations and their activities. However, “small and medium enterprises (SMEs) make up more than 90 percent of businesses worldwide and account for between 50 and 60 percent of employment” (Vives, 2005). Although SMEs “may not have significant effects on the economy taken individually” (Spence & Schmidpeter, 2003), their “cumulative impacts...are highly significant” (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2004). Moreover, “until now, most of the research on CSR has focused on developed-country firms, mainly from North America and Europe” (Frynas, 2006). Few studies currently exist about the practice in emerging and developing economies, particularly among SMEs, which invariably play an important role in the socio-economic development and stability of these economies. Therefore, we conceptualized this study with the dual purposes of chronicling CSR practices in a developing economy in Latin America and focusing on SMEs and not large corporations.

Our rationale for this study is further bolstered by the reality that “in Latin America, 95 percent of firms are SMEs, and account for between 40 and 60 percent of jobs, depending on the country, and contribute 30 to 50 percent of GDP” (Vives, 2005). Colombia is one of Latin America’s biggest economies and therefore its contribution to the socio-economic development of the region is significant. The term Corporate Social Responsibility or its equivalent in Spanish *Responsabilidad Social Empresarial* is also increasingly being recognized in the region, which further justifies our focus the perceptions and the practices of CSR among a sample of Colombian SMEs.

Literature Review

Like most concepts, scholars have given various definitions for the term corporate social responsibility. According to Davis (1973), CSR is “the firm’s consideration of, and response to, issues beyond the narrow economic, technical and legal requirements of the firm” (p. 312). One of the most comprehensive definitions was provided by Bowd, Harris and Cornelissen (2003): “CSR is corporations being held accountable by explicit or inferred social contract with internal and external stakeholders, obeying the laws and regulations of government and operating in an ethical manner which exceeds statutory requirements” (p. 19). We are using their definition for this study.

Keith Davis (1960) suggested that social responsibility refers to businessmen’s “decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm’s direct economic or technical interest” (p. 70). Milton Friedman (1970) criticized the view of expanding a business’ responsibilities beyond the economic return to shareholders and strongly advocated that corporations stick to making profits. Carroll (1979) provided a three-dimensional model to define corporate social performance (CSP) and its relationship with CSR. Edward Freeman (1984) expanded the discussion about CSR proposing the stakeholder theory where the objective of a corporation is not only to maximize shareholder value, but also, to consider the interests of other relevant publics or stakeholders. May, Cheney, and Roper (2007) stated that “Most of the [CSR] debates in the 1990’s sought to come to terms with the profound effects of globalization” and CSR was given a big boost when then Secretary-General of UN Kofi Annan invited the business sector “to embrace, support and enact a set of core values in the areas of human rights, labor standards, and environmental practices” (United Nations, 1999). This served as the prelude to launching Global Compact in January 2000, which has sought to drive voluntary CSR practices among corporations globally.

CSR among Latin American SMEs

As noted by Vives & Peinado-Vara (2011), there are few studies of CSR in Latin America and even fewer of SMEs in the region even though, as we have already noted, 95 percent of Latin American firms are SMEs accounting for at least half of the GDP of the region (Vives, 2005). Vives further stated that CSR practices among the region's SMEs are mostly limited to ethical and religious factors, concern for employees, the desire to improve profits and the need to maintain good relations with clients, suppliers, and the community. Vives found that pressure from civil society and public sector incentives did not seem to be good drivers of CSR practices. In addition, Latin American SMEs in general and micro and small enterprises in particular, are known for, among other things, low capital intensity, presence of owners / shareholders / family members as labor, minimum bureaucratic structure, centralized power, difficulties to access foreign finance, and dependence on large firms (Vives, Corral, & Isusi, 2005). Additionally, in the case of family businesses, "when one or more relatives have simultaneous roles (e.g., owner-father & president) decision-making can become centralized" (Tagiuri & Davis, 1996, p. 3). The role of social responsibility in the area "includes understanding that the region's societies have a significant concern for the improvements in the basic standard of living. . . . Issues such as health, education, and basic infrastructure hold a very high priority in Latin America" (Vives, 2006).

The Argentine and the Peruvian economic crises, and the Brazilian and the Colombian social crises, have elicited responses from the private sector. Many more business people have come to understand that . . . [a healthy business cannot thrive in an ailing society and therefore] have joined philanthropic traditions that in the past were rooted in religious beliefs but today respond to civic obligations. . . . Altruism and solidarity have been significant drivers in the Latin American private sector, resulting in large parts from the tradition of charity derived from the region's Catholic background. Many business leaders, particularly in family-owned firms, describe their civil commitment as "doing the right thing" from an ethical standpoint (Gutiérrez & Jones, 2004, p. 3).

Colombia is an important player in the development of the region as it is part of the *Latin American Five (LA5)* along with Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Peru. The LA5 countries "account for about 80 percent of the region's gross domestic product" (Canales-Kriljenki, Jácome, Alichí, & Oliveira Lima, 2001) and consequently are of great importance in the promotion of sustainable practices in the region.

The definition of what is an SME is a bit different in Latin America than elsewhere in the world. As stipulated by Law 905 of 2004, SMEs in Colombia are classified based on two criteria: the number of employees and the total value of assets. Thus, a micro enterprise is one with 10 or fewer employees or with total assets (excluding housing) valued at or below 500 legal minimum monthly salaries. A small enterprise is one with between 11 and 50 employees or total assets valued at between 501 and 5.000 legal minimum monthly salaries. Finally, a medium enterprise is one that has between 5.001 and 30.000 legal minimum monthly salaries. . . . Vives et al. (2005) reported that Colombian SMEs generate between 63% and 73% of total employment and Solarte (2003) stated that these firms employ around 26% of salaried employees and 93% of independent workers. About 80% of their production is consumed domestically and around 20% is exported (Vives et al., 2005). In sum, SMEs are vital to the economy of Colombia and thereby that of Latin America.

CSR among Colombia's SMEs

Although there is some research on CSR practices among Colombian companies, it is either in Spanish (Solarte, 2003, & Herrera and Abreu, 2008) or is part of studies of the entire Latin American region (Cici and Ranghieri, 2008, Peinado-Vara, 2005, Vives, 2005, &

Vives et al., 2005). The latter were all conducted for the Inter-American Development Bank. Further, none of these studies specifically studied CSR among SMEs. To fill this knowledge gap, we conceptualized this study to assess CSR practices among SMEs in Colombia based on a theoretical framework with the hope of contributing to the global body of knowledge. In doing so, we relied on the conceptualization and research design by Sriramesh, Wee, Ting & Wanyin (2007) who conducted the first study of the perceptions and practices of CSR in Singapore. We also were inspired by Coppa & Sriramesh (2011) who conducted one of the first studies of CSR among SMEs in Italy. Based on the literature review, the following research questions (RQ) were identified for this study:

RQ1: What are the current perceptions of CSR among a sample of Colombian small and medium enterprises?

RQ2: Which activities do the SMEs in the sample conduct in the name of CSR?

RQ3: What motivates SMEs to engage in CSR?

RQ4: Which stakeholders do they consider to be important?

RQ5: What decision-making process drives the CSR practices of these SMEs?

RQ6: How do they communicate their CSR activities?

RQ7: What resources do they allocate to CSR?

RQ8: Do they measure the results?

RQ9: What are the benefits achieved through CSR?

Methodology

Data were gathered from two sources: an online survey of executives of Colombian SMEs and in-depth qualitative interviews with opinion leaders (elite interviews) and representatives of some SMEs. These two sources of information contributed to increasing the validity of the findings, reducing possible researcher bias, while also offering depth of knowledge on the topic.

A self-administered online questionnaire developed by Sriramesh, Wee, Ting & Wanyin (2006) was used for the present research with minor changes on some questions to adapt to the reality of Colombia's economy. Twenty-six questions, in three sections, sought to measure the understanding of corporate social responsibility; measuring CSR practices in companies; and demographic questions. The questionnaire was translated into Spanish by the first author and translated back to English by a native Colombian to ensure congruency.

We obtained a list of companies from four governmental and private organizations who work with SMEs and used nonprobability sampling to generate our respondents to the web survey. In addition, we also consulted online business directories and leveraged on the personal contacts of the first author who is a native of Colombia. Two emails were sent to the potential participants of the survey. The first invited them to respond to our questionnaire while the second, sent two to three weeks after the first, reminded those that had not yet responded. The survey was available from the 26th of December 2011 to the 9th of March of 2012. Only 62 of the 3,085 SMEs that were invited to participate replied, for a response rate of 2%. Repeated efforts to increase the number of respondents went in vain indicating the challenges of survey research in a developing economy. We used a filter question to ensure that respondents belonged to SMEs (a maximum of 200 employees and 8,456,842 USD of total assets) resulting in a loss of 8 companies for total number of 54 companies.

The sample represented varied industries; *manufacturing* (35.2%), *service* (22.2%), *commerce* (11.1%), *information technology* (7.4%), *building and construction* (7.4%), *biotechnology* (3.7%), and *banking and finance* (3.7%). The remaining 1.9% of the companies were in *agriculture, design and construction, food commerce* and *wholesale food*. Almost half of the surveyed companies (46.3%) served regional markets while 29.6% operated in local markets, followed by 18.5% serving multinational/international markets and

5.6% working on the *national market*. The participating SMEs were located in different cities of the country, where it can be emphasized the presence in the capital city *Bogotá* (33.3%), followed by *Barranquilla* (11.1%) and *Cali* (11.1%). Almost half of the respondents were part of senior management (42.6%), 63% were male and 46.3% of them were in the age intervals *from 26 to 30* (20.4%) and *above 50* (25.9%).

The data were collected using an online survey platform and exported to Excel where they were translated from Spanish to English. The data file was cleaned and exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. The qualitative data were intended to provide additional insights regarding the environment for operation of Colombian SMEs while also offering depth of empirical data. The interview protocol was drafted in English and later translated into Spanish. The interviews were conducted in Spanish between the 5th of January and the 22nd of February of 2012. Each interview lasted an average of 90 minutes and some of the interviews were recorded depending on the consent of the interviewees. In all cases, extensive field notes were taken and all the recorded discussions were transcribed and used for further analysis.

An open-ended interview protocol served as the guide for the elite interviews with five opinion leaders. The questions solicited information on the level of understanding of CSR; CSR practices among SMEs; the environmental variables and enablers; and CSR experiences of these experts. For the interviews with the two SME executives, questions sought information on the level of understanding of CSR, the CSR practices within the company and about some recommendations to increase responsible practices among SMEs in Colombia.

Findings

Perceptions of CSR

At the very outset we asked respondents if they had heard the term “corporate social responsibility” or its Spanish equivalent *responsabilidad social empresarial*, to which 92.6% responded affirmatively – an unexpectedly high number compared with other studies in the literature. All respondents were invited to continue responding to the questionnaire even if they had not previously been exposed to the term. However, in order to assure consistency in the understanding of the term, we presented all respondents with the definition provided by Bowd et al. (2003), which was used for this study.

Participants were asked what were some of the elements of CSR in Colombia. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of all the items. The means of the parameters were relatively high, ranging from 3.87 to 4.89 showing they were perceived as relevant to CSR. The most important items characterized by the highest means and the lowest standard deviations were: *Environment* ($M = 4.89, SD = 0.32$), and *Human rights* ($M = 4.83, SD = 0.38$); whereas the only item with a mean lower than four was *Profitability* ($M = 3.87, SD = 0.83$). Respondents added *Technology and educational transfer*, and *Development programs for employees and their families*, as other elements of CSR practices. Executives and opinion leaders corroborated the survey’s findings stressing the importance of transferring knowledge from larger organizations to SMEs. In addition, the interviewees commented that many small businesses carried out activities considered as responsible because it is part of the fundamental nature of their culture. One opinion leader stated: “People of Colombia who have social responsibility have a clear ethical or moral tradition, this is specially noted on family run companies.”

Next, respondents were asked to convey their level of agreement on a 5-point scale, with a list of statements describing the concept of CSR (Table 2) and 96.3% agreed or strongly agreed that CSR should be a core business function ($M = 4.19, SD = 0.78$), and 81.5% agreed or strongly agreed that “*CSR should be a consideration while setting corporate*

strategy” ($M = 4.43, SD = 0.57$). Respondents were mixed in their thoughts that CSR should be a voluntary function with no laws governing or mandating it ($M = 3.02, SD = 1.42$). The other statements had low means ranging from 1.57 and 2.39. Additionally, 88.9% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed on the negatively worded statement “*companies need not be concerned with society*” ($M = 1.57, SD = 1.04$), indicating that the respondents agree with its opposite – that companies need to be concerned about social welfare. Interestingly, a high 74.1% of the survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that “*CSR is largely a publicity / image issue*” ($M = 2.09, SD = 1.03$).

When asked if CSR should be voluntary or mandated by law, the overwhelming majority expressed the need to motivate more SMEs to engage with CSR voluntarily. One of the SME executives felt “there should be some obligatory guidelines” while an opinion leader commented: “in a country like [Colombia] you have to use force to make companies give a bit more, because voluntarily there are just a few that [do] or give something” to CSR projects. Another opinion leader stated “the fundamental idea is that CSR is not a company program, but the way in which the company functions (i.e. structure, mission, values) and it must be coherent with the triple bottom line.”

CSR Practices

Research question 2 (RQ2) enquired about the activities the SMEs in the sample conducted in the name of CSR (Table 3). More than half of the respondents carried out the following activities: *Employee welfare* (79.6%), *Employee training and development* (74.1%), and *Adoption of charities and other non-for profit causes* (53.7%). In general, almost all the activities had high frequency percentages with the exception of *Arts and cultural activities* (16.7%) and *corporate volunteering* (22.2%). In addition to the alternatives presented some respondents added the implementation of management systems that could be classified as part of *Corporate Governance*.

The opinion leaders in our sample commented that corporations implement socially responsible activities both for pragmatic and moral reasons. One of the survey respondents commented that his company implement managerial and operational systems in order to obtain certifications and to have access to market opportunities. Another executive, when he asked why his company carried out internal CSR practices stated: “If we [enterprises] do not do something, then we are all guilty of what the world is currently facing...this is why I consider I need to have an impact on my circle of influence. I know it is not a great thing, but if I do not do this, I would not be able to operate.” Further, according to some opinion leaders, two other possible reasons for Colombian SMEs preferring to carry out the activities mentioned on Table 3 are the possibility of reducing cost (i.e. implementation of environmental projects), and improving market opportunities for being perceived as a good corporate citizen.

Respondents were asked to identify factors that are important in motivating their companies to be socially responsible (Table 4). The main drivers are: to *Enhance community trust and support* ($M = 4.44, SD = 0.72$), *Long-term sustainability* ($M = 4.31, SD = 0.93$), and the moral driver *Improve public welfare* ($M = 4.24, SD = 0.87$). The two items with the lowest means were *Avoid regulation* ($M = 2.33, SD = 0.99$) and *External pressures from NGOs, government, media, consumers, community, etc* ($M = 2.63, SD = 1.07$). Additionally, one opinion leader commented, “the best way to promote CSR practices among SMEs is to identify what generates added value to them. If you show them the benefits they receive by acting responsible I assure you they will get involved with CSR.”

Stakeholders

Research question 4 (RQ4) sought to measure the importance of different stakeholders to their corporation. Two stakeholders were considered most important: *Customers* ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 0.38$) and *Employees* ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 0.44$). Other stakeholders that received a high ranking were: *Shareholders* ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.69$), *Suppliers* ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.72$), *Business partners* ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.81$) and *Community* ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.78$). Secondary stakeholders such as *Competitors* ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.01$), *Government* ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.94$), and the *Media* ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.04$) received median scores below 4 but were still considered relevant. Interestingly, *NGOs / unions / special interest groups* ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.12$) obtained the least mean value even though the literature suggests that activism is an important driver of CSR activities. Clearly, Colombia appears to be different in this respect. The survey respondents added *Family of employees* and *Neighbors* as important groups of interest for their businesses, whereas interviewees mentioned the *Academy* as a potential actor to serve as bridge to connect the other organizations (i.e. SMEs, government, business associations). Personal observations of the first author suggests that the relationship between corporations and their employees resembles that of a parent-child, where the company tends to protect and ensure the quality of life of their workers and their families, and in turn employees have a high sense of belonging towards the company and care for its owner-managers, which includes the founders and their families.

Decision-Making about CSR

Given that these are SMEs where the CEO holds most of the power, it was not surprising that 75.5% of the sample selected CEO as the main decision maker about CSR while 43.4% selected the *Board of Directors*, and 17% choose the option *Head of Human Resources*. The other options *Head of Corporate Communications / PR / Public Affairs*, *Head of Marketing*, and *Head of Legal Department* received few responses suggesting that public relations does not really have a role in decision making about CSR. Making extrapolations, Colombian SMEs tend to organize their structure as they start to grow and therefore it is not common to find a clear hierarchy or explicit job positions in many of these organizations.

In the case of family businesses, other family members may participate in this process and since in most cases the owner-managers do not have to request permission from external parties (i.e. investors) decision-making remains in the family. However, in order to get tax write-offs for charitable contributions, some SMEs base their decision to contribute on whether recipient organizations can provide them with the appropriate certificate to obtain a tax rebate. In spite of that, many SMEs might choose to forego the tax benefit to support foundations managed by individuals in whom they trust even if those foundations are unable to provide the tax rebate certificates.

Communication of CSR

Communication is an important aspect of CSR and therefore we sought to assess the communication activities of the sample organizations. The main stakeholders for CSR communication were: *Employees* (92%), *Shareholders* (78%) and *Customers* (70%). In addition, the participants also communicated with *Business partners* (48%), *Suppliers* (42%), *Community* (32%), *Government* (20%) and the *Media* (16%). Again, NGOs/unions/special interest groups (6%) were at the bottom of this list signifying very low activism vis-à-vis CSR. The goal for such communication was summed up in the comments of one executive: “one of the main issues of CSR for SMEs is how to communicate the activities we carry out and the recognitions we receive for our good practices”. The media used for communicating CSR-related activities were: *Meetings* (82%), *Word of mouth* (50%), *Company newsletters / leaflets / posters within the company* (42%), *Websites* (36%), *Annual reports* (31.5%),

Campaigns (16.7%), *Press releases / press conferences* (8%), and *Mass media* (2%). It is worth noting here that mass media were at the bottom of the list and the two tools with the highest usage among the sample involve personal contact with others, which is a reflection of the impact of the societal-culture dimension *collectivism* in Colombia.

Resources Allocated to CSR

In responding to RQ7 respondents discussed the resources allocated for CSR activities. We found that 16.7% of the respondents have a department such as *Social responsibility* or *Quality and integral management* that conducted CSR activities. In some organizations CSR responsibilities were given to the *Human Resources* or the *Public Relations* departments. As if to reiterate the increasing importance of CSR, of the 25.9% companies that answered that they did not have a department but intended to have one, 84% reported they intend to have it by the end of 2013; and 25.9% of the total sample manifested having a designated budget for CSR. One of the executives interviewed commented: "I cannot say that we have within our company X budget percentage designated to CSR, this is one of the main issues." Similarly, one opinion leader stated, "The CSR topic has a cost and SMEs scarcely can get the money to pay the payroll for also having to assign resources to CSR."

When it came to measuring CSR activities, only 38.9% of the sample conducted some form of evaluation. Some of the popular methods of evaluation were: *Customer feedback* (43.3%), *Surveys* (33.3%), *Stakeholder feedback* (33.3%), *One-on-one interviews* (26.7%), *Monitoring profit figures* (23.3%), *Monitoring media coverage* (16.7%), and lastly throughout *Focus groups* (13.3%). An executive commented: "We still do not have a way to measure what we are doing. We are carrying out [CSR activities] because it is essential for our operations; and since this is a family company I don't have to be accountable to shareholders but to myself, and this shareholder is happy because everything is well functioning and the market is accepting what we are doing." An opinion leader commented: "the big problem in these kinds of responsible projects is that companies start to work on them but do not measure the results and benefits they obtain from their implementation, the before and the after."

Perceived Benefits of CSR

In response to RQ9, participants responded on the benefits they had received from their CSR practices (Table 5): *Improved organizational culture* (79.6%), *Attracting and maintaining best employees* (60%), *Improved image and reputation* (56%), and *Improved customer loyalty* (46%); the least cited benefit was *Increased favorable media coverage* (10%); and one respondent added *Improve the well-being of the community*. The comment by an opinion typified the sentiments of most interviewees: "The benefits are a matter of image and reputation, of minimizing costs from good environmental practices, and of license to operate, because companies have an impact on their community."

Drivers of CSR in Colombia

Although the purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions and practices of corporate social responsibility among SMEs in Colombia, we believe it is important to address who are, or can be, the champions of CSR practices in any country. In this section we present an illustration of the most relevant strengths and weaknesses of each stakeholder and provide also provide a suggestions of what each of them could do to promote CSR practices amongst the country's SMEs. We have classified the stakeholders of SMEs under four groups (*very strong, strong, moderate and weak*) according to our informed perception of their level of influence in promoting CSR in Colombia. We believe three stakeholders are

key in the adoption of responsible practices among SMEs in Colombia: *The Government, International Organizations, and Business Associations.*

The first driver, *The Government*, has the authority and the structure to promote change nationally and at all levels of society to ensure compliance of regulations. But the government of Colombia has a reputation for corruption, red tape, and inconsistent policies depending on the party/people in power. Lack of regulation by government agencies is another problem that affects government of CSR driver. *International Organizations*, have resources (i.e. knowledge, experience, funds) and power of influence on the Colombian government to motivate it to embrace CSR as part of its agenda. But they often lack detailed information of the specific needs of SMEs and therefore leverage on the Colombian government or on business associations. *Business Associations*, have up-to-date information of the market needs and trends, and networking power to link SMEs with other important actors such as those previously mentioned. They could improve their communication strategy to increase general awareness of the projects they carry out to promote responsible practices (i.e. implementation of corporate governance), and enhance their policies so that the personal interest of their managers not interfere with the actions of the association. Finally, SMEs play an essential role in fostering CSR practices by being committed entrepreneurs willing to take action towards sustainability.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to empirically analyze corporate social responsibility practices among SMEs in Colombia as there were no studies from this country and region of the world. The evidence gathered for this study shows that Colombian SMEs practice informal internal and external CSR characterized by being influenced by cultural and contextual aspects of the country's society. *Customers, employees and shareholders* are the most important stakeholders for SMEs in Colombia. Interestingly activists did not appear to be a driver of CSR in Colombia. The communication practices of SMEs are determined by the significance of their stakeholders with meetings and word of mouth serving as the most frequently used tools to communicate with relevant groups. A key aspect of Colombian culture is the importance of interpersonal relationships and these were displayed in the evidence gathered for this study further highlighting how the personal influence model (Sriramesh, 1992) has been largely ignored by our field. The perceived benefits of CSR practices by SMEs such as *improved organizational culture, attracting and maintaining best employees, improve image and reputation and improve customer loyalty*, also reflect the importance SMEs give to satisfying their most relevant stakeholders. Even though the quantitative findings show that the sample companies considered CSR while setting corporate strategy, this is not consonant with the qualitative findings where the interviewees stressed the lack of formality, strategic planning and existence of a business strategy amongst SMEs. Interviewees also repeatedly commented on the economic uncertainty of the majority of small and medium businesses that is reflective of the scarce of resources allocated to CSR activities. The owner-manager, in most cases also the founder of the organization, made most of the decisions including CSR activities. The beliefs and personal characteristics of the CEO invariably get transmitted to the organizational culture and are reflected in the business actions of these organizations. Future studies could investigate the socio-cultural environment of SMEs and their relationship to CSR activities. Future research is also needed to identify more deeply the decision-making process that drives CSR practice among Colombia's SMEs, and the effects that stakeholders such as consumers could exert on businesses practices.

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Tables

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of the Items Companies Think Would Make a Company Socially Responsible

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Compliance with all laws and regulations	4,54	,69
Business Ethics	4,78	,46
Mission, visions and values	4,46	,66
Profitability ^a	3,87	,83
Corporate governance	4,00	,87
Accountability and disclosure	4,00	,91
Anti-corruption	4,65	,59
Quality of products and services	4,78	,50
Environment	4,89	,32
Health and safety	4,78	,50
Labor practices	4,69	,58
Non-discrimination/ Equal opportunity	4,69	,51
Human rights	4,83	,38
Charitable contributions ^b	4,00	,88
Community involvement	4,41	,71
Sustainability	4,54	,60

Note. N=54 with the exception of the cases marked with a and b both with N=53

Table 2

Frequency Percentages Indicating the Extent Companies Believe the Following Statements Describe the Concept of CSR

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
CSR is largely a publicity / image issue	31,5%	42,6%	13,0%	11,1%	1,9%
CSR is about making charitable	27,8%	37,0%	18,5%	9,3%	7,4%
CSR does not have a positive impact on financial performance	24,1%	37,0%	22,2%	9,3%	7,4%
CSR should be a recognized core business	-	1,9%	16,7%	42,6%	38,9%
CSR should be a consideration while setting corporate strategy	-	-	3,7%	50,0%	46,3%
Companies need not be concerned with	66,7%	22,2%	1,9%	5,6%	3,7%
CSR should be completely voluntary – no laws should govern it	16,7%	24,1%	24,1%	11,1%	24,1%

Note. N=54. A dash symbol indicates the data were not reported.

Table 3

Frequency Table of the Activities Undertaken by the Companies in the Sample

Activity	<i>f</i>	%
Community projects	19	35,2%
Educational projects (e.g. scholarships and bursaries)	18	33,3%
Arts and cultural activities	9	16,7%
Sports	24	44,4%
Healthcare	24	44,4%
Adoption of charities or other non-for-profit causes	29	53,7%
Charitable donations	26	48,1%
Corporate volunteering	12	22,2%
Employee training and development	40	74,1%
Employee welfare	43	79,6%
Environmental projects	25	46,3%
Ethics code	24	44,4%

Note. N=54

Table 4

Means And Standard Deviations Of The Items Important In Motivating Companies To Be Socially Responsible

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Increase profits	3,65	1,01
Long-term sustainability	4,31	,93
Company tradition	3,98	,86
Recruit / retain employees	3,93	,87
Attract investors	3,70	1,06
Promote transactions / partnerships	3,57	1,00
Enhance community trust and support	4,44	,72
Avoid regulation	2,33	,99
Enhance reputation	3,81	1,03
Favorable media coverage	3,17	1,02
Improve public welfare	4,24	,87
Charitable donations	3,65	,83
External pressures (NGOs, government, media, consumers, community etc)	2,63	1,07

Note. N=54

Table 5
Frequency Table of the Benefits Companies Have Achieved Through CSR-Related Activities

Benefits	Yes		No		Missing
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
Improved organizational culture	39	79,6%	10	20,4%	5
Attracting and maintaining best employees	30	60,0%	20	40,0%	4
Improved incentives for managers and employees	19	38,0%	31	62,0%	4
Improved management quality	20	40,0%	30	60,0%	4
Increased profits	8	16,0%	42	84,0%	4
Improved image and reputation	28	56,0%	22	44,0%	4
Improved customer loyalty	23	46,0%	27	54,0%	4
Increased favorable media coverage	5	10,0%	45	90,0%	4
Better business operation conditions (business environment)	12	24,0%	38	76,0%	4
Better governmental relations	9	18,0%	41	82,0%	4
Not sure	2	4,0%	48	96,0%	4
Not applicable	5	10,0%	45	90,0%	4
Other	1	2,0%	49	98,0%	4

Note. $N=54$. The values under the missing column indicate the number of respondents who did not provide any answer and therefore were not taken into account for the frequencies calculations.

Table 6
Potential Influence of SMEs' Stakeholders and Drivers on the Promotion of CSR Practices

STAKEHOLDER	POTENTIAL STATUS	Strengths and Weaknesses to reach the potential status
	(What the stakeholder could do to promote CSR practices among SMEs)	
<i>VERY STRONG INFLUENCE</i>		
SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exhibit disposition to embrace change. Show openness to establish two-way symmetrical communication with other stakeholders. Get involved with business associations, NGOs and academic projects to have access to opportunities and increase contacts in the network. 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to be competitive in the market. Low hierarchy and flat organizational structure. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short-term vision, lack of formality and resources, and reactive behavior. Tendency to follow the status quo. Lack of clear understanding of what CSR involves.

STAKEHOLDER	POTENTIAL STATUS (What the stakeholder could do to promote CSR practices among SMEs)	Strengths and Weaknesses to reach the potential status
Government ¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish long-term and consistent plans and regulations including CSR with international standards. Reduce their level of bureaucracy. Set laws for tax-exemption for companies with CSR practices (i.e. for waste 	<p>Strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authority to promote change at all levels. Structure to ensure compliance of regulations. Influence and networking power could be used as a facilitator to generate relationships with other national and international
International Organizations ¹ (i.e. MDIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate opportunities for knowledge exchange with SMEs. Increase funding for the implementation of sustainable practices among SMEs. Motivate the national government to create 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High level of influence, especially in agenda setting by governments. Availability of resources (i.e. knowledge and financial) and experience. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> General knowledge about the industry and the operations of
Business Associations ^{1,2}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase communication of the programs they have to promote CSR practices among SMEs. Serve as intermediary to link SMEs with other national and international organizations. Provide guidance and share knowledge with SMEs. Create awards and incentives for good practices. 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of the market needs and trends. Lobbying power with the government and international organizations. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some members of Business Associations prefer to have low standard levels that do not respond to international criteria.
STRONG INFLUENCE		
Shareholders and Business Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request to the company's management to embrace CSR activities. Demand accountability and reporting from the company's 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High level of influence on companies. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some see the company just as a
Larger Enterprises (Local and Multinationals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transfer their knowledge and expertise to SMEs. Act as promoter of CSR practices on their value-chains. 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence on <i>Drivers</i> and on value chains. Higher amount of resources. High recognition from other actors (i.e. Media, community). <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low interest on sharing their experiences and practices. Some prefer to buy from foreign

STAKEHOLDER	POTENTIAL STATUS (What the stakeholder could do to promote CSR practices among SMEs)	Strengths and Weaknesses to reach the potential status
Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand good practices from companies. • Include ethical factors in their buying decision-making process. 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Among the most important stakeholders for Colombian SMEs as they affect their economic performance. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buying decision-making based on price. • Lack of interest on having deeper knowledge about company's practices.
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express interest on participating in CSR activities. • Provide feedback to employers regarding their practices. • Motivate other colleagues to engage with CSR processes. • Consider CSR practices when 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered the second most important stakeholder by SMEs. • Directly affect the company's operations and bottom-line. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not provide input on how the organization could work. • Sometimes is the only aspect they care about is remuneration.
Competitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open to cooperate with other actors to implement standards and regulations. • Exhibit interest on participating on the decision-making of projects and situations that affect the 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the business environment. • Could be benefited from the good practices. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote their products based on
<i>MODERATE INFLUENCE</i>		
Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report cases of good CSR practices and trends to the business industry. • Get involved with business associations to provide guidance to SMEs in their processes. 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to up-to-date knowledge and market trends. • Disposition and willingness from other actors to interact with the academy. • Educated personnel capable of providing guidance to companies.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product and company boycotts in case of negative impact. • Request companies to be active in community projects and decision-making 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right to request companies on their area to participate in the community. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See companies as providers of

STAKEHOLDER	POTENTIAL STATUS (What the stakeholder could do to promote CSR practices among SMEs)	Strengths and Weaknesses to reach the potential status
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply CSR to their communications, taking into account their power of influence and their ability to create models of ethical behavior. • Increase the knowledge about what CSR is; is not just philanthropy. 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence power on varied actors. • Capacity to modify cultural models (i.e. ideal of access to easy money) for example helping the government to generate civil culture. • High diffusion and coverage nationally and internationally.
Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibit interest to establish networks and clusters to make of CSR practices on the chain sustainable in the long-term. 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence on the value-chain and on the buying company's final offering. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normally relationship based just on
Creditors / Banks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate funding opportunities for SMEs. • Provide facilities for access to credit and payment of the debt. • Create programs to guide 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient capital to finance SMEs. • Currently use SMEs funding as part of their CSR strategy. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of requirements for
WEAK INFLUENCE		
NGOs / Unions / Special interest groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness about relevant issues affecting society. • Participate in corporate networks to exchange information regarding CSR practices and create alliances. 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of current issues. • Willingness to share information with other parties. <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually national NGOs require

Note.

¹*Drivers* are stakeholders with the highest power and potential of promoting CSR practices.

²*Business Associations* include trade associations, territorial associations, chambers of commerce and SME associations. Colombian business associations play an important role in Facilitating, Improving, Promotion and Advocacy, Partnering and Endorsing (Cici & Ranghieri, 2008).

**Dealing with Subsequent Crisis Response:
An Evaluation of Transparency in Government Response
to the 2013 New Jersey Boardwalk Fire**

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Abstract

A year after Hurricane Sandy, two New Jersey beachside towns experienced a fire in that destroyed a large portion of the recently re-built boardwalk. Through narrative textual analysis, researchers found transparency, references to resilience, and other elements were present in messages released following the fire.

In fall 2013, after just completing many of the rebuilding projects from Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the New Jersey beachside towns of Seaside Park and Seaside Heights experienced a subsequent crisis. A fire in fall 2013 destroyed a large portion of the recently re-built boardwalk. Later, authorities determined that wires buried and left unattended after Hurricane Sandy had caused the fire.

