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Provocations in Public Relations:  
A Study of Gendered Ideologies of Power-Influence in Practice

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Abstract  
This research project draws from three extensive data sets to explore how female and male public relations practitioners define, perceive and enact power-influence. Findings suggest that perceptions of power are articulated as gendered identities, which constrain practitioners’ perceptions about doing the right things that the practice is called to produce.

Introduction  
Issues of power and gender significantly impact public relations, but research has only begun to interrogate these issues as socially constructed norms that constrain public relations practitioners and their work. Over the past 10 years, Berger and Reber (Berger, 1996, 2005, 2007; Berger & Reber, 2006; Reber & Berger, 2006) have explored power and influence, and through interviews and surveys, they have developed a “power relations” perspective for public relations. Over the same time period Toth and Aldoory (Aldoory, 2003, 2005, 2007; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Toth, 2001) have developed gender theory in public relations to examine how the profession is gendered. The following essay brings together the data and theory from these four scholars and analyzes power and gender as intertwined social and discursive constructions that influence meanings about public relations ascribed by public relations professionals.

Specifically, the authors reinterpreted qualitative data collected by Berger and Reber (2006) using Aldoory’s (2005) discursive conceptualizations for gender and power in public relations. Berger and Reber (2006) conducted in-depth interviews with public relations managers and senior executives and completed a random-sample survey of members of the Public Relations Society of America to examine perceptions of influence and power among male and female professionals. The amount of data collected and the various methodologies used are significant contributions to public relations research—and re-examining some of these data elaborates and strengthens the power relations perspective for future empirical testing. Additionally, this essay helps evaluate the heuristic and practical value of using Aldoory’s (2005) concepts of gender and power for public relations. We hope this essay contributes not only to theory-building in public relations, but also to the decline of stereotypes about who can perform “feminist” analysis and how useful it is for general theory in public relations.

Literature Review  
Power and Influence in Public Relations
Spicer (1997) defined power as: “the ability to affect organization ends, to influence the decision-making process” (p. 142). He said power occurs through interactions between organizational members. It can result in influence on others, especially when it occurs through “legitimate, sanctioned organizational bases, such as those that formally come with any position or accrue through perceived expertise” (p. 142). Berger and Reber (2006) argued that while scholars have parsed the definitional difference between power and influence, “most organizational members use the terms interchangeably” (p. 4). Therefore, they wrote, “we use power and influence to mean more or less the same thing, that is: the ability to get things done by affecting the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, decisions, statements, and behaviors of others” (p. 5, emphasis in original). We use the two terms similarly in this essay.

Studies of power and influence are limited in public relations scholarship. The existing scholarship has looked at power in public relations practice from political (Spicer, 1997), postmodernist (Holtzhausen, 2000), and practical-critical perspectives (Berger, 2005, Berger & Reber, 2006). Spicer (1997) argued, “…many (if not most) public relations decisions are political ones. As such, understanding power and politics is essential for understanding the ‘political nature’ of many public relations decisions and actions” (p. 14). Similarly, in her call for public relations scholarship to be developed based on postmodernist theory, Holtzhausen (2000) wrote that “public relations is inherently political” (p. 110). She continued:

Postmodern theories urge public relations practitioners to acknowledge the political nature of their activities and to be aware of the power relations inherent in everyday practice. Public relations is about change or resistance to change. … This redefines the boundary-spanning role. Instead of claiming objectivity, practitioners are forced to choose on which side they are on. (p. 110)

Power relations and public relations roles have been analyzed from the perspective of three systems – power over, power with, and power to (Berger, 2005; Berger & Reber, 2006). Public relations practitioners operating in a power-over system simply do what they are directed to do by others who are in charge of their actions. Practitioners operating in a power-with system play an advocacy role for the organization – constructing mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and its publics. Those public relations practitioners operating in a power-to system are seen as political actors. In a power-to system:

The job of public relations professionals is to engage in power relations; they must use political intelligence, resources, and willpower to push back on the forces, processes, practices, and structural arrangements that otherwise constrain their abilities to help organizations do the right thing in a complex world. (p. 69)

Gender Research in Public Relations

More than 20 years ago, when the International Association of Business Communicators reported the results of the organization’s “Velvet Ghetto” study (Cline, Toth, Turk, Walters, Johnson, & Smith, 1986) the research team claimed that there was a bias against women in public relations management, in part, because “Women were seen as caring nurturers, well suited for working with clients who need sympathy, but not tough enough for corporate life” (Cline et al., 1986, p. 3). Other studies described how the increasing numbers of women entering public relations were more likely than men to perform technical rather than managerial roles, earn significantly less money than men and face barriers to being considered for advancement (Toth & Cline, 1989; Wright, Grunig, & Springston, 1991; Hon, Grunig, & Dozier, 1992).
Some feminist scholars contested these standard comparisons between men and women in public relations (Rakow, 1989; Creedon, 1991; Hon et al., 1992). According to Aldoory and Toth (2002), “We believe there are differences between women and men, but not based on biological gender, rather based on gender role orientations that predict behavior. However, we believe that there are fewer differences than our societal stereotypes have fostered” (p. 125). Rakow (1989) introduced public relations scholars to the concept of gender as “a meaning system that is fundamental to how the worlds we live in are ordered and characterized” (p. 289). This meaning system is discursive and constraining, and ascribes certain characteristics to masculinity (individualism, rationality, competition, suppression of the private sphere) and other, less valued characteristics to femininity (cooperation, community, and suppression of the public sphere) (Rakow, 1989, p. 293). Creedon (1991) used this conceptualization of a gendered meaning system to argue that public relations roles research should be re-envisioned from a feminist perspective, and that the managerial role should not be held up as ideal role for all practitioners. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2000) similarly refuted research merely about sex differences in their analysis of feminist values in public relations that can actually contribute to effective, ethical communication (p. 49). They concluded that feminism was not just about women, but rather about “oppression through the domination of beliefs” (p. 57).

Gendered Power in Public Relations

Berger (2005) considered whether power relations in public relations has a gendered component. He wrote that most dominant coalitions in large corporations consist primarily of men. Furthermore, these men may equate two-way symmetrical approaches to public relations or shared power with feminist viewpoints (p. 17). He wrote:

- In the dualism reflected in the dominance perspective—power and powerlessness, winners and losers, strength and weakness, rational and irrational—women represent weakness, irrationality, powerlessness, and emotionality (Bologh, 1990; Rakow, 1989). Does symmetrical public relations, or shared-power ideology, whether advocated by female or male practitioners in the dominant coalition, represent similar “weaknesses” in the eyes of some power brokers? (Berger, 2005, p. 17).

Berger (2005) posed the question of the role gender may play in power relations, especially in a field that is heavily populated by women, but is still dominated by men in the highest positions within organizations.

This question was the impetus for Aldoory’s (2005) essay that reconceived gender and power, along with diversity, for purposes of strengthening and improving a feminist paradigm for public relations research. She asserted that gender constrains both men and women because it is infused in all communicative acts, constructing not only the feminine expectations for women but also the masculine expectations for men. As Wood (2001) explained, we “learn” how to be masculine and feminine (p. 22); we do so through organizational discourse as well as through other types of discursive and nondiscursive contexts. This gendered discourse is constantly in struggle, though, due to power relations about what is valued and who has influence.

Power and traditional notions of its corporeal nature are also deconstructed by Aldoory (2005), who instead suggested looking at power in ways van Zoonen (1994) and Mumby (2001) suggested, as multiple relations of subordination constructed through discourse. Power is exhibited through control over meanings in organizations, which are discursively shared.
Analyzing how public relations practitioners communicate about power might be able to illuminate how gender has created perceptions of power.

Some scholars in organizational communication have already illuminated the idea that gender and power in organizations are socially constructed mine fields that workers, both female and male, negotiate every day (Ashcraft, 2006; Mumby, 1998). Mumby (1998) argued that capitalistic organizations seek to control and suppress individual identities by enforcing masculine versus feminine discursive practices. In Mumby’s (1998) case studies of male machinists and white-collar workers, both groups constructed masculine identities either in opposition to or to buy in to organizational goals. The men sought to distance themselves from the feminine, by defining their manhood either as heads of the family or by devaluing the family. Mumby (1998) argued that the men in his cases may have conserved their self-identities as masculine by adopting strategies and language that illustrate traditional notions of power-influence. His views suggest how difficult it might be for both male and female public relations workers to resist management power and articulate their own identities. Workers in public relations who conform to gendered norms and management decisions might not have much room to negotiate or collaborate with others in the public relations function.

It is with these postmodern, discursive conceptualizations of gender that we consider the ways that the men and women perceive power, power sources, influence tactics, types of actions to influence, and perceptions of power dimensions. While the men and women of public relations share an occupational space, we argue that they negotiate public relations work and power differentially through gendered discourse.

**Research Questions**

In summary, literature and theory suggest that power-influence is discursive and central to public relations efficacy, and that gender is socially constructed and constraining for men and women in public relations. Overall, the purpose of this essay was to explore these concepts of power-influence and gender and discover how they are discursively constructed by female and male public relations practitioners. Within this overarching research goal, the following specific questions helped guide authors in this secondary analysis of data:

**RQ1:** How do men and women in public relations define power-influence?

**RQ2:** What do men and women in public relations articulate as the most valuable power sources within their organizations?

**RQ3:** What discursive approaches are used by men and women in public relations to advocate for change by management when it makes a poor or inappropriate decision?

**RQ4:** What vocabulary is used by men and women in public relations to express their advocacy approaches?

**RQ5:** Are there gendered dimensions – e.g., organizational, professional, educational – that can be found here that appear to shape public relations power?

**Method**

The data used here were collected during three studies, two using in-depth interviews and one using a random sample survey. The Influence interviews consisted of 65 public relations professionals from eight countries. These interviews examined definitions of influence in practice, the resources and tactics practitioners accessed in power relations, their perceptions about acceptable power-to approaches, and their ideas for strengthening the power and legitimacy of the profession. Interviewees were recruited through convenient and snowball
means. An attempt was made to make the sample diverse in terms of practice area, industry, and geography. The second set of interviews, *PR Success* interviews, was conducted with 97 high-level public relations executives. These interviews examined success factors, power sources, influence tactics, and constraints on the profession. Finally, the *Dissent Survey* included qualitative data from 707 professionals in response to an open-ended question: “What do you think it means to ‘do the right thing’ in public relations when management is making decisions that you believe are inappropriate?” The random sample derived from the membership of the Public Relations Society of America: 808 participants completed questionnaires, giving us a response rate of 15.4%.

Given that these data were previously collected and this is a secondary analysis, different pieces of the data sets were useful in answering different parts of the research questions. In general, the data were mined to examine definitions of power, strategies for gaining power, and sources of power. Specifically, the following were pulled out and used: 1. what influence means to *Influence* interviewees; 2. most valuable power sources for *Influence* and *PR Success* interviewees; 3. approaches used by *Dissent Survey* participants to advocate for change by management when it makes a poor decision; and 4. vocabulary used by those in the *Dissent Survey* to express their advocacy approaches. Lastly, we explored whether we could tease out any organizational or professional factors influencing the ways participants talked about power.

The qualitative responses were read and then subsequently sorted, categorized, and interrelated according to any emerging patterns and schemes of interpretation. Tables are provided here where males and females are compared with each other to note any significant differences between the two groups. Z scores were calculated to standardize sampling differences. However, men and women were also considered separately in the discussion below,

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1 The *PR Success* interviews were funded by Heyman Associates, a leading public relations executive search firm based in New York. The purposive sample was built as William Heyman, CEO and President of the Heyman agency, invited 207 executives to participate in the interviews. Ninety-seven or 47.5% of the invited executives completed the interviews.