Shortly after the fire, business owners and town leaders expressed initial concerns that their two small tourist towns would not be capable of recovering from this subsequent crisis. The state and local governments released formal messages less than three hours after the fire. They continued to release messages until the source of the fire was determined. This helped to create a crisis narrative, or collective public understanding of the adverse event, which brought hope to the community and provided a transition out of the second crisis (Hutchins, 8 September 2013).

In a case study of the New Jersey boardwalk fire, the researchers seek to determine if the messages used are transparent messages, shared formally about the crisis. The researchers want to see if the crisis recovery narrative conveyed through the press releases and public statements were the same narratives that appeared in the news media.

After a natural disaster, transient dysfunction is often followed by a return to pre-disaster levels of functioning (Norris et al., 2007), but subsequent crises can stunt recovery (Black & Hughes, 2001), since money and resources are often limited after dealing with a natural disaster (Eisenman et al., 2006). Transparency has been shown to provide a platform for honesty, credibility and trust during post-disaster recovery (Rawlins, 2009; Balkin, 1999). Although academic research has examined how the response of public figures can change how the public responds to a crisis, it lacks the scope to evaluate the media messages used to mitigate a subsequent crisis following a large-scale natural disaster. Also, few studies have researched how government transparency works in subsequent crisis situations. Journalism has the ability to formally capture the activities of people, and local journalism often provides a platform for discussing the state of a community (Carey, 1987).

The paper will present a theoretical framework through which narrative analysis will take place, and then proceed to dissect the different strategies that are presented in the news releases and public statements made by official sources. Considering this process, this study seeks to examine the role of public messages released by Governor Chris Christie and other public officials during the aftermath of the boardwalk fire, which occurred just one year after Hurricane Sandy.

Theoretical Framework

In order to fill this gap, these researchers conducted a narrative textual analysis of online news coverage and press releases that evaluated the crisis response and transparency of local and state governments. The researchers used Situational Crisis Communication Theory (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2001) as a framework to identify the factors that contributed to the crisis response. While SCCT has mainly been used in quantitative research it provides three key factors that can be examined in text. SCCT applies Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1985, 1986) to a wide range of crises. SCCT research extends and is comparable to the early product harm and ethical crises research found in the management and marketing literatures (Coombs, 2007). In the process of crisis assessment, SCCT begins with the crisis manager examining the crisis situation in order to assess the level of the reputational threat of a crisis—if no action is taken. Three factors in the crisis situation shape the reputational threat: (1) initial crisis responsibility, (2) crisis history, and (3) relationship history/prior reputation. In the case of an additional crisis following a natural disaster, the crisis manager must consider these factors as steps in his or her response. These three factors

of SCCT provide a context for examining subsequent crisis as well as understanding the way messages might be catered in the context of a subsequent disaster.

The study aims 1) to identify factors that affect government communications response, and 2) to examine how that response led a continued focus on recovery for the New Jersey seaside region, 3) to examine the publics involved and how they wrapped the response to the fire into the ongoing recovery from Hurricane Sandy as well as 4) to examine how transparent government communication and action can filter into news coverage and in turn contribute to the public crisis recovery narrative.

This paper, in consequence, examines where SCCT is applied to the subsequent crisis. It also evaluates how this response aligns with the concept of transparency in government communication. The study provides an ideal platform for practical evaluation of government response to natural disasters and subsequent crises in that it examines the messages produced by the government and the news media during a recent crisis.

Bouncing back from a subsequent crisis is much more difficult for those involved in the initial crisis (Black & Hughes, 2001). It is also very difficult to address the after effects of a natural disaster long-term when resources are limited and tensions are high. As more time elapses, with collaborative planning and recovery efforts transient dysfunction is often followed by a return to pre-disaster levels of functioning (Norris et al., 2007). However, the blow of a second crisis or disaster can cut down on recovery. Post disaster, money and resources are limited (Eisenman et al., 2006), and therefore a subsequent crisis creates an even greater threat on any community in the recovery phase. Coping can also be stunted if a subsequent crisis slows the recovery process, halting resilience in the community. However, resilience increases as a result of successfully coping with adversity or changes (Wagnild & Collins, 2009), and if a subsequent crisis is handled correctly result in a boost for community recovery. This boost creates a unity within the community and addresses issues left unresolved after the first crisis.

Communication is key in the recovery process (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Often a public figure makes statements concerning the crisis, which the public then rallies around. For this reason transparency and honesty of public figures can contribute to resilience. Transparency (Rawlins, 2009) addresses the flow of information between the public figure and the public.

In considering SCCT (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2001) in line with contingency theory (Cancel, A.M., Mitrook, M.A. and Cameron, G.T., 1999) the researchers will look for predisposing vs. Situational Factors, stance, where on the continuum. This theory examines how messages should seek to address different publics based on their involvement with the crisis (Cancel et al., 1999). In addition to using a SCCT framework, this paper examined the New Jersey government's crisis strategy as a contributor to resilience after a crisis. The second crisis is couched in the process of recovery from the first crisis (in the case of this study that was Hurricane Sandy). To address crisis strategy the paper examines Elwood's framework. Elwood (2009) encouraged businesses to look at the resilience strategies and models being used by other fields, such as public health organizations and government, to aid in resilience planning concerning natural hazards. In addition, building on the empirical research from SCCT provides a set of guidelines for how crisis managers can use crisis response strategies to protect a reputation from the ravages of a crisis (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2001).

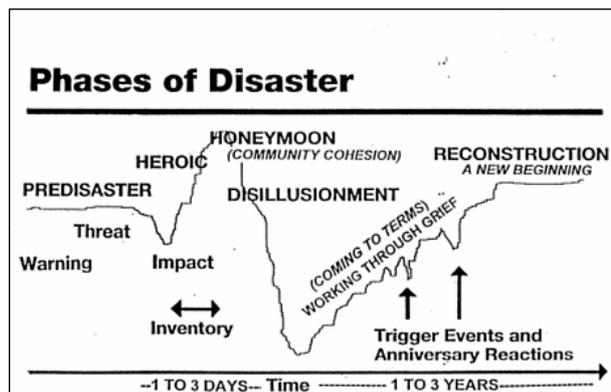


Figure A.

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/primer.asp>

The second disaster occurs in what is labeled (Figure A) as the **reconstruction and recovery phase** where people move beyond self interests and start to rebuild (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). In the chart, following disillusionment, a phase called “coming to terms” where trigger events and anniversary reactions happen. These anniversary events and trigger events are integral to the process of meaning making (Kitch, 2008). Trigger events can change the way that an adverse event is remembered and memorialized. They can even create opportunities to rewrite the outcome of the disaster. Resilience, is the process of reconstruction and recovery as well as the process of meaning making (Norris et al., 2007). Communities with the ability to process tragedy and cope with it in a way that allows that community to return to normal or better than normal conditions are ideal for resilience building (Buzzanell, 2010; Elwood, 2009).

Local news organizations contribute to the recovery process after a natural disaster, while the amount and focus of the news coverage may vary from outlet to outlet (Quarantelli, 1996; Sood, Stockdale & Rogers, 1987; Wenger & Friedman, 1986; Wilkins, Steffens, Thorson, Kyle, Collins, & Vultee, 2012). Specifically, local newspapers often “open pages and often publish special issues” following community disasters (Quarantelli, 1996; Austin, Fisher Liu & Jin, 2012).

While crisis messages often impact the decisions of the public at large, it is clear that media messages have both hidden and identifiable effects on individuals and communities (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007; Cook et al., 1983; Funkhouser, 1973; Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002; McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Similarly the news media often functions as a publicity tool for public officials during a disaster, by “repeating and enhancing the impact of these interpretations” (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003, p. 119). Despite the increased sourcing of information through social media, the mainstream media continues to be the main source of trusted information for the public (American Press Institute, 2014). When a natural disaster happens, the public seeks out the more credible information in order to determine actions (Seeger et. al, 2003). For example, during hurricane Katrina people in the path of the disaster sought information on evacuation and preparation (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007). Following the crisis, those outside the effected area or “strike zone” of the hurricane were able to get information about what areas were affected by the disaster. The public also sought media coverage of the disaster area to hear accounts of recovery and relief (Littlefield & Quenette, 2007). Although the public might have access to additional resources, most information is obtained through mass media and is limited to the messages made available by the media through formal or social media channels.

In addition, crisis leadership is vital to the spread of information. As a crisis event

After a comprehensive read of all the statements, and viewing the public statements made by Governor Chris Christie (which were available in both text and video form on his website), researchers then used a qualitative approach by adopting narrative theory (Riessman, 2010; Gray & Lombardo, 2001; Barrett & Stauffer, 2009) and a narrative coding strategy. Since events are often remembered in storied form, studying narratives can help to understand how these stories contribute to individual and cultural identities. Narrative analysis is “a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). Narratives provide context for how stories are understood and interpreted within culture overtime (Foss, 1996) and can contextualize stories, metaphors, and other literary elements (Fisher, 1995; Carr, 1986). The stories people tell and do not tell are narratives (Riessman, 2008) and are key to understanding collective and individual identities (Yuval-Davis, 2010). The process of recovering from a natural disaster and subsequent crisis provides an ideal platform for examining how desires for a new reality can transform the way in which people experience the actual reality. This is because, narrative has the potential to bring the imagined into the real world because as they are pathways between the “abstract and the concrete, between cognition and behavior, and between symbolic and the material” (Riessman, 2008, p. 16). Narratives have also been found help individuals make sense of lived experiences (Bold, 2011, p. 121). Therefore the adoption of a consistent crisis narrative can provide power to crisis communicators.

For the purpose of this study, narrative theory, which comes out of critical theory, was used to identify themes, or mini narratives, within larger text. Therefore in the process of gathering data for narrative research, the researchers asked several reflexive questions: (1) What do we notice? (2) Why do we notice what we notice? (3) How can we interpret what we notice? (4) How can we know that our interpretation is the right one? (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 159). Following the identification of themes and patterns in the messages, the researcher then identified specific strategies, approaches, and acts of transparency within the narratives. A timeline of key events associated with the subsequent disaster was created within the context of the Hurricane Sandy recovery (Figure C). Key events concerning the news coverage of the boardwalk fire were indicated on the timeline as well.

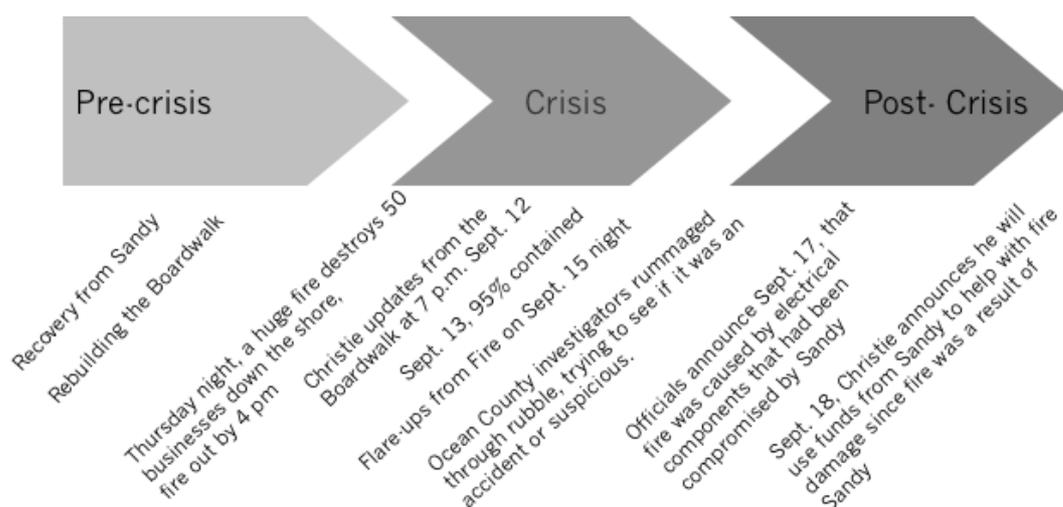


Figure C. Timeline.

The press releases and news stories were organized in a document in chronological order so as to observe the changes of the stories over time. In addition, narrative theory was used to inform the thematic coding a list of six strategies were identified and placed in a temporal (plot narrative) progression:

Strategies Identified:

1. Create a zone of shared meaning
2. Express Sympathy/Compensation
3. Engage in Dialogue
4. Release rich information
5. Justify the rumors
6. Cooperate with other departments

This next section will outline the strategies that were identified and the narratives that dominated each step in the progression. Although these appear to be clearly outlined steps, there was some overlap within the news stories and press releases and the texts did not always stay in temporal order. While narratives do not always span temporal order, because the narratives concerning the fire are dependent upon the first crisis, Hurricane Sandy, time is an important element in telling these stories. Each strategy contributes to the overarching narrative of the second crisis.

Strategy #1 Create a Shared Zone of Meaning:

An accommodative stance, Cameron, Pang, and Jin note, “[S]tance is operationalized as the position an organization takes in the decision making, which is supposed to determine which strategy or tactic to employ,” (p. 147). This is seen in the way that Christie creates a “Zone of Meaning” with Seaside community (Heath, 1997). In his statement directly following the boardwalk fire, Christie states, “I feel like I want to throw up and that’s me.” By using informal language (conversational voice) in his formal statement he integrates himself into the concerns of the communities affected by the disaster, although he does not live there—he comments that he is a New Jerseyan and therefore the boardwalk is part of his identity. He also uses several statements to share the value of resilience in the community following Hurricane Sandy, and solidarity with those who survived the first disaster in 2012. Here Christie considers his history with crisis and disaster in their region, how his reputation might be at stake and who might be at fault considering the fire.

Strategy #2 Express Sympathy: Postponed filing sales and use tax returns

Beginning in his first statement on the boardwalk Christie states, “We are providing immediate help to businesses in the fire-damaged area by giving them extra time before they have to make scheduled tax payments or file returns.” He focuses again on helping the community in the ways that he can. He can’t provide more monetary compensation because New Jersey is already dealing with expenses from Hurricane Sandy, however he can extend the deadline for local taxes. He also states, “This will help them get back on their feet and back in operation as quickly as possible.” This process of offering compensation creates a place where sympathy is integrated with the Governor’s stance (according to SCCT). Here compensation comes in two forms. The first one is direct form by devoting \$15 million to recovery. The second form of compensation involves waving financial penalties for businesses that were impacted with the upcoming tax-filing deadline. Here Christie does not take responsibility for the crisis, but is proactive in the recovery efforts. All statements are made considering the previous crisis and recovery history of the area, as well as his relationship and history of offering compensation for disaster. Certain expectations are

established because of how Christie handled the Hurricane Sandy response and the role he played is still fresh on the minds of people in the seaside communities.

Strategy #3: Engage in Dialogue

In the news coverage the statements echo those expressed in formal statements and press releases as well on local government websites. The Governor creates a “Mobile Cabinet Forum” which is held on Sept. 16, to address issues at a local level. He also releases information when new information becomes available and provides the press with a number of press conferences and news releases. This narrative discusses the dialogue of the community. Those involved include community business owners, officials, and others quoted in the news media. When engaging in dialogue it is imperative that public officials convey the level of responsibility they have for the crisis. In the case of the fire, what caused the fire is still unknown—it could relate to crisis history, but it could be entirely unrelated. That information is not readily available or even known to the public officials or the public. The cause is ambiguous and assigning blame too early on could lead to misinformation. Crisis history is also important in this context because previously established lines of communication make sharing information a lot more established. When there are established lines of communication people use those familiar channels first to gain information. Hurricane Sandy created a network of information exchange concerning rebuilding and recovery, and therefore the public expects the government to communicate through these channels.

Strategy #4: Release rich information

The richer the information released the more transparency takes place (Rawlins, 2009). As mentioned before, there are a number of press releases and public appearances by Governor Christie as new information is released. In fact there are a number of statements made by the Governor in the first five days following the fires:

- My Heart Goes Out To The People Of Seaside (Sept. 12)
- Christie Administration Announces Debris Removal Assistance for Seaside Park and Seaside Heights in the Aftermath of Boardwalk Fire (Sept. 16)
- Christie Administration Announces Tax Relief for Businesses Impacted by Seaside Boardwalk Fire (Sept. 17)

There are also a number of press releases that included information from the local electric company, and local insurance agencies cited in the news coverage of the event. The Town of Seaside Heights also posts information concerning efforts to help businesses connect to resources, on the town website—by adopting channels that were used to address Hurricane Sandy recovery. Christie’s response is within five hours of the fire, and resolution of the “cause” within a week (a timely response). Link back to narrative and SCCT

Strategy #5: Justify the Rumors

Both the public statements and news coverage include a number of rumors. They include attempts to cast blame for the fire (“someone started the fire”), questions as to who will pay to fix the problem, and if FEMA will cover the damages as part of the federal government’s allotted Hurricane Sandy funds. This period lasted less than a week, and rumors were dispelled quickly with public statements. As soon as information was available it was shared with the public. Citizens need to know what caused the fire, as well as who will pay for their loss. If the government can’t justify rumors, it will look bad. Citizens will become upset and worried and people may become angry. People might also fear that someone could set fire to their homes and businesses and such situations need corresponding

strategies. With rumors there is no initial crisis responsibility, but crisis history may dictate how rumors are interpreted. If rumors have circulated concerning disgruntled community members in the past, those rumors will remain unless information is provided to disprove them. Similarly, rumors that were found to be true in the past could dictate how new rumors are interpreted.

Strategy #6: Cooperate with other Departments

From the analysis, it is evident that there are many different departments cooperating together, state and local governments appear to be coordinating and insurance companies and businesses appear to be cooperating with the governments. There are not statements concerning certain groups that are absent, rather the acknowledgement of those that are present. Considering the factors involved in SCCT, communication and cooperation between departments could result in the public official taking less responsibility for the crisis. Also departments and organizations that have a reputation for working together, will be more likely to work together again if they felt those relationships were beneficial. Organizations will also consider if the public official did not fulfill certain promises or commitments in the past when deciding whether to cooperate or not.

Are the Pathways Clear?

Following the last government response, the national media has ceased to cover the event concerning the context of the fire. Local media has taken the word of Christie that issues have been resolved and their formal news coverage is also limited. It appears that event has been wrapped up into the Sandy recovery narrative. Although local news stories include the accounts of local residents and business owners for the most part, these stories are dominated with the language from the formal statements made by Christie and the local governments of Seaside Park and Seaside Heights. The flow of information very clearly channels from the statements made by public officials and figures, to the news media. The local newspapers are not critical of the statements, and most media questioning and speculation is followed by an official response.

There are several points that to be made from this examination. First, the narratives help to illustrate the way in which the government took a formal, accommodative response to the 2013 New Jersey Boardwalk fire. The response is predominately pro-active in recognizing the need for solutions and a quick recovery plan. This is best done, as reflected in the literature, through formal established credible channels, like press releases, press conferences and other public appearances.

Second, the factors that pertain to the government communications response, and by using the crisis response frameworks provided by Heath (1997), Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (2003) and Littlefield and Quenette (2007), the pathway becomes clearer. The challenge to this framework is that by examining a framework based off of a particular theoretical lens, the study is limited to the scope of that lens. The paper attempts to examine both news releases and newspaper coverage to bridge a gap, but because the information does not differ (news releases capture what the news media capture), there is no way to know what is being hidden and what voices are not being heard.

In line with the above observations, the news media continues to focus on recovery for the New Jersey seaside region, the focus on recovery might be because Hurricane Sandy is still too fresh on the minds of people living in the region, as many of them had not returned to their home—or had just recently returned to their homes. At the time of this study “more than 30,000 residents of New York and New Jersey who remain displaced by the storm, mired in a bureaucratic and financial limbo” (McHeehan & Palmer, 6 December 2013). Many people were waiting for funding from FEMA or other insurance programs, and had not

received word. The fire was an opportunity to bring many of these issues up, but for some reason the fire is controlled and becomes a “rallying point” for the community rather than an opportunity to bring attention to neglect and unresolved issues about the hurricane recovery.

In this case study, the publics involved and how they wrapped the response to the fire into the ongoing recovery from Hurricane Sandy. Local institutions bear the majority of a burden in a crisis and the importance of communication, the influences of the news media and the support the community can provide for itself all play into the recovery efforts. A building up of social capital is often considered to result from the adverse conditions of a crisis and therefore can create a stream of social capital for a community to pull from when dealing with subsequent crises (Wicke & Silver, 2009). The local news media conveys specific messages about the crisis response because of many factors, limited resources could mean that journalists do less investigative work and focus more on what will make the constituents of their communities happy or even contribute to a more resilient narrative.

Perhaps that explains why the Boardwalk fire loses intensity in the news fairly quickly. It also helps to explain why the government response appears to be transparent based on Coombs framework. In addition, government communication and action can filter into news coverage and in turn contribute to the public crisis recovery narrative.

One narrative of “recovery” becomes the dominant platform for the crisis response. The government’s strategies appear to be transparent but primarily reactive, based off of Rawlins (2009) criteria, and accommodative based on SCCT. This case study provides a view of the how one subsequent disaster, framed within a specific approach to crisis communication resulted in the disappearance of a second narrative. The actions of public officials and the information in formal messages convey this narrative through the recommended framework and hide other narratives that might distract the community from moving on after the crisis. The disaster also provides a place where the community can once again rally together to address the disaster and once again focus on what is needed to further recover.

This provides a practical example for how crisis communicators might approach subsequent, less resource-draining crises in the wake of a devastating crisis. It also helps to contextualize how formal messages are used in mainstream news media. This paper illustrates where SCCT and crisis communication response aligns with the concept of transparency in government communication. By examining the narratives at play in the six crisis strategies, the study provides a practical evaluation of government response to natural disasters as well as a perspective concerning the messages produced by the government and the news media during a recent crisis.

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Using Appreciative Inquiry Research to Build Community during Culture Change: A Case Study

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Abstract

This paper is a case study exploration of how Appreciative Inquiry methodology was used to not only gather information but to refocus the dialogue of the members of a large church in the Midwest that was in the midst of a culture change. Using autoethnography as a methodology, this case study draws upon the author's "lived experience and personal history as a cultural site" (Alexander, p. 423). It presents the argument that Appreciative Inquiry is an effective research methodology to use in membership communities.

All research influences the environment in some way, but the use of an interactive method like Appreciative Inquiry has the potential to have a profound effect on the participants and those with whom they interact on a regular basis. The results are based on 27 Appreciative Inquiry focus groups conducted in a parish of 3100 families. The intent was to identify what respondents felt was best about the parish, thereby providing the key messages upon which to base the culture change campaign.

This paper documents the role AI played in a four-year culture-change initiative undertaken by a large Catholic Church in the Midwest. The situation of the church studied here was not unlike many of today's religious congregations: the old verities were fraying. The sense of ownership and responsibility for the church—the faith, the folks, the facilities—was weakening appreciably. Attendance at services was often based more on convenience than commitment, volunteerism was minimalized, contributions were static. The parish was in debt, but updating and other expenses were needed. The decision was made to hire a Stewardship Director in hopes of turning the situation around. With 3100 families, the task was daunting.

A culture change initiative was clearly needed, but it would take time—most culture change initiatives take an average of three to five or more years if they are to have some degree of permanence. It could not be a communication campaign alone, although that would be a part of it. It had to be a lived, interactive experience that resulted in shared values, and it would require change on the part of the dominant coalition and staff as well as the parishioners. Appreciative Inquiry, a research method that focuses on what is positive about an organization, played a key role in laying the groundwork for the culture shift.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to introduce Appreciative Inquiry (AI) into the larger conversations about the use of research in public relations. The traditional SWOT method of research (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), while important in strategic planning, often leads to a focus on the negative and is perhaps best left to the managerial levels. This is especially true if “fixing” the negative is not feasible in the near future. The negative is not to be ignored: It is just more productive if it is not the focus. This is particularly true in a public forum and, as in the case presented here, during a culture change process. At the grassroots level, AI has the potential to be uplifting and encouraging, to build a sense of pride and vision, to build ambassadors out of bystanders, and to grease the wheels of culture change in unexpected and powerful ways.

As an educator, I had used a number of different texts and resources in my research and in my classroom. I taught and used SWOT throughout most of my years of teaching. It wasn't until I did a sabbatical in church work that I was introduced to AI and experienced first-hand the power of *accentuating the positive and eliminating the negative*, as the old song goes. It is related to the importance of opinion leadership in public relations campaigns, but in many ways it democratizes the theory. Rather than identifying opinion leaders, it makes opinion leaders/ambassadors out of the reticent as well as the assertive. It helps to construct a new language, a new way of thinking and talking about a culture that is more quickly accessible to a broader audience. That is the reason for sharing this case study about AI in the context of a *public relations* campaign rather than in the church literature, to which it will also add.

Methodology

Using an historical autoethnographic methodology, this case study draws on my personal experience as a full-time Stewardship Director of a large Catholic church in the Midwest, which will remain unnamed. For readership ease I will refer to myself as “the Stewardship Director” throughout.

Autoethnography, a qualitative methodology in which the writer uses “lived experience and personal history as a cultural site” (Alexander, 2000, p. 423), is rooted in the activity of ethnographers who “reflect on and critically engage with their own participation within the ethnographic frame” (Tedlock, 2000, p. 467). Ethnographers “attempt to heal the split between public and private realms by connecting the autobiographical impulse (the gaze

inward) with the ethnographic impulse (the gaze outward)” (Tedlock, 2000, p. 467). At its best, Autoethnography engages “the cultural forms that are directly involved in the creation of culture. The issue becomes not so much distance, objectivity, and neutrality as closeness, subjectivity, and engagement” (Tedlock, p. 467). It allows for what Geertz (1974) calls “thick description,” which can serve to both inform and to model future research and professional practice.

Because of my unique position as both academic and practitioner, I consciously applied public relations theory to orchestrate the culture change. Records, meeting notes, and artifacts of the campaign were used to reconstruct the case. While this study is not generalizable, it does present an experience that can be layered with other experiences to arrive at an understanding of the role of Appreciative Inquiry in organizational culture change. It contributes to the scholarship that deals with the importance of the role of public relations in developing opinion leadership, and, because it involves a church setting, which will make a contribution to the area of religious scholarly literature as well.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Appreciative Inquiry is a research method developed by Johnson and Cooperrider (1991). Rather than approaching change in the traditional method of looking for a problem, diagnosing it, and finding a way to solve the problem, Appreciative Inquiry starts with the question “What is working around here?” (Hammond, 1998). In so doing, the focus is put on the positive rather than the negative. Appreciative Inquiry searches for the best practices that are already in existence and amplifies them, focusing on the “life-giving forces” rather than the decay in an organization (Paddock, 2003, p. 3).

Paddock (2003) draws on the work of Johnson and Cooperrider (1991) and Watkins and Mohr (2001) to discuss the five “D’s” in the Appreciative Inquiry process: Define (what the focus on the inquiry is), Discover (what can be appreciated), Dream (imagine what could be), Design (decide what should be), Deliver (put the changes into effect) (p. 5).

The concept draws strongly on the theoretical underpinnings of the Social Construction of Reality (Berger & Luckman (1967) as can be seen in Hammond’s (1998) focuses on the role of assumptions in change. To understand AI, she contends, “you have to understand the role of assumptions in organizations” (p. 13). She defines assumptions as “the set of beliefs shared by a group, that causes the group to think and act in certain ways” (p. 13). She defines eight assumptions inherent in AI (p. 20-21):

1. In every society, organization, or group, something works.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
4. The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
7. It is important to value differences.
8. The language we use creates our reality.

Paddock (2003) sees AI as relevant for building relationships and community, doing strategic planning, creating mission statements, enhancing transitions, and deepening spiritual renewal (pp. iii-iv).

It is an effective way to bring groups of various sizes into constructive discussions that focus on the positive.

The Case Study

This case study explores the influence using Appreciative Inquiry had on a large Catholic parish in need of a culture change. To address the situation of stagnant donations and volunteerism in the parish, a Stewardship Director was hired. Two Stewardship Directors before she had tried and failed to affect the changes needed. She inherited a five-year-old \$750,000 debt in addition to the parish's other stewardship needs.

The Stewardship Director's first year was one of listening: one-on-one conversations, small group discussions, attendance at as many meetings and socials as could fit in a week's schedule, a presence at services. Parishioners came to talk, to find someone with whom they could share their concerns. They really liked the parish but... and the fill-in-the-blanks were as varied as the people who came. There was nothing really major wrong; there were no major consistent complaints. While there was a strong sense of vibrant spirituality among the faithful, there was also a hunger for something undefined and a lethargy in self-giving. There was little consistency, little cohesion. A tremendous amount of good works were being done, but people didn't seem to have a sense of the them in the bigger picture. Many were involved but in a fragmented context.

It was a time of change in the parish: Prior to hiring the Stewardship Director, a much-loved pastor had moved into a part-time assistant pastor role in preparation for his retirement. A new younger priest who had been the assistant pastor there for a few years was promoted to pastor. In addition, some new staff members were hired, which added to that sense of transition and disconnectedness.

When the Stewardship Director did an inventory of ministries, she identified more than 200 different groups at work in the parish. Even the staff was surprised at the number. One of the first overt actions the Stewardship Director took was to identify and organize the leaders of those groups and to hold a leadership retreat. She worked with the leaders in a variety of ways, which is not important here except to note that as they came together for the first time and began to work together on a regular basis, the sense of belonging to something bigger created cohesion.

In the second year, the Stewardship Director introduced the need to revisit the strategic plan and introduced a research strategy that included first a census survey of the parish and second a series of AI focus groups. She worked with a small group headed by the parish council president to develop the research program.

The first of the AI inquiries was conducted with the staff. The second was conducted with the leadership during a leadership retreat. The group of 100+ individuals was broken down into small focus groups that were lead by the Stewardship Director and other parishioners who were trained by the consultant in the AI process. These were followed with 27 focus groups, most of which were intentionally segmented by demographic variables and stages in the life cycle, and some of which were open to the community as a whole in a "town meeting" format.

A great deal of research and preparation went into developing the AI format and questions. The Stewardship Director and the parish council president initially attended a workshop to learn about Appreciative Inquiry, and they recommended hiring an Appreciative Inquiry consultant. The consultant lead the planning team through a series of discussions to more clearly focus what they wanted to do and how they needed to do it. He didn't say much during the first session—he just asked good questions that helped the team engage in an amazingly spirited (and spirit-filled) discussion. He helped them hone their thinking, which resulted in them taking a different direction than they had planned to take and yielded a much richer end result.

The team, composed of six members of the parish council and other parish leaders, spent every Monday evening together through August and early September discussing what they knew based on a combination of personal experience, the results of the parish survey, and published research about similar situations in other churches. They also addressed what they needed to know. As a group they read and discussed the book, *Appreciative Inquiry for Catholic Churches*.

They learned that research in a large parish is expensive both in terms of time and resources. (The Stewardship Director written and received a large grant that included a research budget.) They also learned that people are hungry to have someone hear them—uninvolved as well as very involved parishioners responded to the invitation to participate in the focus groups. They also learned that those who wanted to have a voice were delighted to have a forum, and those who came to the focus groups really enjoyed participating.

The main advantage of using the Appreciative Inquiry process was that the discussion leaders could keep the focus on what was best about the parish. As a result, people left the AI discussions feeling good about being a member of the parish (with a few disgruntled exceptions). Even those who came with an axe to grind soon got involved in the positive banter. They were usually able to refocus the things they didn't like into positive solutions instead of negative complaints. The team received a great deal of positive feedback during the discussions and afterwards as well.

Through the Appreciative Inquiry process and preliminary survey information, they identified the themes that shaped other priorities:

Unified. Parishioners sought a relationship with God through on-going human relationships with others in the community. At that parish these included:

- A. Retreat formats that have a continuation element (Christ Renews His Parish, Cursillo, Antioch)
- B. Educational opportunities (Bible study, Rite of Christian Initiation, sacramental preparation, school activities)
- C. Athletic teams
- D. Social functions
- E. Communal prayer (liturgy, prayer groups, parish missions, funerals)

Spiritual. At the heart of everything was the deep sense of spiritual connectedness. Spirituality was the foundation upon which everything else was built. In addition to communal prayer, private prayer (personal devotions, spiritual reading) was also important. The Adoration Chapel—a small chapel where the Eucharist was exposed 24 hours a day, seven days a week and was perpetually attended by a long list of at least two parishioners per hour who volunteered to be in the chapel one assigned hour each week—was one of the most frequently mentioned strengths of the parish among Appreciative Inquiry discussants.

Orthodox. The parish community members tended to be conservative and wanted to know and understand the truth through their faith. Many felt the more orthodox orientation of the parish was one of its greatest strengths.

Generous. The overwhelming amount of services the parish provided for the poor was also one of the most frequently discussed strengths. Many of the parishioners expressed amazement as they learned more about the good works that were done quietly on a daily basis by parish volunteers.

Personal. Parishioners wanted to be recognized as individuals, to receive personal invitations into the life of the parish, and to have others in the parish know them by name. They wanted to feel that they were supported by others and had a place to come in times of need. They wanted to feel welcome.

As a result, the strategic planning process enveloped these strengths. Parish leadership used these values to create a new mission, values and goals statement for the parish, and they were incorporated into the goals of the three-year strategic campaign as well as into the programming and communication during that time.

From a communication perspective, the findings of the Appreciative Inquiry were used to shape the key messages of the campaign. The AI results were published in the parish newsletter and on the web. All internal and external media (weekly bulletins, monthly newsletters, signage, parish-wide direct mail correspondence, stories pitched to Catholic and area newspapers, digital displays, etc.) were produced with the intention of reflecting back to parishioners examples of how the people of the parish—*the Church*—were participating in activities that demonstrated these strengths.

The newsletter was redesigned to accommodate more stories of parishioner as stewards doing the good things that were identified in the AI, thereby reinforcing and magnifying the stories shared in the interactive experience of the AI focus groups. The first edition of the parish newsletter in the first fall of the campaign carried the new parish mission, values and goals statements along with an explanation of what they meant. A large framed version of the mission, values and goals was hung in the church narthex (entry foyer) for all to see. Clear plastic clings with the new parish campaign slogan, *Stewards of Faith, Hope and Love*, hung over every major door jam in the church building.

Most importantly, parishioners *talked* about the positive aspects of the parish in a wide variety of settings—both formal and informal—and the on-going dialogue resulted in a deeper sense of pride about the good the parish accomplished. That dialogue, which started with the Appreciative Inquiry, began to influence the parish norms. And the giving of time and talent increased in a variety of unexpected ways.

The parish did meet its budget that year and several ministries reported new members joined their ranks. Perhaps the strongest evidence to speak for the effectiveness of the first year of the initiative is the result of the biennial Diocesan fundraising campaign dovetailed with a parish capital campaign.

In spite of dovetailing a debt-reduction capital campaign for two biennial cycles and including a debt-reduction envelope in the monthly donation envelope packets, the parish had not been able to retire its five-year-old debt for the parish renovation and construction project. At the beginning of the campaign, the debt stood at \$750,000 and the mandatory contribution from the parish to the Diocesan campaign was \$741,000. To that, an additional \$1.3 million for new space, including a new rectory, was added for a total capital campaign goal of \$2.8 million. At the end of the two-year stewardship campaign discussed here, between out-right cash donations and in-kind donations of materials and furnishings for the rectory, the goal was met: One campaign that highlighted the strengths of the parish that were discovered in the Appreciative Inquiry process was able to accomplish what two previous ones failed to do. In addition to the capital campaign, the annual operating budget of more than \$4 million was also met.

Identifying the strengths of the parish through Appreciative Inquiry and reflecting those strengths back to the parishioners in a variety of venues contributed significantly to the success of the campaign.

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**Alumni Commitment, Social Media, and Organization-Public Relationships:
A Study of the University of South Carolina's No Limits Campaign**

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Abstract

Using online survey and informal qualitative analysis, this study explored alumni commitment in the organization-public relationship (OPR) within the University of South Carolina's *No Limits* campaign and how it could be applied to the campaign's social media component. Guided by reputation management and OPR literature, insights about alumni commitment emerged.

Purpose

Public relations is broadly defined as a management function of communications between an organization (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and its respective primary, secondary, and unintended publics (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006). The ability to effectively communicate an organization's message to these publics increases the likelihood of better outcomes from an organization's strategic communication plan. Effective communication and the ability to measure these outputs validates public relations as an effective industry, as well as provides a baseline for creating, enhancing, and maintaining relationships with key publics. An organization's relationships with its publics are economic, cultural, and political in nature (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

In the ever-changing media landscape, organization-public relationships are amplified, particularly in social media where organizations can receive immediate feedback from their respective publics. Evaluating organization-public relationship theory in University of South Carolina's *No Limits* campaign through an adaptation of Hon and Grunig's 1999 *PR Relationship Measurement Scale* provides an in-depth look at organization-public relationships in social media for an academic organization, particularly in the commitment dimension. Furthermore, organization-public relationships can help public relations practitioners enhance organization-public relationships through tailored campaigns with social media components.

Literature Review

Organization-public relationships are thought of as processes of forming and maintaining relationships between an organization and its publics (Yang & Grunig, 2005). The dimension of organization-public relationships pertinent to this study is commitment. As defined by Hon and Grunig (1999), commitment is the "extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote" (p. 3).

Reputations play an important role in organization-public relationships. Reputations are "perceptual representations of a company's past actions and future prospects that describes the firm's overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals" (Fombrun, 1996, p. 72). Reputations provide recognizable advantages and privileges to companies within an industry, which is the basis of a competitive advantage (Fombrun, 1996). Social media, also thought of as social networking sites, are online tools that help foster active relationships between an organization and its target publics through reciprocal communication (Bowen, 2013).

Previous studies have looked at organization-public relationships in an academic setting in terms of measurement validation (Jo, Hon, & Brunner, 2004) and relational quality (Yang, Alessandri, & Kinsey, 2008). The purpose of this mixed-method study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) is to explore alumni commitment in the organization-public relationship within the University of South Carolina's *No Limits* campaign and how it can be applied to the campaign's social media component. Understanding the extent to which commitment in organization-public relationships affects alumni involvement may help public relations practitioners design campaigns with effective social media components.

Reputation

According to the reputation literature of Fombrun (1996), reputations result from competition; thus, reputations provided a competitive advantage grounded in trust and respect (p. 20). Typically, reputations are centered on a unique product or service an organization provides (Fombrun, 1996). Moreover, Fombrun (1996) argued that reputations inform consumers and publics about an organization's products and services, what its values are, and whether it is a viable and sound entity for financial investments.

Building on his assertion that reputations have financial implications, Fombrun (1996) asserted that an organization's reputation is intrinsically linked to an organization's identity, which Dukerich and Carter (2000) argued consists of external perceptions of an organization's actions. Perceptions regarding an organization's actions contribute to how it approaches building and maintaining relationships with its publics.

Organization-Public Relationships

Theoretical grounding. Drawing on literature from interpersonal communication, psychotherapy, interorganizational relationships, systems theory, Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997) called for a uniform definition for organization-public relationships. Explication of the various areas of literature led to conclusions that relationships between organizations and publics thrive on perceptions and expectations held by both parties (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). Within these relationships, both parties depend on exchange and reciprocity to meet needs (Broom et al., 1997). Broom et al. also concluded that relationships have "unique and measureable properties" (Broom et al., 1997, p. 95).

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) used telephone surveys and in-depth interviews to explicate the organization-public relationship through an examination of subscribers' intentions on whether to switch to a new telephone provider in a competitive market. Ledingham and Bruning defined the organization-public relationship as, "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" (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62).

Ledingham and Bruning explained that an organization's support in community events can evoke loyalty among primary publics, but in doing so, organizations must consider the organization-public relationship as a two-step process (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). This process included: establishing a relationship with target publics and communicating the types of activities that the organization is involved in that would benefit the target public, which lends to building and maintaining organization-public relationships (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

Study of organization-public relationships revealed that there were different types of relationships. Bruning and Ledingham (1999) further explicated organization-public relationships through the development of a multi-dimensional scale that would aid in the measurement of perceptions of organization-public relationships and their impact on "consumer attitudes, predispositions, and behaviors" (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999, p. 157). Using a survey method, the multi-dimensional 10-point scale looked at "trust, openness, involvement, investment, commitment, reciprocity, mutual legitimacy, and mutual understanding" to ascertain level of agreement (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999, p. 162). By developing this scale, Bruning and Ledingham found three different types of relationships: professional, personal, and community (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999).

Scale development. Grounded in interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution research, Hon and Grunig (1999) explicated organization-public relationships through the development of a *PR Relationship Measurement Scale*. Hon and Grunig (1999) determined in the *PR Measurement Scale* that there were nine antecedents to relationship management: access, positivity, openness, assurances, networking, sharing of tasks, integrative, distributive, and dual concern. Hon and Grunig (1999) argued that these antecedents could be used strategically to maintain relationships. Control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, and communal relationship were key outcome variables in the *PR Relationship Measurement Scale*. Hon and Grunig argued that the most effective, long-term relationships are two-way relationships from which both parties benefit (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

By examining primary public perceptions of professional, personal, and community relationships of banks, Bruning and Ledingham (2000) found that professional and personal relationships were the most significant indicators of satisfaction with the financial organization in question. Study findings suggested that perception played a major component in organization-public relationships, specifically as it related to symbolism and behavioral outcomes involving primary publics, as well as with members of publics in different industries (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000).

While some scholars have developed scales and examined the nature of organization-public relationships (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), other scholars have examined dialogue and exchange, and how it affected organization-public relationships (Bruning, Dials, & Shirka, 2008; Hung, 2005). Bruning, Dials, and Shirka (2008) argued that “organizations facilitate relationships best through a dialogic process,” which involves the organization engaging members of a primary public in a conversation or communications (p. 29). Through an evaluation of dialogue, Bruning et al. (2008) argued that all entities in an organization-public relationship influenced each other; thus, a relational approach focusing on dialogue enhanced interaction between the organization and its publics (p. 29).

Communal and exchange relationships. Extending Bruning and Ledingham’s 1999 findings regarding the different types of relationships, Hung (2005) explored organization-public relationships in China and Taiwan among 36 multinational companies through qualitative interviews. Through this explication, Hung asserted that multinational corporations had fostered seven types of relationships with their publics in China: communal, covenantal, contractual, symbiotic, manipulative, and exploitive (Hung, 2005). Hung argued that mutual communal, covenantal, and exchange relationships were beneficial types of relationships that organizations should foster since there was no exploitation (Hung, 2005).

Communal and exchange relationships have been evaluated through an application of resource theory to explain the behavioral intentions between organizations and their respective publics (Hung, 2005). Hung argued that communal and exchange relationships tend to occur in tandem where the organization gives and its publics reciprocate, creating a mutual norm among the entities involved (Hung, 2005). Based on this assertion, Hung postulated that “intention or motivation...determines the type of relationship an organization develops with its publics” (Hung, 2005, p. 415). Intention is a key component in building trust in organization-public relationships (Bowen & Gallicano, 2013; Gallicano & Heisler, 2011; Jo et al., 2004). Bowen and Gallicano (2013) argued that all other relationship outcomes are “undermined if at least some degree of trust is not present; therefore, trust is the foundational element that must be present” (p. 195).

Perception of satisfaction. Perceived satisfaction seemed to positively impact organization-public relationships and attitudes towards brands, particularly when pertaining to purchasing products. Kim and Chan-Olmsted (2005) explored how different aspects of organization-public relationships affect brand attitudes through use of survey. Through their evaluation, Kim and Chan-Olmsted (2005) found that perceptions of relationships with an organization affect customers’ brand attitudes of the organization. In that study, perception of satisfaction seemed to have a significant impact on customers’ attitudes toward a brand (Kim & Chan-Olmsted, 2005). Evaluating brand attitude through purchase intention, Kim and Chan-Olmsted predicted brand attitude through an examination of the satisfaction dimension of organization-public relationships and “product-related attribute beliefs” (Kim & Chan-Olmsted, 2005, p. 165).

Since perceived satisfaction played an integral role in determining the quality of organization-public relationships, perceived satisfaction also contributed to the willingness to maintain relationships. Surveying college students, Johnson and Acquavella (2012) extended

organization-public relationships through an examination of customer satisfaction and willingness to maintain relationships with cellphone service providers. Johnson and Acquavella found that there was an association between personal commitment, anthropomorphism, perceived satisfaction, and willingness to maintain relationships with an organization. Within this association, Johnson and Acquavella (2012) argued “personal commitment and anthropomorphism were associated with perceived satisfaction and that personal commitment was associated with likelihood to pursue a future relationship with the organization” (p. 163). Citing Brunig and Galloway (2003), Johnson and Acquavella (2012) defined anthropomorphism as when an organization “embodies human characteristics,” which included trustworthiness, meeting expectations of its respective publics, and community involvement (p. 164).

Using an experimental method, Lee and Park (2013) explicated organization-public relationships through an examination of message interactivity and its effects on organizational reputation. Lee and Park (2013) argued that organizations were evaluated in a positive manner when they commented or responded. More so, comments elicited perceptions of higher trustworthiness, as well as perceptions of “having better control of mutuality and communal relationships, and higher satisfaction, compared to organizations that did not respond back” (Lee & Park, 2013, p. 188). Lee and Park asserted that “actively responding to the public’s comments posted on organizational Web sites and blog sites positively influence both perceptions of relationship management and corporate reputation” (Lee & Park, 2013, p. 201).

Relational quality. Using a factor analysis and the Q technique, Yang, Alessandri, and Kinsey (2008) explicated organization-public relationships between college students and universities through an evaluation of relational quality and subjective stakeholder views. Yang et al. (2008) found that college students’ perceptions were formed by “quality of education and evaluations of athletic/sports program performance” (p. 161). Furthermore, Yang et al. (2008) confirmed the presence of communal relationships, exchange relationships, and outcome-oriented relationships. By evaluating reputational quality, Yang et al. (2008) asserted that relational quality and reputation are rooted in subjective stakeholder views of “their experience, interactions, and information” (p. 162).

Through this review of the literature, opportunities surrounding the commitment dimension of organization-public relationships appeared for further study and evaluation. The following research questions are presented:

RQ 1: To what extent do alumni feel committed to the University of South Carolina?

RQ2: To what extent does commitment cause alumni to interact with the University of South Carolina’s *No Limits* campaign on social media?

RQ3: To what extent does an organization-public relationship exist in the social media component of the University of South Carolina’s *No Limits* campaign?

Method

Online survey method was employed in the examination of the organization-public relationship found amid the University of South Carolina’s *No Limits* campaign. The crafting of online survey questions centered on attitudes and beliefs pertaining to the commitment dimension of organization-public relationships. Informal qualitative thematic analysis of Facebook user comments on University of South Carolina’s *No Limits* Facebook posts was also employed in the examination of the organization-public relationship found amid the *No Limits* campaign’s social media component.

Survey Design

This study used a cross-sectional study design, meaning that it evaluated attitudes and beliefs regarding the University of South Carolina's *No Limits* campaign at one point in time (Shoemaker & McCombs, 2003). Attitudes and behaviors towards the campaign illuminated how the University of South Carolina could tailor the social media component of its campaign to increase alumni commitment. Given that this study surveyed human subjects about their relationship with organizations in social media, IRB approval was obtained prior to the distribution of the online survey.

Tested in previous studies (Jo et al., 2004; Kim & Chan-Olmsted, 2005), this survey instrument adapted the Hon and Grunig (1999) scale to focus on the University of South Carolina's *No Limits* campaign and the campaign's social media. Built using Qualtrics software, questions focused on the commitment dimension of organization-public relationships and were constructed using 7-point Likert scales, which were modeled after the Hon and Grunig (1999) scale. Two screening questions were included at the beginning of the instrument to exclude those who were not aware of the *No Limits* campaign. Demographic questions were incorporated at the end of the instrument. The instrument was anonymous and designed to take less than ten minutes for respondents to complete.

Sampling

Alumni of the University of South Carolina were the primary focus of this study. Alumni were one of many publics that the university targeted with its social media efforts. Alumni, as defined by the University of South Carolina, were individuals who have graduated or taken more than 15 credit hours or more at the university.

Sampling method and procedure. Email distribution lists containing the addresses of University of South Carolina alumni comprised the sample frame for this study. The sampling method for this study was a simple random sample. The sample frame for this survey included a list of 7,000 email recipients, which was obtained through the University of South Carolina's Advancement Services office. An email message eliciting participation in the online survey and explaining the purpose of this research project was distributed to the primary alumni email list by the University of South Carolina's Advancement Services office. The survey collected 238 responses, but with two screening questions, the sample size was 103 responses from alumni familiar with the *No Limits* campaign. The intent behind this sampling method was to elicit a large number of responses. For this reason, the sampling procedure was designed to facilitate a greater response rate.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS. Data were analyzed using one-way ANOVAs and chi-square tests. All statistical tests used $p < 0.05$ to determine significance. Frequency and distribution tests were also conducted for descriptive purposes.

Qualitative Analysis

Facebook posts containing *No Limits* campaign verbiage and any comments on those posts were collected for an informal qualitative analysis. Data collected in this convenience sample informed the extent to which an organization-public relationship existed in the social media component of the University of South Carolina's *No Limits* campaign.

Data collected from the University of South Carolina's Facebook page was dated from the beginning of the *No Limits* campaign soft launch in September 2012 through July 19, 2013. Data pertaining to the organization's *No Limits* campaign messaging was grouped by common themes found in reputation management strategies as they were the antecedents found in the maintenance of organization-public relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Using

pattern matching, data were collected pertaining to Facebook user response to the organization's *No Limits* campaign. Data were then grouped together by themes found in the outcomes of organization-public relationships (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Findings

Findings addressing the following research questions revealed that alumni who were connected to the University of South Carolina on its Facebook page desired to maintain a relationship or affiliation, as well as interact with the University. More so, alumni who desired to maintain a relationship or association with the University realized that the University wanted to maintain a long-term commitment, as well as a relationship with alumni through the *No Limits* campaign. Relationship management strategies used by the University of South Carolina in the social media component of its *No Limits* campaign focused on strategies of positivity and relationship nurturing -- elements of stewardship.

RQ 1: Alumni Commitment to the University of South Carolina

When asked if there was a long-lasting bond between the University of South Carolina and its alumni, survey respondents tended to agree (38.8%), somewhat agree (23.3%), or strongly agree (24.3%). Responses about the prominence of the value of an alumnus' relationship with the University above other institutions were mixed. When asked whether their relationship with the University of South Carolina had greater prominence than a relationship with any other institution, responses showed varying levels of agreement (59.2%), uncertainty or neutrality (13.6%), and varying levels of disagreement (27.2%). Responses about whether an alumnus' relationship with the University of South Carolina was "very important" indicated overall agreement. Respondents strongly agreed (32%), somewhat agreed (10.7%), and agreed (40.8%).

Survey respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they wanted to maintain a relationship or affiliation with the University. Responses showed that respondents agreed (50.5%), somewhat agreed (8.7%), and strongly agreed (33%), where as few respondents indicated neutrality or uncertainty (5.8%) and disagreement (1.9%) toward maintaining a relationship with the University of South Carolina.

Responses surrounding whether the University's *No Limits* campaign was an attempt to maintain a long-term commitment with alumni or to maintain a relationship with alumni were mixed. When asked whether the University of South Carolina was trying to maintain a long-term commitment to alumni through the *No Limits* campaign, respondents indicated that they were unsure or neutral (40.8%), agreed (20.4%), strongly agreed (17.5%), or somewhat agreed (14.6%). Survey respondents also indicated that they were unsure or neutral (35.9%), agreed (26.2%), strongly agreed (20.4%), somewhat agreed (11.7%), disagreed (2.9%), strongly disagreed (1.9%), or somewhat disagreed (1%) that the University of South Carolina wanted to maintain a relationship with alumni through its *No Limits* campaign.

Respondents indicated that they are very loyal to the University of South Carolina. Responses showed that respondents strongly agreed (40.8%), somewhat agreed (11.7%) and agreed (32%), where as few respondents indicated uncertainty or neutrality (9.7%) and disagreement (4.9%). When asked if they did not want to interact with the University, respondents indicated that they did want to interact with the University by strongly disagreeing (44.7%), somewhat disagreeing (10.7%), and disagreeing (35%) with this survey question.

Respondent demographics. Graduation years for survey respondents ranged from 1947 to 2012 with 1986 (5.8%) and 2012 (5.8%) being the most frequently reported years. Graduation year distribution was normal. Respondent ages ranged from 23-years-old to 88-years-old. The most frequent age of survey respondents was 60-years-old (4.9%). There was an even response from males (48.5%) and females (48.5%). Respondents were

overwhelmingly Caucasian (90.3%) with few respondents identifying as African American (4.9%), Hispanic (1%), or Asian/Pacific Islander (1%). Additionally, most respondents were members of My Carolina Alumni Association (58.3%) as compared to non-members (38.8%).

Frequency reports indicated that the University of South Carolina degree attained by respondents was a bachelor's (50.5%) with some respondents reporting having a master's (32%) or a doctorate (13.6%). Respondents tended to have full-time employment (67%), while some respondents indicated that they were unemployed (13.6%). Frequency reports indicated that the highest frequency of respondents made more than \$90,000 (31.1%). Individuals earning between \$30,001 to \$60,000 (26.2%) and \$60,001 to \$90,001 (23.3%) were relatively even. The most frequently reported state that respondents resided in was South Carolina (68%), North Carolina (7.8%) and Georgia (4.9%).

RQ2: Alumni Commitment and Interaction with the *No Limits* Campaign on Social Media

Findings from this online survey revealed that respondents had either seen (58.3%) or thought they had seen (41.7%) University of South Carolina's *No Limits* advertisements, television commercials, or online posts. When asked whether they were connected to the University on its various social media platforms, there was an almost even split among respondents who indicated they were connected (46.6%) and those who were not (47.6%).

Chi-square test results. While this sample ($n=103$) was relatively small, several chi-square tests were performed, which yielded significant associations between variables. An alpha level of $p < 0.05$ was used to determine significance.

Being connected to the University of South Carolina on its various social media accounts seemed to indicate that alumni wanted to interact with the University, $X^2(10, N=103) = 18.78, p < 0.05$. Alumni who desired to maintain a relationship or affiliation with the University of South Carolina also seemed to value his or her relationship more than any other institution, $X^2(24, N=103) = 127.51, p < 0.05$, which was statistically significant.

The desire to maintain an association or relationship with the University seemed to indicate that the individual's relationship with the University of South Carolina was very important to them, $X^2(24, N=103) = 159.29, p < 0.05$. The desire to maintain an association or relationship with the University seemed to indicate that the individual was very loyal to the University of South Carolina, $X^2(20, N=103) = 140.24, p < 0.05$. Additionally, the state in which the individual resided, $X^2(65, N=103) = 89.80, p < 0.05$, as well as whether the individual was a member of the My Carolina Alumni Association, $X^2(5, N=103) = 16.56, p < 0.05$, were statistically significant when examining whether an alumnus felt loyal to the University of South Carolina. Membership in the My Carolina Alumni Association also was associated with an individual's desire to maintain a relationship or affiliation with the University of South Carolina, $X^2(4, N=103) = 18.43, p < 0.05$.

Alumni who desired to maintain a relationship or an affiliation with the University of South Carolina seemed to realize that the University wanted to maintain a long-term commitment, $X^2(24, N=103) = 46.83, p < 0.05$, as well as a relationship with alumni through its *No Limits* campaign, $X^2(24, N=103) = 43.89, p < 0.05$.

One-way ANOVA results. A one-way ANOVA was used to determine if different levels of employment affected whether or not alumni wanted to interact with the University of South Carolina. This analysis revealed that the effects of different levels of employment on interaction with the University were significant, $F(3, 88) = 4.60, p < 0.05$. Post-hoc analysis using a Tukey HSD showed that the mean for full-time employment ($M = 6.04, SD = 1.12$) was significantly different than unemployment ($M = 4.86, SD = 0.95$) and graduate student ($M = 5.00, SD = 2.83$). Contrarily, the mean for full-time employment differed little from part-time employment ($M = 5.86, SD = 1.22$). Based on this finding, it seems that alumni who were employed, whether it was full-time or part-time, wanted to interact with the

University of South Carolina. Given the current economic climate in the United States, employment status may indicate another way the University of South Carolina can tailor its *No Limits* campaign messaging.

RQ3: Organization-Public Relationship Presence in *No Limits* Campaign Social Media

Informal qualitative analysis of University of South Carolina Facebook posts and user comments demonstrated the presence of an organization-public relationship.

Antecedents. Guided by Hon and Grunig (1999), dominant relationship management themes found through an informal qualitative analysis of *No Limits* campaign messages posted by the University of South Carolina on its Facebook page showed an emphasis on positivity and relationship nurturing, an element of stewardship. Stewardship, a relationship management strategy, was defined as “recogniz[ing] the strategic value of previously established relationships” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 17).

Positivity, defined as actions taken by an “organization or public does to enhance the enjoyment in a relationship” (Hon & Grunig, 1999), presented itself in at least six of the ten University of South Carolina’s *No Limits* Facebook posts. Using verbiage from the *No Limits* campaign, Facebook posts focused on the positive aspects of the University of South Carolina, particularly topics like beautiful weather, pride of the University, humor, heart, spirit, potential, and love that would elicit a positive emotional response from a member of any of its target publics.

Relationship nurturing, one of the four elements of stewardship, recognizes and places “importance of significant publics keeps them central to the organization’s consciousness” (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Facebook posts pertaining to the *No Limits* campaign messaging placed prominence primarily on students and their achievements in their respective areas of study, as well as in their extracurricular activities like volunteerism. One Facebook post portrayed a doctoral student in biological anthropology who examines skeletal remains to discover different ways of diagnosing breast cancer. Other Facebook posts centered on a student giving an inspirational speech during Black History Month and another focused on a student’s service and volunteerism with the local United Way chapter and other University service organizations.

Outcomes. Guided by Hon and Grunig (1999), dominant organization-public relationship outcomes found through an informal qualitative analysis of Facebook user comments about *No Limits* campaign messages posted by the University of South Carolina on its Facebook page include: control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, and exchange relationships. Interestingly, communal relationship was not a significant theme in the informal qualitative analysis of Facebook comments regarding the University’s *No Limits* campaign.

Control mutuality and exchange relationship themes emerged in comments on the University of South Carolina’s Facebook posts regarding its *No Limits* campaign in the form of critique of the University’s first *No Limits* television advertisement. Some Facebook commenters indicated that the television advertisement was “uninspiring” and was “made for a much older audience.” Examples of trust occurred when commenters were willing to express their hope that Conner Shaw, a University of South Carolina quarterback, would not get hurt in a football game. Satisfaction was expressed in comments on the University’s Facebook page about the campaign’s slogan, student feature stories, the first *No Limits* television advertisement, and winning a football game.

Commitment themes emerged in comments on the University of South Carolina’s Facebook posts regarding its *No Limits* campaign when it was related to sharing April Fool’s jokes and sports, particularly football. The affective dimension of commitment centered on emotions, whereas the continuance dimension centered on action (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Two Facebook user comments showed cross-over between the affective and continuance

dimensions of commitment. One Facebook user's comment focused on pulling a "Gamecock" April Fool's prank on a co-worker and recruited others to participate in it. Another Facebook user's comment centered on an individual expressing excitement about an upcoming football game and taking his mother to her first University of South Carolina game.

Discussion

Organization-public relationships, processes of forming and maintaining relationships between an organization and its publics (Yang & Grunig, 2005), are amplified in an ever-changing social media landscape. In a social media environment, organizations can receive immediate feedback from their respective publics (Bowen, 2013). Feedback from these relationships, as well as an understanding of why publics participate in organization-public relationships and reputation management can help organizations tailor their communication campaigns. The University of South Carolina appeared to have an understanding of organization-public relationships in the social media component of the *No Limits* campaign in an effort to tailor its reputation management strategies to resonate with alumni.

Positivity and relationship nurturing were key reputation management strategies that the University of South Carolina used in the social media component of its *No Limits* campaign. As a result, the outcomes indicated that there was an effective organization-public relationship within the social component of the campaign. Facebook user comments centered on trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, commitment, and exchange relationships. However, a focus on alumni in Facebook posts with *No Limits* campaign messaging could enhance the University of South Carolina's relationship nurturing strategies and increase interaction with alumni on Facebook. *No Limits* campaign messaging in the University's Facebook posts reflect the achievements of current students. A possible strategy may be to focus on alumni experiences at the University of South Carolina that prepared them for achievements made post-graduation.

Interestingly, based on the informal qualitative analysis in this study, communal relationships were not as significant as other organization-public relationship outcomes. While some members of the University of South Carolina's Facebook community did provide support around the critique of the first *No Limits* television advertisement, this support was not as frequent as those who critiqued the advertisement. Perhaps, strengthening these communal relationships might foster greater online community advocates for the University of South Carolina's *No Limits* campaign on social media.

Quantitative data collected through an online survey examined the commitment dimension of the organization-public relationship found in the social media component of the *No Limits* campaign. Commitment was defined as "extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 3). Examining the extent to which alumni felt committed to the University of South Carolina provided insights about the extent that commitment caused alumni to interact with the campaign messaging on the University's Facebook page. While being connected to the University of South Carolina on its various social media accounts seemed to indicate that alumni wanted to interact with the University, the degree of commitment seemed to be affected most by the desire to maintain an association or relationship with the University of South Carolina.

Value and importance of the relationship with the University of South Carolina, as well as loyalty to the University seemed to also be significant. Interestingly, My Carolina Alumni Association membership, geographic location, and employment also seemed to have significant associations with alumni desire to interact with the social media component of the

University of South Carolina's *No Limits* campaign, as well as their desire to maintain an association or relationship with the University.

Understanding the factors interwoven or associated with alumni commitment may help academic institutions tailor their campaign messaging to social media in a manner that fosters greater interaction with the organization's alumni public.

Limitations & Further Research

Limitations. Cross-sectional survey design only looks at attitudes and behaviors at one point in time; thus, one survey cannot fully assess how commitment affects organization-public relationships over time. Given that this survey has been conducted in the summer, response rates were lower than the ideal rate of 20%. A second wave reminder email was planned for and anticipated, but due to technical difficulties and University policies, a follow-up reminder was unable to be sent out. The inability to send out a second wave was a significant limitation of the online survey. Alumni on the email distribution list, as defined by the University of South Carolina, were individuals who have graduated or taken more than 15 credit hours or more at the university. Additionally, respondents overwhelmingly identified as Caucasian (90.3%) with very few respondents identifying as Hispanic (1%) or Asian/Pacific Islander (1%).

In the collection and analysis of Facebook comments, it was unclear whether individuals were either alumni or students; therefore, all comments were coded for the presence of organization-public relationship outcomes. Alumni and students may have varying levels of commitment in an organization-public relationship; thus, the ability to clearly identify alumni was needed.

Further research. Further research should implement the same survey within six months of the initial data collection to determine how fluctuation pertaining to the commitment dimension of the organization-public relationship embodied in the University of South Carolina's *No Limits* campaign has evolved.

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**Capturing Potential Contribution of Public Relations to Organizational Success:
An Approach to Evaluation of Consistency in Corporate Messages**

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Abstract

This paper examines public relations practitioners' communication efforts by focusing on consistency in corporate messages. We measured their effort to express their corporate values in external messages by conducting a quantitative content analysis of the corporate documents which 10 Japanese companies published on their websites during the period of 2007 to 2012. We also analyzed its relationships with other variables: their effort to deliver messages and reputation. The results suggest that practitioners' communication efforts are closely related to reputation.

Introduction

Both scholars and practitioners recognize the importance of consistency in terms of messages. Their concerns can be divided into two categories: Consistency between messages and consistency between messages and behaviors. They argue that these consistencies foster or enhance an understanding of organizations, relationship with publics, and reputation, which help organizations achieve their goals (e.g., Cornelissen, 2011; Fombrun & van Riel, 2004; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Heath, 1994). However, some scholars do not fully agree with the second category of consistency that is the consistency between messages and behaviors. As one example of such scholars, Christensen and Langer (2009) argued that "differences between words and actions are essential dimensions of social and organizational change" (p. 131). And the development of indicators to objectively verify the consistency between messages and behaviors is required (Lee, 2008).

Despite its importance, little attention has been given to evaluating consistency in corporate messages as an indicator of practitioners' communication efforts. This study aims to clarify how practitioners should implement consistency into their practice, and to demonstrate how their communication efforts can be evaluated. On the status of research-in-progress, this paper reports and discusses key findings from our recent analyses. With the data collected from 10 Japanese companies' websites, this paper examines consistency between internally shared values and external messages as one of practitioners' communication efforts, and analyzes its relationship with other communication effort and that with reputation.

Theoretical Background and Research Questions

There has been a great discussion about the importance of delivering consistent messages among practitioners and scholars across the various communication and other disciplines (e.g., public relations, marketing, management, strategy, branding, advertising, HR, reputation). Fombrun and van Riel (2004) argued that "[consistency] clarifies the breadth of company's activities and makes them interpretable" and "consistency of messaging and initiatives helps to shape shared values among internal and external stakeholders" (p. 97). The former argument refers to the consistency between messages which is often described as speaking with one voice. The latter refers to the consistency between messages and behaviors which is also expressed as walking the talk. Discussions regarding consistency can be divided into these two categories.

The notion of "speaking with one voice" has been emphasized especially in the context of crisis communication (e.g., Coombs, 1999, 2012; Huang & Su, 2009) and IMC/integrated communication (e.g., Cornelissen, Christensen, & Vijn, 2006; Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Hallahan, 2007; Hutton, 1996; Smith, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). They argue that it enhances organizations' accountability, credibility, and legitimacy. It is also thought to foster "an understanding of the company as its management and employees want it to be understood" (Heath, 1994, p. 55), and "[through consistent messages] an organization is more likely to be known and looked upon favorably by key audiences groups" (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 23). As a whole, scholars in the field of corporate communication uniformly argue that "organizations should aim for a unified, consistent voice across different markets and different audiences" (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011, p. 387).

On the other hand, "walking the talk" is a controversial matter. Although it has been often stressed in the context of CSR, Lee (2008) argues that there is a need to develop objective and behavioral indicators which could verify whether organizations are walking the talk. Moreover, some scholars do not always support this idea. As one example of such scholars, Christensen and Langer (2009) argue that "organizations should not construe and implement the walk-the-talk imperative too tightly" citing the viewpoint of Weick (1979);

"walk-the-talk imperative seriously limits the possibility of discovering new solutions or ideas for which the previous words are inadequate" (pp. 142-143). They also suggests that the notion of consistency between messages and behaviors might be against Grunig et al. (2002)'s symmetrical communication. Since symmetrical communication encourages changes in attitudes or behaviors of both publics and organizations to establish and enhance mutually beneficial relationship, inconsistencies in organizations' messages can be manifestation of their effort to improve relationship with their publics.