2 For details on methodology of these three studies, please refer to Berger and Reber (2006).

3 In the *Dissent Survey*, 82% of males and 82% of females responded that they would “advocate to try to change the decision” of management when it makes a poor or inappropriate decision. Given that this was by far the most frequent response, specific types of advocacy appeals and approaches were subsequently analyzed.
so that each of their “stories” could be told here without comparison to the other. Thus, after noting any differences, we then explored responses from women separate from those of men.

**Analysis and Discussion**

*Definitions of Influence*

Most of the men and women defined “influence” as: having a seat at the table; helping shape actions and decisions; and having a voice in decision making (see Table 1). Almost all the women defined influence as such, but about one-third of the men also included notions of “winning”: possessing strong persuasion skills and getting results. Males were significantly more likely than females ($z = 2.00$) to define influence as “winning.” This difference may be the result of the men already perceiving themselves to have a seat at the table; whereas perhaps most of the women are still striving for their perceived ideal notion of power.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th><em>What Influence Means in Public Relations</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a seat at the table, a voice in decision making</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning; obtaining desired goals through persuasion</td>
<td>11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaping the organization’s image, messages</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other definitions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total | 37 | 28 | 65 |

* Significant at the p < .05 level.

For men, the second most frequent response was that influence means persuasion, getting results and “winning.” This finding illustrates a traditional, corporeal concept of power. This notion of power indicates something to obtain over someone else who will subsequently be a “loser.” Perhaps this expression of power reveals a socialization process, perhaps a subconscious one, that has encouraged men to ascribe favorable, masculine aspects to winning. It does reveal support for Mumby’s (1998) argument that males attempt to separate themselves from feminine notions of power and conserve a masculine identity by adopting discourse that illustrates traditional notions of power-influence.

For the women, about two-thirds responded that influence means having a seat at the table, shaping actions and decisions and having a voice. Only a few women defined influence as winning, as shaping the organization’s image, or as something else. It may be that the women are aware of their lack of power in their current professional situations; it may be that they are acknowledging the effectiveness of public relations when it has access to the dominant coalition of an organization; and it may be they assume the effectiveness of two-way communication, which has been characterized as feminine (Grunig et al., 2000).
Most Valuable Power Sources

Both men and women reported that their most valuable power sources derived from personal relationships and professional experience. While a few more men selected professional experience over personal relationships and a few more women selected personal relationships, there were no significant differences between these responses (see Table 2). These emphases on personal relationships and professional experience reveal prevailing professional and educational ideologies of practice, which supersede gender distinctions here. In other words, the current norm in public relations is to focus on relationship-building, which is actually an ascribed feminine construction for public relations work (Aldoory, 2005; Toth, 2001). While women might view personal relationships a bit more valuable as a power source than men, both men and women are illustrating here the accepted discourse about what brings power to public relations, that of relationship building. At the same time, the emphasis on professional experience reveals a negotiation process for participants where they see their own personal power increased through experience yet their organizational power increased through relationships with others. Nevertheless, the lack of gender differences could suggest the dominance of professional norms over gender norms for public relations professionals.

There were, however, gender differences, in other valuable power sources mentioned by participants. Females were significantly more likely than males to indicate that the level of reporting position \((z=3.912)\) and access to decision-makers \((z=3.067)\) were their most valuable power sources—the two least valued power sources for males, actually. Males were significantly more likely than females \((z=3.125)\) to indicate that data and research results were their most valuable power source—females ranked data and research results as their least valuable source.

These differences are consistent with the data on what influence means (Table 1), in that women may still perceive needing higher reporting levels and greater access to power because they do not envision themselves currently as having “a seat at the table.” Perhaps they are reflecting some insecurities about their formal positions of power that conflict with their internal self-definitions of who has power. The men, who may perceive themselves as already holding certain power in their organizations, instead turn to other sources of power, such as information subsidies and knowledge outputs, i.e., “data and research results.” They may do so because they perceive a growing importance for such power sources. Numbers and data, which can fuel the calculation and administration of elaborate metrics, are increasingly valorized influence resources in strategic decision making in large organizations (Berger & Reber, 2006).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Valuable Power Sources</th>
<th>Females (n=65)</th>
<th>Males (n=97)</th>
<th>Total (n=162)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal relationships</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional experience</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance record</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional expertise</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting position, level</td>
<td>26*</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Business, organization knowledge          10  26   36
Data and research results                6  28*  34
Political knowledge                      16  18  34
Access to decision makers                18*  9   27
Interpersonal skills                     8   16  24
Persuasive skills with top executives    10  14  24
Personal credibility                     6   14  20
Others                                    36  43  79

Totals                                   239 327 566

* Significant at the p <.01 level.

For the women, most valuable power sources (following personal relationships and professional experience) included level of reporting position, performance record, and access to decision makers. These three power sources are all formal measures of organizational status as well as visual indicators of a public (not private) organizational domain. Rather than focus on specific professional measures of public relations, the women emphasized general understandings of organizational status. Interestingly, interpersonal skills, personal credibility, and different bases of knowledge ranked lower for women, which may indicate that they disdain private or hidden sources of power, which are traditionally ascribed to women’s work and hence traditionally devalued. It might also indicate that women already perceive themselves to possess such power sources and thus turn to other structural resources that may visibly enhance their status in organizations and especially in strategic decision-making groups.

For the men, secondary sources of power included performance record, professional expertise, data and research results, and business/organization knowledge. This group of power sources may be reflecting the men’s assumption that public relations knowledge and expertise can bring power and influence to them within their organizations. It’s also possible that men, if they are more often members of dominant coalitions and have readier access to organizational leaders, may have observed more closely and more often how this group of power sources is both employed and evaluated by senior leaders in decision-making arenas--an important form of political intelligence.

Advocacy Appeals

In the open-ended response on the Dissent Survey, participants listed various approaches they would take in order to advocate for changing a poor or inappropriate decision that management made. Males were significantly more likely than females (z=3.083) to emphasize threats to the company’s brand or image. Females were significantly more likely (z=2.535) to use facts, case studies, and rational arguments (see Table 3). This distinction seems rather marked, where women seem to be suggesting a straightforward “accurate” tact while men are engaging in punishment discourse about ruined organizational brand or image. It may be that men are more attuned with the discursive norms for power in organizations and recognize that influencing upper management will only occur when organizational image is at risk. As Berger (1996) noted, the strategic decision-making calculus used by many organizational leaders is one in which the
perceived costs or risks of not doing something are weighted as much as, or more heavily than the value that might be gained in doing it. It may also be that the men are not recognizing their use of masculine power discourse that they have been socialized to provide. On the other hand, perhaps the women are misguided (due to feminine socialization process) in believing that facts and rationality are enough to influence management. The gendered norms for power discourse are constructing what are acceptable masculine and feminine ways of influence.

If the men are examined on their own, a different story emerges about their preferred types of advocacy approaches. The most common response among the men is to attempt change by citing ethics codes, integrity, and transparency; and the second most common response is to attempt change by using facts and rational arguments. Even though statistically different from the women, the men ranked using threats to organizational brand or image fifth behind the use of legal standards and reference to stakeholder needs. While we can’t ignore social desirability’s role in these responses, the data may also be reflecting the negotiation process that men in public relations must engage in, between what they assume are current “feminized” ways of effective influence in public relations and what they believe are self-identified masculine ways of being a professional.

For the women, the first-ranked approach to advocating a change is the use of facts and rational arguments, and second is the citing of ethics codes, integrity, and transparency. They ranked third and fourth the use of legal standards and using references to stakeholder needs. It may be that the women believe in using ethics and transparency as advocacy tactics, but are themselves negotiating with what they believe are more masculine ways of influencing management—the use of facts and rationality.

Table 3

Advocacy Appeals to Do the Right Thing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Appeals to Change Decision</th>
<th>Male (n=209)</th>
<th>Female (n=369)</th>
<th>Total (n=578)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use facts, rational arguments, case studies</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>163*</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite ethics codes, integrity, honesty, transparency</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite legal standards, laws, regulations</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer to stakeholder needs, responsibilities</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite threats to company, brand, image</td>
<td>28*</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimation--company values, mission</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written appeals--white papers and documentation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite religious passages or examples</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use emotional or inspirational appeals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin the decision to minimize damage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>756</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the p<.05 level.
We specifically pulled out and examined the verbs used to express the advocacy approaches suggested by participants from the *Dissent Survey*. Three differences were found between males and females. Males were significantly more likely than females ($z = 1.975$) to confront, combat, and challenge management. Females were significantly more likely to present, suggest, or share alternate solutions ($z = 2.167$), and to work and negotiate ($z = 2.012$) with leaders to reach a solution (see Table 4). These differences support Wood’s (2001) argument that men and women learn how to be masculine and feminine (p. 22). Men here are representing masculine discourse for power while the women are using traditionally feminine discourse to attempt influence. This learning process is typically subconscious, so participants may not notice when they articulate certain feminine or masculine ways of communicating.

In looking only at the women’s data, we find that the most frequent verbs used are: “express,” “discuss,” and “voice” concerns with management. Second, the women would “present, suggest, share, offer” alternate solutions; and third they would “make, state, build” a case with management to change. These sets of verbs reflect a somewhat diminutive stance but a relational one as well. It seems the women perceive a management that maintains decision-making power, and the goal for the women here is to have a dialogue (i.e., “discuss”) with those in power. The verbs “suggest” and “share” imply that alternate solutions are not necessary, but rather *optional* for management—the knowledge and power to take action remains in the hands of management. However, “building” a case with management does suggest that a relationship is necessary between management and the public relations practitioner. The women maintain a relational stance, which has been traditionally the kind of position ascribed to women.

### Table 4

*Vocabulary of Influence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Used to Advocate for Right Thing</th>
<th>Male (n=209)</th>
<th>Female (n=369)</th>
<th>Total (n=578)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Express, discuss, voice</em> concerns with management</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Confront, combat, challenge, oppose</em> management</td>
<td>45*</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Make, state, build</em> a case with management to change</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Present, suggest, share, offer</em> alternate solutions</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37*</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Stand up, speak out</em> for what’s right</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Advise, counsel</em> management on course of action</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Inform, notify, talk</em> to supervisor about issue</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Act on conscience; be</em> soul of the organization</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Push, persuade, convince</em> management to change</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Work, negotiate</em> with leaders to reach solution</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>17*</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (numerous)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the men, the most frequent set of verbs used to advocate change is “confront, combat, challenge,” and “oppose” management. These terms are war-like in their verbal pushing back against supervisors’ decisions. The power here seems to be positioned in both management and practitioner sites, and the practitioner perceives he has the ability and legitimacy to attempt change. Perhaps some men even feel “required” to challenge such decisions as a result of their socialization as “competitors-against-other-men” in playground, athletic, organizational, and other arenas in life. This sharp vocabulary also reflects the individual- and masculine-oriented world of conflict outlined in Weber’s (1921/1968) action theory, where individuals and groups confront each other and compete in ongoing struggles to identify problems and solutions, define reality, assign meanings, and lay claim to legitimacy.

**Organizational and Professional Influence**

The data used here are based on an individual-level unit of analysis--the individual perceptions and opinions of the people who work in public relations. Given that this is a secondary analysis of already collected data, an examination of professional or organizational factors is limited by these individual-level perspectives, since organizational-level measures were not part of the original studies.