According to Lindenmann (2005), public relations measurement and evaluation has been discussed and carried out for more than 70 years. Practitioners and scholars have been invented many methodological tools and techniques. However, their main concerns are measuring and evaluating "outcomes", and little attention has been given to developing evaluation method for activities themselves or strategies behind them. As long as consistency in corporate messages is considered to play a critical role in the organizational success, it is important to evaluate messages as an indicator of practitioners' communication efforts and analyze the impact on outcomes. Furthermore, even though building, maintaining, and enhancing quality relationship with publics and favorable reputation are often referred as public relations long-term objectives which contribute to organizational success (e.g., Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, Grunig & Huang, 2000; Lindenmann, 2003, Watson & Noble, 2007), their efforts to achieve such goals have not been examined.

Taking above discussions into account, this study focuses on words and expressions in messages which practitioners compose and deliver to publics. It rephrases "consistency between messages and behaviors" as "consistency between *external* messages and *internally shared values which form the basis for* behaviors". Thereby, the level of consistency is defined as the degree of practitioners' effort to express internally shared corporate values in external messages. This paper examines the level of consistency and practitioners' long-term consistent effort to maintain quality of message (high level of consistency).

Furthermore, as Hallahan (2001) argued that "... communications produced in public relations can be considered products. In this sense, the goal of public relations communicators is the creation of usable deliverables" (p. 237), it is worth to examine its relationship with their effort to deliver messages, as well as that with reputation.

This paper addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the level of consistency relate to practitioners' effort to deliver messages?

RQ2: How does the level of consistency relate to reputation?

In this study, practitioners' communication efforts mentioned above are considered "input" variables and reputation is "outcome" variable, by adopting Macnamara (2008)'s classification of evaluation levels in the Pyramid model³².

³² Macnamara (2008) describes evaluation levels in his model as, "... inputs are the strategic and physical components of communication programs or projects such as the choice of medium (eg. event, publication, Web, etc), content (such as text and images), and format. ... Outcomes are the impacts of communication, both attitudinal and behavioural" (p. 16)

Method

As it was defined as the degree of practitioners' effort to express internally shared corporate values in external messages, the level of consistency was measured by calculating how often their corporate values are mentioned in external messages. This was done by conducting a quantitative content analysis taking following two steps. First, keywords which represent internally shared values were determined, and then the frequency of these keywords in external messages was calculated. Then relationships among three variables (level of consistency, degree of effort to deliver messages, and reputation) were analyzed.

Material and Time Frame

Two kinds of corporate documents were served as material for the analysis: Core documents which are assumed to contain internally shared corporate values, and external messages. Core documents include statements of mission and vision, corporate philosophy, and action guidelines. As external messages, news releases were used since Miyabe and Suda (2013)³³ demonstrated the usefulness of news releases for analyzing the organizations' efforts on external communication. In addition, news releases provide us opportunities to examine longitudinal consistency.

To examine practitioners' long-term consistent effort, the time frame was set to 2007 through 2012, which include two major events impacted on Japanese companies and their publics: The Lehman shock on 2008 and the Great East Japan Earthquake on 2011.

Sample Selection and Data Collection

To select companies, this paper used the data from Miyabe and Suda (2013), in which they evaluated web features for news release users on 30 major Japanese companies' websites. The evaluation scores were considered an indicator of degree of practitioners' effort to deliver messages. According to the evaluation, the five highest-scored companies and the five lowest-scored companies were selected as a high-effort group and a low-effort group, respectively.

Core documents and news releases were obtained from selected companies' websites. (Appendix A lists name of companies and number of news releases). To answer the research question two, reputation scores were obtained from Nikkei BP Consulting (2012)'s Brand Japan 2012 ranking³⁴ which are available on their website.

Analyses

As a preparation for content analysis, raw data downloaded from corporate websites were processed by taking the following steps: (1) HTML/PDF documents were converted to text file format, (2) All files were classified into two folders ("Core" and "External") for each company, (3) All files inside a folder were combined into one file, (4) Morphological analysis (word segmentation and part-of-speech tagging) were performed. For step 3 and 4, a free software for quantitative content analysis called KH Coder³⁵ was used.

³³ They examined linguistic changes in news releases issued by 30 Japanese companies after the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 2011. The results of their analyses suggested close relationship between linguistic changes and the practitioners' effort to deliver messages.

³⁴ The scores were compiled through the survey of general public and business persons.

³⁵ It was developed by Koichi Higuchi, an associate professor of Social Sciences at Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan. It is available at <http://khc.sourceforge.net/en/>. It provides various kinds of searching and statistical analysis functions by using ChaSen for morphological analysis, MySQL for searching and extracting data, and R for statistical computing and graphics as back-end tools.

Each company's keywords were determined according to word frequencies in the combined "Core" file. The five high-frequency nouns were selected as keywords excluding proper nouns and commonly used nouns such as corporation, customers, or year (Appendix B lists each company's keywords). Then, proportion of news releases that contain keywords was calculated yearly for each company through dividing the number of news releases that contain any of keywords by the total number of news releases. This proportion represents the level of consistency.

The relationship between two "input" variables (level of consistency and degree of effort to deliver messages) was analyzed by comparing the level of consistency and long-term consistent effort between two groups in which companies were classified according to the degree of effort to deliver message. The geometric average of the level of consistency (proportion of news releases that contain keyword) for each group was calculated. The difference between two groups was statistically tested by performing a two sample test for equality of proportions with R. In terms of long-term consistent effort, the changes in the consistency level and those in the frequency of key verbs ("aim" and "challenge")³⁶ during 2007 to 2012 were compared between two groups.

Lastly, correlations among three variables (level of consistency, degree of effort to deliver messages, and reputation) were computed.

Findings

The Relationship Between Two "Input" Variables

As shown in Figure 1, the level of consistency appeared to differ among companies and to reflect practitioners' effort to deliver messages.

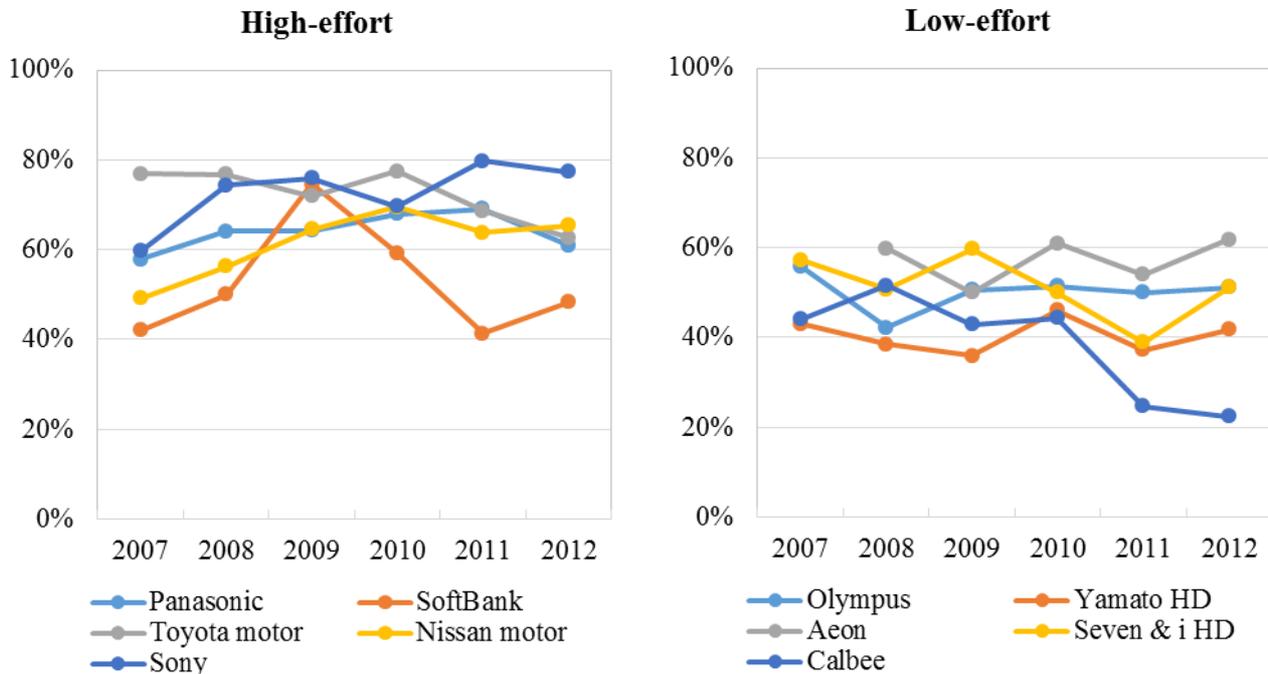


Figure 1. Differences in level of consistency (yearly calculated proportion of news releases that contain keywords).

³⁶ The verbs "aim" and "challenge" were focused on in Miyabe and Suda (2013) because they are often used to express or describe one's goals, objectives, or intentions including vision and mission.

The average (geometric) level of consistency of the high-effort group was higher than that of the low-effort group as shown in Figure 2. The highest proportion and lowest proportion of the high-effort group and those of the low-effort group are 79.80% and 41.33%, and 69.87% and 22.45%, respectively (See Appendix A, yearly calculated proportions are shown in parentheses).

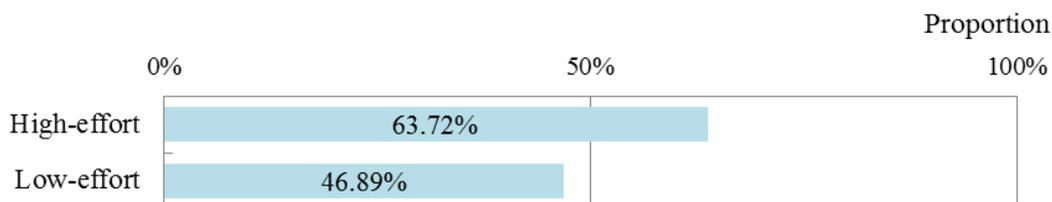


Figure 2. Comparison of the average (geometric) level of consistency between two.

The result of two sample test for equality of proportions with continuity correction showed the significant difference between two groups ($\chi^2(1) = 228.65, p < .001$). These results suggest that practitioners who make efforts to deliver messages are likely to expend their effort in expressing internally shared values in external messages.

Regarding long-term consistent effort, the changes in the consistency level during 2007 to 2012 were compared between two groups. The high-effort group maintained higher level of consistency than the low-effort group over six years as shown in Figure 3.

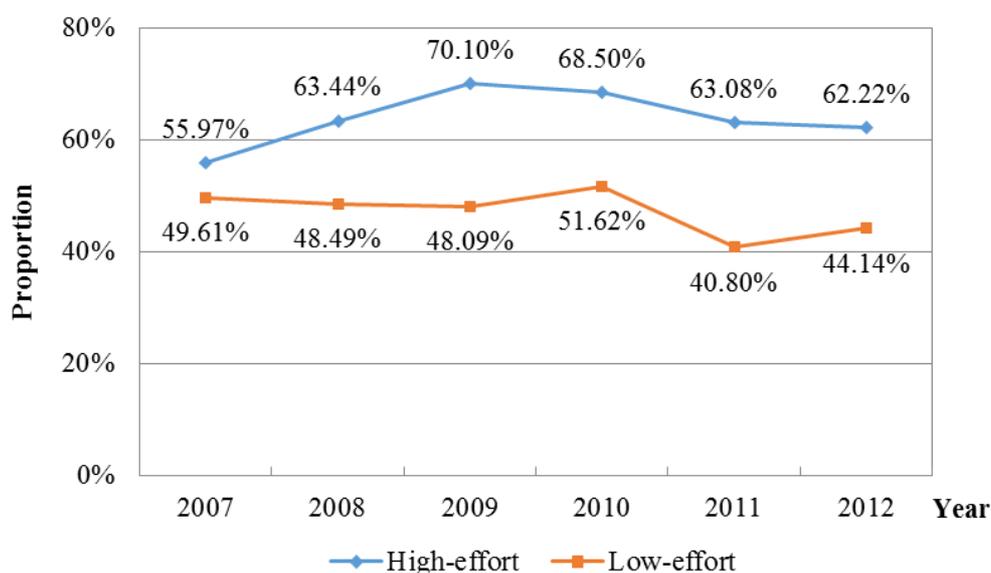


Figure 3. Comparison of changes in level of consistency between two.

In the same manner, the high-effort group maintained higher frequency of key verbs than the low-effort group over six years as shown in Figure 4. It should be noted that regarding the impact of two major events, the Lehman shock on 2008 and the Great East Japan Earthquake on 2011, the impact of latter event on corporate messages seems to be more apparent on the low-effort group companies. In contrast, the high-effort group seems to have been less affected by both events. This can be seen as their strength of consistent effort.

However, fluctuation³⁷ in changes in the level of consistency or in the frequency of key verbs does not always work as an indicator of their long-term consistent effort to maintain quality of message. Especially for organizations with lower level of consistency or frequency of key verbs, if they do not make effort to improve quality of messages, fluctuation would be small with negative meaning. With this reason, the difference in the long-term consistent effort between two groups has not been statistically tested.

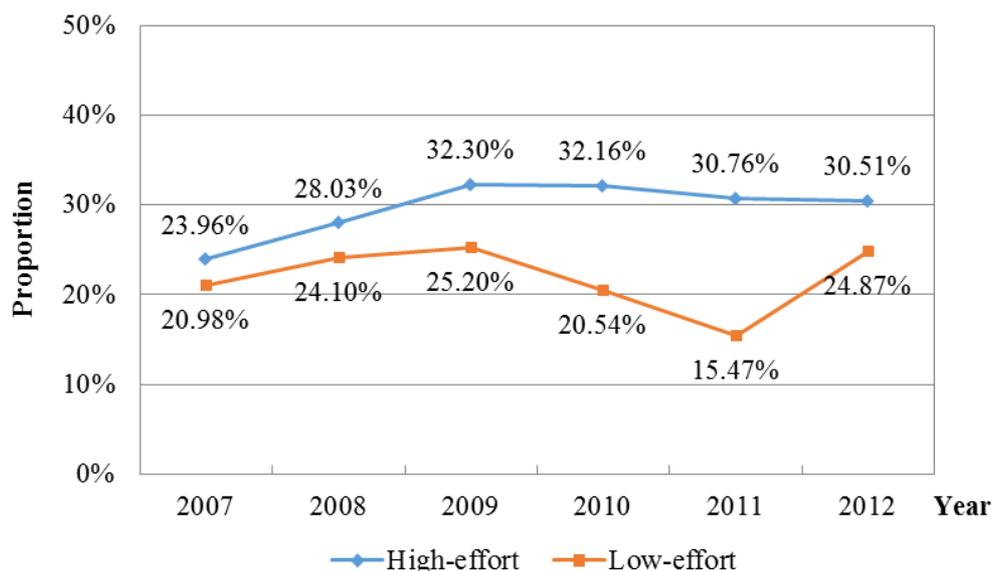


Figure 4. Comparison of changes in frequency of key verbs between two groups.

Relationships Among Two "Input" Variables and "Output" Variable

Table 1 shows the correlations between three variables. There were moderately strong, positive correlations between level of consistency and degree of effort to deliver messages ($r = .648, p < .05$), and between level of consistency and reputation ($r = .708, p < .05$). The relationship between degree of effort to deliver messages and reputation was even stronger ($r = .865, p < .01$). These results indicate that the higher the reputation, the more the communication efforts practitioners make. To clarify the causal relationships among variables, further investigation is required.

Table 1
Correlations between Three Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Level of consistency	-		
2. Reputation	.708*	-	
3. Degree of effort to deliver messages	.648*	.865**	-

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Olympus is not included due to missing value of reputation.

³⁷ CV (Coefficient of variation) can be used to compare the stability of communication efforts. But small fluctuation is not always a good sign.

The answers to the research questions are described as follows;

1. The level of consistency is positively and moderately correlated with practitioners' effort to deliver message. In other words, practitioners who make effort to deliver messages through news releases more likely make effort to express their corporate values in their messages, or vice versa. Although it has not been statistically tested, Figure 3 and 4 show the difference in their long-term consistent effort (to maintain quality of message) by the degree of effort to deliver messages.
2. The level of consistency is also positively and moderately correlated with reputation. In other words, practitioners who work for organization with high reputation more likely make effort to express their corporate values in their messages, or those who make effort to express their corporate values in their messages more likely contribute to organization's reputation. However, the relationship between their long-term consistent effort (to maintain quality of message) and reputation has not been statistically tested.

Discussion

In this paper, we measured the level of consistency which represents the degree of practitioners' effort to express corporate values in external messages. And we analyzed how it relates to their effort to deliver messages as another input variable, and reputation as outcome variable. The results showed moderate to strong positive correlations between those three variables, which indicate that practitioners' communication efforts are closely related to reputation. Although further research is required to prove a causal relationship, there is a possibility that the consistency in corporate messages contribute to organizations.

By examining the long-term consistent effort, this paper advanced Miyabe and Suda (2013)'s findings. They found changes in linguistic expression in Japanese companies' news releases after the Great East Japan Earthquake. However they could not insist that the earthquake caused the changes since they only compared news releases issued in preceding year and following year of the earthquake. With the longer period of time frame, this study provided some insight into this issue. We confirmed that in comparison with the high-effort group, the low-effort group showed more apparent negative changes in corporate messages after the earthquake. This could be an evidence of that creation of corporate messages is closely related to organizational matters such as structure, strategy, and resources.

To improve methodology, developing a means which enables statistically valid analysis to assess practitioners' long-term consistent effort is needed. Since companies we examined were limited number of relatively large sized, B2C (business-to-consumer) companies, to draw a practical conclusion, more samples including small and medium sized companies and B2B (business to business) companies need to be examined.

One of the limitations of this paper involves the underlying assumptions of the method. Taking Christensen and Langer (2009)'s argument into account, this study did not apply "walking the talk" criteria directly to the evaluation. Instead, we examined the consistency between internally shared values and external messages based on the following assumptions; Corporate values are actually shared inside the organization, documents that describe corporate values are fully disclosed on their website, and those values have been remained during the time frame set for this study. Therefore it will be necessary to verify whether these assumptions are appropriate.

As Watson and Noble (2007) emphasized that "any objective which is achievable through public relations alone is not worth measuring, and that any objective worth measuring is not achievable through PR (alone)" (p. 179), it is important to consider to what extent public relations contributes to the achievement and what factors may affect PR activities. This will be our next step.

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Appendix A

Number of News Releases issued by 10 Companies during 2007 – 2012 and Proportion of News Releases that contain Keyword(s)

Company	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
Panasonic	363 (57.85)	379 (64.12)	339 (64.31)	365 (67.95)	349 (69.05)	379 (60.95)	2174 (63.98)
^a SoftBank	50 (42.00)	50 (50.00)	59 (74.58)	81 (59.26)	75 (41.33)	85 (48.24)	400 (52.5)
Toyota motor	199 (76.88)	206 (76.70)	221 (71.95)	217 (77.42)	310 (68.71)	244 (62.70)	1397 (71.87)
Nissan motor	309 (49.19)	313 (56.23)	240 (64.58)	288 (69.44)	282 (63.83)	289 (65.40)	1721 (61.13)
Sony	164 (59.76)	183 (74.32)	158 (75.95)	201 (69.65)	203 (79.80)	190 (77.37)	1099 (73.07)
Olympus	129 (55.81)	116 (42.24)	87 (50.57)	105 (51.43)	90 (50.00)	88 (51.14)	615 (50.24)
Yamato HD	100 (43.00)	91 (38.46)	89 (35.96)	63 (46.03)	70 (37.14)	79 (41.77)	492 (40.24)
^b Aeon	-	122 (59.84)	134 (50.00)	156 (60.9)	211 (54.03)	171 (61.76)	794 (57.25)
Seven & i HD	82 (57.32)	69 (50.72)	77 (59.74)	52 (50.00)	72 (38.89)	125 (51.20)	477 (51.57)
Calbee	84 (44.05)	64 (51.56)	63 (42.86)	79 (44.3)	72 (24.66)	49 (22.45)	411 (39.08)
Total							9580

Note. ^a "SoftBank news" are included. ^b Aeon's news releases are available from 2008
Proportions of news releases that contain keywords are in parentheses (%).

Appendix B

List of Keywords extracted from Core Documents

Company	Keywords
Panasonic	environment, world, earth, region/local, culture
SoftBank	evolution, internet, information, society, world
Toyota motor	environment, region/local, earth, information, global
Nissan motor	society, environment, emission, technology, world
Sony	information, environment, region/local, business, society
Olympus	society, value, information, environment, region/local
Yamato HD	society, philosophy, information, attitude, environment
Aeon	region/local, environment, society, resource, philosophy
Seven & i HD	society, environment, information, region/local, earth
Calbee	society, nature, region/local, natural bounty, earth

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication:
Intermedia Agenda Setting Effects between News Releases and Press Coverage**

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Abstract

Due to the lack of a standard definition for the term *corporate social responsibility* (CSR), different discourse communities attach different meanings to it. Based on the intermedia agenda setting theory, this study examines the extent to which CSR-related news releases published by the two electricity providers in Hong Kong influences press coverage between 2006 and 2011. The results indicate that the two corporations and the press place different levels of emphasis on different types of CSR activities. This study found that CSR-related news releases which are highly relevant to the core operations of the corporation and have high impact on society have a higher possibility of being reported in the press.

Introduction

The term *corporate social responsibility* (hereafter CSR) is an oxymoron – *corporate* implies profit making; *social* implies a multiplicity of interests of different stakeholder groups; and *responsibility* implies required, thus involuntary actions. It is a fluid concept to which communicators can attach different meanings (Windell, 2007). In spite of the lack of consensus on a standard definition of CSR, there is a common assumption in the different definitions of CSR: it is universally acknowledged that corporations do have responsibilities towards society beyond their own self-interests and legal obligations (Podnar, 2008).

Over the years, there have been changing social dynamics, such as changing norms, values and expectations, which have contributed to the ongoing debate about what CSR is and how it should be presented. As a consequence of the British Petroleum (BP) Oil Spill in the Gulf in 2010, which is the largest oil spill in the history of the petroleum industry, BP was heavily criticized for the environmental impact, health consequences and other negative impact that it had made on society. In relation to the accident, the Washington Post criticized BP's award-winning CSR campaign, Beyond Petroleum, for presenting BP as aligning itself with the interests of the community without exposing its primary interests in profit maximization (Freeland, 2010). Examples of corporate misbehaviors, like the BP accident, have caused CSR to be considered a postmodern public relations exercise serving the purpose of image management (Lessen, 2007). Some argue that corporations can never be socially responsible because of their inherent nature of being profit-driven and their incapability in addressing the needs of all stakeholder groups (McMillan, 2007; Waddock, 2007).

In fact, CSR has often received more criticisms than compliments; this could be caused by the different expectations and goals that different stakeholder groups have about CSR. Burchell and Cook (2006) suggest that there is a competition of power and dominance amongst different discourse groups about CSR. Specifically, stakeholder groups compete in gaining access to and influencing the dialogue on CSR. The dialogue is not necessarily dominated by corporations; multiple actors are involved in a dialogue on what constitutes CSR whereby “the capacity of civil society actors to shape the debates and parameters of CSR discourse is balanced against the more powerful corporate voices to cast the discourse of social and environmental responsibility in terms more favorable to them” (Burchell & Cook, 2006, p. 134). Therefore, Burchell and Cook suggest that future studies on CSR discourse investigate the balance between how social actors and powerful corporations exercise their capacity in getting their voices heard respectively.

The dialogue on CSR does not necessarily refer to the direct communication about CSR amongst discourse communities only; it is also about the indirect influence that each group has on one another. Wehmeier and Schultz (2011) argue that it is the “interplay of public and organizational narrations” that is developing CSR stories (P. 479). In the current age of Web 2.0, consumers can also be the *prosumers*, taking part in both the production and the consumption of CSR-related information (Capriotti, 2011). Ihlen (2008) recommends the use of *public sphere* as a concept for the analysis of CSR because there are social actors other than corporations who are changing the norms, values and expectations about CSR. In social constructivist perspectives, the communication of CSR is “constructing and modifying reality, social conditions and relationships” (Ihlen, Bartlett, & May, 2011, p. 11).

One of the communication platforms on which the dialogue on CSR is taking place is the media. According to Arvidsson (2010), corporate management in Sweden perceived increased media coverage as a driving force for them to take a proactive rather than reactive approach to CSR because the proactive approach could help present their corporations as operating within the norms and expectations of society and could help them gain legitimacy. Despite this, Carroll (2011) found that only a handful of reporters had covered CSR-related news stories; he suspected that the principles of newsworthiness and professionalism, such as

the degree of autonomy, professional norms and public service orientation, were possible structural factors causing a low coverage of CSR-related news stories.

Because corporations' success in creating positive CSR stories is perceived to be advantageous in protecting their image during crises and ensuring better financial performance, corporations are advised to understand what news values are and add news values to their stories so as to win the competition for story placements (Carroll, 2011). Thus, based on the intermedia agenda setting theory, this study examines the extent to which the CSR-related news releases published by corporations, as a form of agenda setting medium, influence subsequent press coverage. The purpose of the study is to empirically identify the similarities and differences of how corporations and the press define the news values associated with CSR-related stories.

Literature Review

Different discourse communities may differ in their definitions of CSR and thus, their interpretations of CSR; what is considered a socially responsible behavior for one group may be considered an image management tool for another. Hence, the communication about CSR is of crucial importance to how different discourse communities exchange and socially construct the definition of CSR. In this regard, Bartlett and Dervin (2011) pointed out that CSR is "not just a technical exercise in describing what corporations do within society, but it is also a normative exercise in defining what corporations should be responsible for in society" (p. 48). In fact, the mismatch between social expectations and corporate behaviors is causes of the criticism towards CSR as being a mismatch between words and actions (Christensen, 2007).

One of the biggest problems in CSR communication is that the communication about it does not necessarily lead to behavioral change. Smith, Palazzo and Bhattacharya (2010) found that one of the problems related to CSR in supply chains is that corporations often restrict their efforts to serving the purpose of image management only and do not intend to change their behaviors. Despite this, Dempsey's analysis (2011) has shown how NGOs' engagement in communication practices has indeed influenced the social responsibility of corporations. She pointed out that discourses are somehow connected to each other, so the creation of something new depends on what has already been previously produced. Various discourse communities are engaged in a process of influencing not only the discourse on CSR, but also corporate behaviors. Instead of seeing each discourse as being isolated from one another, they should be seen as being connected with one another.

Despite the interconnectedness amongst different discourse communities on the CSR discourse, most literature on CSR communication has either examined one single communication tool (Chan & Welford, 2005; Maignan & Ralston, 2002), or an overall communication strategy enacted by organizations (Ihlen, 2008). More research should be conducted to look into how different discourse communities influence one another.

For this reason, the intermedia agenda setting theory was selected as the theoretical framework for the present study; it suggests that there is a transfer of issue salience from one medium to another. Its origin could be traced back to 1972 when McCombs and Shaw came up with the agenda setting theory, suggesting that the news media played a crucial role in shaping the political reality because their audience attached importance to issues which were reported in the news media. As a result, the media sets the agenda for the public to think about the issues that they report. Agenda setting is a cognitive process during which the audience's perception of reality is shaped by the media's filtering and shaping of reality. The reality is shaped through the media's selection of topics.

The intermedia agenda setting theory has been applied to study the extent to which issues reported in one medium influence another medium. For instance, DiStaso's(2007)

thesis examined the influence of corporate news releases on media reports on financial information; she found that what corporations say, how they present it, and what and how much content is transferred to the media is important in influencing their reputation. Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2008) defined intermedia agenda setting effects as being about “how news media emulate each other and adopt each others’ stories” (p. 860). The major distinction between intermedia agenda setting effects and the original agenda setting theory is that the former is more about influencing each other’s issue attention. It is characterized by the competitive nature of the media market, resulting in a behavioral rather than an attitudinal change.

What is reported in the media is of crucial importance to corporate reputation; at the same time, the news media is an important agent in the public sphere for the public discourse on CSR about what it is and what it should be (Carroll, 2011). Thus, not only should discourse communities hoping to gain access to influence the CSR discourse understand news values, they also seek to influence the media agenda on CSR. Due to economic constraints, the media adopt more information from public relations information subsidies in certain circumstances (Curtin, 1999). Curtin suggested that media gatekeepers would place the information subsidies they receive in a continuum from public service to profit. If the purpose of the subsidies is profit only, the information subsidies will be discarded by the media. On the other hand, if it is about public service, the information will be analyzed by journalists based on journalistic standards to decide whether it will be reported. There are also other factors influencing whether information subsidies get reported; for example, limited economic resources may motivate editors to cover the stories so that the space gets filled up. Even if an information subsidy gets covered, however, it has to bear the risk of being changed based on professional norms of journalism.

To influence the media agenda on the CSR discourse, those who follow media routines and style are likely to exert more influence. Sweetser and Brown (2008) found that information subsidies do make agenda setting effects on the media’s agenda building process. In fact, it was estimated that information subsidies, such as news releases, press conferences, media and the like, account for as much as fifty percent of the news content (Akpabio, 2005). Of these information subsidies, news releases are strategically written to achieve an organizational goal and are used as a narrative by an organization to influence its stakeholders, such as the media (Gitpin, 2007). “News releases might be characterized as genres of autobiographical narrative produced by organizations wishing to highlight certain circumstances or provide a given interpretation of events in order to influence stakeholders, including the media.” (Applegate, 2005, p. 12). According to Gitpin, public relations practitioners utilize news releases as a means of communicating with publics via the media as a more credible third party.

To compete to influence the media agenda on CSR, corporations are advised to understand how news values are defined in the professional practice of journalism (Carroll, 2011). For instance, news releases should consist of elements of newsworthiness that resemble a news article, including conflict, impact, prominence, proximity, timeliness and the unusual (Applegate, 2005). The purpose of news releases published by corporations is not only to influence what issues are reported in the media, but also the content of the news stories.

To study beyond the transfer of issue salience, the agenda setting theory can be classified into two levels: the first level is about the transfer of salience of the issues covered in the media whereas the second level is about the transfer of salience of the attributes related to the issues (McCombs, 2005; Weaver, 2007). According to Weaver, issues undergo processes of being selected, emphasized, excluded and elaborated during content production. In second-level agenda setting, attributes are defined as “a property, quality, or characteristic

that describes an object” (Kiouisis, Mitrook, Wu, & Seltzer, 2006, p. 269). The second level agenda setting can be further classified into two dimensions: the substantive dimension refers to the ideology whereas the affective dimension refers to the tone of descriptions about the substantive dimension. With respect to the tone of the news coverage about CSR, Carroll’s (2011) study of CSR-related news found 80% of positive news coverage, 17% of neutral news coverage and 3% of negative coverage. Therefore, in spite of the uncertainty about how the media may change the content of information subsidies based on the journalistic norms, it can be argued that CSR-related information subsidies are more likely to be reported positively if they are covered in the media.

Based on the literature review on CSR communication, the purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the CSR communication presented by corporations influences subsequent press coverage. It seeks to fill the gap of the lack of research on how discourse communities influence one another on CSR and how to define the newsworthiness of CSR. It raises one research question: to what extent do the news releases published by corporations on the different CSR themes receive news coverage? It applies intermedia agenda setting effects as the theoretical framework, suggesting that how corporations set their agenda on CSR through their news releases can influence how the media build their agenda on CSR.

Method

To study how the CSR agenda set by corporations influences the subsequent media agenda on CSR, news releases from corporations were compared against the subsequent media coverage about those news releases in the press. According to Harris, Kolovos and Lock (2001), content analysis is the dominant approach in agenda setting research due to its usefulness in documenting what has been covered. Furthermore, MacKuen and Coombs (1981) argued that the number of articles devoted to an issue reflects the media’s judgment on the salience of the issue. For the present study, data collection and content analysis were conducted in multiple stages.

In the first stage of data collection, the news releases published by the two electricity providers in Hong Kong, namely CLP and Power Assets, between 2006 and 2011 were collected from their official web sites. The two electricity providers in Hong Kong are listed in the Hong Kong Stock Exchange and operate as a monopoly of serving two different parts of Hong Kong. They were selected for this study because of their significance to the entire Hong Kong population and thus, to the media. According to the Corporate Social Responsibility Survey of Hang Seng Index Constituent Companies published by Oxfam Hong Kong in 2010, which measured the CSR performance of 42 listed companies, CLP was ranked second whereas Power Assets was ranked thirteenth.

In the second stage of data collection, the key words “CLP” and “Power Assets” were entered into the *Wiseneeds* database, an online database on which most published news articles in Hong Kong can be found, to generate all the news articles published over the same six-year period from 2006 to 2011. At the time of data collection, there were a total of 19 newspapers in Hong Kong. Because only 17 of them were available on *Wiseneeds*, only 17 of them were included.

The third stage of preliminary data analysis involved two coders classifying the news releases published by the two electricity providers as either *CSR-related* or *non-CSR related*. Two coders, a graduate student and an undergraduate student with previous experience in content analysis, had to agree on whether each news release was CSR-related or non-CSR related before proceeding with the analysis. As a result, 129 news releases from CLP and 73 news releases from Power Assets moved to the stage of data analysis. As for the news articles, the two coders also had to agree on whether each news article was CSR-related or non-CSR

related based on the headlines. A total of 722 and 323 news articles from CLP and Power Assets were analyzed respectively.

In the fourth stage of data analysis, qualitative content analysis was conducted for open coding and axial coding to be used to identify the different CSR themes that could be found in the news releases (Strauss, 1987). Each news release and each news article is considered a unit of analysis. The process of coding generated the seven mutually exclusive CSR themes based on which each unit of analysis is categorized. First, *recognition* refers to the corporation's receipt of an award or other forms of acknowledgements in recognition of their CSR-related efforts. Second, *products and services* refers to the corporation's launch of a new product or service for customers as an extension of its social responsibilities, such as e-invoice. Third, *operations* refers to the corporation's investment in making improvements in existing operational facilities or new facilities to extend their social responsibilities, such as the use of renewable energy. Forth, *donation and sponsorship* refers to the corporation's making a donation or sponsorship on a voluntary basis. Fifth, *education* refers to the corporation's execution of an educational program, such as a training program for the youth. Sixth, *community* refers to the corporation's execution of a community program, such as a health program for senior citizens. Lastly, *environment* refers to the corporation's launch of an environmental program which is oriented towards preserving the environment and promoting awareness about energy conservation, such as a tree planting event.

The two coders content analyzed each news article based on the above categories. Before proceeding with the analysis, a sub-sample of 30% of the news releases and news articles were taken for a pilot test by the two coders. Upon agreement on the definitions of the categories, the coding reached a reliability score of Cronbach's alpha of 0.833 before proceeding with the analysis for all news releases and news articles in the sample.

Even though the data collection for the news releases and the news articles were conducted independently, the open coding shows that related news releases could be found for all news articles in the sample; thus, all the news releases were one of the sources, if not the only source, of the subsequent news coverage about the same CSR-related news stories. In addition to classifying each news release into each CSR theme, the present study also content analyzed the news releases based on the tone of news coverage as being *positive*, *negative* or *neutral* (Carroll, 2011).

In the final stage, upon data collection, repeated revisions and finalization of the coding scheme, and completion of the coding, the data were inputted into the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for data analysis.

Results

The theory of intermedia agenda setting effects posits that there is a transfer of issue salience from one medium to another. The results of the statistical analysis indicate that the relationship is not significant; there is no transfer of issue salience from news releases to news articles on CSR-related stories. Table 1 shows a comparison between the number of news releases and the amount of press coverage for each CSR theme. It was found that even though the two corporations and the press place an equal level of emphasis on the top ranked theme of *operations* and the least level of emphasis on the lowest ranked theme of *donation/sponsorship*, the salience they assign to other CSR themes is different.

Corporate news releases, as a type of information subsidies, were published for the purpose of gaining media coverage. Hence, corporations are advised to highlight the news values in the news releases. In addition to newsworthiness, however, there are also other factors within the journalistic practice that determines whether a news release will be covered in the press. Table 2 indicates the number of news articles published for each news release published under each CSR theme. It was found that in average, about 9.58 news articles were

published for each news release about *operations*. The second ranked CSR theme was *product and services*, gaining an average of 7.77 news articles for each news release. The third ranked was *donation/sponsorship*, attracting an average of 4.5 news articles for each news release. The fourth ranked was *environment*, receiving an average of 3.83 news articles for each news release. The fifth ranked was *community* with an average of 3.14 news articles for each news release. The sixth ranked was *education* with an average of 2.64 news articles for each news release. The lowest ranked CSR theme was *recognition*, gaining an average of 2.04 news articles for each news release.

As for the tone of press coverage, Table 3 indicates that even though *operations* and *products and services* are ranked top in terms of amount of coverage, they were also the two which received the highest percentage of *negative* news articles. These two themes also received the lowest percentage of *positive* news articles, especially the theme of *operations*, which received a very low percentage of 23.59% of *positive* coverage, 27.77% of *negative* coverage and 48.43% of *neutral* coverage. The theme of *products and services* received 81.19% of *positive* coverage, 2.48% of *negative* coverage and 14.85% of *neutral* coverage. Even though CSR is generally perceived to be positive, the theme of *environment* still received 1.45% of *negative* coverage. Apart from these three, none of the other themes attracted *negative* coverage. The theme of *recognition* received 100% of *positive* news articles.

Based on the results of the present study, the four quadrants for measuring the newsworthiness of CSR-related stories based on CSR themes were created and are shown in Figure 1.

Discussion

The present study examines the extent to which corporations' agenda setting efforts on CSR exert influence the processes of media's agenda building efforts. By investigating how much press coverage a CSR-related news release can gain, it seeks to find out whether corporations are able to influence how much salience the media places on each CSR theme. Based on the finding that there was no significance between the two agendas and the comparison between CSR-related news releases and press coverage, Figure 1 was created. The present study has identified two conditions under which a CSR-related story is likely to receive more press coverage: its level of impact on society and its relevance to the corporation's major operations.

It was found that the CSR themes of *operations* and *products and services* attract the highest percentage of news coverage. These two CSR themes share the same characteristic of making high impact on society and being highly relevant to the two corporations' core operations in the electricity industry. Because they operate as monopolies in Hong Kong and are listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, changes or decisions made about their operational facilities and their products and services are highly impactful on the entire population. Moreover, these two themes are of high relevance to their business in providing electricity and services to the population; being engaged in these two themes implies that the corporations have incorporated CSR into their core operations, first serving the stakeholder groups which are of high importance to them, such as their investors and their customers. Incorporating CSR into their *operations* and *products and services* could help to address the criticism that CSR is just about image management because corporations are mostly engaged in external CSR activities, such as making donations to society. It implies that corporations are changing their behaviors in terms of their internal operations as well.

Even though these two themes attract a higher percentage of news coverage, implying that they are more successful in creating agenda setting effects. But Table 3 also shows that these two themes are also higher in terms of *negative* news coverage, especially the theme of

operations. In a way, it can be argued that the more press coverage a theme receives, the higher the possibility of its receiving negative coverage. It is possible that the theme of *operations* has received more negative coverage because it is likely to involve some controversial issues, such as whether the use of renewable energy will increase the cost of electricity for consumers. For issues like these, the media are likely to obtain additional balancing sources in addition to those used in the news releases as well. Also, experts and environmental groups might comment on these activities, which could change the tone of the coverage. The high percentage of news coverage on the CSR themes of *operations* and *products and services* also indicate that CSR is best practiced when it is incorporated into a corporation's core business operations.

The CSR themes that fall into the quadrant of being highly impactful on society and being low in relevance to core operations are the second most highly covered in the press; these themes include *education*, *community*, *environment* and *donation/sponsorship*. One of the major characteristics of these themes is that although the corporations are involved in either funding and executing the programs or just funding the programs, these programs do not have much to do with the business's core operations in terms of the provision of electricity. For instance, under the theme of *community*, CLP ran the "Care for the Elderly" program and Power Assets ran the "U3A" program with NGOs to care for the health of senior citizens. A minor portion of the programs might involve electricity, such as sending a team of volunteers to fix the electricity in their homes. Yet, the themes are still largely unrelated to electricity. These themes also receive none or little negative news coverage. It is possible that they receive relatively little coverage because the press does not wish to serve as the mouthpiece in promoting these corporations. For these themes, it is also relatively difficult for journalists to collect additional sources to counter-balance the tone.

The CSR theme of *recognition* has received the lowest percentage of coverage out of all CSR themes because it falls under the quadrant of being highly relevant to business operations but lowly impactful on society. Being highly relevant to the corporations' business operations is advantageous for enhancing news values, but being lowly impactful on society makes it counter-productive to the core concept of CSR being about businesses' having responsibilities towards society beyond their self-interests. After all, if the media are to report the awards and recognition that a business has received, it will again sound like they are helping to promote the corporations. This theme receives a percentage of 100% positive news coverage for it is not possible to counter-argue against the recognition that businesses receive from credible bodies.

Lastly, the last quadrant of being lowly relevant to core operations and lowly impactful on society makes a piece of news release or a piece of news article non-CSR related. Because the two coders had to agree on whether to include the news releases and the news articles as being CSR-related in the sample before proceeding to the open coding for deriving the seven CSR themes, what is not considered CSR is also defined. The quadrant indicates that news values in CSR-related stories are best exemplified for the themes of *operations* and *products and services*, that is, when CSR is incorporated into the core business operations of the corporations, making an impact on its more core stakeholder groups.

To study how the two electricity providers in Hong Kong, representing the discourse community of corporations that shapes *the corporate agenda*, influences *the media agenda* through the transfer of issue salience in CSR-related stories, intermedia agenda setting effects which is based on the agenda setting theory was used as a theoretical framework. But this study overthrew the assumption that there is a transfer of CSR issue salience: the press remains partially independent in its topic selection – there is no correlation between the number of news releases for each CSR theme and the amount of press coverage for each

theme. One of the possible reasons why agenda setting effects were not established is because of the positive nature of CSR information. Most of the CSR information may be considered lacking in newsworthiness, such as conflict, impact, prominence, proximity, timeliness and the unusual (Applegate, 2005). Furthermore, as the news media are established as a credible third party which mediates information between their sources and their audience, they are not supposed to promote the corporations positively. When maintaining a balanced tone, which is mostly defined as having both positive and negative sources, is emphasized in journalistic practices, the news media might ignore a piece of positive CSR information because it is unable to find other sources to counter-balance the tone. Other factors, such as the economic power of the news organizations and the amount of news a news organization has prepared for the day, may also determine whether a piece of CSR-related information is covered in the news.

Conclusion

Without a standard definition, communicators could enjoy limited freedom in defining CSR by attaching meanings to it to their own advantage. As long as they deviate too much from the existing social and business norms, other discourse communities are likely to share some, if not all, meanings. Despite this, different discourse communities are created for a strategic purpose; different groups have different expectations for CSR and have to abide by different professional norms, causing different discourse communities to create and shape their own meanings about CSR. The present study serves as a reminder that discourse communities do not live in isolation from one another and do influence one another. Adopting the assumption of intermedia agenda setting effects as the theoretical basis, this study has identified two conditions under which CSR-related news events can be considered newsworthy: their relevance to the corporations' core business operations and their impact on society. These two conditions of newsworthiness also portray that the news media perceive CSR as being best defined as socially responsible activities which are incorporated into the core operations of a business.

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Tables & Figures

Table 1

Comparison between Corporate and Media Agendas in Terms of CSR Themes

Rank	Corporations	Freq.	%	The Press	Freq.	%
1	Operations	50	24.8	Operations	479	45.8
2	Education	44	21.8	Products & Services	202	19.3
3	Community	35	17.3	Education	116	11.1
4	Products & Services	26	12.9	Community	110	10.5
5	Recognition	25	12.4	Environment	69	6.6
6	Environment	18	8.9	Recognition	51	4.9
7	Donation/Sponsorship	4	2	Donation/Sponsorship	18	1.7
	Total	202	100.1	Total	1045	99.9

Table 2

Average Amount of News Coverage for Every News Release Published

Rank	Theme	Number of News Articles for Every News Release in Average
1	Operations	$479/50 = 9.58$
2	Products & Services	$202/26 = 7.77$
3	Donation/Sponsorship	$18/4 = 4.5$
4	Environment	$69/18 = 3.83$
5	Community	$110/35 = 3.14$
6	Education	$116/44 = 2.64$
7	Recognition	$51/25 = 2.04$

Table 3

The Overall Tone of the News Coverage regarding each CSR Theme

Theme (frequency)	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Operations (479)	23.59%	27.77%	48.43%
Products & Service (202)	81.19%	2.48%	14.85%
Education (116)	90.52%	0%	9.48%
Community (110)	90%	0%	8.18%
Environment (69)	94.2%	1.45%	0%
Recognition (51)	100%	0%	0%
Donation/Sponsorship (18)	88.89%	0%	11.11%

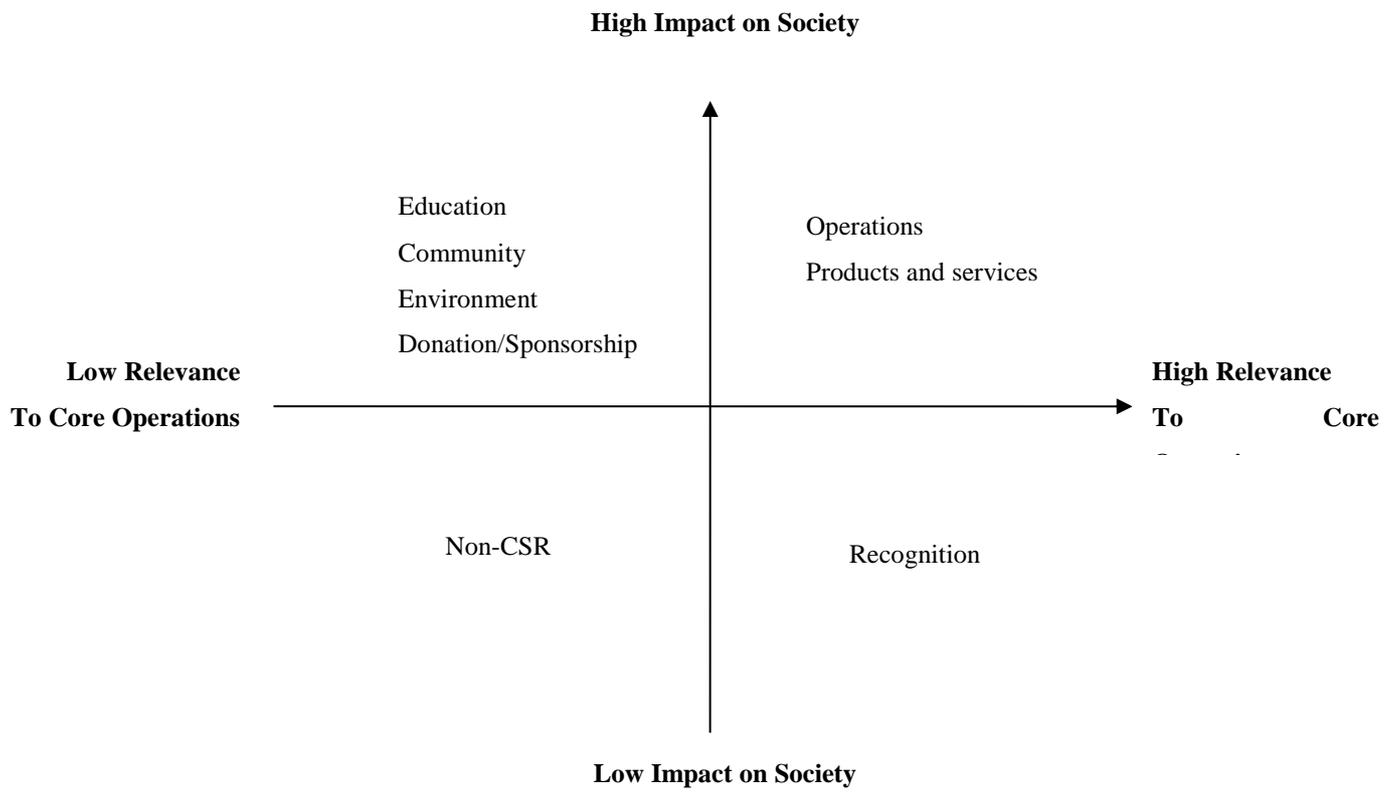


Figure 1. Four quadrants for measuring the newsworthiness of CSR-related news stories.

**The Effect of the Attacker's Reputation on Reputation Attacks
As a Function of Organization Transparency**

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Abstract

Activist groups may undermine organizations' reputation, while a hypocritical attacker delivers weaker blows. This experiment tests the relationship between organizational response strategies, transparency and activist groups' identity

Introduction

The reputation of an organization has been perceived as a valuable resource (Winkleman, 1999). Crises, however, are considered a threat to organizational reputation (Coombs, 2007) and may damage an organization's reputation. However, the reputation of the attacker may also influence the damage it may cause; a hypocritical attacker may deliver weaker blows (Kim, 2009). This also applies to the relationship between the private sector and activist groups. When an activist group's ascribed identity does not match its avowed identity, the activist group is perceived as hypocritical, which may affect the efficacy of its attacks. This paper examines the optimal ways for organizations to respond to hypocritical activist groups, with a view toward obtaining the best reputational results.

Organizations, when attacked, need to respond immediately in order to protect their reputations. Abundant theories and literature have focused on different response strategies and their outcomes. Image restoration theory offers five general strategies with many different variants as guidance for image and reputation restoration and protection (Benoit, 1997). Coombs (2007) also identified key factors in crisis situations and suggested seven response strategies for organizations to use when confronted with attacks. Contingency theory (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997; Cancel, Mitrook & Cameron, 1999) holds that many variants may affect the stance of an organization when dealing with a crisis. This theory implies that the process of crisis management is dynamic instead of static, and the stances taken move constantly on a continuum from pure advocacy to pure accommodation. This theory is also integrated with many other models and theories to reflect the complex process of crisis communication.

Except for theories and literature concerning organizational response strategies, studies have shown that transparency is also an important factor for healthy organizational public relations. Scholars have found that being transparent to its publics enhances organizational credibility, trustworthiness and reputation (Kim, Hong & Cameron, 2013; Rawlins, 2008). Studies about the concept of transparency, however, rarely if ever address image restoration theory and contingency theory, or the specific relationship between organizations and activist groups.

From the attacker's end, activist groups are very distinctive organizations that exert special pressure on organizations. In fact, the pressure from activist groups is considered to be a driving force that "stimulates organizations to develop excellent public relations departments" (Grunig, 1997, p. 25). In the literature, activist groups are usually referred to as special interest groups, pressure groups, issue groups, grassroots organizations, social movement organizations and groups formed on a mutual issue about which the members care (Smith, 1996; Mintzberg, 1983). The definition of activist groups also reflects the goals and purposes of these groups. Scholars summarized activist groups are issue-oriented groups that seek to influence or change conditions, public policies, organizational actions, social norms and values through actions such as education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics, or force (Grunig, 1992; Berry, 1984; Smith, 1997).

In order to achieve these goals, it is also essential for activist groups to maintain their membership, not only because their struggle for social change is a "long term ongoing process" (Ferguson & Smith, 1992, p. 294), but also because of the necessity to thrive in a competitive market of ideas and issues as well as adapt to changes. However, when activist groups initiate very appealing missions to attract or maintain members (Hrebner & Scott, 1982, p. 20), some groups' actions may betray their avowed missions, and publics may perceive that the groups' ascribed identity does not match their avowed identity. When People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) avowed itself as the animal rights protector, for example, it was reported that PETA kills thousands of animals in its care

(PETA kills animals, 2007). However, few scholars looked into the issue of activist groups' identity discrepancy, and its influences still remain unclear.

To further explore the relationship between organizations and activist groups, and to fill the academic gap of identity discrepancy, this experiment is intended to test the efficacy of reputation repair strategies when attacked by hypocritical activist groups as a function of transparency.

This study has several potentially significant implications. First, it has theoretical implications in so far as it tests the concept of transparency in image response strategies. It also provides suggestions on how organizations should reply to activist groups in order to gain the best reputational results. In addition, the study's results shed light on the role of identity in enhancing the credibility of activist groups and how identity affects public perception of these groups' targets.

Literature Review

Organizational Response Strategies

The relationship between activists and organizations, according to Ferguson and Smith (1992), has been symbiotic but tense since the earliest days of the modern practice of public relations. In fact, it has been suggested that "public relations practitioners gain legitimacy and increase their utility to an organization primarily in the presence of active publics" (Ferguson & Smith, 1992). Organization-activist group relationships have become a significant challenge. As Jones and Chase (1979) said, "The overwhelming important challenge faced by professional senior management is how to develop and establish a systems approach to the management of public policy issues in order not to surrender corporate autonomy and efficiency to the whims of bureaucrats and activist groups" (p. 8).

Studies have shown that activist groups often disrupt organizations' routines, influence issues that might threaten organizations, use threatening tactics with threatening issues, and damage organizations with considerably larger reputations and resources (Smith, 1997, Grunig, 1992, p. 514). Thus, "responding to activists requires strategic planning, with consideration given to the desired outcomes and implication of a confrontation" (Ferguson & Smith, 1992).

Several studies have addressed the common response strategies for dealing with activist groups within different normative frameworks. Grunig (1992) identified that when confronted with activist groups, organizations reverted to imbalanced communication, from symmetrical to asymmetrical, in order to dominate rather than cooperate with their environment. The change from two-way asymmetrical to a one-way pattern when dealing with activist groups also applies to other organizations in his study. One interesting finding is that, even though compromise was a less typical response, the results were deemed positive. This finding is in line with previous studies that concluded that response strategies on the accommodative side are more effective.

Smith and Ferguson (1992) also concluded Oliver's (1991) five strategies for responding to outside pressure:

1. acquiesce, which includes complying with activists' demands;
2. compromise, which involves balancing the perspectives of multiple constituencies, pacifying outside critics, or bargaining to reach agreements;
3. Avoid through concealing problems, changing activities, or building barriers between the organization and outside pressure;
4. defy by ignoring explicit norms and values, challenging new requirements, and attacking the sources of institutional pressure; and
5. Manipulate through co-opting influential constituents, influencing perceptions of the

organization, and controlling the processes by which the organization might be influenced (p. 297).

J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1997) suggested the following organizational response strategies to activist groups based on Excellence study:

1. Listening to all strategic constituencies is an important way in which to learn the consequences that an organization has on those publics.
2. Disclosing information and telling the organization's story helps to establish trust and credibility.
3. Communicating with activists should be continuous, largely because their shifting stances.
4. Recognizing the legitimacy of all constituent groups, large and small, is important because of the potential that even small activist groups have for engaging an organization (L. Grunig, 1992; Olson, 1965).
5. Enacting two-way symmetrical responses requires skilled practitioners.
6. Determining long-term effectiveness is important in helping both the organization and the activists to remain patient during the extended time it takes to reach agreement.
7. Public relations practitioners who are close to the center of power in an organization are better able to shape the organization's response to activists.

They also identified that compromise and defiance are the two common extremes of organization responses. Ferguson & Smith (1992) added that defiance actions, including attacking the critics, can backfire.

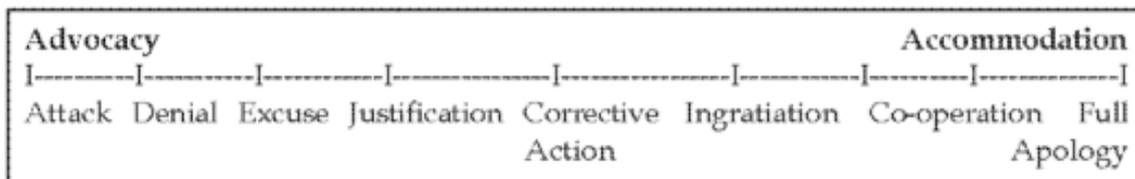
In addition to response strategies tailored specifically toward dealing with activist groups, theories and literature also focused on general response strategies that are used for crisis management. Benoit (1997) developed image restoration theory, which offers both preventative and restorative approaches to maintaining organizational image and reputation. When an organization is under attack and is perceived to be culpable, organizations should take action in order to protect their image by utilizing the following broad strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action and mortification. Among the five broad strategies, there are many different variants that can be applied to different situations. For example, attacking the accuser is one variant for reducing offensiveness of the event. Image restoration theory has been widely used and tested in various kinds of crises. For example, Liu (2007) analyzed the image restoration theory at play in President George W. Bush's post-Katrina speeches, and found that, in his speeches, President Bush used the evasion of responsibility, reduction of effectiveness, denial, corrective action and mortification strategies. Hultzhausen and Roberts (2009) also tested the image restoration theory in the crisis of sexual assaults at the Air Force Academy in 2002.

Coombs (2006) also identified the key factors that can affect organizational crisis communication and provided seven crisis response strategies along the defensive-accommodative continuum: attack the accuser, denial, scapegoat, excuse, justification, compensation and apology.

However, the practice of public relations is too complex to rely on any single normative model (Reber & Cameron, 2003). Thus, Cameron and his colleagues developed contingency theory. This theory suggests that the practice of public relations is a dynamic process that "moves constantly on a continuum from total advocacy for a client or employer to total accommodation of a public" (Reber & Cameron, 2003). Many factors can affect the stance of an organization in any given time and, in fact, Cameron and his colleagues identified eighty-seven variables that can contribute to the stance choice of an organization

(Cameron, Pang & Jin, 2006). They then categorized these variables into the predisposing variables and situational variables (Cancel, Mitrook & Cameron, 1999).

Many researchers integrated contingency theory with other theories and models in an attempt to develop a complete and flexible understanding of crisis management. For example, Jin, Pang and Cameron (2006) integrated contingency theory with Coombs' (1998) crisis communication strategies to "reflect the true spirit of the contingency theory", and came up with the following continuum:



Many studies also contributed to the discussion of which is the best response strategy. During a crisis, public relations executives should not only respond, but also choose the appropriate response in order to protect the organizational reputation, and the effect of choosing an inappropriate response is "actually worse than not responding" (Bradford & Garrett, 1995).

Benoit and Drew (1997) tested the appropriateness and effectiveness of fourteen particular response strategies in image restoration theory. The results show that corrective action was considered more effective and appropriate among the image restoration options, while "denial, provocation, minimization and bolstering were reported to be least appropriate and effective".

Coombs (2006) divided response strategies into three different clusters: deny cluster (deny, attack accuser and scapegoat), diminish cluster (excuse and justification) and deal cluster (concern, regret, compassion, ingratiation and apology). He concluded that the deny cluster is risky since the organization claims no responsibility. Thus, it should be reserved for "crisis situations that require a fight such as rumors or unfair challenges". By contrast, deal strategies indicate that the organization is responsible for the crisis, and should be used in the intentional cluster.

Bradford and Garrett (1995) discovered that denial and excuse generated more negative results with an agreement situation when the organization is accused of unethical behavior, whereas concession was an optimal response strategy, and they suggested that when accused of unethical behaviors, concession "may not only protect and maintain corporate image, but may also actually enhance it".

However, even though response strategies on the accommodative end have been proven to be more effective and appropriate, there are situations where accommodative actions are not available. For example, Cameron, Cropp and Reber (2001) suggested that some response strategies are simply not possible under some circumstances. In their study, they found that pure accommodation is sometimes precluded by factors such as higher moral authority, being caught between two contending publics, litigation/regulation and jurisdictional issues.

Even though the above-mentioned response strategies provide useful suggestions for practical applications, there are not many studies that have tested organizational response strategies toward activist groups using image restoration theory and contingency theory. Moreover, very few studies have looked into the question of how response strategies will influence organizational reputation. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Participants perceive the organization has a higher reputation when taking accommodative action (i.e., corrective action) than advocative action (i.e., attack accuser).

Transparency

Publics perceive an organization as credible and trustworthy based on more than a simple response strategy. It has been demonstrated that organizational transparency is also essential for an organization. According to Rawlins (2009), being transparent means being more visible, and transparency is the opposite of secrecy. Transparency is believed to be an ethical element in human communication. It is not only “an issue regarding what we say”, but also “why we say it and even how we talk” (Plaisance, 2007).

The concept of transparency in the field of communication has always been referred to as journalistic or media transparency. According to Kim (2012), transparency is “instrumental to the openness of information to the public”. Kim, Hong and Cameron (2012) also suggested that transparency as a journalistic concept “refers to a party’s openness or open communication to pursue his or her trustworthiness”. Rosen (2005) emphasized that being transparent also “includes being open about mistakes”, and described the merits and the importance of being transparent as: killing rumors and conspiracy theories that breed distrust; softening criticism or at least directing it to more appropriate targets and enhancing credibility (p. 1). Allen (2008) concluded that journalistic transparency is “making public the traditionally private factors that influence the creation of news”, and, in addition to the sense of ethic it fosters, it enables journalism as a profession to “increase its power and standing within society”.

The literature also indicates that transparency plays a vital part in the modern world. Development in politics, economy and culture as well as information technology require a much more transparent code of conduct. Craft and Heim (2009) wrote that with the help of new media, globalization and the development in democracy has led to a more independent world, and people have been urged to be more transparent. In a similar vein, Mitchell and Steele (2005) researched the transparency in blogs, and concluded that the trend toward transparency in modern times requires bloggers to be transparent about the principles they hold, the procedures they follow and the persons they are.

The concept of transparency in the field of crisis communication has been gaining popularity in recent years. Gower (2006) suggested that transparency is the organization’s attempt to publicize its actions and decisions, and make them “ascertainable and understandable” by stakeholders (p. 95), and he insisted that the information must be perceivable and believable so that the stakeholders are informed with “everything they need to know” (p. 96). Heise (1985) added that being transparent is not only about information disclosure; it is also about when, and how to disclose the information. He wrote that a transparent organization will “make available publicly all legally releasable information – whether positive or negative – in a manner which is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal”(p. 209). Rawlins (2009) also emphasized that merely disseminating information does not equate to transparency, “This is more accurately called disclosure”, and he argued that transparency is a mutual process that requires “both input (voice and representation) and output (choice and information)” (Stirton and Lodge, 2001). This definition is in line with Cotterrell’s (2000) opinion that “transparency as a process involves not just availability of information but active participation in acquiring, distributing and creating knowledge” (p. 419). The concept of transparency is also closely related to accountability, and it is considered to be a valuable quality of an organization (Eijffinger & Hoeberichts, 2002; Rawlins, 2009).

Many researchers have also studied the outcomes and benefits of transparency. Several articles suggest that being transparent enhances the organization’s accountability and

trustworthiness (Sweetser, 2010; Rawlins, 2009). Kim, Hong & Cameron (2013) concluded that “transparency explicated as open communication may be a necessity condition for earning other’s trust”, and they argued that being transparent is a strategy for organizations to gain trust and favorable reputations among publics. Rawlins (2008) also identified that transparent communication promotes higher reputation, which is defined as “having integrity, respecting others, being open, and being ethical”. His study confirms that by executing transparency strategies, an organization can achieve a better reputation.

However, the current research has mainly focused on the general consequences of organizational transparency efforts, while very few have considered the specific, tricky situation that arises when private sector organizations are confronted by attacks and accusations brought by activist groups. To assess the role that transparency plays in the relationship between organizations and radical groups, and to fill this academic gap, this paper is interested in:

H2: Participants perceive that the organization has a higher reputation when it responds transparently.

RQ1: What are the interactions between transparency and response strategies?

Activist groups and ascribed identity vs. avowed identity

Activism as a part of public relations studies experienced an acceleration in the academic field during the 1960s and 1970s, the time when activism burgeoned in the wake of one of its first fights with the American Medical Association (Ferguson & Smith, 1992). The debate between the American Medical Association and anti-vivisectionists in 1884 is considered to have foreshadowed today’s animal rights movement (Cutlip, 1994). Researchers at the time attempted to explain and predict the behaviors of these radical groups, and tried to find ways to manage the issues they brought to attention (Ferguson & Smith, 1992).

The concept of organizational identity was first introduced by Albert and Whetten (1985), and subsequently caught the attention of many scholars in organizational behavior, organizational theory and strategic management (Kim, 2009). According to Albert and Whetten (1985), organizational identity represents the essential characteristics of an organization that is perceived as central, distinctive and enduring in the past, present and future.

Ashforth and Mael (1996) adopted Albert and Whetten’s definition and further stated that organizational identity has three aspects: centrality, distinctiveness and continuity. Centrality pertains to the “focal or core set of attributes that denote the essence of the organization” (p. 23), and is “a more or less internally consistent system of pivotal beliefs, values, and norms, typically anchored in the organizational mission that informs sense-making and action”(p.26). Distinctiveness suggests that “organizations actively seek to perceive or create flattering differences between themselves and otherwise comparable organizations”, while continuity connotes “a bedrock quality, that the organization has sufficient substance, significance, support, and staying power to warrant the investment of one’s participation and trust” (p. 26). Moreover, organizational identity is more internally consistent, simplistic and idealized, and is an intersubjective concept that is captured in the hearts and minds of organizational members, while reflecting the needs and preferences of the stakeholders (Kim, 2009). Ashforth and Mael (1996) also mentioned that the conceptualization of organizational identity is not fixed, it could be affected by the changing composition of organizational membership and the gradual accumulation of a body of collective experience over time (also see in Kim, 2009). Accordingly, Kim (2009) concluded that organizational identity is “inherently fluid, dynamic, and unstable”.

Organizational identity is crucial for organizations to maintain their membership, enhance member loyalty and facilitate the realization of organizational goals. It is a process of psychological attachment that connects the defining characteristics of the organization and the characteristics of the individual members. Stronger organizational identification attracts more attention from potential members, enhances in-group cooperation between members and also triggers greater competitive behavior directed toward out-group members (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) also distinguished between two different kinds of identity: the identity perceived by the members and the construed external identity.

Foreman and Whetten (2002) identified organizational identification “as a comparison process between what a member perceives the identity of the particular organization to be and what that member thinks the identity should be” (p. 620). They tested the effects of organizational congruence on organizational commitment, and the results demonstrated that identity congruence could affect members’ relationships with their organizations at an attitudinal level.

Some scholars developed the concept of organizational identity in the sub-field of activism. Aldoory and Sha (2006) surmised that the identity of an activist group has a dual role: publics to the target organization and organizations with a need to build and maintain relationships with their own publics (p. 352). Sha (2006) distinguished cultural identity as avowed identity from ascribed identity. According to Sha, avowed identity refers to an individual’s self-identified membership in a group that shares the same fundamental values and beliefs about a certain issue. On the other hand, ascribed identity is assigned by other entities instead of self-declared, and the assigned identity may be different from a person’s avowed identity. Similarly, Hecht et al. (1993) defined avowed identity as being “internally defined”, while ascribed identity is “externally imposed”. Rotheram and Phinney (1987) discussed the two as the “extent to which one feels and acts like a group member” and how others see the member (p. 16).