Nevertheless, in examining what participants perceive as their most valuable power sources (Table 2), we found some institutional constraints and professional prescriptions influenced by gender. For example, the responses provided by the women reveal certain organizational constraints playing a role in their definitions of power sources. For the women, power is confined to organizational status and formal sites; and furthermore, access to these sites is deemed a valuable resource for the women. For men, professional stature and professional knowledge were defined as valuable sources of power, revealing perhaps their move away from a need for formal organizational influence. If men already perceive themselves to be legitimate players within gendered organizations because of their inherent masculinity, then their attention can be instead paid to sites where they feel less legitimated, i.e., public relations profession and the need to boost the respect and power of the profession rather than themselves as individuals.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this analysis was to reconceptualize gender and power as socially discursive constructions for men and women in public relations who might play an advocacy role for their organizations and attempt to influence “management” towards doing the right thing for mutually beneficial relationships with publics. We analyzed data that had been gathered in three previous studies about perceptions of power, and then reconsidered these perceptions through the lenses of gendered identities, professional norms, and organizational socialization. We argue that personal identity, the public relations profession, and organizations are all imbued with gendered norms that constrain the individual practitioner, their perceptions and articulations of influence, and their public relations work.

We discovered a complicated process of discursive practices that cannot easily be dichotomized between men as masculine and women as feminine. On the surface, there were some apparent sex differences between the men and the women who participated in the studies.
These sex differences are manifestations of gendered expectations for beliefs and practices that are prescribed by socialized norms. For example, the data suggest that male practitioners use masculine discourse that defines the traditional organization -- to win, confront, combat, and challenge, and to threaten management if necessary. These observations parallel industry norms that encourage ‘talking the talk of management’ to gain influence. It also indicates support for Mumby’s (1998) findings where men attempted to separate themselves from feminine notions of power by adopting discourse that constructs masculine notions of power-influence. The gender differences in the data further supported Wood’s (2001) argument that men and women learn how to be masculine and feminine (p. 22).

When examining the data from a more in-depth, social constructionist perspective, we found many factors that mediated simple sex differences in how women and men perceived power. For example, for the women, organizational-level factors seemed to influence how the women articulated their most valuable power sources. In addition to personal relationships and professional experience, the women included level of reporting position, performance record, and access to decision makers. These are formal, organizational measures of power that exist in public work sites. The women seem to be indicating their desire for greater access to public domains of power rather than to private spaces where they have been traditionally given power.

For the men, though, power derived from specific professional measures, such as public relations knowledge, public relations expertise, and research data, was more important. Public relations offers expertise and knowledge that can be a source of influence; if the men perceive themselves to already be entrenched in public work spaces, then they do not feel constrained by lack of voice; they instead feel constrained by the perceived devaluing of public relations and turn their attention to gaining value and power through their profession.

An emphasis throughout the data on professional experience and skill revealed a negotiation process about power for participants, where they perceived that personal power increased through experience but organizational power increased through relationships with others. There were few gender differences in definitions of influence and in primary sources of power, which might suggest an interplay of professional norms with gender norms for public relations professionals.

Future Directions for Research

While innovative in its examination of public relations power as gendered and discursive, this paper was based on secondary analysis of previously collected data. We would be able to enhance understanding of the gendered nature of public relations work if original, empirical and qualitative research was conducted on how power and gender are intertwined through social and discursive constructions. For example, we suggest use of qualitative research with men and women in various public relations roles, to listen to their stories about using influence tactics that had been successful for them and the tactics that had failed to gain traction for them. Feminist theory could also provide a perspective through which to view organizational power processes if case studies of different organizations were conducted. Case studies might help grasp what Berger and Reber (2005) concluded was the fluid, situational and complex nature of organizational power. An acknowledged weakness in this analysis is the statistical analyses on some relatively small samples. Future analyses might include the combination of findings from a larger quantitative sample with analyses using a gendered lens and feminist theory.

The analysis and discussion offer some scholarly and pragmatic implications. For theory, we combined gender and the power relations perspective to create an approach that can be used
to study gendered power constructions in public relations. We found that perceptions of power are articulated as gendered identities, and these articulations can constrain practitioners’ perceptions about doing the right things that the practice of public relations is called to produce. We need to consider the strengths and weaknesses that feminine and masculine norms bring to the practice of public relations. For students who we consider the future of the profession, we should be teaching the gendered nature of workplaces—not to cause division among our students, but to help them build alliances. For practitioners, it seems that an understanding of how gender and power influence their work and their professional identities would benefit both men and women in the practice; it would enhance their personal confidence as well as professional skills in gaining influence in their organizations; it would improve discursive practices between men and women and with management; and it would potentially loosen some of the constraints that are encouraged by stereotypical, gendered norms.

References


Toward the theory of relationship management:  
An examination of quality and conflict in organization relationships  
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Abstract  
Building on the literature of relationship management, this study explores the way organization type influences the nature of the organization-public relationship. Three categories of organizations were examined – volunteer, consumer, and political – which were mapped to Hung’s (2005) continuum of relationships, ranging from communal to exploitive. Six dimensions of the relationship were examined: trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment, admiration and conflict. Three hundred and thirteen respondents completed a paper and pencil survey about their relationship with all three organizational types. Significant differences were detected between organizations which were deemed high, medium and low in communality. Results provide insight into the role that communality plays in levels of quality and conflict in the organization-public relationship.

Literature review  
Relationship management theory finds its roots in a paper by Mary Ann Ferguson (1984) in which she called for public relations to focus its study on the relationship that exists between an organization and its publics. She proposed that the unit of study be the relationship rather than the communication that flowed between the two partners.  
More than a decade later Huang (1997) developed a scale to measure the relational quality outcomes of the organization-public relationship (OPR). This scale was later refined and published (Huang, 2001a) and become the commonly accepted way of measuring the OPR (Ledingham, 2006).  
The scale for measuring relational quality outcomes consists of four constructs – control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment, and trust. The first dimension of relationship quality involves the balance of power. Termed control mutuality by Hon and Grunig (1999), this component seeks to evaluate which party has more power over the other. Power exists in any relationship, and the parties involved are usually sensitive to which side exhibits and uses the power to gain control in the relationship. This power can involve influence over attitude and behavior.  
The dimension of satisfaction serves to measure whether the parties involved have positive feelings about one another. Hon and Grunig (1999) note that “a satisfying relationship is one in which the benefits outweigh the costs” (p. 3). Satisfaction has been one of the variables that has been measured by numerous scholars, including Bruning, Langenhop and Green’s (2004) examination of city-resident relations.  
Another dimension that is grounded in interpersonal relationships is commitment. This variable highlights the parties’ beliefs that the relationship is worth the resources that are put into maintaining it. Hon and Grunig’s scale contains measures of both attitude and behavioral
intention. Bruning and Galloway (2003) report that commitment—the level of dedication to an organization—is a key component of OPR because it is fundamental to the public’s attitude of the organization.

Trust, quite simply, refers to one party’s confidence that it can be open and honest with another party. Hon and Grunig’s trust scale measures three dimensions, including integrity, which centers on the belief that both parties involved in the relationship are fair and just; dependability, which is primarily concerned with whether the parties involved in the relationship follow through with what they say they will do; and competence, which focuses on whether the parties have the abilities to do what they say they will do. Trust was an important component in the scale created by Ledingham and Bruning (1998), and Coombs (2000) noted that public relations studies examining relationships were most promising when they have explored measures derived from interpersonal communication.

A fifth relationship outcome, admiration, has been identified as the strongest predictor of overall quality in nonprofit organizations (Bortree, 2007). The concept of admiration, the respect one has for another, has been studied in the interpersonal communication literature as a measure of an individual’s perception of significant relationships at different developmental stages (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). This outcome is a measure of the degree to which an organization shows respect and regard for its publics as well as the degree to which its publics feel respect for the organization.

Network of relationships

Studies of the OPR have examined one organization at a time (Bruning, 2002; Bruning, Castle, & Schrepfer, 2004; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Ledingham, 2001). Understanding of the nature of the relationships that exist between organizations and publics would benefit from a comparison of the relational quality of multiple organizations that fall into the same category (consumer, religious, political, etc.). As well, the study of OPRs would benefit from looking at the way the same individuals rate different organizations types, so reliability and construct validity across organization types could be tested. This study takes the first step toward making a multiple-organization comparison by surveying multiple organization types as perceived by the same individuals.

A precedent for this type of analysis comes from the interpersonal communication literature. Furman and Buhrmester (1992) examined the way young people at different ages (grades 4, 7, 10, and college) rated various significant others, including family member, friends, and teachers using scales in an instrument they deemed “the network of relationship inventories.” The researchers tested relationships of college students (in comparison to younger children) along the lines of support, conflict and relative power. In general, college students reported feeling more support, less conflict and more relative power in their relationships than did participants a few years younger (10th grade). The same model for measuring multiple relationships could be adopted to examine the organization-public relationship across a number of organization types. This would provide insight into the way that the same individuals perceives their relationships with organizations in different categories as offering different levels of quality (trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment and admiration).

Following the lead of Hon & Grunig (1999) and Huang (2001) who adopted scales from interpersonal communication to study the relationship between organizations and their significant publics, this study adopted a modified version of one of Furman and Buhrmester’s

**Conflict**

The literature promotes the role of public relations as a conduit for anticipating and reducing the amount of conflict that occurs between an organization and its publics (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 1995; Huang, 2001; Plowman, 2005). Explaining the role of public relations in managing organization conflict, Plowman (2005) offers the following:

> The use of conflict as a theoretical base to resolve problems in public relations is not new…Communication skills developed by public relations seem vital to resolving conflict while communication and conflict seem to be endemic to organizations…Communication can cause conflict, can be a symptom of conflict, and is effective for resolving conflicts…Conflict, in communication terms, is the notion of perceived incompatibilities. (Plowman, 2005, p. 133)

As discussed above, conflict is a dimension of the organization-public relationship that may impact the quality of the relationship. At the same time, research has found that the quality of the relationship has implications for the presence of conflict in the relationship (Huang, 2001). Specifically, OPRs of higher quality tend to be more effective in conflict resolution. The study presented examines the relationship between quality and conflict for relationships that exist at difference levels of communality.

**Continuum of relationships**

Research on the nature of the organization-public relationship has yielded a continuum of relationships ranging from those which are low in communality, distinguished by their concern for self-interest (exploitive), to those which are high in communality and make a priority of the other’s interests (mutual communal) (Hung, 2005). Categories of relationship include mutual communal, covenantal, exchange, symbiotic, contractual, manipulative and exploitive. At one end, organizations interact with publics with little regard for the publics’ needs and at the other end, organizations elevate the needs of the publics above their own. Publics’ needs could range from volunteers’ need for feedback and direction to political party members’ needs for honest, unbiased information about candidates.

Key relationship types in Hung’s (2005) continuum of relationships:
- One-sided communal: One party gives to the other party to the detriment of its own success or its own existence.
- Communal/Mutual communal relationships: A partner works for the good of the other even if receives nothing in return.
- Covenantal relationships: The goal of this relationship is to work for the common good of all parties involved.
- Exchange relationships: Parties enter into relationship in which future benefits are expected based on past exchanges.
- Contractual/Symbiotic relationships: Two parties agree to an arrangement that may not be balanced, but both get something from it.
- Manipulative relationships: This relationship uses asymmetrical communication to achieve goals with publics.
• Exploitive relationships: One partner takes advantage of the other, does not follow relational norms

The study presented here examined the nature of quality and conflict in relationships that fall at three points on the continuum or relationship. Three organization types – volunteer, consumer and political – were mapped to the continuum, with volunteer-nonprofit organization relationships acting as communal/mutual communal relationships, consumer-for-profit organization relationship acting as contractual/symbiotic/exchange relationships, and political organization-public relationship acting as an exploitive/manipulative relationship (Figure 1).

These three organization types were chosen based on key characteristics of these relationship types. First, in a volunteer-nonprofit relationship, the volunteer is giving time with very little expected in return (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). It is assumed that this would be indicative of a communal/mutual communal or covenantal relationship. Second, the consumer relationship is dependent on the exchange of goods or services rendered, and the relationship is often contingent on the success of those exchanges (Korgaonkar & Moschis, 1982; Stewart & Hood, 1983). For this reason, the consumer relationship is considered to fall into the range of exchange/contractual/symbiotic. Third, the political party-political party member relationship was considered to be manipulative/exploitive because of frequent use of deception and manipulation in political messages to motivate party members to vote or donate along party lines (Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000).

This study tests the assumption that organizations which value the concerns of their publics (are higher in communality) are rated higher in quality and lower in conflict than organizations which do not regard publics’ needs. In other words, organizations that engage in exploitive and manipulative relationships are likely to be judged more negatively by their publics than are organizations that engage in contractual or exchange relationships. Organizations that engage in communal and mutual communal relationships are likely to be perceived the most positively.

Figure 1: Hung’s (2005) continuum of relationships with three representative organizational relationship types (political, consumer and volunteer)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploitive</th>
<th>Manipulative</th>
<th>Contractual</th>
<th>Symbiotic</th>
<th>Exchange</th>
<th>Covenantal</th>
<th>Mutual</th>
<th>One-Sided</th>
<th>Communal</th>
<th>Communal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given this study’s aim to examine the organization-public relationships of three organization types – volunteer, consumer and political – which represent different degrees of relationships along the relationship continuum, the following two research question were created:

Hypothesis 1: Volunteer organization relationships will be rated by their publics as significantly higher in trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment and admiration and significantly lower in conflict than consumer organization relationships.

Hypothesis 2: Consumer organization relationships will be rated by their publics as significantly higher in trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment and admiration and significantly lower in conflict than political organization relationships.

**Method**
This project utilized pen-and-paper surveys that were administered to undergraduate students in two large lecture classes in the college of journalism and communication at a Southeastern university and one medium size lecture class in the college of communication at a large northeastern university. In all three classes students were given advance notice in class that they could participate in the survey for extra credit. Of the 401 students who received a survey, 313 respondents indicated that they had relationships with all three relationships under study, for a 77% completion rate.

The survey designed for this study used Hon and Grunig’s (1999) four outcome scales—trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment. In addition, it used measures of admiration (Bortree, 2007) and one relational quality from the literature on network of relationships – conflict. These questions were used to evaluate the relationships participants had with the three different organizations, volunteer, consumer and political.

The students were asked to identify one volunteer organization, one consumer organization and one political organization with which they had involvement. For the volunteer organization they were asked to identify an organization for which they had volunteered in the prior 12 months. For consumer organization, they were asked to identify the most recent store at which they had spent $50 or more. The political organization was the political party with which they most closely identified. Participants also anonymously provided information about their demographics, including gender, age, race, and major.

Relationships were tested using the above-mentioned scales, which were measured using a modified 9-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (9). The survey had six measures for trust; five each for commitment and satisfaction; four measures for control mutuality; and three measures each for conflict and admiration.

To support the placement of the three organization types on the continuum between communal and exploitive, a measure of communality was used to assess the degree to which the participants felt the organizations helped them or met their needs.

Results

The participants in the study represented a variety of backgrounds. The respondent group was 72% female and 27% male with 1% not indicating gender. Seventy percent of respondents said they were Caucasian; 4% said Asian; 15% said Latino; 6% said Black; 3% said other; and 2% did not indicate race. The mean age of the participants was 20.2 years, ranging from a low of 18 years to a high of 27.

All measures used in the study yielded moderate to high reliability with Cronbach alpha scores ranging from .70 to .85 (trust = .84, control mutuality = .85, satisfaction = .82, and commitment = .81, admiration = .76, conflict = .70, and support = .78).

To test the measure of communality between organizations, participants were asked to assess the degree to which each of the three organizations (volunteer, consumer and political) helped them or met their needs. The researchers expected to see a significantly higher rating of the volunteer relationship over the consumer relationship and a significantly higher rating of the consumer relationship over the political relationship. This would support the placement of the three relationships with volunteer as highest on the communal scale and political as lowest. Consumer would fall between as significantly higher than political and significantly lower than volunteer. A one-way repeat measure ANOVA was run with the three relationship types acting as the independent measures and the measure of communality as the dependent measure. Because repeated measure ANOVAs are sensitive to the order in which observations are entered,
the observation for volunteer organizations was entered first, consumer organization second and political organization third. Entering the observations in this way maintained the ranking of communal to exploitive relationships. As predicted, results indicated that the volunteer organization was ranked highest (M = 5.51, SD = 2.68); consumer relationship was ranked second (M = 5.01, SD = 2.82); and political relationship was ranked lowest (M = 4.04, SD = 2.33). There was a significant difference between each organization type (F(1.95, 596) = 38.08, p<.001). This supports the placement of the three organizations on the continuum, with volunteer as most communal, consumer as significantly less communal, and political as the least communal.

To test the two hypotheses, which predicted a significant difference in relational dimensions between the three organization types, repeated measure ANOVAs were run for each dimension. Again, the organizations were entered from most to least communal – volunteer, consumer and political. For the dimension of trust, the volunteer organization was rated the highest (M = 7.15, SD = 1.32), consumer organization was rated second highest (M = 6.24, SD = 1.54), and political organization was rated the lowest (M = 5.50, SD = 1.57) (Table 1). A Mauchly’s Test of Sphericity indicated that the homogeneity of variance assumption for this data was met. Results of the within-subjects effects indicated significant differences (F(2,624) = 127.02, p<.001) between observations (Table 2). A post-hoc analysis using LSD test indicated a significant relationship between all three organizations: volunteer organization was rated significantly higher in trust than the consumer organization, and the consumer organization was ranked significantly higher in trust than the political organization.

For the dimension of control mutuality, again, the volunteer organization was rated the highest (M = 6.60, SD = 1.68), followed by consumer (M = 5.42), and political (M = 5.54, SD = 1.53) (Table 3). A test of sphericity indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated for this data. As a result, the Huynh-Feldt test was interpreted, which indicated a significant difference between observations (F(1.76, 549.17) = 74.39, p<.001) (Table 4). A post-hoc test of differences between observations found a significant difference between volunteer organization-public relationship and the consumer organization-public relationship as well as a significant difference between the volunteer organization-public relationship and the political organization-public relationship. No significant difference was detected between the consumer organization-public relationship and the political organization-public relationship.

For the dimension of satisfaction, the order of rating was, again, volunteer organization (M = 7.39, SD = 1.38), consumer (M = 6.94, SD = 1.45), and political (M = 5.61, SD = 1.59) (Table 5). A Mauchly’s Test of Sphericity found that the homogeneity of variance assumption was met for this data. The tests of within-subjects effects was significant (F(2, 624) = 153.18, p<.001) (Table 6), and a post-hoc test revealed a significant difference between the ratings of all three organization types.

For the dimension of commitment, the rating of organizations different from prior relational dimensions, with volunteer organization rated the highest (M = 6.97, SD = 1.73), political organization rated second (M = 5.95, SD = 1.85), followed by consumer organization (M = 6.0, SD = 1.87) (Table 7). The assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated for this data, requiring that the Huynh-Feldt test be interpreted for significance. A significant result was detected (F(1.97, 614.11) = 38.90, p<.001) (Table 8). Post hoc pairwise comparisons revealed a significant difference between volunteer and consumer organization-public relationships and between volunteer and political organization-public relationships, but no significant difference between consumer and political organization-public relationships.
For the dimension of admiration, publics rated their volunteer relationship highest (M = 6.56, SD = 1.85), followed by consumer relationship (M = 4.80, SD = 1.95), then political relationship (M = 4.67, SD = 1.73) (Table 9). A test of the homogeneity of variance was run and found that this assumption was violated. The Huynh-Feldt test was interpreted and indicated a significant difference in a test of within-subject effects (F(1.90, 593.08) = 149.37, p<.001) (Table 10). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons revealed that a significant difference between the volunteer and consumer organization-public relationships and between the volunteer and political organization public relationships. No significant difference was detected between the consumer and political organization-public relationship.

For the dimension of conflict, the political organization-public relationship was rated highest (M = 4.20, SD = 1.53), followed by consumer relationship (M = 3.03, SD = 1.68), and then volunteer relationship (M = 2.95, SD = 1.62) (Table 11). The homogeneity of variance assumption of this data were met, and a within-subject effects test was significant (F(2, 624) = 103.28, p<.001) (Table 12). Post-hoc test revealed a significant difference in conflict between the volunteer and political organization-public relationships and between the consumer and political organization-public relationships. No significant difference was detected between the volunteer and consumer organization-public relationships.

Examining the two hypotheses, both H1 and H2 were partially supported. H1 predicted that volunteer organization relationships would be rated higher in trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment and admiration and lower in conflict than the consumer relationship. The volunteer relationship was rated significantly higher than the consumer relationship in all five relationship quality outcomes – trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment and admiration; however, there was no significant difference in conflict between the volunteer and consumer relationships. H2 predicted that the consumer relationship would be significantly higher in all relationship dimensions except conflict than the political organization relationship. For conflict, H2 predicted that the political organization relationship would be higher. This was partially supported by the data. The consumer relationship was significantly higher in trust and satisfaction, and significantly lower in conflict; however, no significant differences were detected for control mutuality, commitment and admiration.

**Discussion**

Findings from the analysis indicate that of the three relationships tested, the volunteer organization-public relationship is the highest in quality (trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment and admiration) and the lowest in conflict, though no significant difference was detected between the volunteer and consumer relationship for conflict. The differences between the consumer and political organization-public relationship are not as clear. Publics appear to trust consumer organizations more than political party with which you have a relationship and feel more committed to them; they also feel more in conflict with those organization types. There is little difference between the two organization types for control mutuality, commitment and admiration.

The findings in this study provide a number of insights into the nature of the organization-public relationship. First, it appears that the degree to which an organization is considered communal vs. exploitive is related to the overall assessment of quality by the publics of the organization. Organizations that make a higher priority of publics’ needs tend to be rated higher in quality by those publics. Two possible reasons for this are, first, a causal relationship between meeting publics’ needs and perception of quality in the relationship or, second, the
possibility that organizations which make a priority of publics needs also behave in ways that
ingenerate trust, offer more control to publics and create more satisfaction, commitment and
admiration among members of publics. Two relationship qualities – trust and satisfaction –
behaved as predicted for all three relationship types. They were judged as highest in the
volunteer/relationship, second in the consumer/relationship and lowest in the political
relationship. Trust, as described earlier, depends on the openness and honesty of all parties in a
relationship. The degree to which publics feel their needs are being met in a relationship may
encourage more open and honest exchange in that relationship.

Satisfaction, which is the overall positive feelings toward the relationship, has been
judged as a predictor for both trust and commitment in the relationship in other research (Ki &
Hon, 2007). The level of satisfaction, too, appears to be related to the communality of the
relationship. Publics who feel that their needs are given priority in a relationship feel more
satisfied with that relationship. Organizations may be able to increase the satisfaction of their key
stakeholders by first identifying and then addressing their needs.

Communality, however, does not appear to always lead to a greater commitment to the
organization, greater admiration or a greater sense of control mutuality. In this study, there was a
relationship between these three outcomes and communality at the highest end of the scale –
between the mutual communal/communal relationship (volunteer) and the
contractual/symbiotic/exchange relationship (consumer). However, no significant difference was
detected between the middle and lower ends of the scale (political). One explanation for this may
be that the political relationship is not, in fact, at the lower end of the scale and is only
significantly less communal, possibly a contractual relationship. Another explanation may be
that organizations which engage in contractual/symbiotic/exchange relationships and
manipulative/exploitive relationships are less likely to encourage commitment, admiration or a
sense of control mutuality in general, so little difference emerges. Prior research has measured
differences in communal vs. exchanges but not exchange vs. exploitive relationships (Hon &
Grunig, 1999). More research needs to be done to understand the differences between these
relationship types.