Kim (2009) believed that the distinction between avowed identity and ascribed identity can be used to examine the identities of activist groups. An activist group’s identity represents the critical value of its commitment and mission, while at the same time other activist groups, organizations, and the public may not see the same. She found that the incongruence between an activist group’s avowed identity and ascribed identity can be an external threat, and unmatched identities would lead participants to perceive the group as vulnerable, and the group may require higher situational demands and more organizational resources. In other words, the activist group is in danger when their identity is shown to be hypocritical, and it adds more uncertainties in crisis management, public relations and financial administration. The discrepancy between an activist group’s avowed identity and ascribed identity also affects publics’ attitude towards the group. Hypocritical groups receive more negative attitudes and responses, and participants are more unwilling to become a member of such a group. In addition, a hypocritical activist group’s communication efficacy is lower than that of a non-hypocritical group.

Kim’s study provides some insight into how identity issues affect activist groups from the angle of relationships between different activist groups. However, the influence of an activist group’s identity issues on the efficacy of its attacks on private sectors has not been tested. Thus, this study is designed to see whether the incongruence of an activist group’s identity will affect the reputation of its target organization:

H3: Participants perceive that the organization has a higher reputation when attacked by an activist group with unmatched ascribed identity than a matched ascribed identity.

RQ2: What are the interactions between organizational response strategies and matched/unmatched ascribed identity?

RQ3: What are the interactions between organizational response strategies, transparency, and matched/unmatched identity?

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a 2 (response strategies: attack the accuser vs. corrective action) x 2 (transparency: transparent vs. not transparent) x 2 (ascribed identity: matched identity vs. unmatched identity) design. Response strategies and transparency served within subject, and ascribed identity served as between subject.

Participants. Based on convenient sampling, a total of 96 undergraduate students from a large Midwestern university were recruited as participants to see how response strategies, transparent responses and the ascribed identity vs. avowed identity affect the public perception of the organization's reputation. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the 4 conditions. 71.6% of the participants were female and 28.4% were male ($n=96$). The age ranged from 18 to 23 ($m = 18.9$, $sd = .94$). 76.8% of the participants were Caucasian, 11.6% were African American, 6.3% were Asian and 5% were Hispanic or Latino.

Stimuli. The study used fictitious names for both the activist group and the organization. In addition, to ensure that the manipulation truly reflects reality, the message was adopted from published news stories with minimal changes. The study chose an animal rights activist group with a mission aimed at animal rights in order to avoid issues with political purposes such as pro-life and pro-choice, pro-gay rights, or pro-gun. The use of real news stories and real cases better reflected the conflict between an organization and an activist group.

Four different versions of the story were created. To operationalize response strategies, attack the accuser was defined as "reduce the credibility of accuser" (Benoit, 1997), while corrective action was defined as "plan to solve or prevent problem" and the company's promise to correct the problem (Benoit, 1997). Thus, the versions that utilized attack the accuser as a response strategy included devaluation of the attacker, denying the accusations, and also accused the accuser of doing something wrong or inappropriate, and may also have identified the negative influences the attacker brought about. Corrective action was operationalized by distributing the plans and efforts that the organization employed to fix the issue identified or the organization's efforts to prevent such issues from occurring in the future. The concept of transparency is operationalized according to Craft and Heim (2009) as disclosure. In this study, transparent responses were referred to as actively disclosing information and providing an explanation regarding the accusation. By contrast, the not transparent responses refused to or were reluctant to offer information or explanation. The activist group's ascribed identity (matched vs. unmatched avowed identity) was operationalized as whether there were incongruences between the way that the group was described by the media and the group's self-identity, which reflected its mission and core values. Matched ascribed identity, in the stimulus materials, was conveyed in a way that the activist group had been serving its mission, and had been devoting itself to protecting animal rights. The unmatched identity, on the contrary, was described as that the activist group was reported being hypocritical and its actions betrayed its mission and values.

Participants were randomly assigned to two different groups. Each participant will read four different versions of a story.

Procedure. The experiment was conducted online by sending out links to participants' email addresses. Participants were randomly assigned to two different groups. Each participant will read four different versions of a story. Participants were asked to complete an online consent including demographic information regarding gender, age and

educational background. After that, participants read the stories and answered questionnaires, and researchers thanked, debriefed and ended the experiment. The experiment lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Measures. For the ascribed identity, two manipulation items offered by Kim (2009) were used: (1) “there was a discrepancy between [name of an activist group]’s mission and the way [name of an activist group] was portrayed by the media”; and (2) “[name of an activist group]’s behavior matched its avowed mission.”

Organizational reputation was measured by using the five-item organizational reputation scale developed by Coombs and Holladay (2009). These items include: (1) “the organization is concerned with the well-being of its public”; (2) “the organization is basically dishonest”; (3) “I do not trust the organization to tell the truth about the incident”; (4) “Under most circumstance, I would be likely to believe what the organization says”; (5) “the organization is not concerned with the well-being of its public”.

Results

Manipulation Check

This experiment involved a manipulation check for an activist group’s identity incongruence. An independent sampled t-test was conducted to check the manipulation. The mean score for matched identity ($m=2.06$, $sd=.327$) was significantly lower ($t(50)=-6.218$, $p<.01$) than the mean for unmatched identity ($m=3.38$, $sd=1.02$). The data showed that the manipulation for identity is successful because participants rated lower score for matched identity (on a 1-5 strongly agree-strongly disagree scale).

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested using repeated-measure ANOVAs. For H1, there was no significant main effect for response strategies ($F(1, 50) = .59$, $p>.05$). No significant difference was found between attack the accuser ($m = 2.64$, $sd = .095$) and corrective action ($m = 2.56$, $sd = .089$).

For H2, a significant, however in the opposite direction from the hypothesis, main effect was found for organizational transparency ($F(1, 50) = 37.97$, $p < .01$). Participants perceived much higher reputation when the organization was not transparent in their response ($m = 2.87$, $sd = .094$) as opposed to when the organization was transparent in their response ($m = 2.323$, $sd = .081$).

For H3, there was a significant, but again opposite, main effect found for the activist group’s identity ($F(1, 50) = 1174.45$, $p < .01$). Participants perceived the organization to have a much higher reputation ($m = 2.88$, $sd = .109$) when the organization was attacked by an activist group with matched identity than when attacked by an activist group with an unmatched identity ($m = 2.315$, $sd = .105$).

For RQ1, a significant interaction was found for response strategy x transparency interaction ($F(1, 50) = 10.51$, $P < .05$). The participants perceived the highest reputation towards the organization when the organization used corrective action as the response strategy and was not transparent ($m = 3.12$, $sd = .099$). The second highest perceived reputation occurred when the organization attacked the accuser, and was transparent in its response ($m = 2.66$, $sd = .107$), while the participants perceived the lowest reputation toward the organization when the organization used corrective action as the response and was transparent ($m = 1.99$, $sd = .144$).

However, there was no significant main effect for response strategy x identity interaction (RQ2) ($F(1, 50) = .001$, $P > .05$).

For RQ3, a significant interaction was found for organizational response strategy x transparency x identity ($F(1, 50) = 7.99$, $P < .05$). When exposed to matched identity, the

participants perceived the highest reputation toward the organization when the organization attacked the accuser and was not transparent ($m = 3.13$, $sd = .259$) or used corrective action and was not transparent ($m = 3.13$, $sd = .142$). The participants perceived the lowest reputation when the organization used corrective action and was transparent ($m = 2.53$, $sd = .207$). When exposed to the unmatched condition, the participants perceived the highest reputation toward the organization when the organization used corrective action and was not transparent ($m = 3.12$, $sd = .137$), and the second highest reputation occurred when the organization attacked the accuser and was not transparent ($m = 2.61$, $sd = .148$). The lowest reputation happened when the organization took corrective action and was transparent ($m = 1.43$, $sd = .199$).

Discussion

The data showed that when attacked by an activist group, participants perceived no significant difference with respect to organizational reputation regardless of whether the organization used attack the accuser or corrective action as a response strategy. Previous literature stated that compromise and defiance are considered the extremes of the contingency continuum (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1997, Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2006), while studies suggested that response strategies on the accommodative end, even though sometimes such strategies were less typical, were more effective than the strategies on the advocative end (Benoit & Drew, 1997, Grunig, 1992). However, this study suggests that response strategies don't have a significant impact on reputational outcomes in the activist group-organization relationship. When facing accusations raised by an activist group, the choice of whether to respond advocatively or accomodatively probably won't significantly affect the organization's reputation. To be specific, attack the accuser and corrective action may generate similar reputational outcomes under some circumstances. This might be attributed to a number of different reasons. First, it may be that the activist group-organization relationship is naturally distinctive from other kinds of public relations. An activist group itself may be too controversial, such that some people may not support their initiatives. Issues such as pro-life and pro-choice, pro-gay rights and pro-gun are so sensitive and controversial that the public's opinions concerning such issues differ greatly, which may affect the relationship between activist groups and organizations. In addition, some activist groups' initiatives and efforts might be so aggressive and extreme that the public might be put off by such groups, and be suspicious of their accusations against organizations. This study chose an animal right activist group who accused a seafood organization of animal abuse in their processing chain. Participants who are not animal rights supporters might inherently find the organization less responsible for their alleged wrongdoing. Thus, response strategies on the advocacy end were proven to be similarly effective as strategies on the accommodative end. Second, the finding may also be attributed to the experiment's design. It may also be the result of the experiment's use of a less controversial topic, the seafood industry, such that some participants didn't agree with the moral or ethical accusations brought by the activist group, or they didn't share the same level of outrage as the activist group in the context of protests against the lobster association. It may also be possible that the participants just enjoy lobsters so much that their practical considerations overrode any ethical concerns. Such a result may also be in line with previous studies claiming that accommodative actions are not always available due to higher moral authority, being caught between two contending publics, or litigation and jurisdictional issues (Cameron, Cropp & Reber, 2001). Accomodative responses may also not be available for organizations when dealing with activist groups with different ethical and moral considerations.

This study found some other interesting results. It suggests that a transparent response may not always result in the best reputational outcome. The data represented that when conducting a non-transparent response, the organization gained much higher reputation than using transparent response. The study also found that for response strategy x transparency interaction, the best combination was implementing a corrective action response strategy and not being transparent. The second highest reputation occurs when the organization attacks the accuser and is transparent, while using corrective action and being transparent has the lowest reputation in this study. These findings contradict previous findings that transparency can enhance the accountability and trustworthiness of the organization, and lead to better reputational outcomes (Sweetser, 2010; Rawlins, 2009; Kim, Hong & Cameron, 2013). Several factors, however, may contribute to this result. First, it may be that being too transparent can make the organization look vulnerable and weak, while sometimes not being transparent may present a strong, solid image to the public. In this case, when an organization used corrective action as its response strategy, it is assumed that the organization admitted what the activist group accused it of, while being transparent and using corrective action may reiterate its wrongful conduct unnecessarily, damaging its reputation. On the other hand, when the organization attacked the activist group as a response, the underlying message was that the organization was the victim of unfair accusations. Thus, being transparent may become extremely necessary for the organization, because being transparent means letting the advantageous truth out; being transparent might be very vital and decisive under such circumstance. As a result, using corrective action as a response and not being transparent as well as attacking the accuser and being transparent appear to be the most effective combination. In addition, when using corrective action and being transparent, the organization not only appears to concede that it made mistakes, but also re-emphasizes its wrongful conduct, doubling the possible negative influences and damaging its reputation.

These findings may also relate to the current lack of research on organizational transparency. Although the existing literature has explored different definitions and dimensions of organizational transparency, and has proved that organizational transparency has a generally positive influence on the organization, the levels of transparency and how much and to what extent different levels of transparency can affect organizational reputation still remain unknown. And even though many studies discussed transparency from a qualitative perspective, very few have measured organizational transparency from a quantitative perspective. Thus, it very hard to determine how much transparency is enough to attain an agreeable reputation, and if being transparent can backfire. In fact, some practitioners suggest that transparency might be inappropriate in some contexts. For example, it may jeopardize national security, violate privacy, or lead to unnecessary damage (Malley & Thompson, 2009). Without proper, qualitative measurements of transparency, it is hard to ascertain whether this concept is adequately operationalized in the stimulus message in order to reach the desired influence, or, more importantly, over-operationalized in a manner that may result in a backfire. At the same time, the student sample used in this study may also affect the experiment results. All the participants recruited in this experiment were undergraduate students, and they might not have formed their own, mature opinions regarding activist groups and their initiatives.

Second, an activist group's identity, as showed in the data, is negatively related to its perceived reputation. Interestingly, participants perceived higher reputation when the organization was attacked by an activist group with matched identity rather than an activist group with unmatched identity. This suggests that when people perceive that the attack comes from a hypocritical activist group, they do not feel it is necessary for the organization to respond at all. It may also be that people just understand activist group-organization

relationships differently. However, few existing researches investigate such relationships when the organization is attacked by a hypocritical group in a quantitative way.

One of the most important results of this experiment was response strategy x transparency x identity interaction. When an organization is attacked by a hypocritical activist group, the most effective response, with respect to its reputation, was for the organization to use corrective action and not be transparent. The second most effective combination was attacking the accuser and being transparent, while the combination with the lowest score was corrective action and being transparent. As discussed above, such combinations might reflect the reality of the situation affected by different factors where being transparent may increase the vulnerability of the organization by reinforcing the organization's wrongful conduct. These findings suggest the possible, and effective ways of responding when attacked by an activist group. If corrective action, or responses on the more accommodative end, is possible, combining it with a less transparent response might produce the best reputational outcome and repair the organization's image. However, more importantly, the unavoidable fact is that sometimes more accommodative responses are not available due to different beliefs, ethical and moral considerations (i.e., a fur company could not stop making fur products even if it was attacked by an activist group). In such circumstances, choosing to attack the accuser, or other more advocative responses, can also produce positive reputational results when combined with transparent responses that clarify the accusations and justify the organization's conduct. And organizations should probably avoid the combination of corrective action and being transparent, as this may not be as successful as the other combinations in the context of organizational reputation.

This study has several theoretical and practical implications. It tested the concept of transparency on the contingency continuum with interactions between different response strategies, and examined the activist group-organization relationship in the aforementioned theoretical framework. It also gave suggestions for both activist groups and organizations with respect to what the possible responses an activist group should expect, and how to react when an organization is attacked by an activist group. It also discussed the role of identity and how it can affect the legitimacy and efficacy of initiatives and efforts.

However, there is also much to be improved on from this study. The study chose a recent published news story to reflect the real conflict between an activist group and an organization; however, the case of seafood may not be controversial and sensitive enough to generate accurate data. Convenient sampling may also affect the data in this study. The participants recruited were all undergraduate students with an average age of 18.9 years old. This sample is probably not representative enough to reflect the general public, and the participants may be too young to form their own opinions on some controversial issues.

Future studies can refine the stimulus and enlarge the participant pool to investigate the best organizational responses when attacked by an activist group. More messages could also be added to create message variances to better imitate reality and avoid biased answers. Researchers should also further explore the concept of transparency, and seek the possible levels and measurement for organizational transparency to evaluate an organization's transparency efforts. Researchers can also look into the identity issue of activist groups, and see how much identity incongruence may affect the legitimacy and efficacy of their initiatives, and what should be expected when they attack their targeted organizations. Also, more studies could also delve deeper into the activist group-organization relationship, and see how this specific relationship fits into other public relations theories and models.

Conclusion

This study found that using corrective action and not being transparent produces the best reputational outcome when an organization is attacked by a hypocritical activist group.

The study also suggests that being transparent may not always be the best strategy under some circumstances. Activist group-organization public relations may be different from other relationships, and more in-depth investigations concerning the level of transparency, and the identity of the activist group should be conducted to explore this special public relationship.

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Corporate Communications From the CEO's Perspective: How Top Executives Conceptualize and Value Strategic Communication

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Abstract

Multilateral demands from different stakeholders, decreasing confidence in business, and the impacts of globalization are all shifting public opinion and strategic communication to the center of corporate management. This move is accelerating the institutionalization of the communication function. However, the professionals and departments in charge are only parts of a larger organizational game. The performance of corporate communications depends heavily on the perceptions, beliefs, and expectations that chief executive officers (CEOs) and other top executives hold towards communication and its contribution to organizational goals. However, little is known about this. Most knowledge on the view of top executives is based on qualitative interviews with leaders of organizations that are known to be at the forefront of strategic communication. The overall picture in business might be quite different. This paper aims to close this research gap. It is based on a quantitative survey of 602 CEOs and board members in the largest European country, Germany. The research questions address the perceptions and expectations of CEOs and executive board members concerning a) the relevance of public opinion and contribution of communication performance to organizational success, b) the communicative role of top executives and their interaction with professional communicators, c) the objectives and values of corporate communications, and d) the importance of various disciplines and instruments. The study identifies a traditional mindset towards communications: top executives focus on primary stakeholders (customers, employees) instead of secondary stakeholders (politicians, activists), they value mass media higher than social media, and they rate speaking more important than listening. Moreover, communication professionals are not always the first choice when CEOs and board members reflect on the topics at hand. This indicates that advanced visions of strategic communication developed in academia and practice have not yet arrived in many boardrooms. There is still a long way to go to establish communication excellence in business.

Introduction

The rising volume of information flows and new configurations of stakeholder networks in a globalized world have triggered the debate on reputation and public trust (Carroll, 2013; Klewes & Wreschniok, 2009), legitimacy (Cradden, 2005; Sandhu, 2012), and authenticity (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Arthur W. Page Society, 2007) in the business world. These concepts are inevitably linked to communication. They are, at least partly, a result of communication activities by stakeholders or multipliers in the realms of mass media and social media. At the same time, organizations try to influence them by various means of strategic communication (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014).

A common and rarely questioned reasoning in academic textbooks and the professional literature argues that this changing environment leads to an increasing importance of corporate communications (Argenti, 2013; Cornelissen, 2011) and stronger institutionalization of the communication function (Gregory, Invernizzi, & Romenti, 2013). Surveys among communicators in various regions of the world support this view. They report a growing influence of communicators (Swerling, Thorson, & Tenderich, 2012; Zerfass et al., 2013) and advanced objectives for the communication function (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007, 2013). However, empirical research also shows a rising gap between the perceived importance of communications and soft as well as hard indicators of its relevance in organizational settings. A large majority (87.0%) of the respondents from 43 countries interviewed for the 2013 edition of the European Communication Monitor, the largest annual study of the status quo of strategic communication worldwide, stated that communication has become more important for their organizations during the turbulent economic and political situation since the year before. However, only 61.6% agreed that the influence and status of their role as communication professionals have increased during the same period, while only 14.8% reported increased budgets for the communication department compared with other functions (Zerfass et al., 2013, pp. 90–98).

This gap is usually explained by a lack of power of communication departments and communication professionals. Researchers and professional associations alike argue that having a seat at the board table or being a member of the dominant coalition would solve the problem (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, pp. 140–182; Smudde & Courtright, 2010; Arthur W. Page Society, 2007; EACD, 2013). As such, structural arrangements and better qualified, business-savvy communicators are necessary. However, others have criticized this view as simplistic. In fact, communication professionals are limited by a large number of organizational and relational constraints (Berger, 2005), which cannot be reduced to reporting lines or personal competencies. Previous editions of the study mentioned above showed that 59.9% of the highest-ranking communication managers in European organizations report directly to the chief executive officer (CEO) (Zerfass et al., 2011, p. 49). Nevertheless eight out of 10 communicators denounce a lack of understanding of communication practice within top management (Zerfass et al., 2012, p. 38), and linking business strategy and communication is named as the single most important strategic (unsolved) issue by European communication professionals (Zerfass et al., 2013, p. 84).

In order to explore the question at hand, this paper builds upon an alternative theoretical approach. It explains the distribution of responsibilities for communication in corporate settings and argues that the symbiotic relationship between CEOs and communication professionals can be analyzed by means of new sociological institutionalism. Along this line, it is important to understand the understandings, experiences, and expectations of top executives towards communication. This is the main research question. A literature review shows that empirical insights into the viewpoints of CEOs and executive board members are rare. Until recently, only a few qualitative studies with small samples have added insights into the results of the Excellence Study (Grunig et al., 2002), which used

quantitative and qualitative methods to research the topic. Some information can also be found in quantitative surveys of CEOs and their priorities in general. The knowledge at hand is used to construct more detailed research questions and hypotheses. Based on this, a quantitative survey is conducted to investigate the perceptions and expectations of top executives. The objects of the research are large, private-owned as well as listed corporations with distinct communication functions in the largest European country, Germany. The empirical research is based on responses from 602 CEOs and board members. This is, to our knowledge, the largest sample of top executives in a key economy interviewed about corporate communications until now. The results and interpretations based on descriptive and analytical statistics are presented. Although the survey, as any empirical study, has several limitations, the broad basis and specific viewpoint make a unique contribution to the body of knowledge.

Responsibilities and Institutions for Corporate Communications

The gap between the rising importance of communication for corporations and the relatively slow advancement of professional communication functions can be explained by taking a closer look at the *distribution of communication responsibilities* in any organization. Communication demands from stakeholders and media reports usually address a whole entity, such as a specific company or brand. Organizations themselves are enacting their environments by interpreting markets and stakeholder settings and by defining visions and business models. As such, the core responsibility for communication as well as for all other strategic decisions and activities is located within the boardroom. Depending on the legal structure of a company, the CEO, president, managing director, or fellow members of the top executive group on the first level of the hierarchy are in charge of communications.

This means that “the CEO should be the person most involved with both developing the overall strategy for communications and delivering consistent messages to constituencies” (Argenti, 2013, p. 54). Some authors have claimed that the CEO should be the first communicator of any organization (Pincus, Rayfield, & DeBonis, 1991). This seems to be a naive understanding of the division of labor in modern organizations. Nevertheless, CEOs decide on the basic understanding and priorities of communication as well as on key structures and resources and they themselves communicate with important stakeholders.

Many top executives have a background in business administration, and so it can be assumed that their typical understanding of communication is the same as in this discipline. Most management scholars conceptualize communication in a traditional way as the *transmission of information* (Zerfass, 2009, pp. 27–31): companies transmit objective information via media to the relevant stakeholders; this stimulus leads to the transfer of meaning and it is intended to evoke desired reactions such as knowledge, attitude change, and behavior. Communication scholars propagate a contrasting view that accentuates the *construction of reality*: communication is a two-sided process, an interaction where perceptions and orientations are shaped subjectively, but meaning and reality are socially constructed.

According to empirical studies, CEOs spend much of their time (up to 50%) on communication (Argenti, 2013, pp. 53–54; Will, Fleischmann, & Fritton, 2011, pp. 18–20). Their communication skills in interpersonal and small group settings as well as when facing the media and large audiences contribute to organizational success (Zerfass et al., 2013, pp. 16–18). This also means that top executives will always have very direct experiences and perceptions of communication, which are not necessarily linked to the concepts and practices of communication professionals.

In large organizations, communication professionals and departments are needed to support top executives in their responsibility for corporate communications (Van Riel &

Fombrun, 2007, p. 16). From a theoretical point of view, they are *agents* working on behalf of their *principals* in top management (Zerfass et al., 2014). As such, corporate communications is “inescapably tied, by nature and by necessity, to top management, with public relations staff providing counsel and communication support” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006, p. 56). Communicators are specialized, on the one hand, at framing public debates and getting messages across (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 16), and, on the other hand, at monitoring public opinion and stakeholder interests, which allows them to inform decision-making processes (White & Dozier, 1992). This duality of outbound and inbound activities has been proven in empirical surveys of communication professionals. *Outbound activities* such as generating public attention, influencing customer preferences, motivating employees, and building up immaterial assets (reputation, brands, organizational culture) are usually more prevalent than *inbound activities* such as identifying opportunities and public concerns or managing relationships to adjust corporate strategies and secure room for maneuver (Verhoeven, Zerfass, & Tench, 2011).

From this point of view, the *understandings, experiences, and expectations of top executives in organizations* are key drivers of the explanation of corporate communication practices. New visions and role models cannot be put into action if CEOs, board members, leaders of business units and other functions (e.g. human resources, sales), and regional directors do not support such developments. As such, it is necessary to explain the complex interactions between organizations, society, and agency.

This can be done by applying *neo-institutional theories* (Greenwood et al., 2008; Meyer & Jepperson, 2000; Scott, 2001). New institutionalism offers rich opportunities to analyze the interfaces of organizations and communication (Frandsen & Johansen, 2013; Sandhu, 2009, 2012). Scott (2001) argues that organizational practices (e.g. corporate communications) are based on cognitive, normative, and regulative institutions. The *regulative pillar* includes rules, laws, and sanctions that constrain and regularize organizational behavior (Scott, 2001, p. 51). Formal arrangements such as a seat for the communication head on the board, reporting lines, or his/her involvement in certain decision-making processes are examples for this dimension. Empirical research shows that this is often influenced by the overarching strategies and structures of the company such as market focus (business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C)), international outreach, and situational/historical factors (Klewes & Zerfass, 2011). This also means that generalizing insights from various companies makes little sense – which is a strong argument against the idea that striving for membership in the dominant coalition is an appropriate and sufficient way to achieve communication excellence. The *normative pillar* refers to values and norms that influence behavior (Scott, 2001, p. 54). The third pillar, the *cultural-cognitive pillar*, “is the major distinguishing feature of neoinstitutionalism within sociology” (Scott, 2001, p. 57). It describes common scripts and shared beliefs that constitute social reality and that are taken for granted. All three pillars are related to each other as a product of the symbolic world (Sandhu, 2012, p. 100). More specifically, the regulative and normative pillars depend on the cultural-cognitive pillar. Rules and norms can only guide interactions in organizations if there is cognitive knowledge about those rules, sanctions, values, and expectations. At the same time, “soft” factors such as the basic understanding of concepts (e.g. communication) and expectations of an organizational function (e.g. corporate communications) are typically not limited to single organizations, but part of shared visions in peer groups. CEOs and other top executives form a social class that differs from other managers (e.g. accountants, marketing experts, salespeople, IT staff, communication professionals) in various ways. While it is difficult to identify all the influencing factors (i.e. academic education, mentoring, networks, media use), sociologists have been able to show remarkable and consistent patterns in the mindsets of top managers (i.e. Buß, 2012).

These thoughts help focus the research at hand, which contributes to the body of knowledge by exploring the understandings, experiences, and expectations (cognitive institutions) of CEOs and board members in corporations. The main research question is thus:

RQ: What are the understandings, experiences, and expectations of top executives towards corporate communications?

This broad question can be broken down into several more specified research questions, which are derived from the basic presuppositions discussed in this section:

RQ1: How important are public opinion, reputation, and communication performance for corporate success?

RQ2: How do top executives conceptualize and perform communication personally, and how do they collaborate with communication departments?

RQ3: What are the objectives of corporate communications, and how does corporate communications contribute to organizational success?

RQ4: How do top executives rate the importance and performance of key disciplines and instruments in corporate communications?

Empirical Studies of Communication from the CEO's Perspective

In contrast to the large number of studies analyzing the status quo and future of strategic communication from the communicator's point of view (e.g. Berger & Meng, 2014; Zerfass et al., 2013, at an international level; and national surveys in many countries, i.e. Swerling et al., 2012), very little is known about the perspectives of top executives. A literature review shows that only a handful of dedicated studies have been published during the past 20 years and that most of these are limited to small-scale, qualitative designs – with two remarkable exceptions.

The first large-scale research on the perceptions of CEOs was part of the *Excellence Study in Communication Management and Public Relations* from 1991–1994 by the Grunigs and colleagues. It was based on a quantitative survey in 168 corporations and 159 other organizations, conducted in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom (Grunig et al., 2002). Additionally, a qualitative survey among 25 of the 327 organizations was carried out. The study identified shared expectations between top executives and communication managers as a key enabler of excellent communications (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995, p. 10). It also showed that CEOs value public relations because it can provide a “broad perspective both inside and outside of the organization” (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 115), which means that inbound activities contribute to organizational success (RQ3). However, the research framework was mainly oriented towards the structural dimensions of the interaction between CEOs and communicators (the regulative pillar in terms of neo-institutionalism), and thus the results do not cover the other questions posed above.

The second quantitative study of communication from the CEOs' perspective was conducted in Norway. *Leaders' Perceptions of Communication and Communication Managers* is a survey of top managers in Norwegian companies of all sizes conducted in 2009 by Brønn. The study produced 1,343 responses (Brønn, 2014). However, owing to the structure of the Norwegian business sector with a majority of small companies, only 292 of the managers represented a company with a distinct communication department or function. Brønn (2014) reports a variety of insights into the perceptions of executives. For example, 86% of the respondents in companies with a communication department believe that reputation contributes to organizational success, while 59% confirm that communication and reputation are nowadays considered in strategic decision-making (p. 28) (RQ1). Moreover, leaders “understand that personal communication is very important for their organizations” (p. 16), which emphasizes the communicative role of CEOs themselves (RQ1). When asked

about the importance of different communication disciplines, executives in organizations with communication departments ranked marketing/branding and consumer communication first followed by communication skills and internal communication (p. 29) (RQ4).

Another cluster of studies is based on interviews with a small number of CEOs and top executives. This qualitative methodology is and was appropriate for entering the mostly unknown terrain of CEOs' attitudes towards corporate communications. At the same time, it has to be noted that some studies are implicitly biased because the interviewees were not sampled from a general group of companies, but deliberately chosen (i.e. because they or their communicators engage themselves in the future of strategic communication, or because they were interested in the subject in general). Nevertheless, this research has produced a wealth of insights that can guide broader studies.

Murray and White (2005) pioneered the field with a study of *CEOs' Views on Reputation Management*. They interviewed 14 deliberately chosen CEOs and chairpersons from leading corporations and associations in the United Kingdom. The answers revealed that respondents have a specific understanding of their own role as corporate speakers:

“CEOs believe it is they who own the management of reputation, with help from their chairmen and boards. Public relations professionals were required to provide advice on how reputation can be managed and oversee various communication activities. All recognised that reputation is perhaps the most important single asset the company has.” (p. 351)

This means that CEOs take personal responsibility for the management of corporate communications and value their own activities as high as, if not higher than, those of communication professionals supporting them (RQ1). The objectives of public relations are developing “profile and positioning” (p. 352) (outbound) as well as taking the “responsibility for the task of ‘holistic listening’ around the various key audiences and stakeholder groups” (p. 355) (inbound) (RQ3). Communication professionals contribute to corporate success through their “role as the communications radar for the organisation, ensuring that decision makers are aware of the views and sensitivities of stakeholders, thus enabling better board-level decision making” (p. 353). However, this was mainly wishful thinking at the time the study was conducted – most respondents lacked the necessary qualifications among many public relations professionals in Britain. As such, strategic communication was mainly seen as media relations (RQ4).

Sterne (2008) followed this path by analyzing the *Business Perceptions of Public Relations in New Zealand*. He used cluster sampling to identify 42 companies from the top 200 in the country. A total of 32 top executives (eight CEOs and 24 senior managers) agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews in 2007. The research showed that corporate communications is “in the hands of a range of owners with their own philosophies” (p. 36), which underlines the relevance of top executives and their understanding for communication excellence. Many public relations practitioners were not considered to be qualified enough to support top management decision-making. Nevertheless, CEOs strongly supported the view that they needed communication to achieve a good reputation. Some even “believed they themselves were the only person who should speak for the organisation” (p. 37). This supports the rising relevance of public opinion and reputation for organizational decision-making as well as the perceived importance of the CEO's personal communication to corporate success (RQ1).

The Arthur W. Page Society (2007, 2013) has commissioned two subsequent, qualitative surveys among the CEOs of large companies in the United States and other undisclosed countries. The survey *The CEO View: Opportunities & Challenges for the Senior*

Communications Executive was published as part of the “Authentic Enterprise” report (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007). Data were collected from 2006–2007 in phone interviews with the CEOs of 28 U.S. and three European corporations. All companies had an annual revenue of more than two billion US\$. The sample was deliberately chosen: the communication heads of most companies were members of the Page Society, which tries to foster the strategic role of the communication function. The follow-up study is named *The CEO View: The Impact of Communications on Corporate Character in a 24x7 Digital World* (Arthur W. Page Society, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were conducted by phone in 2013 with the CEOs of 20 U.S. and international companies, whose communication heads are all members of the society. The majority of the corporations reported annual revenues of two billion US\$ or more. The earlier study by the Arthur W. Page Society (2007) showed that CEOs see a rising value of reputation for their businesses (p. 42). It is the CEO’s job, as one interviewee phrased it, “to be a communications person for both the industry and the company” (p. 42). Public opinion plays a major role for corporate success and top executives as well as supporting communication professionals are in charge (RQ1). Those specialists, especially the heads of communications, are “more valuable than ever” (p. 40) and act as trusted advisers. This includes not only messaging and campaigning abilities, but also the function of a “crystal ball” (p. 44) – inbound activities of monitoring or anticipating stakeholder reactions and public opinion are drivers of corporate success (RQ3). The follow-up research by the Arthur W. Page Society (2013) supported some of these views and added new insights. The top executives interviewed claim that reputation matters even more (p. 6) (RQ1). They report that active listening has become a reality now (RQ3):

“Whereas before they would issue releases, launch campaigns, etc., now they often task their communications people with finding new and better ways to listen to their stakeholders and take those views into account when formulating strategy.” (p. 10)

When talking about the objectives and priorities of strategic communication, many CEOs focus on employees and internal communication (p. 11). Social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook, and blogs are perceived to be as relevant as traditional media for public opinion building (RQ1).