The relationship between communality and conflict was mixed as well. At the higher end
of the scale, there was no significant difference in conflict. Participants rated their volunteer
relationships and consumer relationships similar in conflict. Likely, the type of conflict is
different between these two organization types; however, those differences were not measured in
this study. At the lower end of the scale, significant differences in conflict were detected. This
may suggest that organizations which make a priority of publics’ needs are able to engage in
conflict and still maintain a high degree of quality in the relationship. At the same time, it may
suggest that those who do not take publics’ needs into consideration are likely to encounter
conflict with key stakeholders.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that engaging in a communal relationship with
key publics leads to a relationship with higher quality and lower levels of perceived conflict.
Relationships which engage in a high level of communality enjoy significantly high level of allive relationship quality outcomes even though their level of conflict is not significantly lower
than those organization-public relationships with moderate levels of communality. Organizations
with the lowest levels of communality tend to experience the highest degree of conflict with their
key publics; however, the degree of commitment, admiration and control mutuality does not
appear to be lower than OPRs with moderate levels of communality. The most pronounced
differences between relationships in this study were observed between organizations with the
highest level of communality and moderate levels of communality, suggesting that efforts to increase communality can have clear measurable positive impact on the relationships which are already engaging some communality strategies.

**Conclusion**

This study offered the first look at the comparison of three organization types. As well, it considered the degree of communality of an OPR in its examination of organization characteristics. Findings of this study suggest a relationship between the level of communality in OPRs and the degree to which publics’ perceive them as high in quality and low in conflict.

There were a couple of limitations to the study. First, the study used a convenience sample of students from three classes at two large universities. Therefore, generalization to other populations is questionable. Second, the data were collected using survey methodology.

Future studies should examine the degree of communality among organizations that fall into the same category; for example, examining the degree of communality within consumer organizations to see its impact on relationship characteristics. As well, the literature would benefit from an examination of other organization types, for example religious organizations.

**References**


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Table 3. Level of control mutuality in relationship

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Table 4. Anova test for control mutuality.

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Table 5. Level of satisfaction in relationship.

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Table 7. Level of commitment in relationship.

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Table 8. Anova test for commitment.

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Table 9. Level of admiration in relationship.

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Table 10. Anova test for admiration.

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Table 11. Level of conflict in relationship.

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Table 13. Level of support in relationship.

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WHAT PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS TELL US REGARDING DOMINANT COALITION ACCESS AND GAINING MEMBERSHIP
Shannon A. Bowen
sabowen@umd.edu

Acknowledgement: This research was funded by the International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation

ABSTRACT
Scholarly and professional literature in public relations emphasizes gaining membership in the dominant coalition, and research concludes that public relations must hold a direct reporting line to the CEO in order to be considered excellent (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Yet only a handful of studies have explored vital questions relating to dominant coalition access and inclusion, and we know little about the ways that successful practitioners have garnered dominant coalition membership. By combining 32 interviews with public relations executives, four focus groups, and open ended responses on a larger survey of communicators, this study seeks to determine the main routes to the dominant coalition. They are, in the order of apparent effectiveness found in these data: organizational crisis, ethical dilemma, credibility gained over time, issue high on the media agenda, and leadership. The positive and negative aspects of each route are discussed, as well as implications for the public relations function and professionals.

Purpose
In various countries, recent seminars for public relations professionals led by this researcher resulted in the airing of one recurrent concern among public relations practitioners: How do they gain access to the highest level of the organization in order to advise on the issues impacting its reputation and credibility? Whether working in-house or consulting to clients, practitioners often indicated that their expertise tells them how to manage and avoid situations leading to reputational harm for an organization, but that they were given no chance to use that expertise in advising executive management. This research was undertaken with those who have achieved dominant coalition access to help answer and alleviate those concerns. If research can assist practitioners in finding routes of access to their dominant coalitions, they might be better prepared to advise their organizations and to counsel executive-level management on matters involving reputation and issues management. Practitioners could also be better able to engage in long-term relationships building and maintenance by considering the values of publics in strategic planning if they were regularly able to participate in dominant coalition activities.

For years, scholarly and professional literature in public relations has emphasized gaining membership in the dominant coalition (Dozier & L. Grunig, 1992; McElreath & Blamphin, 1994), also known as the political power-base of an organization (Mintzberg, 1983; Spicer, 1997), or the strategic decision-making core (Berger & Reber, 2006). However, most scholarly research on this topic ends at the point of advising that access to and membership in the dominant coalition is to be sought and is necessary for the public relations function to excel. Although public relations scholars have touched on the topic frequently, we still have little idea about the varied routes successful practitioners used to gain dominant coalition access and inclusion. Berger (2007) argued: “Acquiring greater power and professional legitimacy remain central issues in the field, and knowing how best to do so continues to be frustratingly elusive”
It is time for more scholarly research to examine the area of dominant coalition access and membership and offer guidance for practitioners to implement in their careers.

**Conceptualization**

Public relations scholars (Dozier & L. Grunig, 1992) made an important argument that the effectiveness of public relations in the organization is dependent on how it is viewed by and participates in the dominant coalition. Their empirical research (L. Grunig et al., 2002) supported the argument that how the dominant coalition views the public relations function is a or even the vital factor allowing for public relations excellence in contributing to strategic management. With conceptual and empirical research emphasizing the integral nature of the public relations functions’ inclusion in the dominant coalition, more detailed study is warranted.

Further, the issue of dominant coalition inclusion warrants further study due to the concern that practitioners exhibit regarding the topic. In Berger and Reber’s (2006) survey of the most important issues facing public relations practitioners, they established that ‘gain(ing) a seat at the decision-making table’ was named the most important issue by professionals, with 33% giving that response, followed by 28% saying measuring the value of public relations was the most important issue (p. 6). They observed that gaining dominant coalition access “was the most important and strikingly consistent one for practitioners at agencies (35.7%), nonprofit organizations (39.2%), and corporations (37.0%)” (p. 5). Although there are many critical issues facing public relations, none appear to be more widely problematic to practitioners than gaining voice in the dominant coalition.

**Defining the Dominant Coalition**

A more precise understanding of the concept “dominant coalition” assists in developing our model of this complex decision-making core. Those in positions of authority in an organization’s structure or hierarchy are commonly members of the dominant coalition, including the chief executive officer (CEO) and other “C-level” executives, such as the Chief Finance Officer, Chief Operations Officer, and Chief Marketing Officer. Some organizations count a communication professional as a member of their dominant coalition, often called a chief public affairs officer or head of corporate communication. Others organizations do not have a communication professional in or reporting to the dominant coalition, in which case decisions are normally delegated to a communicator for implementation. As Berger (2005) revealed, the dominant coalition will often vary by issue or the type of decision under consideration, as well as the strategy of the organization. White and Dozier (1992) argued that if the decision is considered “strategic” then it “becomes more social and more abstract” as it moves to consideration at this highest operational level of the organization (p. 98). Communication may or may not be involved in the strategy of the organization at this point, depending on whether the public relations function is viewed as a part of strategic management. In a detailed examination of the topic, scholars (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic, & Sriramesh, 2007) defined strategic communication as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (p. 3).

Berger (2005) noted that it is common for the membership in the dominant coalition to shift depending on the issue, and these shifting coalitions may or may not include the public relations professional—oftentimes depending on how public relations is viewed in the organization and how important of a role communication plays in adapting to the organization’s environment. Further complicating the matter of defining the dominant coalition is the presence
of what Berger (2005) defined as formal and informal or “ad hoc” dominant coalitions, especially in organizations of considerable size or geographic dispersion. These shifting groups often arise episodically and hold power over discrete areas, such as legal battles or financial issues, with levels of power often depending on access, expertise, and authority over a given topic (Berger, 2007). J. Grunig (1992a) stated that the dominant coalition is a group of 5 to 7 key decision makers, whom he called “the power holders of the organization” (p. 24).

Power is often a term associated with the dominant coalition concept or even used interchangeably, and the two are inextricably related. Excellence theory (J. Grunig, 1992b), political power perspectives (Berger & Reber, 2006; Chen, 2007; Spicer, 1997), roles theory (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992), rhetorical theory (Heath, 1994; Heath, 2001), relationship theory (Hung, 2007; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005), and even critical approaches (Holtzhausen, 2000; Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002) have all recognized the importance of the dominant coalition to public relations practice and the power differentials involved. Defining the nature of the dominant coalition is, therefore, a challenging and often convoluted pursuit.

In defining the term dominant coalition, the literature of business management and organizational theory provides interdisciplinary richness. Morgan (2006) wrote that a dominant coalition shares control of decision-making processes and the ability to influence those processes, exercise formal authority, or the control of resources and outcomes. Hatch (1997) wrote that although organizational theorists initially favored explanations based on structure, authority, or legitimacy, the organization and its decisions are a political arena. Hatch went on to note that “outside of authority, the sources of power do not necessarily follow the organizational hierarchy” (p. 283), offering some explanation for changing dominant coalition membership, opportunity, and interests in varied issues.

Mintzberg (1983) used the term “internal influencers” instead of dominant coalition, explaining that the influencers in this core vie for control over decisions by acting on formal authority, an area of expertise, a system of politics, or an accepted ideology. Mintzberg noted that these influencers and the systems they use of functioning either in concert or independently “are often imperfect or incomplete” (p. 117) leaving a certain amount of ambiguity and discretion in play. Mintzberg’s concept of ever-changing systems of power and control in a core of internal influence melds well with current thinking in public relations scholarship. Whether the public relations practitioner is or is not included in a dominant coalition, then, is dependent upon not only many organizational variables, but also upon the issue and whether it involves a significant component of communication.

Heath’s (1997) work on issues management identified an important caveat for public relations practitioners seeking inclusion in the dominant coalition. He cited research finding: “Public relations practitioners will be part of the dominant coalition in organizations (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1989) only when they can influence strategic business planning and management in ways that can enhance the bottom line (Ewing, 1987; Wartick & Rude, 1986)” (p. 11). We can conclude from the work of Heath and the scholars he cited that another variable affecting whether public relations can be included in the dominant coalition is the ability of its members to understand the complex linkage between the bottom line and reputation.

Relationships with publics are often not ‘contributors’ to the bottom line, but can be conceptualized in terms of money saved for the organization in avoiding lawsuits, boycotts, and negative media attention (Hon, 1998). Organization-public relationships build credibility and insulate the organization’s reputation from some kinds of harm, yet they are often difficult for
practitioners to quantify in terms of bottom-line contribution. Public relations researchers (L. Grunig, 1992a, 1992b; L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Ehling, 1992) argued that this obstacle can be minimized through educating the CEO and having the CEO truly understand the value of public relations. However, we do not know much about the experiences of public relations practitioners in educating CEOs about the abilities of public relations, or about the ratios of current CEOs who are open to viewing public relations as a strategic management function rather than a support function.

Rates of Dominant Coalition Access and Inclusion

Berger (2007) lamented, “widespread empowerment of (public relations) professionals has been slow to come” (p. 229). Although precise figures for professionals who report to or are included in a dominant coalition are difficult to obtain due to the vague and changing nature of dominant coalitions, the general air of the scholarly literature is that public relations professionals as a whole have neither a satisfactory level of dominant coalition access nor involvement in strategic planning. Perhaps this finding is due to a management’s view of public relations as a non-management function, as Mintzberg explained: “the support staff includes those people working in the cafeteria, mailroom, public relations department, and legal office” (p. 115). Support staff generally are not included in management because their role is to implement the strategic decisions of others, and this is often the case reported by public relations professionals. If CEOs and senior executives are not aware of the contributions to overall organizational effectiveness that can be made by public relations in the areas of strategic planning, issues management, public affairs, and risk management, then public relations practitioners are not likely to be included in strategic management in the same manner as more traditional management functions.

Although we might not know exactly who is consistently involved as a member of the dominant coalition, reporting structures for top communicators have been studied in public relations. Research in three countries for the excellence study (L. Grunig et al., 2002) concluded that “most top communicators report directly to the CEO—about 57% based on the questionnaires completed both by the PR head and the CEO” (p. 172). This finding indicates that top communication managers are taking on important strategic roles in many organizations, and are—at least part of that time—members of the dominant coalition. Recent research (Bowen, 2006, 2008; Bowen et al., 2006) offered a glimpse inside the organizational roles of practitioners around the world and showed to what extent they occupy or do not occupy a seat in the dominant coalition. That survey of 1,827 professional communicators concluded that practitioners do have access to the dominant coalition: 29.8% (n=485) of survey respondents reported directly to the CEO, and 35.5% (n=576) of the worldwide sample reported to a C-level executive (i.e., a “Chief of” a certain area). Combined, that means that 65.1% of the sample did have either a direct reporting relationship to the CEO or some influence within the dominant coalition, allowing them to contribute in the most optimal manner to organizational effectiveness. For the purpose of this discussion, the 29.8% of the sample reporting directly to the CEO can be assumed to be dominant coalition members at least part of the time. Communication is involved in a multiplicity of organizational concerns, leading to a solid basis for including the public relations practitioner among the dominant coalition in many organizations where she or he reports directly to the CEO. Self-reports of dominant coalition membership are unreliable, and so we cannot know the exact number of practitioners considered “regular” dominant coalition members by their CEOs, but this number is included in the 29.8% reporting to CEOs.
As reported in the IABC study (Bowen et al., 2006), 35% (n=627) of the sample reported that they do not have access to the dominant coalition, meaning that they do not have input into strategic decision making, often that they are simply implementing the strategic decisions of others and their counsel is not sought by the dominant coalition. Other communication professionals in that sample related problems gaining dominant coalition access arising from encroachment, in which the public relations function is directed by other organizational functions. The sample included 8.6% (n=157) who reported to marketing, 6.6% (n=120) who reported to human resources, and just under 1% (n=14) who were headed by the legal department. The work of Lauzen (1992) and other scholars (Dozier & L. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig, 1992a; Metzler, 2001; Pieczka & L’Etang, 2001; Spicer, 1997) illustrated the value of public relations having access or a direct reporting relationship to the dominant coalition rather than being subsumed by other areas of the organization. The excellence study’s (J. Grunig, 1992b; L. Grunig, 1997; L. Grunig et al., 2002) evidence suggested that the only relationship contributing to overall excellence in the public relations function is a direct report to the CEO for communication.

Leadership as a Factor in Dominant Coalition Inclusion

When defining the term dominant coalition, leadership is another concept that becomes intermingled with those of power, influence, authority, and making decisions in an organization. Like ‘dominant coalition,’ leadership has many schools of thought regarding how it is and should be defined. Some definitions focus on personal character traits, others focus on behavior, and others focus on groups (Northouse, 2007). Leadership scholar Northouse (2007) offered a definition emphasizing influence, group processes, and goals: “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). So, do public relations practitioners consider themselves leaders once they gain access to the dominant coalition? Does long-term membership in the dominant coalition convey their leadership in the organization? Or do characteristics and personality traits exemplifying leadership lead professional communicators to membership in the dominant coalition? The present study asked participants to discuss their dominant coalition access and inclusion regarding leadership.

Once a direct reporting relationship to the CEO or being included in the dominant coalition is reported by a public relations professional, another set of problems for researchers is quick to emerge. Berger, Reber, and Heyman (2007) first raised the question of determining which top communicators are influential advisers or leaders in their dominant coalitions versus those who are simply present at meetings. The researchers (Berger et al., 2007) interviewed 97 dominant coalition members who talked about their leadership roles within their respective organizations. However, almost half of the study’s executive communicators reported a severe impediment to their own success in the organization due to “inaccurate or incomplete perceptions of the function’s role and value by other organizational executives” (p. 66). The study’s practitioners linked this problem to “the prevalence of spinmeisters” in public relations and explained that they had each, in various ways, tried to underscore their own leadership characteristics in order to compensate for negative perceptions of public relations. The leadership route to dominant coalition access and inclusion is explored in this study; the influence that professionals hold within their dominant coalition is discussed, but warrants further study building on that of Berger, Reber, and Heyman (2007).

Factors Influencing Reporting Structure
The structure of an organization and its resultant reporting chains and dominant coalition access or inclusion are influenced by many considerations, and these characteristics also relate to the organizational communication process. One scholar (Jablin, 1987) provided an overview of the organization as a system of communication with complex and interrelated functions or units. He reviewed the empirical literature on the many factors affecting organizational communication: “(1) configuration (e.g., span of control, organizational size), (2) complexity (vertical and horizontal), (3) formalization, and (4) centralization” (p. 391). These concepts include the structural considerations of organization size, hierarchy, decision making, organizational culture, power, networks, and other factors that might influence the communication patterns of an organization. Although the linkages are complex, they constitute an important factor of how and when organizations communicate.

Other factors which might influence communication are concerns such as the industry of an organization and how visible and interactive with publics it needs to be, government regulation, and the issue-related strategic decisions of management. Jablin (1987) explained, “Strategic decisions concern policy-related issues and focus on an organization’s long-term relationship to its environment” (p. 407). Placing his analysis in the systems theory context, Jablin offered a rationale for public relations practitioners to play a central role in the strategy of organizations, applying their knowledge of publics in the environment and building long-term relationships as a part of an organization’s overall strategy. As J. Grunig (1992a) declared, “the top public relations manager will be in the dominant coalition only when public relations potential is high in the organization” (p. 24). Public relations potential was defined in his research as the characteristics of excellent public relations, including strategic management and knowledge of the managerial role of public relations.

New ways of understanding how organizational structure determines communication were reviewed by Poole (1999) and then summarized by McPhee and Poole (McPhee & Poole, 2001). These new ways of looking at organizational structure include reliance on information technology to make the organization more efficient, flexible structures that can be reconfigured at will according to the demands of issues or projects, the use of technology to create a unified group despite geographic dispersion, autonomous yet team-based configuration, a dispersion of power among relatively flat hierarchies, and use of a market-based strategy of assignment of dynamic groups and tasks. Understanding the characteristics of both classical organizational structure and new forms of organizational structure allows public relations scholars to better conceptualize the role of the public relations function within and organization with regard to the dominant coalition and inclusion in a decision-making core of strategists.

**Research Questions**

Knowing the characteristics supporting the flow of communication within an organization allows public relations practitioners to better navigate the organizational structure to have the maximum impact with their activities, proving worth to the organization and enhancing chances on dominant coalition inclusion or access. It is for these reasons that the dominant coalition is seen both as an aspirational locale for top public relations professionals and the subject of scholarly scrutiny regarding its precise definition, role in managing the organization, power and control both formal and informal, and ability to determine the type of communication and model of public relations used. To assist in understanding the complex process of dominant coalition access and inclusion, the following research questions will guide data analyses:
For those reporting to the CEO, how was your membership in the dominant coalition obtained?
For those reporting to a member of the dominant coalition and having regular dominant coalition access, how did you arrive at that level of authority?
For those who are still striving to attain dominant coalition access or inclusion, what have been your primary barriers?
These questions are not inclusive of all of the complexities related to dominant coalition access and inclusion, organizational power, and structural challenges for communication. They also did not allow for practitioners to elaborate at great length about what value was placed on their recommendations after dominant coalition inclusion, as the focus of this research was how they gained that stature. Some practitioners did elaborate about the extent of their influence, but these comments emerged naturally in the data rather than as a response solicited by researchers from all of the participants. Future research should explore these questions in this area deemed by practitioners as the most pressing problem facing public relations.

Methodology
An international survey funded by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation revealed that 29.8% of respondents in a worldwide membership survey identified themselves as members of the dominant coalition reporting directly to the CEO or President. Their work experience level was high, at 21+ years on average.
New territory is explored with regard to IABC data by looking specifically at the qualitative data regarding dominant coalition membership. Open-ended responses on various topics from 1,827 respondents were studied. It should be noted that the survey was not undertaken to study dominant coalition access or inclusion, but that those factors were included by examining reporting structure and in the natural comments arising from the practitioners responding to the survey. Most of the open-ended question responses were related to ethics in general, but comments were coded, searched by code word, and included in this paper if relevant to dominant coalition access, inclusion, or a lack of those, because many survey respondents used the open-ended space to express frustration with their positions.
Qualitative research consisted of 32 long interviews conducted with executive practitioners, with supporting data from four focus groups, in which one focus group was exclusively executive-level practitioners. Additional senior-level practitioners were randomly interspersed in the other focus groups. Therefore, these focus groups included those who were currently in a dominant coalition (or had been before retiring) as well as practitioners who were only sporadically involved in the dominant coalition or did not have dominant coalition access or inclusion.

Negative Case Analyses
To provide a balanced report, this paper will also discuss the information reported by public relations practitioners who did not have dominant coalition access or membership. That 35% of the quantitative sample and a similar proportion of two focus groups can also provide valuable information in contrast to the practitioners with access because they can identify barriers to access and failed methods of attempting to gain membership. Other negative case comments occurred spontaneously in focus groups and in the open-ended responses to a question on a quantitative survey. Interestingly, survey respondents seemed far more likely to write negative comments or complaints about their position in the open-ended question box than they
did to provide positive information. Researchers have long found a bias toward the reporting of negative information, termed the negativity effect, that potentially explains this anomaly within the data (Vonk, 1993). Negative data is useful in identifying common complaints regarding dominant coalition access.

Research Perspective and Data Analyses

A constructivist approach was used to the study design and data collection since public relations theory offers a glimpse of what would be found in the field; the theoretical conceptualization reported earlier in this paper told the researcher that dominant coalition access was to be sought as a contributor to overall organizational effectiveness for public relations and offered themes to search for and emphasize in data collection and analyses. Although it played a role in analyses, this research was not undertaken from a perspective of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) because that theory indicated that one should enter the field with no theoretical propositions or preconceived notions of what one might find.

Grounded theory data analysis methods (Strauss, 1987) were used. Coding of qualitative data for key terms related to dominant coalition access, denied access, reporting structure, inclusion, membership, and means of gaining membership allowed a more thorough look at what emerged from the data naturally than the researcher could have written into any data collection instrument. Combining a strong theoretical conceptualization from public relations scholars in a constructivist approach and using open-ended qualitative questions allowed the researcher to emphasize the strengths of both theory building in our literature and grounded theory forms of analyses. It is hoped that this dual approach provides for a strongly reliable and valid study in which the strengths of each paradigm are used to offset their respective weaknesses.

Results

Coding of this qualitative data by pattern matching (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) revealed that there are five “routes” to gaining access to and possibly eventual membership in the dominant coalition:

1. Issue high on media agenda; 2. Ethical dilemma; 3. Crisis situation
4. Credibility through correct analyses over time; 5. Leadership

These data are qualitative because the quantitative survey included a question about dominant coalition access only as an open-ended response item. Related quantitative results will be included when relevant, but relate primarily to reporting structure and more discrete organizational variables like title rather than the more nebulous concept of dominant coalition access and inclusion. Categories or “routes” of access should be viewed accordingly, as suggestive qualitative data with potential areas of overlap, rather than completely discrete methods of access. Although this data is qualitative, it offers a satisfactory level of reliability because the point of theoretical saturation was reached, indicating that answers became familiar and repeated after a solid amount of data collection. The validity of these data in answering the questions posed was satisfactory and echoed findings discussed in the literature review.