Will et al. (2011) joined forces between academia and an executive search company to conduct the study *Communication from the CEO’s perspective*. The authors invited the CEOs of the 40 largest listed and private-owned corporations in Germany to participate. They were able to interview 11 CEOs personally in 2010. However, most of the top executives were interviewed along with their communication head, which might have induced a positive bias towards the function. Respondents stated that corporate communications is a critical success factor for organizational strategy and a core element of strategic management (p. 22). Companies adapt themselves and their decision-making routines to the rules of the media society (p. 31) (RQ1). Therefore, CEOs place high expectations on communication professionals, who they value as key advisers and business partners (pp. 27–28) (RQ2). Communication professionals have to act as organs as well as a relay to the environment – speaking out and listening are complementary ways to create organizational success (RQ3). Nevertheless, top executives feel that they are personally responsible for communication as well (RQ1). In fact, they use a large part of their own time (one-third on average) for all disciplines of corporate communications, ranging from internal and brand communication to investor relations (pp. 18–19). When asked about various platforms for communication, CEOs prefer traditional print media and public speaking. Audiovisual media are considered to be more risky and social media was not discussed at all (pp. 41–42). While the latter might

be explained by the year when the study was conducted, the strong valuation of traditional media might be an indicator of the continuing importance of media relations in the communications portfolio (RQ4).

The last study identified in the communication literature was commissioned by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and authored by Shugoll (2012).

A View from the Top: Corporate Communication from the Perspective of Senior Executives is based on telephone interviews conducted in 2011 with 20 CEOs, presidents, and managing directors in the United States. They represented large companies with annual revenues of one billion US\$ or more. Respondents were purposefully sampled because they are “extremely involved in communicating with all key constituencies for their organization” (p. 49). As such, the study, like the ones by the Arthur W. Page Society (2007, 2013) and Murray and White (2005), is probably biased towards communication-savvy executives. Shugoll (2012) reported an increasing demand in communication (pp. 10–13) and the necessity for top executives to communicate at every level and with any stakeholders (pp. 17–18) (RQ1). Effective communications means sending messages as well as receiving them (p. 23) – an insight that shows a traditional understanding of communication as transmission (RQ2), while it also confirms the necessity of combining outbound and inbound activities (RQ3). Many of the CEOs interviewed stated that the communication head should have a seat on the board and that they value him/her as a strategic partner (RQ2). In terms of their own communication activities, top executives “believe that nothing can replace face-to-face communication and that constituents still crave personal interaction” (pp. 31, 44) (RQ2). Social media is rated as important, but also estimated as being burdensome. While active use needs careful thought, it is obvious that social media influence corporate reputation as much as mass media (p. 36) (RQ1).

Reputation and communication are also explored in a few global surveys on CEOs’ perceptions and expectations in general. Obviously, those insights are limited as the studies are less focused. Nevertheless, they are a good starting point for building hypotheses, as they put corporate communications into a larger context.

The *Fifth Global CEO Study* by IBM (2012) asked 1,709 CEOs and top executives from 64 countries about their major challenges. According to the respondents, who were interviewed face-to-face in 2011 and 2012, their key focus is motivating employees and gaining customer insights (pp. 17–42). Communication can contribute to this both by outbound activities (building corporate culture) and by means of inbound listening (RQ3). While face-to-face and traditional media are most relevant today, social media will take over soon (pp. 34–37). This means that both mass media and social media are important for reputation, while traditional measures of corporate communications (media relations) are prevailing at the moment (RQ1, RQ4).

A similar picture emerged from the *16th Annual Global CEO Survey* published by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2013). In total, 1,330 interviews with CEOs in 68 countries were conducted in late 2012 with a mixed-method approach – mainly face-to-face, but in some countries also via telephone, print, or online questionnaires. The most influential stakeholder groups are, from the CEOs’ points of view, customers/clients, competitors, government/regulators, and employees. Fewer than 20% stated that local communities, mass media, users of social media, or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have a significant influence on their business strategies (p. 22). On the other hand, customers/clients, employees, and social media users lead the list of those stakeholders with whom CEOs want to strengthen their engagement (p. 24). When translating this result into the realm of corporate communications, it can be assumed that mass media and social media have the

same impact on corporate reputation today (RQ1), while motivating employees and consumer information are key goals and disciplines for corporate communications (RQ3, RQ4).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Insights from the literature review can be used to construct hypotheses for each of the research questions developed above. Obviously, the qualitative status of most existing research makes it difficult to define concrete numbers. Thus, all hypotheses test either priorities (most important ratings by respondents) or approval by the majority (agreement by more than 50% of respondents). This builds a bridge to develop a quantitative survey instrument, which is necessary to gather data from a larger, non-selective sample of CEOs and other top executives.

As a reminder, the overall research question is:

RQ: What are the understandings, experiences, and expectations of top executives towards corporate communications?

Four more detailed research questions, which are based on the theoretical framework above, complement these hypotheses:

RQ1: How important are public opinion, reputation, and communication performance for corporate success?

H1: The majority of top executives agree that mass media and social media information influence corporate reputation.

H2: Most top executives agree that impacts on public opinion are more relevant for corporate decision-making today compared with five years ago.

H3: The contribution of top executives' personal communication performance to corporate success is valued higher than the contribution of professional communication by specialized departments or agencies.

RQ2: How do top executives conceptualize and perform communication personally, and with whom do they collaborate when developing communication strategies?

H4: Most top executives support a traditional understanding of communication, focusing on transmitting information from a sender to a receiver.

H5: Face-to-face conversations with stakeholders are considered to be more important than media and social media skills for top executives.

H6: Communication managers and departments in an organization are the most important partners for top executives in the field of corporate communications.

RQ3: What are the objectives of corporate communications, and how does corporate communications contribute to organizational success?

H7: Motivating employees and building communicative assets (image, reputation, trust) are the two most important objectives of corporate communications for top executives.

H8: The majority of top executives value both outbound activities (speaking to stakeholders, influencing public opinion) and inbound efforts (listening to stakeholders, adjusting corporate behavior) as important for corporate success.

RQ4: How do top executives rate the importance and performance of key disciplines and instruments in corporate communications?

- H9: Communicating with customers, suppliers, and dealers (marketing communication) is considered to be the most relevant and best-performing field of corporate communications by top executives.
- H10: Top executives believe that media relations is the most relevant and best-performing instrument of corporate communications.

Methodology and Sample

In order to answer these research questions, a quantitative survey among CEOs, managing directors, and executive board members – only at the top level of the organizational hierarchy – of German corporations was conducted in 2013. The most comprehensive address list of corporate executives in the country, called the *Hoppenstedt Manager Database*, was used to identify the population. The database provided only postal addresses. Therefore, all top executives were invited by the researchers with a letter that included a personal access code to an online questionnaire. Owing to the enormous financial and operational effort, it was not possible to send reminders.

The study was restricted to top managers working in large corporations, joint stock, or private owned, with an annual turnover of at least 50 million €, in 10 core industries: automobile and suppliers, financial industry, energy and primary goods, trade, industrial products, information technology and communication, consumer goods, media, pharmaceuticals, and transport and tourism.

The procedures for preparing, conducting, and evaluating the survey followed established rules of communication research. A questionnaire in German with 25 questions in four sections was constructed and pretested with 45 top managers. The data were collected anonymously by using a professional web-based software (EFS Enterprise Suite Survey) from January 24 until February 27, 2013. Only fully completed questionnaires were considered for the analysis. It was explicitly tested whether questionnaires were filled in by top executives themselves or handed over to their communication departments. Those replies were deleted and not evaluated. The adjusted data set was analyzed by using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 21). Statistical tests were performed where appropriate. Significant results are marked in the text below. The questions and items reported were translated into English by the researchers.

The analysis is based on a sample of $n = 602$ respondents. All of them are top executives (CEOs, presidents, managing directors, full-time board members, etc.) in large corporations. The annual turnover exceeded 250 million € in 52.8% of the organizations; 38.7% even report more than 500 million €. Companies mainly operating in the B2B field (41.5%) outweigh those focusing on B2C markets (17.3%), while 41.2% address both segments. Respondents were, on average, 50 years old (Mdn = 51) and had 20 years of leadership experience (Mdn = 18). The often-reported gender inequality in boardrooms, at least in large companies, also shows up in this study. 92.2% of the top executives were men and only 6.8% women. A large majority (80.1%) had an academic education and – rather typical of German executives in this age group – 15.1% hold a doctorate (Dr., Ph.D.). As suggested by general studies of the managerial elite, most respondents with an academic education have a background in business administration, management, or economics (62.0%), followed by engineering, mathematics, or information technology (18.1%), natural sciences or medicine (4.3%), and law (3.3%). Only 2.3% of those who made it to the boardroom studied communications or journalism.

The sample included top executives with different responsibilities and formal connections to the communication function. This represents the reality of corporate communications and communication professionals, who usually interact with an inhomogeneous group of (internal) clients. Altogether, 29.7% of respondents stated that the

corporate communications function and chief communication officer report directly to them. These are usually CEOs in charge of communications at the board level, which means they are directly responsible for key decisions regarding budgeting, staffing, and strategies for communications. A smaller group (14.1%) also acts as principals for communication professionals, but in another way: these top executives commission communication departments or agencies out of their functional budgets, namely as board members responsible for human resources or a specific business unit. A total of 41.5% of the top executives interviewed interact with communication professionals from time to time. Typically, these are board members involved in specific projects, such as the chief innovation officer who does not invest into formal communication, but in topics within his/her responsibility and is part of the internal and external coverage. Finally, 14.6% of respondents stated that they seldom or never interact with communication departments or agencies, which is an interesting result on its own in the information age.

Results

The empirical study showed that CEOs and executive board members value the importance of corporate communications and its contribution to organizational success. They take their own roles as corporate speakers and personal communicators very seriously, whereas the perceptions of the professional communication function and some instruments in use (especially social media) are less encouraging.

Across the whole study, the correlation analyses showed that the expectations, experiences, and understandings of top executives are influenced by a number of independent variables. It makes a difference whether respondents work closely together with communicators or not. The size of the company, measured in terms of annual turnover, also matters. Moreover, the main market segment (B2B or B2C), the endurance of respondents' managerial responsibility, and the amount of time they personally spend on corporate communications influenced some results.

Public opinion, reputation, and corporate success (RQ1; H1, H2, H3)

The first research question asked about the relevance of public opinion for corporate reputation (mediatization as an external influence on the organization) and on decision-making in corporations, namely whether organizations consider this internally.

Nearly every executive (96.2%) believes that mass media coverage influences corporate reputation, whereas only seven out of 10 respondents (71.9%) agree that social media has an impact (see Table 1). The relatively low assessment of the online sphere is also represented by the fact that 26.7% of top executives fully support the reputational impact of social media, while 66.1% fully agree to the same statement regarding mass media.

H1 was verified. The majority, which means more than 50% of the top executives surveyed, agree that both mass media and social media information influence corporate reputation. Nevertheless, mass media reporting was rated higher ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.65$) than social media discussions ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.03$).

Table 1

Relevance of Public Opinion for Reputation and Corporate Decision-Making

	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Mass media coverage (TV, radio, print) influences corporate reputation	96.2	4.60	0.65
Discussions on social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) influence corporate	71.9	3.82	1.03

reputation			
Impact on public opinion is kept in mind more strongly in corporate decision-making, compared with five years ago	70.4	3.79	0.99

n = 602 CEOs and board members.

Percentages: respondents supporting the statement positively or totally (4 or 5 on a five-point scale).

Means: approval for the statement on a five-point scale, ranging from “do not support at all” to “support totally”.

Mediatization also influences how CEOs and other board members handle key issues. Altogether, 70.4% of respondents agree that public opinion and positive or negative effects that may arise are considered more intensively when making strategic decisions today. One quarter (23.1%) fully supports the statement and only 2.3% do not see such a development at all. The statistical analysis showed that public opinion is significantly more important for decision-making in B2C companies ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.95$) than in B2B companies ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.02$) (chi-square test; $p \leq .001$). Furthermore, there are highly significant differences concerning the importance of public opinion between larger companies with an annual turnover of at least 250 million € ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.91$) and those with a business volume between 50 and 250 million € per year ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.05$) (chi-square test, $p \leq .001$).

H2 was also verified. Most top executives (more than 50%) agree that impacts on public opinion are more relevant for corporate decision-making today compared with five years ago.

Incorporating public opinion in decision-making means that communication has an impact on the achievement of organizational goals. The CEOs and board members in the sample were asked to rate the contribution of professional corporate communications – managed by communication departments or agencies – to corporate success on a five-point scale ranging from very low to very high. Two-thirds of the top executives (64.6%, $M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.73$) reported a high or very high contribution. Consistent with the result above, top executives from companies with an annual turnover of more than 250 million € shared this opinion to a significantly stronger degree ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.65$) than those from companies with a lower turnover ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.79$) (chi-square test, $p \leq .01$). Thinking of the future, two-thirds (66.5%) of the CEOs and board members predicted a rising relevance of the communication function within the next three years compared with other functions in their company. A bright future for the profession seems to be ahead – but only at first glance. The study also asked, separately and in another part of the questionnaire, how top executives rate the contribution of personal communication performed by top management and leaders to corporate success, based on their experiences. Nearly nine out of 10 respondents (87.2%; $M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.67$) suggested a high or very high contribution (4 and 5 on a five-point scale). These values are clearly higher than the ratings for communication performed by professional teams.

H3 was confirmed. The empirical study approves the supposition based on insights from previous qualitative research: CEOs and board members value the contribution of personal communication performed by top executives to corporate success higher than the contribution of professional communication by specialized departments or agencies. The cognitive institutions prevalent among the CEOs and board members of large organizations are consistent in the way in which they condense an understanding of communication as a driver for success, which combines a support of strategic communication by professional means with an even higher-ranked belief in the necessity and power of executive communication.

Communication patterns of top executives (RQ2; H4, H5, H6)

How do CEOs and board members conceptualize communication themselves, and which skills are relevant for them and their peers in the top ranks of business? And with whom do they discuss matters of public opinion and strategic communication? The second research question addresses understandings, experiences, and expectations; as such, it is also linked to cognitive institutions.

The top executives in the survey were asked to assess two statements representing different comprehensions of communication. Respondents had to choose spontaneously and state which alternative represents their personal understanding most appropriately. Nearly two-thirds (65.5%) supported the statement “In communication processes, information is sent directly or via media in order to cause an effect on receivers”. Another third (34.4%) preferred the alternative: “In communication processes, all those involved use signs and symbols that create meaning and social realities”. Only younger CEOs and board members with shorter leadership tenures (up to 9 years) voted differently and ranked both statements almost equally, with a slight preference for the second view (47.1% compared with 52.9%).

Hence, H4 was confirmed. Most (more than 50% of) top executives support a traditional understanding of communication, focusing on transmitting information from a sender to a receiver, which is consistent with the educational background of most respondents in business administration and predominant conceptualization of communication in this discipline discussed above.

When asked about the importance of different capabilities for executives and leaders, almost all respondents (99.0%) rank face-to-face communication skills highest (see Table 2). Competencies linked to traditional media and platforms such as giving speeches at events and giving interviews to journalists are valued by more than half of top executives, while a clear minority of no more than 13.8% state that social media communication skills are important. This supports the results from the qualitative studies cited above and rebuts many optimistic views in the communication profession and academia. Interestingly, three out of four (76.4%) claim that the ability to estimate and evaluate the achievements of corporate communications is an important part of a CEO’s or top manager’s qualifications. Being able to read and interpret data derived from applied communication research is an important asset for 50.8% of respondents. This represents a cognitive managerial mindset, which is comprehensible, as top executives are ultimately in charge. It is absolutely necessary for principals to understand the bigger picture, as this allows them to guide agents in communication departments and agencies who take care of the details.

H5 was thus verified. CEOs and board members consider face-to-face conversations with stakeholders to be more important ($M = 4.74$) for themselves and their peers compared with media skills such as interacting with journalists ($M = 3.63$) and social media competencies ($M = 2.50$).

Table 2
Important Communication Skills for Top Executives

Skill	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Talking with employees, customers, suppliers, politicians, etc.	99.0	4.74	0.48
Estimating the success of communication activities	76.4	3.91	0.76
Giving public speeches	76.9	3.89	0.77
Giving interviews and talking to journalists	62.0	3.63	0.87

Analyzing the results of opinion and media research	50.8	3.42	0.90
Writing texts for brochures, letters, etc.	28.1	2.88	1.01
Communicating on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Xing, etc.)	13.8	2.50	0.91

n = 602 CEOs and board members.

Percentages: respondents rating the item as important or very important (4 or 5 on a five-point scale).

Means: importance on a five-point scale, ranging from “not important at all” to “very important”.

Top executives see themselves at the center of strategic communication. Nevertheless, both theoretical considerations and the literature review showed that they need support from others to master the challenges of a 24/7 information flow and the dynamics of real-time opinion building in global settings. Respondents were asked with whom they exchange views on public opinion building and strategies for corporate communications. Multiple answers were possible. Unexpectedly, communication departments or professionals working in the company are only addressed by 63.5% of CEOs and board members. This is a quite moderate proportion for specialized agents who are – or should be – designated to support their principals in general management. The most relevant advisors and partners for top executives are peers on the board or in functional divisions of the company (mentioned by 86.7%). Following third are business partners in other companies (49.8%), which are more important than industry associations (38.4%) and external communication advisers or agencies (28.7%) and a number of other choices. However, communication professionals are valued higher by CEOs and board members who interact with the communication function more intensively. The statistical analysis proved a very significant difference (chi-square test, $p \leq .001$) between top executives with the communication head as direct report and those who their use own budgets to commission communication departments compared with respondents who collaborate with professionals on projects seldom or never. For example, 73.0% of the respondents responsible for the corporate communications function collaborate with the department in the situations at hand, and 36.3% out of this subgroup talk to external communication advisers.

Nevertheless, H6, which stated that communication managers and departments in the organization are the most important partners for top executives in the field of corporate communications, was rejected. Obviously, the expectations of top executives do not reflect the self-perception of many communication professionals, who see themselves as the sole and most important counselors for management. This idea is – until now – not a widespread part of cognitive institutions in modern corporations.

Objectives of corporate communications and leverages of success (RQ3; H7, H8)

The third research question investigated the goals that can be achieved by corporate communications from two perspectives. First, top executives were asked to rate the importance of a number of typical communication objectives. The list was derived from a longitudinal survey of communication professionals (Bentele et al., 2012). Furthermore, it was tested whether outbound and inbound goals, which were identified as differing but complementary ways in which to foster organizational success, were acknowledged by respondents. Both parts of the question try to identify institutionalized cognitive patterns.

Table 3
Objectives of Corporate Communications

Objective	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Informing and motivating employees	95.0	4.53	0.61
Conveying corporate trust	96.1	4.48	0.60
Building and preserving a positive image	95.5	4.46	0.61
Informing objectively	84.2	4.13	0.73
Creating transparency about corporate policies and strategies	72.8	3.87	0.82
Keep the company out of negative headlines	70.4	3.86	0.96
Standardizing corporate design	69.7	3.83	0.86
Gaining trust from journalists	56.2	3.50	0.95
Fostering dialogues with stakeholder groups	51.5	3.48	0.83
Exploring trends and developments in society	51.5	3.46	0.91
Influencing journalists	29.9	2.95	0.97

n = 602 CEOs and board members.

Percentages: respondents rating the item as important or very important (4 or 5 on a five-point scale).

Means: importance on a five-point scale, ranging from “not important at all” to “very important”.

Table 3 shows the mindsets of CEOs and board members regarding the objectives of corporate communications. Informing and motivating employees received the strongest support ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.61$) on a five-point scale followed by fostering corporate trust ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.60$) and supporting a positive image ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.61$). Most respondents (more than 95%) stated that those three aspects are important. The objectives that focus on listening, namely creating opportunities for dialogues with stakeholder groups ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.83$) and capturing trends and issues in society ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.91$), were rated as less important. The same was true for the goals related to journalists and the mass media. CEOs and board members think that gaining trust from journalists ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.61$) is more important than influencing them ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.97$).

H7 was verified by the data. Motivating employees and building communicative assets (image, reputation, trust) are the two most important objectives of corporate communications for top executives.

The literature review unveiled a common motive: communication contributes to corporate success by messaging, by supporting operational activities, by building up reputation, brands, and cultures (outbound activities), and by monitoring public opinion, identifying issues, and outside perspectives, which can help adjust strategies and secure room for maneuver (inbound activities). The survey tested whether the cognitive mindsets of CEOs and board members reflect this duality, or whether one of both perspectives is prevalent.

Table 4
Contribution of Corporate Communications to Organizational Success

	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Facilitate business processes	94.2	4.37	0.62

(motivate employees, inform customers and suppliers, generate public attention)			
Build immaterial assets (corporate culture, brands, reputation)	90.8	4.34	0.68
Adjust organizational strategies (identify opportunities, integrate public concerns)	71.1	3.83	0.80
Secure room for maneuver (manage relationships, manage crises)	81.2	4.02	0.72

n = 602 CEOs and board members.

Percentages: respondents rating the item as important or very important (4 or 5 on a five-point scale).

Means: importance on a five-point scale, ranging from “not important at all” to “very important”.

Overall, the first assumption was confirmed. All four leverages presented in Table 4 are rated as important by a clear majority. However, the traditional understanding of communication as transmission is dominant. Conveying information to stakeholders and building communicative assets such as reputation and brands is important for nine out of 10 top executives. Inbound means are valued as less important for corporate success. In total, 81.2% of CEOs and board members state that communication supports success by managing relationships and gaining legitimacy, while 71.1% see a value in listening activities that help adjust to corporate strategies.

H8 was verified. The majority of top executives – more than 50% – value both outbound activities (speaking to stakeholders, influencing public opinion) and inbound efforts (listening to stakeholders, adjusting corporate behavior) as important for corporate success.

Disciplines and instruments of corporate communications (RQ4; H9, H10)

Corporate communications addresses a broad set of stakeholders and involves multiple instruments, platforms, and channels. In an ideal world, the significance of stakeholders for corporate strategy and the effectiveness of various lines of action would be used to divide limited budgets and resources. In practice, the preconceptions of decision-makers and usages of the trade play a major role. While communication professionals are traditionally geared towards journalists, policymakers, and communities, CEOs might feel more familiar with the needs of shareholders, customers, and employees. This is quite natural: top executives are responsible for keeping the company alive and prosperous. Thus, they focus on primary stakeholders, those “without whose continuing participation the company cannot survive as a going concern” (Clarkson, 1995, p. 106), and less so on secondary stakeholders, who are neither engaged in transactions nor needed to exist. At the same time, the qualitative research identified in the literature review suggests that CEOs and board members value media relations higher than social media communications. The fourth research question focused on these topics. Respondents were asked to rate the relevance of the key disciplines and instruments of corporate communications for their company. In another part of the questionnaire, they were asked to value the performance of their companies and respective communication departments or agencies in the same fields. This design allowed us to evaluate the perceived significance of disciplines and instruments as well as the gap between the relevance and performance for each item.

Table 5 shows how CEOs and board members value different communication disciplines. Internal communication with employees and leaders is considered to be the most important discipline of corporate communications (rated as relevant by 95.5%), followed by

marketing and customer communication (90.4%) and financial communication (60.6%). All those disciplines address primary stakeholders at the core of the business cycle; they are needed to finance, produce, and sell products or services. In contrast to many discussions among professional communicators and those in public relations research, communication with stakeholders in the political realm (34.2%) and society (27.7%) is valued as less relevant. However, both disciplines are evaluated more positively by top executives representing companies with an annual turnover of more than 250 million € ($M = 3.16 / 3.00$, $SD = 1.01 / 0.94$) compared with companies with a lower turnover ($M = 2.86 / 2.77$, $SD = 1.08 / 0.95$) (highly significant correlation, chi-square test, $p \leq .001$).

Interestingly, top executives are less satisfied with the effectiveness of communication in the most important field, internal communication ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.82$). The study shows a gap of almost one scale point (0.94) between relevance and performance. The best-performing disciplines, according to CEOs and board members, are marketing communication ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.74$) and financial communication ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.07$). Only one-quarter of respondents (25.7%) state that the specialists in charge deliver a high performance when communicating with society.

H9 was thus rejected. Communicating with customers, suppliers, and dealers (marketing communication) is considered to be the best-performing discipline by top executives. However, it is no longer considered to be the most relevant field of corporate communications. Internal communications has entered pole position in the boardroom.

Table 5
Relevance and Performance of Key Communication Disciplines.

Discipline	Relevance			Performance			Divergence
	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	ΔM
Internal communication (with employees, managers)	95.7	4.54	0.61	58.8	3.60	0.82	0.94
Marketing communication (with customers, resellers, suppliers, etc.)	90.4	4.35	0.77	68.1	3.72	0.74	0.63
Financial communication (with investors, banks, owners)	60.6	3.63	1.04	64.8	3.64	1.07	-0.01
Political communication (with the government, authorities, parties)	34.2	3.02	1.05	31.9	2.94	1.05	0.08
Communication with society (NGOs, critics, local communities, universities, associations, etc.)	27.7	2.89	0.95	25.7	2.90	0.94	-0.01

n = 602 CEOs and board members.

Percentages: respondents rating the relevance as important or very important (4 or 5 on a five-point scale);

respondents rating the performance as high or very high (4 or 5 on a five-point scale).

Means: relevance on a five-point scale, ranging from “not important at all” to “very important”;

performance on a five-point scale, ranging from “very low” to “very high”.

A traditional picture emerged when the CEOs and board members in the study were asked to assess the relevance of various communication instruments or platforms as well as the corresponding performance of their communication departments or agencies (see Table 6). Almost three out of four believe that press and media relations (73.9%) are relevant for their companies, with advertising and sales promotion (61.8%) and live communications such as events and trade fairs following (60.2%). Less than half of respondents rate corporate media (47.7%) and online communication including the social web (46.7%) as relevant for their organizations. The list of precedence is the same as that for the question about the performance of communication departments and agencies when using those instruments. However, there is always a gap between the mean relevance and mean performance, which means that communication professionals do not match the expectations of their principals regarding quality and effectiveness. For example, only 28.7% of CEOs and board members believe that their organizations have a strong performance in social media.

Again, it was tested whether the independent variables affect the results. Large companies with an annual turnover of more than 250 million € rate the relevance of media relations higher ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.79$) than companies with a lower business volume ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.02$) (highly significant correlation, chi-square test, $p \leq .001$). This can be explained by the stronger public exposure for larger companies due to news factors such as prominence (Kepplinger, 2008).

H10 was thus confirmed. Top executives believe that media relations is the most relevant and best-performing instrument for corporate communications. Social media, web applications, and other means of online communication are rated lowest.

Table 6
Instruments and Platforms of Corporate Communications

Instrument/Platform	Relevance			Performance			Divergence
	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	ΔM
Press and media relations	73.9	3.92	0.93	57.0	3.53	0.98	0.93
Advertising, sales promotion	61.8	3.64	0.98	49.2	3.37	0.97	0.27
Live communication (events, trade fairs)	60.2	3.59	1.02	49.6	3.36	1.05	0.23
Corporate media (customer and employee magazines)	47.7	3.32	1.04	40.2	3.05	1.13	0.27
Online communication (internet, social media)	46.7	3.28	1.02	28.7	2.84	1.05	0.44

n = 602 CEOs and board members.

Percentages: respondents rating the relevance as important or very important (4 or 5 on a five-point scale);

rating the performance high or very high (4 or 5 on a five-point scale).

Means: relevance on a five-point scale, ranging from “not important at all” to “very important”;

performance on a five-point scale, ranging from “very low” to “very high”.

Discussion

This empirical study of 602 CEOs and executive board members of large corporations confirmed most insights from previous qualitative research in various regions of the world. This means that there are shared understandings, expectations, and experiences of top executives, which can be conceptualized as cognitive institutions in business. The cognitive patterns of principals cause opportunities and constraints for agents such as communication professionals, departments, and agencies (Zerfass et al., 2014). Overlapping perceptions might facilitate the influence and quality of corporate communications. Rivaling perceptions can be a cause of misunderstandings and poor performance.

At first sight, the results give a positive outlook for strategic communication as an integral part of corporate management. Top executives have a clear understanding of mediatization as a threat and opportunity for organizations. They see how mass media and social media influence public opinion and corporate reputation. They have incorporated this knowledge into internal routines and they think of possible consequences when making decisions. Consequently, CEOs and board members highly value corporate communications and its contribution to overall goals. Two-thirds of respondents (66.5%, $M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.80$) even predict an increasing importance of corporate communications until 2015, because social media is having a rising impact (approved by 85.3%, $M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.76$) and stakeholder groups are becoming more critical and active (73.7%, $M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.96$).

However, this is not reflected in top executives' mindsets of communication in general, namely corporate communications and the communication function in organizations. This mindset is traditional and not shaped by ideas such as dialogue, stakeholder integration,

or interactivity, which can be assumed if social media and active audiences are named as drivers in the field. On the contrary, most CEOs and executive board members view communication as a transmission of 'objective' meaning. They think that their own communication performance is more relevant than professional communication by specialized departments or agencies. This is a traditional problem: many believe in being able to judge and perform communication, as this is a basic human competence, and a reflection on the differences between communication at the individual level (micro), in organizational settings (meso), and in societies or large-scale networks of institutional actors (macro) is often missing.

More specifically, an analysis of the results across the different research questions unveils four key elements of the prevalent top executive mindset. First, *CEOs and board member focus on primary stakeholders (customers, employees) instead of secondary stakeholders (politicians, activists)*. This is apparent in the valuation of communication disciplines, where activities aimed at employees, customers, resellers, suppliers, and investors are clearly rated higher than communicating with governments, authorities, political parties, NGOs, and critical stakeholders. Likewise, informing and motivating employees is a much more important objective of corporate communications than goals linked to society at large, including journalists as gatekeepers and relays. Similar preferences are visible in the answers on communication skills for top executives. Concepts such as corporate social responsibility (Ihlen et al., 2011) and global stakeholder governance (Muzi Falconi et al., 2014) promoted by communication researchers and practitioners are less prevalent in the mindsets of CEOs. This might change in the future, as the executives interviewed have already confirmed the rising relevance of public opinion and critical stakeholders.

Second, *top executives are still geared towards traditional mass media and less convinced of social media*. Social media is clearly identified as a trend in the public sphere. Nevertheless, CEOs and board executives believe that mass media coverage has a much stronger impact on corporate reputation. They rarely value professional online communication, namely the use of the Internet and social media by communication departments or agencies. It is the least important and least effective corporate communications instrument from the executives' view. In addition, communicating on social media is the least important field of communication skills for top executives. Again, this might reflect the dynamics of Internet development and the caution described in some qualitative studies of CEOs discussed before. However, it also shows that the online-savvy boardroom is a myth in most corporations. Some qualitative studies, such as the one commissioned by the Arthur W. Page Society (2013), might be too optimistic, probably because of the strong focus on companies with leading-edge communications.

Third, *top executives rate speaking as more important than listening in corporate communications*. Most respondents understand that communication helps reach organizational goals by facilitating business processes, by building immaterial assets (outbound), and by securing room for maneuver and adjusting corporate strategies (inbound). However, the first, more traditional goal receives more support. Moreover, the objectives of corporate communications aimed at informing others as well as building image and trust are valued more importantly than listening activities or dialogues, such as exploring trends and developments in society and fostering dialogue with stakeholders. On a personal level, only every second CEO and top executive interviewed (50.8%) believes that analyzing the results of opinion and media research is an important skill.

Fourth, *communication professionals are not always first choice when CEOs and executive board members reflect on public opinion and strategic communication*. Peers at the top hierarchical level of the company as well as leaders of functional divisions are mentioned most often as counterparts and sounding boards in the survey. Further, opportunities to be

asked and to advise rise with a direct reporting line. This shows that structural arrangements (regulative institutions), which have long been discussed, are still relevant, but they are not the only way in which to gain influence and power.

In spite of the many future-oriented conceptions in academia and in the professional world, a traditional view of corporate communications is institutionalized in the business world – even in large corporations with dedicated and professional communication departments. Studies of the institutionalization of strategic communication based on large-scale surveys of communication professionals in Europe have produced similar results: an overall strategic orientation is evolving, but outbound is still prevailing over inbound, and media relations holds the pole position (Moreno et al., 2010; Verhoeven et al., 2011).

There is clearly a need for stronger alignment between principles and agents in corporate communications. Understanding each other's mindsets and cognitive institutions prevalent in the boardroom and in the communication department is a first step (Zerfass et al., 2014). Developing business knowledge among communicators and a broader view of communication among top executives, leaders at large, and students of business administration is another aspect. In the end, each company has to create suitable conditions to master the challenge. A set of organizational values, beliefs, and procedures (normative, cognitive, and regulative institutions) is needed. These are needed to link communication to business strategies, set measurable targets, and evaluate communication activities in order to gain competitive advantage. The ongoing debate on these issues (Likely & Watson, 2013) has to be put into a broader context and this can be reinterpreted from the point of view of neo-institutionalism.