It is hoped that public relations practitioners can proceed with measured confidence in applying these findings, and individual combinations of these access routes, to their own positions resulting in success in gaining higher levels of organizational access and inclusion in strategic decision making. Knowledge of the negatives and problems associated with each route can also allow professionals to prepare for meeting those barriers.
Route 1: Issue High on Media Agenda

Of these data, the most predictable route to access and potential or eventual inclusion in the dominant coalition was having an issue on the media agenda. This circumstance occurred when the organization had a newsworthy topic generating media inquiries either through its own merit or through an industry-related news topic. Practitioners regularly mentioned the connections between the media agenda and being called in by the CEO or dominant coalition to handle such issues. Some of the practitioners identified this aspect of gaining dominant coalition access or inclusion as a routine and somewhat controllable method, as contrasted with emergency situations like a crisis. Others identified this method as a route to only partial or temporary dominant coalition access, because, as one practitioner said “Once the media interest dies down, so does your interest from the top.” Professionals commonly used the threat of media attention to gain or increase their influence in the dominant coalition. One focus group participant explained:

Clients are more careful because they are more aware of the power of the media. When management is discussing a business policy which is ‘nearly legal’ I would just warn them and say that “the media would eat you.” Usually the new policy is taken off the agenda following my warning.

Many practitioners identified the media agenda route to dominant coalition access as problematic and fraught with pitfalls due to what one participant called the “magical thinking of the CEO.” Magical thinking was the term given for a situation in which negative media coverage of the organization is taking place so the CEO calls in the public relations manager and requests him or her to “fix” the negative coverage, or somehow “implies a magical control of the media.” One survey participant expounded: “My experience is that when bad news happens at a business-unit level that jeopardizes earnings, corporate management expects the PR people to "do something about" the news, even if it is true.” Countless practitioners concurred, such as the dominant coalition member who said, “We are seen as being the magicians that can keep the organization out of trouble with the press.”

Numerous practitioners explained that they found themselves in the role of educating the dominant coalition about why they could not simply “fix” negative coverage or control the media. In this case, they pointed out that they were forced to make a non-empowering argument for what the public relations function cannot do, rather than emphasizing what it can do. Some practitioners said that they believed this undermined their credibility with the dominant coalition, while others said they used it as an opportunity to explain why the organization should be honest in the first place or more proactive in issues management. The “magical thinking” conundrum places public relations professionals with a double edged sword of inclusion in the dominant coalition but with limited control over an already formed issue.

Further frustrating the media agenda access route to the dominant coalition is the situation of what to say and what not to say on an already emergent issue. One survey participant explained: “Most problems I see in my company are sins of omission rather than of commission. That is, no decision is made to give false information, but information that perhaps should be given is held back.” Numerous practitioners echoed the sentiment of this professional, and others argued as did this practitioner that their own managements “did not trust me with all of the facts, so I couldn’t make the informed decision.” Full and honest disclosure becomes more complicated when one considers that the legal department is likely to be involved in contentious issues on the media agenda. One executive practitioner explained, “I am always at loggerheads with legal because they just want to have no comment on anything” and another maintained “I
am not fond of legal. They want to stop us in doing our job.” Another participant conveyed: “I fought very hard to have that equal weight with legal (in the dominant coalition). I want to see my role as just as important.” One dominant coalition practitioner expounded on the relationship with legal counsel: “I try to get to the meetings early to talk about it before legal get there. I’ve found that (then) even some of my verbiage is used.”

For the negative case examples in this area, some practitioners said that having a topic on the media agenda just resulted in implementing the decisions of the dominant coalition on that issue regarding whether or not to communicate, and the nature of any communication. For instance, this respondent explained: “Authentic voice will always win over corporate speak in the minds of customers and community, but my senior management group allows the risk of lawsuits to make me respond either with silence or an artificial corporate story.” Many participants lamented the lack of integrity of their managements in asking them to “spin” or “cover up” a negative story.

It is clear that having an issue high on the media agenda is oftentimes a route of access to the dominant coalition, but is no guarantee of dominant coalition membership. Many practitioners reported that this route of access was only a temporary method of inclusion rather than an invitation to involvement in long-term strategy. This route of access also provides many problems for public relations with regard to disclosure issues, legal counsel and the “magical thinking of CEOs” conundrum. It is not the ideal route of dominant coalition access or inclusion, but might provide a proving area to lay the groundwork for future inclusion.

Route 2: Ethical Dilemma

Professional communicators revealed that a sure call from the dominant coalition would come on matters of ethical dilemmas. They noted that this request to join the dominant coalition was especially reliable with ethical dilemmas having any component dealing with a public or of potential interest to an external public, including the mass media. Practitioners who reported that they had joined the ranks of the dominant coalition frequently reported that an ethical dilemma for their organization offered them the opportunity to “show what public relations can do” or use their expertise on publics to counsel the dominant coalition on “how decisions would be viewed from other positions, especially groups outside” the organization’s boundaries.

Some practitioners confided that they had been acting as ethical counselors in their dominant coalitions long after the first ethical dilemma on which their advice was sought. Many practitioners maintained that they acted “as an ethical sounding board” for their CEOs or dominant coalitions on a regular or even daily basis. Almost every interviewee and focus group participant mentioned the “important” role of ethics in their positions with the dominant coalition. One practitioner wrote, “I have found more personal challenges to my own ethics in this field that I imagined. I agree that an important part of our role in organizations is to keep people focused on ethical behaviour and core values.”

One issue that the dominant coalition communicators mentioned is that often their discussions were not termed ethical but couched in terms of right or wrong, should or should not do, or “How would this look to the media?” This semantic battle is frequently mentioned by public relations professionals who know they are dealing with ethics counsel, but take on the role as an informal ethics counselor in their dominant coalitions. For instance, one public relations executive said, “I counsel on ethics all the time—they just don’t call it that.” Another practitioner with dominant coalition membership expounded:
Public relations is called in to discuss challenges and problems, with legal counsel and with the CEO, to discuss what’s right and wrong. I don’t think we would see it as discussing ethics, but we do know how to discuss what’s right and wrong. When practitioners are engaged in discussions of what is right and wrong, or what should be done or should not be done, these concepts are clearly ethical, and fall within all of the major definitions of ethics as a type of moral philosophy. The hurdle for practitioners is a semantic one in articulating decisions in terms of ethics.

The challenge is also one of education, in terms of making the CEO, dominant coalition, and other organizational functions aware that public relations can play a role in determining the ethical course of action for management. The connections that public relations practitioners hold with external publics allow them to see potential decisions through the lens of differing values systems and goals than just those of the organization, making decisions more thorough and well-considered than they could be without that input.

A few practitioners noted the connection they believe acting as an ethics adviser has with corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship. Several indicated that demands for a social responsibility report had generated a new level of access to their CEOs. Others noted that corporate governance was a part of ethics that helped the organization remain autonomous or free of greater regulatory constraints, so they saw it as one practitioner said, “part of my contribution to the bottom line.” Another survey respondent elaborated, “Ethics is strongly related to the governance an organization has in place. Good governance is largely viewed as a positive item within organizations that encourage ethical behavior, rather than SEC or other regulatory compliance.”

Although it might not be as fraught with potential pitfalls as the media agenda route to the dominant coalition, advising on ethical dilemmas brings its own set of challenges for public relations practitioners. A plethora of participants in both the quantitative and qualitative research decried the lack of ethics training among young practitioners and ethics education offered by universities who teach public relations. For example, one respondent stated:

Most practitioners don’t get properly prepared in university to deal with the type of ethics dilemmas they face in the real world. This is unfortunate. There are many unscrupulous PR consultants out there as well that seek personal gain before professional service. Practitioners often reflected on the lack of ethics preparation with comments such as the one from this survey respondent: “I believe educational institutions teaching public relations, journalism, marketing, communications, etcetera, should ensure each student is trained in ethics.” Another respondent argued: “Ethics counseling has naturally come to us as the "experts" in public opinion, however we don't have proper training to really provide this role, nor would are we recognized as a true ethics expert.” One professional complained, “I see these young practitioners out there who will do absolutely anything. Is no one teaching them ethical standards?”

Myriad practitioners connected ethics with credibility for the discipline and education in ethics, as one professional articulated:

We need more emphasis on ethics in public relations to give the field better credibility. More emphasis is required in training programs, degree programs and professional association sessions. By including it in curriculum, it will be viewed as an integral part of public relations in future.

In a negative case analysis, droves of practitioners responding to the survey complained that they simply did not have the access, standing, or credibility within their organizations to
advise on ethics. Of the 35% who did not have dominant coalition access, these professionals were often most frustrated by what they saw as a lack of ethics in their organizations or clients, combined with their own lack of power to change that. Innumerable practitioners commented on how the negative reputation of public relations as “spin” has an impact in their own positions of management assuming unethical behavior or a complete amorality in the function, as one participant illustrated: “Ethical discussions are held at C-suite level. Other than accounting concerns, other ethical dilemmas are considered taboo for "staff" to discuss.” Another respondent elucidated this point:

I find myself gatekeeper for decisions with which I'm sometimes decidedly uncomfortable -- and I'm not sure that my organization is atypical. I've been a communicator for 13 years in five organizations -- private, public, and non-profit -- and I've never worked for an organization where I wasn't asked -- expected -- to lie, either by commission or omission.

Finally, an organizational culture supporting ethical values and discussion must be present in the organization before issues are even labeled as an ethical dilemma. The practitioners lucky enough to gain dominant coalition inclusion via this route worked in organizations that were willing to discuss ethics and to attempt to do “the right thing.” It remains that practitioners who were dominant coalition members consistently and regularly mentioned ethical issues as playing an important role in gaining their stature within the organization. It is a reliable path to inclusion, but requires the existence of many factors predisposing the organization to consider ethics at the highest levels in the first place. Ethical dilemmas are a sure route to dominant coalition access only when the organization recognizes that a dilemma exists, competing values are at stake, and that the public relations function holds expertise that would help to resolve the dilemma. However, public relations executives must be knowledgeable about ethical decision making, have some professional experience or academic training in the area, and be willing to research, explain, and resolve those competing demands. Therefore, the route to dominant coalition access and inclusion of counseling on ethical dilemmas is a demanding one and requires that many factors in the organization, from structural variables to knowledge variables, be present.

Route 3: Crisis Situation

Comments on organizational crisis by practitioners revealed another route to dominant coalition access and potential or eventual inclusion: a serious organizational crisis. The researcher was surprised by the candor with which practitioners relayed their relief, gladness, and appreciation for the damaging or even devastating crises befalling their organizations. A dramatic and serious crisis was often described as the only route through which the public relations practitioner could get the attention, ear, and reliance of the CEO and dominant coalition. Undertones of desperation and frustration were present in the comments of many practitioners, who were thankful for the day a crisis hit their employer as the event allowing their dominant coalition access. For example, on dominant coalition member explained:

I was so happy when that crisis finally came, I mean, I didn’t even know if we’d survive it to see the other side. But it was what I had been waiting for all this time to get in there and prove what I could do.

Another dominant coalition member expressed similar relief: “The day that crisis hit was my best day at (Organization name). Sure it is bad for the company, even devastating, but it was great for me and did wonders for p.r.” One dominant coalition member said, “It (a crisis) made my career.
When we got that call it was the time to react and get the media statements. The CEO let us do it (pause) and from then on I was in.” A similar sentiment was echoed by this dominant coalition member:

I hated it that that had to happen; you know several guys – employees, did not make it out of there. That was awful. But I wouldn’t have gotten the chance otherwise, to get myself a known quantity to the CEO. He learned he could rely on me and that I wasn’t going to lead us astray, but I had been waiting for years.