Limitations and further research

The research reported here has, like any study, several limitations. While the survey was able to identify the average perceptions and experiences of CEOs and executive board members, it does not make any statements about the situation in specific companies. Standard deviations indicate that different pictures might emerge in some organizations, which is important to know for communication professionals interpreting the results. Nevertheless, this study provides an insight into the overarching cognitive institutions, some of which are influenced by independent variables at the level of organizations (size, market focus) or individuals (leadership tenure). The empirical findings are restricted to the sample conducted in Germany. This is the largest European country and fourth-largest economy in the world with highly developed systems of corporations and corporate communications. While it can be assumed that there will be many similarities in other Western countries and businesses, the specific system of corporate governance (Schwalbach, 2001) as well as cultural differences may lead to differing results in other regions. Corporate communications might be valued differently by top executives in various industries because of differences in public exposure, stakeholder settings, and quests for legitimization. The analysis confirmed some differences between B2B and B2C companies. However, the sample did not allow for a detailed analysis of industry factors. It also has to be noted that this survey used a comprehensive and solid database. This is rather advanced compared with most of the small-scale qualitative studies and quantitative CEO studies reviewed above, which rely on deliberately chosen participants, snowball sampling, or similar approaches. Nevertheless, the results of this study do not claim to be representative, as the distribution of participants in the sample of top executives might not reflect the overall characteristics in German corporations regarding gender, age, industry sectors, and so on.

The theoretical considerations and empirical data presented should be used as a starting point for further research on the views of top executives and on the institutionalization of corporate communications in a broader sense. Additional methods such

as focus groups with top executives and action research might be applied. In a globalized world, it would be interesting to research the diverging mindsets of CEOs and board members on communication in various countries and cultures – either within the same setting of one global company or across different industries. Obviously, the dynamics of the information age ask for a replication of the study to research the development of cognitive institutions (i.e. regarding social media and inbound communication) over a period of time.

Broadening the view and leaving the narrow focus on communication professionals and practices, which is typical of a large part of public relations research, helps cross disciplines and conduct research that matters for practice. CEOs, presidents, managing directors, and other executives are the most important stakeholders for communicators of all. They have to be part of the ongoing journey towards a comprehensive and strategic view of corporate communications.

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The Role of Public Relations in Social Capital and Civic Engagement

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Abstract

Public relations scholars have increasingly argued for the broader role of public relations and strategic communication in society (e.g., Taylor, 2010). That is, how can knowledge of public relations be used to make society better rather than simply making organizations more effective? This study examines how different types of public relations and strategic communication efforts contribute to citizens' social capital and civic engagement. Specifically, this study uses data from the 2010 Pew Internet and American Life Project '*Social Side of the Internet*' survey to examine the relationship between various strategic communication efforts by social, civic, professional, and religious organizations and individuals' social capital and civic engagement. Overall, the analyses suggest that organizations' face-to-face meetings with their members foster interpersonal trust and both social-oriented and private-oriented civic engagement, and that organizations' strategic communication via social media boosts both social-oriented and private-oriented civic engagement, whereas strategic communication via email, blogs and websites *decreases* social-oriented civic engagement. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings for the larger role of public relations and strategic communication in social capital and civic engagement are discussed.

Traditionally, public relations research focuses on how public relations efforts make organizations more effective. Increasingly, public relations scholars have argued for the central role of public relations and strategic communication in reviving community relations (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988) and fostering social capital, civic engagement, and democracy (e.g., Taylor, 2009; Taylor, 2010). Social capital in this paper is defined as encompassing various forms of citizen engagement in community affairs and features of social life such as networks, norms, and trust which enable citizens to effectively work together to improve society at large. Civic engagement involves individuals working to make a difference in their communities. By doing so, they develop knowledge, values, skills and motivation to make that difference (Ehrlich, 2000). Civic engagement activities include community volunteer work, consumer activism and involvement in social causes in areas including the environment to the economy (Bennett, 2003).

Two common debates within the civic engagement literature are whether it is an individual or community-level phenomenon (Lin, 2001). Putnam (2000a) views it as a community-level quality, while Bourdieu (2001) suggests that individuals possess different levels of civic engagement based on their personal virtues. Whether the engagement is for personal gain or for the community is based on the goals of the individual. According to Mascherini, Saltelli and Vidoni (2007), private engagement refers to individuals' participation in those organizations that are geared toward their private interests and social engagement refers to individuals' participation in those organizations that aim at serving the community at large.

Public relations in this study is defined as building relationships and connections between an organization and its publics. Public relations media, be they public media (i.e., newspapers and television), interactive media (i.e., Internet, social networking sites), controlled media (i.e., newsletters, direct mail), events/group communication (i.e., rallies, conferences), or one-on-one communication (i.e., lobbying, personalized visits) classified by Hallahan (2001), are the major mechanisms of creating, maintaining, and utilizing social capital.

The advent of Internet media, especially social media, has transformed the practices of public relations. Social media or social network sites (SNSs), in the forms of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, and LinkedIn, are defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profiles within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). Most SNSs share structural similarities and may be fundamentally classified as community sites with profiles, friends, and comments (boyd, 2008). The online context of an SNS best resembles a community of connections, although it is based on an individual. That is, SNSs provide a means for one to focus on building one's own of social connections via online interaction. As such, SNSs encourage user participation which is primarily seen in the form of providing feedback, sharing information, and otherwise communicating through the web-based service. Therefore, social media improve the ways public relations practitioners communicate with organization's publics and are especially instrumental in building relationships with specific publics and enhancing involvement and engagement (2001). These unique features of social media make it more likely for organizations to generate social capital.

Many studies have focused on the relationship between internal public relations and social capital (Kennan & Hazleton, 2006; Sommerfeldt & Taylor, 2011) and between organizational communication and civil society (Taylor, 2009). Lack of scholarly attention has been paid to how public relations and strategic communication affect citizens' social capital and civic engagement in general with the exception of Zhang and Seltzer (2010). To

fill the vacuum in this area, this study examines the influence of public relations and strategic communication in social capital and civic engagement by using data from the 2010 Pew Internet and American Life Project *Social Side of the Internet* survey.

Specifically, this study investigates the relationship between various strategic communication efforts by social, civic, professional, and religious organizations and social capital and civic engagement. The focal independent variable, *strategic communication*, includes social, civic, professional, and religious organizations' use of print newsletters, face-to-face meetings, email, message boards, websites and blogs, and social media (Facebook or Twitter) to communicate with members. Dependent variables include social capital variable (*interpersonal trust*) and civic participation (*social engagement and private engagement*).

Literature Review

Public Relations Effort, Social Capital and Civic Engagement

Because public relations focuses on building and maintaining relationships between an organization and its publics, the social capital and civic engagement ideas provide a deeper meaning of relationships for the community and society at large as well as for the individuals and organizations. Public relations scholars have begun examining the role of public relations in social capital and citizenship behavior (e.g., Kennan & Hazleton, 2006; Luoma-aho, 2009; Zhang & Seltzer, 2010), but the social capital and civic engagement ideas have been applied to the field of public relations only moderately.

Previous studies include ones that focus on public relations role in building communities such as Kruckeberg and Starck's (1988) "community building theory" and Hallahan's (2004) notion of community as a foundation for public relations. They maintain that the crucial role of public relations practitioners is to foster a sense of community and make the community a better place.

Many applications of social capital in public relations produced a mixed bag of evidence for the benefits of social capital. Hazleton and Kennan (2000) examined the role of organizational social capital in an organization's bottomline such as reduced transaction costs, increased productivity, quality, and customer satisfaction. They investigated three dimensions of social capital that are instrumental for public relations: Structural dimension, communication dimension, and relational dimension. They argue that communication is not only the foundation of social capital but also the "mechanism whereby the available stock of social capital can be accessed and expended to further various organizational goals and objectives" (p. 83). Luoma-aho (2005, 2006) focused on theorizing social capital in public relations. She argued that social capital is the resource that an organization may possess via networks of trust and reciprocity among its various publics and that communication with an organization's publics is vital not only for an organization's survival but also is valuable by itself for its legitimacy and reputation.

Interpersonal Communication and Civic Engagement

Interpersonal communication, be it group communication (direct interpersonal communication between the representatives of an organization and a group of people) or one-on-one communication (face-to-face contact using oral communication or interpersonal media using telephones, newsletters, and other correspondences), has unique characteristics and plays an important role in achieving an organization's objectives. Hallahan (2001) proposed an integrated public relations media model for program planning and divided public relations media into five broad types: Public media, interactive media, controlled media, events/group communication, and one-on-one communication and compared and contrasted the features that differentiate the five types of public relations media. Hallahan proposed that group communication is mainly used to mobilize people to take actions and reinforce their

preexisting beliefs and values and one-on-one communication is particularly useful in obtaining commitments and solving problems.

In general, communication research investigates the mobilizing influence of both media communication and interpersonal communication on citizens' civic engagement (e.g., McLeod, Scheufele, Moy, Horowitz et al., 1999; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). Stamm, Emig, and Hesse (1997) maintained a key role of interpersonal discussion as "the primary mechanisms for community integration" (p. 106). McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy (1999) found that although interpersonal communication played a modest role in institutionalized participation (i.e., vote, contact a public official) it played the strongest role in generating heated discussions about local issues. In addition, McLeod, Scheufele, Moy, Horowitz et al. (1999) identified three types of effect of political and civic issue discussion: More frequent discussion of issues makes a person more likely to seek more information and pay attention to local news, to reflect on those issues and to participate in deliberative civic forums. Zhang and Seltzer (2010) integrated the organization-public relationship (OPR) model in the public relations literature and social capital theory and found strong influence of interpersonal political discussion in both civic participation and political participation.

Public Relations and Private Engagement

According to Sommerfeldt (2013), building social capital is a public relations activity. He states, "as a means to create shared meaning, voice collective opinion, and build relationships among groups, the burden of social capital creation lies squarely in the court of public relations" (p. 287). Past public relations studies have examined the relationship-building role within organizations in civil societies (e.g., Kent & Taylor, 2002; Taylor & Doerfel, 2003). Specifically, the role of dialogue in the formation of relationships has been the central role most emphasized. Kent and Taylor (2002) explicated the concept of dialogue as being based on the acknowledgment of the diverse values of others, facilitation of participation and an emphasis on mutual benefit with like-minded individuals.

From a public relations organizational perspective, dialogue allows organizations to develop relationships with its publics and facilitate interaction through public forums such as town meetings and community workshops (Kent & Taylor, 2002). In fact, organizations who participate in face-to-face communication will be well-placed to gauge the level of social capital among stakeholders (Willis, 2012). Hazleton and Kennan (2000) state that social capital's relational dimension focuses on the nature and character of connections among individuals. And, it is the individual who decides to participate in civil society and forms associations through active participation. Sommerfeldt (2013) examined the role of relationships between civic society actors and community members in Peru and concluded that organizations pushing social capital must recognize that their relationships have a direct consequence on the ability for the community and the organization to benefit from the social capital acquired through the relationships. It is the civil society actors that must lead the charge in improving the relationship variables associated with social capital such as collaboration and information exchange (Sommerfeldt, 2013).

Two main components of social capital are bonding and bridging. "Bonding social capital is found between individuals in tightly-knit, emotionally chosen relationships, such as family and close friends. Bridging social capital... stems from weak ties, which are loose connections between individuals who may provide useful information or new perspectives for one another but typically not emotional support" (Steinfeld, Ellison & Lampe, 2008, p. 436). For public relations practitioners, aligning organizational causes with those that an individual's close friends and family support will help an organization create a bond with that individual, which will build social capital.

In line with these concepts, prior studies have discovered that individuals are more likely to connect with people they already know or with whom they have a connection with (Steinfeld, Ellison, Lampe & Vitak, 2012). Specifically, Steinfeld et al. (2012) found that maintaining a connection is the most important activity associated with bridging and bonding social capital. Online communication is one way for organizations to facilitate the building and maintaining of relationships between individuals and like-minded others.

Influence of Online Media on Private Engagement

Although some scholars believe that relationships created online are not as meaningful as offline ones (Nie, 2001) and that the Internet causes higher rates of emotional and social loneliness (Aiken, Vanjani, Ray & Martin, 2003), it can be used to increase social capital with people whom it would be impossible to interact with face-to-face (Kennan, Hazleton, Janoske & Short, 2008). Through the interactive capabilities of the Internet, people can develop a social network that extends beyond their local community (Wellman, Haase, Witte & Hampton, 2001), and organizations can form meaningful relationships with people in other online and offline communities (Best & Krueger, 2006; Hampton & Wellman, 2002). Moreover, people utilize the Internet for exchange of information, ideas and opinions (Kennan et al, 2008) without time and space restrictions (Conroy, Feezell & Guerrero, 2012). By having access to more information, individuals have the ability to learn about activities that may spark self-interest that they did not know existed previously.

One major advantage of using the Internet is to advance personal civic and political participation. According to Vitak et al. (2011), “the Internet supplements traditional methods of participation (e.g., posting videos from campaign rallies online) and provides additional outlets for participation that do not exist offline (e.g., personal blogs, tackling political issues)” (p. 108). Drew and Weaver (2006) identified attention and exposure to political information online as positively related to campaign knowledge and interest. Tolbert and McNeal (2003) found access to the Internet positively associated with voting. Engagement in chat rooms also predicts higher voting rates (Mossberger, Tolbert & McNeal, 2008).

The Internet not only allows individuals to access information, but it also allows them to coordinate their actions to address issues with like-minded individuals (Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005). In their 2005 study, Shah et al. discovered that the majority of participants sought information online for civic engagement activities. And, it was discovered that a strong correlation, over time, between Internet use, information gathering, and political expression existed. This finding provides public relations practitioners with great insight into the power of the Internet. In order to mobilize and engage with individuals regarding civic activities, the Internet provides public relations practitioners, especially in the political realm, with the most efficient tool. Online tools like email provide individuals an avenue to share their views with many people simultaneously (Shah et al, 2005).

Similar to the Internet, SNSs have shown positive effects between use and increase in civic participation. SNSs facilitate the acquisition of information, but also provide a forum for discussion and relevance with other members of a particular social network (Zuniga, Nakwon & Valenzuela, 2011). SNSs offer public relations practitioners an opportunity to build relationships, solve problems, and crowd source (Kent, 2013). Through the relevant literature on the relationship between SNSs and social capital, three consistent themes are evident: 1) Identity information and information disclosure on SNSs influence usages and outcomes (Burke, Marlow & Lento, 2010); 2). SNSs blend online and offline behavior for social action (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007); 3). Distinct social capital benefits associated with SNS use such as bonding and bridging social capital are evident (Ellison et al., 2007; Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2010).

Most research examining SNSs influence on civic and political involvement involves Facebook and its various features (Ellison et al., 2007; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2008). Facebook Groups allow for discussions based on common interests and activities (Park, Kee & Valenzuela, 2009). And, once individuals belong to a group, they can receive mobilizing information that may not be available any place else (Park et al, 2009). Individuals who use Facebook Groups to learn about events are more likely to actively engage in civic actions taking place around them. In fact, a number of participants stated that they frequently used Facebook Groups to organize and support civic meetings and activities, such as hobby and environmental clubs (Park et al, 2009). Facebook Groups can provide public relations practitioners a forum to organize individuals who have weak ties to an organization or cause to socialize with others on the basis of social issues and common interests. According to Park et al., (2009) Facebook Groups provide an emerging, yet powerful tool for drawing individuals to societal concerns and uniting like-minded people as active participants in society.

As mentioned previously, SNSs are great tools for bridging and bonding social capital. Ellison et al. (2007) found that there is a strong association between heavy Facebook use and an individual's bridging social capital. Facebook use helps individuals turn online contacts into real connections, often by reducing barriers that would normally exist in offline relationships (Ellison et al, 2007). Social network sites enable self-expression through the profiles created, which consist of numerous opportunities for individuals to share information with one's friendship networks, political affiliations, and other aspects of the self (Ellison et al, 2010). Therefore organizations, through public relations efforts can provide information for individuals to share with their social networks.

Overall, past research shows that SNSs are emerging, yet powerful tools for drawing attention to societal concerns and uniting individuals to become active participants (Park et al, 2009).

Public Relations and Social Engagement

In order to increase social capital and civic engagement, an individual may participate in activities for self-interest or do so for the greater good of his or her community. According to Patrick (1998), the basic core of civic engagement is an individual's interaction with their society and community. Many scholars have argued that it is the responsibility of public relations practitioners to improve communities by involving and engaging individuals in the community building process (Leeper, 1986, 2000; Taylor, 2011). Public relations can serve as the bridge between an organization and its publics (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988), which can lead to creating social capital outside the organization. Through various campaigns focusing on community building, organizations can provide members an opportunity to address shared issues with the outside community (Jin & Lee, 2013). The role of public relations also includes the fostering and creation of communal values including alliances and partnerships with the local community (Jin & Lee, 2013). Specifically, through their 2013 study, Jin and Lee concluded that if people see that an organization uses public relations to tie its employees with local residents, their belief that community members can be empowered to address and resolve shared issues and problems with the organization are harbored. The authors suggest that organizations should implement various strategies such as sports, educational, cultural and volunteer programs for employees and their families, as well for local residents, to foster community capacity.

By bridging with the local community, organizations can improve its competitive advantage as well. Kennan and Hazleton (2006) approach social capital from an organizational-centric position believing that the benefits of social capital can help an organization become more competitive and successful.

For public relations to foster positive social engagement, the quality of relationships between the organization, individuals, and the community must be strong (Sommerfeldt, 2012). Promoting volunteerism is one way public relations practitioners can encourage social engagement. According to Valenzuela (2009), fundraising for nongovernmental organizations, volunteering to help the needy, and participating in community service all encompass civic participation and social engagement. In recent years, Internet and SNS use has increased the visibility and capability of organizations and individuals alike to increase their social engagement. In fact, Valenzuela (2009) found that offline political and civic participation is associated to an individual's involvement with online political and civic groups.

Influence of Online Media on Social Engagement

Scholars have argued that information technology has caused a new social paradigm where social relationships are derived and cultivated online (Castells, 1989). Through the Internet, everyone has the capability to push news to their social groups, create advocacy groups, organize public gatherings, and connect with people around the world, without ever meeting face-to-face (Mandarano, Meenar & Steins, 2011).

The ability to use the Internet for mobilization and engagement is especially prevalent in politics. Citizen engagement is not simply created by the efforts of campaign staffers, but also by volunteers' willingness to connect with political organizations, which is more easily done through the Internet (Nielsen, 2010). One major concept that links political mobilization and social engagement is collective action. Collective action involves strategies and tactics that bring people together to affect political, social, and ideological change (Obar, et al., 2012). There have been numerous examples of advocacy and political groups utilizing the Internet to pursue collective action. Advocacy groups use the Internet to facilitate massive email writing campaigns and public comment submission to law makers (Obar et al., 2012). In fact, individuals who frequently use the Internet for information are more likely to become involved with offline clubs and use that information to demonstrate high levels of political knowledge (Pasek, More & Romer, 2008).

In addition to the Internet, SNSs provide an opportunity for individuals to socially engage with their community. Sites such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter provide organizations platforms to mobilize individuals to volunteer and fundraise for various causes (Nielsen, 2010; Obar et al., 2012). Two great examples of SNSs being used to mobilize like-minded individuals for a specific cause are the 2011 "Occupy" movement and the "Arab Spring" movement in the Middle East. In both instances, social media platforms were adopted to organize protests and gatherings (Sommerfeldt, 2012).

Public relations can contribute to the building of social capital through the use of SNSs by employing trust, reciprocity and engagement. From a top-down approach, organizations can encourage employees and consumers to enact civil society by utilizing social networking sites to reach audiences that were impossible to reach before (Sommerfeldt, 2013). Although scholars have criticized SNSs and similar media tools as contributing to the erosion of community life (Putnam, 2000), these sites, in fact are providing an avenue for individuals to become socially engaged with their community.

This study seeks to identify which public relations efforts utilized by organizations influence interpersonal trust, social engagement and private engagement. Specifically, we focus on offline tactics including the distribution of print materials and conducting face-to-face meetings and online tactics including Internet and social media use. Based on the literature review above, the following research questions and hypotheses are proposed:

RQ1a: What is the relationship between an organization's distribution of a newsletter and interpersonal trust?

RQ1b: What is the relationship between an organization's distribution of a newsletter and social engagement?

RQ1c: What is the relationship between an organization's distribution of a newsletter and private engagement?

H1a: Organizations' face-to-face meetings will have a positive influence on interpersonal trust.

H1b: Organizations' face-to-face meetings will have a positive influence on social engagement.

H1c: Organizations' face-to-face meetings will have a positive influence on private engagement.

H2a: Organizations' general Internet use will have a positive influence on interpersonal trust.

H2b: Organizations' general Internet use will have a positive influence on social engagement.

H2c: Organizations' general Internet use will have a positive influence on private engagement.

H3a: Organizations' social media use will have a positive influence on interpersonal trust.

H3b: Organizations' social media use will have a positive influence on social engagement.

H3c: Organizations' social media use will have a positive influence on private engagement.

Method

Data

Data for this study came from the 2010 *Social Side of the Internet* survey from the Pew Internet & American Life Project (Rainie, Purcell & Smith, 2011). The theme of the data centers on the role of social network sites in civic group formation and participation (Rainie et al. 2011). The fieldwork of this national representative telephone survey with the random-digit dialing techniques was conducted from November 23, 2010 to December 21, 2010 by the Princeton Survey Research Associates International. The interviews were conducted with adults aged 18 and above to both landlines ($n = 1,555$) and cell phones ($n = 748$) with a total of 2,303 respondents. The response rate was 11% for the landline sample and 15.8% for the cellular sample.

Measures

Dependent variables included *interpersonal trust* and offline civic engagement including *social engagement* and *private engagement*. Based on the adaptation from the work of Mascherini, Saltelli, and Vidoni (2007), offline civic participation was divided into *private engagement* and *social engagement*.

Private engagement was an additive measure of 17 items. Respondents were asked if they were "currently active in any of these types of groups or organizations, or not": sports or recreation leagues (25.1%), hobby groups or clubs (19.5%), professional or trade associations (23.3%), parent groups or organizations (13.4%), youth groups (10.1%), veterans groups or organizations (8.6%), consumer groups (26.8%), farm organizations (4.9%), travel clubs (6.2%), sports fantasy leagues (7.0%), gaming communities (5.0%), national or local organizations for older adults (20.5%), political parties or organizations (17.6%), labor unions (8.3%), fan groups for a particular TV show, movie, celebrity, or musical performer

(5.5%), fan groups for a particular sports team or athlete (9.7%), and fan groups for a particular brand, company or product (3.4%). The scale was dummy coded (0 - *not active*, 1 - *active*). Respondents were asked about their different levels of participation in those organizations such as taking a leadership role, attending meetings or events, contributing money, or volunteering one's time to a group one was active in. The intensity of their active participation in those organizations was also dummy coded (0 - *no*, 1 - *yes*). An individual's intensity of participation in each organization was the sum of one's participation in each organization combined with their participation levels. All 17 items were combined to form the *private engagement* index.

Social engagement was an additive measure of 10 items. Respondents were asked if they were "currently active in any of these types of groups or organizations, or not": community groups or neighborhood associations (22.2%), church groups or other religious or spiritual organizations (45.3%), performance or arts groups (12.2%), social or fraternal clubs, sororities or fraternities (9.7%), literacy, discussion or study groups (12.5%), charitable or volunteer organizations (25.4%), ethnic or cultural groups (5.5%), support groups for people with a particular illness or personal situation (19.1%), alumni associations (17.8%), and environmental groups (8.8%). Just as was done for *private engagement*, the scale was dummy coded (0 - *not active*, 1 - *active*) and the intensity of their active participation in those organizations was also dummy coded (0 - *no*, 1 - *yes*). Again, an individual's participation in each organization was the sum of one's participation in each organization combined with their participation levels. All 10 items were summed to form the *social engagement* index.

Interpersonal trust was a single item measure of whether the respondent agreed that "most people can be trusted" (50.6%) or "you can't be too careful" (49.4%). This item was dummy coded (0 - *you can't be too careful*, 1 - *most people can be trusted*).

Independent variables included organizations' strategic communication efforts and demographic variables.

Organizations' strategic communication efforts included four variables: *sending out print newsletter* (47.8%), *holding regular in-person meetings* (60.8%), *general Internet use*, and *SNS use*. *General Internet use* was an additive measure of four items. Respondents were asked whether different organizations they are presently active in organize group activities or communicate with members via email or electronic newsletter (61.7%), host online discussion groups or message boards (29.5%), have their own websites (54.7%) and have their own blogs (23.1%). Respondents were also asked whether different organizations they are presently active in have a page on a social networking site like Facebook (36.2%) and communicate with members through Twitter (11.7%). The two items were combined to form the index of *SNS use*.

Demographic Variables. 54.1 percent of the sample respondents were female. On average, respondents were 50 years old ($SD = 17.99$). Respondents on the whole attended some college ($SD = 1.66$). Of the respondents, the majority were Caucasian (78.2%), followed by Black (12.2%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1.8%), mixed race (2.2%), Native American (1.6%), and other (1.0%). Race was dummy coded (0 - *other*, 1 - *Caucasian*). With respect to *ideology*, on average, respondents were moderate conservative ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.04$). The average 2009 family income was \$40,000 to under \$50,000 ($SD = 2.42$).

Data Analysis Strategies

Hierarchical regression analyses were performed to answer the research questions and test hypotheses of this study to determine whether organizations' strategic communication efforts exerted significant influences on interpersonal trust and offline civic participation (social engagement and private engagement). Demographic variables were entered as the first

block, followed by the focal independent variables; organizations' strategic communication effort.

Results

RQ1a, RQ1b, and RQ1c examined the influence of organizations' sending out a newsletter on interpersonal trust, social engagement, and private engagement, respectively. According to Table 1, after controlling for influences of demographic variables, organizations' sending out a newsletter to their members did not produce any significant impact on members' interpersonal trust, social or private engagement.

H1a, H1b, and H1c predicted that organizations' face-to-face meetings with their members would have positive impact on interpersonal trust, social engagement, and private engagement. As seen in Table 1, after controlling for demographic influence, organizations' frequent face-to-face meetings with their members had a significant positive effect on interpersonal trust ($\beta = .06$, $p < .05$), on social engagement ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), and private engagement ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H1a, H1b, and H1c were all supported.

H2a, H2b, and H2c predicted that organizations' general Internet use would have a positive effect on interpersonal trust, social engagement and private engagement, respectively, after controlling for the influence of demographic variables. Based on Table 1, organizations' general Internet use did not exert any significant positive influence on interpersonal trust and private engagement, therefore, H2a and H2c were not supported. Organizations' general Internet use had a negative influence on social engagement ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .05$), the opposite of H2b predicted, so H2b was not supported.

H3a, H3b, and H3c predicted the positive impact of organizations' strategic social media use on interpersonal trust, social engagement, and private engagement. As seen from Table 1, organizations' social media use did not have a significant positive influence on interpersonal trust, so H3a was not supported. As predicted, organizations' social media use did exert positive influence on social-oriented participation ($\beta = .05$, $p < .05$) and private-oriented participation ($\beta = .05$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H3b and H3c were supported.

Concerning the influence of demographic variables on interpersonal trust, social and private engagement, older people tended to trust others in general ($\beta = .07$, $p < .01$) but age was not a significant factor in social-oriented or private-oriented participation. Females tended to trust people in general less ($\beta = -.06$, $p < .01$) but gender did not make a difference in people's social or private engagement. Educated individuals were more likely to trust people in general ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$), engage in social-oriented participation ($\beta = .10$, $p < .001$) and private-oriented participation ($\beta = .09$, $p < .001$). Wealthy individuals trusted people in general more ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$) and were more active in social engagement ($\beta = .08$, $p < .001$) and private engagement ($\beta = .08$, $p < .001$). Caucasians were more likely to trust people in general ($\beta = .10$, $p < .001$) but less likely to participate in social-oriented engagement ($\beta = -.06$, $p < .01$) and private-oriented engagement ($\beta = -.04$, $p < .05$). In a similar fashion, liberals were more likely to trust other people ($\beta = .05$, $p < .05$) but less likely to participate in social-oriented engagement ($\beta = -.06$, $p < .01$) and private-oriented engagement ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

The public relations discipline is closely related to the society at large, but the crucial macro-social role of public relations in society is often neglected by public relations scholars. The social capital theory popularized by Robert Putnam (e.g., 1995a, 1995b, 2000b) has generated tremendous literature in political science, sociology, and mass communication but is rarely applied to the field of public relations. Increasingly, some scholars have advocated the central role of public relations and strategic communication in reviving community

relations (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988) and fostering social capital, civic engagement, and democracy (e.g., Taylor, 2009; Taylor, 2010). However, the emphasis has been on the impact of internal public relations and organizational communication in generating social capital (Kennan & Hazleton, 2006; Sommerfeldt & Taylor, 2011) and revitalizing civil society (Taylor, 2009). Some scholars sketched a research roadmap on the relationship between public relations and social capital and civil society but sporadic empirical studies in this area have been conducted.

This study provides initial empirical evidence for the important role of public relations and strategic communication endeavor, in particular the strategic social media use and interpersonal communication, in fostering civic engagement. Overall, organizations' strategic social media use boosts both social-oriented and private-oriented civic engagement, confirming the results from the limited empirical work in this area (Park et al., 2009; Valenzuela, 2009; Obar et al., 2012). This finding points to great potential for social media as a mobilizing tool for organizations in revitalizing democratic governance and societal functioning. In addition, organizations' regular face-to-face meetings with their members enhance interpersonal trust and stimulate both social-oriented and private-oriented engagement in civic affairs, which is in keeping with findings from previous studies (Zhang & Seltzer, 2010; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; McLeod, Scheufele, Moy, Horowitz et al., 1999). Findings for the role of interpersonal communication or discussion are positively consistent. That is, the size and heterogeneity of discussion networks and frequency of interpersonal discussion exert positive influence on civic participation and political participation.

The analysis also indicates the limitations of public relations effort in stimulating social capital and civic engagement. For instance, sending out print newsletters does not make any difference in enhancing interpersonal trust or civic engagement, nor does general Internet use. As Kennan and Hazleton (2006) indicate, social capital is best considered as a resource, and it is important to distinguish resources from the ability to activate these resources.

Findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications. Luoma-aho (2009) argued that public relations theory tends to be organization-driven and lacks meta-level theorizing. Social capital theory allows the field to focus on the larger societal benefits accompanied by healthy social relations and social connectedness. In a practical sense, the findings of this study shed light on the mechanisms of social capital creation, that is, the important role of strategic social media use and interpersonal discussion. As the benefits of social capital such as relationships, interaction, and cooperation become more apparent, the importance of social capital for the broadening identity of public relations and practice will increase accordingly.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the major limitations of this study lies in the inherent disadvantage of doing secondary analysis of an existing dataset though Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project reliably provides quality survey data for academic use. Users of secondary data are limited to the existing variables because there is no way to go back for additional information (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). For instance, various forms of strategic communication such as traditional, and Internet and social media usage are measured through the use of simple "yes" or "no" questions. Future research could use interval level measurements to gain more accurate estimates. Because the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project only examines Internet's impact on political and civic life, future research should also investigate the effects of the nature of social media use on offline participation and online participation. This study has only examined the influence of social

media use on interpersonal trust and civic engagement. Future research should also investigate the influence of specific activities on SNSs on issue-specific attitudes and a variety of civic activities.

A cross-sectional design cannot establish causal direction, therefore, future research may consider utilizing a panel design to survey the same respondents at different points in time to delineate the long term causal effects of strategic communication on social capital creation. This study only examines generalized interpersonal trust as one of the dependent variables. Future research should expand the outcomes of organizations' strategic communication efforts such as institutional trust and particularized trust, and other forms of organizational outcomes. Future studies can also explore the influence of strategic communication in different types of social capital such as bridging social capital and bonding social capital. From a public relations angle, bridging social capital may be viewed as the relationship between an organization and its external publics while bonding social capital is vital for the relationship between an organization and its internal audiences such as employees. Bonding social capital is instrumental for establishing a sense of community and organizational identity within an organization and bridging social capital is "better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Both types of social capital are important and a delicate balance between the two is optimal for public relations practices. Social capital tends to be considered always positive to those possessing it, but it can be very harmful to those outside the groups (Putnam, 2000b). In the public relations context, an organization may have a great deal of bonding social capital, but external publics may feel ignored. Future research should explore the relationships between different types of public relations media and the nature and types of social capital to get a nuanced picture of public relations influence in the social capital and civic engagement processes.

The significant findings of the importance of social media also call for further linking SNS research to the uses and gratifications theory and investigate how differential motives for using SNSs affect people's social capital and civic engagement (e.g., Bode, 2012). Like the social capital theory, many research studies seem to suggest that social media are almost always positive and neglect the potential unintended negative consequences of social media. Social media are not panacea and they do not necessarily increase social capital. It depends on how organizations utilize it. More studies should examine the limitations of social media in the social capital processes. Finally, future research should examine the contingent conditions or moderators for social capital and civic engagement in the public relations context.

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Table 1
Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Interpersonal Trust, Social Engagement and Private Engagement

Independent Variables	Interpersonal Trust	Social Engagement	Private Engagement
Demographics			
Age	.07**	.03	.02
Gender (female coded higher)	-.06**	.03	.01
Education	.14***	.10***	.09***
Income	.14***	.08***	.08***
Race (Caucasian coded higher)	.10***	-.06**	-.04*
Ideology (liberal coded higher)	.05*	-.06**	-.07**
R² (%)	9.1***	5.8***	5.5***
Strategic Comm Variables			
Send out print newsletter	.00	-.03	-.04
Hold regular in-person meetings	.06*	.31***	.31***
General Internet use	-.01	-.07*	-.06
Social media use	.01	.05*	.05*
Incremental R² (%)	.3 n.s.	7.5***	7.3***
Total R² (%)	9.4***	13.3***	12.8***

Note. The beta weights are final standardized regression coefficients. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$