Interestingly no real negative case patterns emerged in the data to report regarding dominant coalition access gained through a crisis. One respondent did note that once the crisis was over, their expertise and input was no longer urgently needed by the dominant coalition. Additionally, crisis is a high-pressure route to the dominant coalition, as illustrated in the statement of another practitioner: “Everything rides on successful performance during a crisis,” and that it is “not the time for on the job learning.”

Crisis response appears to be reliable method of gaining access to the dominant coalition, but not of gaining sustained membership in the dominant coalition. It does, however, allow public relations professionals to prove their worth to their organizations and to have the opportunity to become an advisor to the CEO. Skill in this exigent situation can lend credibility to the practitioner and the function, and perhaps can increase understanding among the dominant coalition of the potential contributions of public relations.

Route 4: Credibility Gained through Correct Analyses Longitudinally

An extremely common theme throughout the data collected referred to the idea of credibility of the public relations function. The credibility to which participants referred was two-fold: both of the public relations function, rising above its tarnished and ethically questionable history, and of themselves as members of a strategic management function. Credibility was consistently described by countless communication executives in terms of persistence, maintaining a history of correct analyses over time, being extremely slow to build, and requiring assertiveness. A fewer but still considerable number of the participants explained credibility in terms of building a relationship with their CEO, gaining his or her trust, and proving their reliability over time.

The theme related to gaining credibility was mentioned by each and every participant in the 32 long interviews, and numerous focus group and survey respondents. It is clear that gaining credibility with the CEO and dominant coalition is a vital step in public relations achieving access and eventual inclusion in the dominant coalition—over a long period of time offering correct analyses. For instance, one dominant coalition member reflected on gaining membership: “I think it’s about finding credibility with them. If you’ve come through for them a few times with good advice, it gets easier after that.”

One drawback to the gaining credibility approach to dominant coalition inclusion is that it is the slowest route that has been explored. Participants state that it took years or even decades to enter the ranks of the dominant coalition in their organizations. For instance, one executive public relations professional said, “It takes ages, really years and years, to earn their trust. You think you have it and then you are back out and have to try again, to keep trying, to be persistent.” Another agreed: “It is a very slow process, and if you get a new CEO you have to start over from square one. Everything you’ve done walks out the door with each CEO.”

Another negative case that practitioners related is that this approach to dominant coalition access and inclusion requires dogged persistence and assertiveness, proving difficult to maintain
for many practitioners or even humiliating. One dominant coalition member offered, “I can’t count the doors that have been slammed in my face.” Many public relations managers called this route “the foot in the door method” or something along similar lines. Yet they explained that it was a frustrating, often fruitless pursuit, but one that did eventually enhance the credibility of some participants. One senior executive explained:

I gave the CEO a memo every time something came up, and if I wasn’t invited to the meeting, I would put it in his hand on the way in the door. I know he read those, every one, because I was proved right over time and then he started asking for my memos. If one wasn’t there I would get a call saying, ‘where is a memo on this?’ and I knew he had been paying attention all along.

Like the participants Berger, Reber and Heyman’s (2007) discussed, public relations practitioners complained that the negative reputation of public relations as a “spin” function worked against their credibility in their organizations. One practitioner’s survey comment exemplified this problem: “My impression is that, while we are making strides, the term "it's just PR," though something less than truthful, remains a barrier to our credibility.” Another said, “Credibility for us with management, it doesn't exist. People care about the bottom line. That's the first letter and last period... regardless of what you find in the middle of the sentence.” Other public relations professionals emphasized the overall need for professionalism in the eyes of the public before it is possible within and organizational setting. For instance, one practitioner maintained: “Right now I suspect we are held in lower regard than the media--probably a tie with politicians in public’s view.”

Although credibility is a necessary condition before once can gain dominant coalition membership, it does not appear to be an effective route to dominant coalition access. The lengths of time for practitioners who relied on this approach ranged from many years to three decades before they said they felt included as a long-term member of the dominant coalition. Credibility and correct analyses over time seem to be the underlying basis for even being considered for potential and eventual access to the dominant coalition, so this is a route best combined by practitioners with other methods of seeking top strategic management inclusion.

**Route 5: Leadership**

The aforementioned hard-to-quantify characteristic of leadership seems to also play an important role in gaining the organizational status in its formalized structure to allow a practitioner the authority and responsibility to be a potential dominant coalition member. Many factors of organizational structure and culture affect which functions and managers are considered leaders in the organization, but the concepts of moral courage or the willingness to offer insightful advice are certainly a significant part of leadership. Although they are perhaps few and far between, there are public relations practitioners occupying this role in dominant coalition in various organizations. One dominant coalition member explained their leadership role in the organization this way: “You know when you are truly considered to be a counselor. That occurs when they allow a senior public relations person to make a crucial decision alone.”

Some practitioners who described their roles as leaders maintained that it was through firm and decisive decision-making ability or a sound sense of judgment that they garnered and held these powerful positions. For instance, one of these executive practitioners declared, “Talk is cheap. Action is all that matters.” The sentiment was common among some of the senior-most dominant coalition members that taking a firm stand on issues was needed to earn a place as an advisor in the dominant coalition. Another respondent explained, “You should disagree, you
should bring things up as counter-points, you should argue these points. That is why you are there – to be the one who says ‘Hold on a minute.’” A self-declared dominant coalition member in a focus group also echoed this sentiment: “There are times when I speak up to say I don’t agree, and the CEO will acknowledge, ‘I didn’t think of that.’ You have to earn your place.”

However, practitioners in the negative case analysis offered numerous instance of being shut-out of strategic decisions at the discretion of the CEO. As a support function in organizations, they often are not able to take up the mantle of leadership, even in times of crisis or ethical dilemmas—those decisions are often made by others and delegated to public relations for implementation. As one participant stated, “In a lot of companies, the public relations department is viewed as an order taker … it’s really up to the C-level execs.”

A plethora of participants reported frustration about not being included in the leadership and strategic decision making of their organizations. For instance, one focus group participant explained, “We are not being involved in long-term planning. We report to management about tactical issues and come up with p.r. initiatives, but don’t influence policy.” Many gave similar analyses, such as the practitioner who said: “I’m not involved in planning for the long term. I can express my opinion but I have no authority in strategic planning.” Others lamented a lack of strategy throughout the organization, such as the participant who said, “The organization does not have any strategic thinking.”

Although it can be an impressive way to enhance authority and credibility with the dominant coalition, a strong sense of leadership is less of a route of access and more a method of gaining credibility with the CEO once access has already been granted. Drawbacks of this route are that having a firm commitment to one’s analyses requires a lot of experience in public relations and confidence that all of the pertinent facts of the situation have been shared. It often takes access to information not privy to the public relations function to make such decisions. Still, leadership skills do play a part in dominant coalition access and inclusion, and perhaps can enhance the ability of public relations professionals to remain in the dominant coalition once access has been granted.

Conclusions and Implications

Implications of identifying these five routes to dominant coalition membership allow scholars to make strategic recommendations to practitioners regarding how to advance their careers and break down the barriers to dominant coalition access and membership that they frequently encounter. This paper explores each of the five routes, offers supporting conceptual theory and data, offering examples of each method of gaining membership, as well as exploring negative aspects of each route. Thus, an attempt is made at contributing to our understanding of the role of public relations and its potential inclusion at the highest level of an organization.

In this study, data from practitioners showed a recurrent pattern of five themes naturally emerging from discussions about dominant coalition access and inclusion: These five themes were labeled the five “routes” to the dominant coalition. They are, in order of apparent effectiveness in the data collected for this study: organizational crisis, ethical dilemma, credibility gained over time, issue high on the media agenda, and leadership. It should be noted that these routes to the dominant coalition can be combined into multiple attempts to gain access or that boundaries can be crossed in situations holding elements of each. For example, on practitioner explained inclusion through ethics, media agenda, and crisis: “We may be able to introduce ethics to business in a crisis recovery situation. We can do something only when it related to media exposure.” It should also be noted that the structural variables described earlier
in this research do vary considerably among organizations and industries, and that those factors
can strongly influence which routes to the dominant coalition are common, available, or effective
for practitioners.

Perhaps no more important variable exists for determining the level of access and
inclusion in a given organization than how the CEO views public relations – as a strategic
management function or as a support staff function. As the excellence study researchers (L.
Grunig et al., 2002) concluded, public relations professionals can increase their chances of
dominant coalition inclusion “via education, experience, and professionalism” (p. 164) but “to be
an excellent department, public relations must be included within the dominant coalition” (p.
157). By gaining access to the strategic decision making core, public relations can increase its
responsibility in the organization, yet practitioners argue that they are often not included in
strategic decision making. This research seeks to fit the conference theme and add value to the
public relations practice by identifying the common and tested means of gaining access to and
eventual membership in the dominant coalition for professional communicators. It is hoped that
public relations practitioners can apply these routes to the dominant coalition in their own careers
to contribute at a higher level to organizational effectiveness and communicative responsibility.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should address questions such as how often public relations practitioners
who self-report dominant coalition membership are included in strategic decision making of
routine decisions and how often they are consulted by the CEO? Additionally, we need to know
how often other dominant coalition members report that public relations is considered a
dominant coalition member, the most effective combinations of the routes identified here in
gaining long-term inclusion, and when and how one knows that one’s advice in the dominant
coalition is taken seriously. To be a strategic advisor across all levels of the organization, public
relations professionals must continue to seek dominant coalition inclusion, and scholars must
continue to study the most effective ways of supporting the field as a member of strategic
management.

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The use of social media sources in the news gathering process and its implications for public relations practitioners: A UK perspective

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Introduction

Studies on news gathering have confirmed that the crux of this process is the exchange of information between public relations practitioners and journalists (Sallot and Johnson, 2005).

However, this paper explores the hypothesis that the growth in use of social media channels by individuals may alter the balance of this information exchange by providing additional – or replacement - resources for journalists to use as part of their news gathering process. The implication of this is that as well as allowing journalists to bypass organizational sources when gathering news, the availability of social media networks may also provide formerly underrepresented audiences with access to mainstream media channels, thus bypassing the organizational routes mediated by public relations practitioners.

In 2003, Shin and Cameron identified that the use by journalists of online sources had grown from 57.2% in 1994 to 95.1% in 1997. While this research concentrated on areas such as company websites and emailed press releases, the “news net” (Tuchman, 1978) could, in 2008, now be argued to encompass sources accessible via a range of social media content such as blogs and podcasts as well as social networking sites, news feeds, wikis, and photo and video sharing sites.

In addition, the rise of ‘citizen journalism’ has seen non-journalists proactively providing pictorial content and comment to news organizations and blogging their views – Allan (2003) claims that such content started to become worthy of recognition as a legitimate news source post 11 September 2001. In addition, services such as RSS and Google Alerts allow journalists to passively receive relevant information from both organizational and non-organizational sources many times each day.

While there have been a number of national and international studies on the use of social media by newsrooms (e.g. Howe, 2006, Beckett, 2007, Lasica, 2003), the experiences of UK-based journalists working for local and regional newspapers and their experience of using social media as part of the news gathering process is under-researched, as is the impact that this shift may have on organizational communications.

This area is worthy of attention simply because of the size and reach of UK regional newspapers. UK regional newspapers sell 3,213,000,000 copies per year (Mintel 2007a). Meanwhile, UK national newspaper sales account for 4,075,000,000 million copies per year (Mintel 2007b).

Methodology

In early 2007 I carried out some quantitative research into journalist use of social media sources for news gathering - in part to develop a dialogue with journalists which could be exploited at a later date. This early research demonstrated that there really wasn’t much understanding or interest in social media among regional newspaper journalists, although a minority were enthusiastic about its potential. Social media was largely seen as a useful tool for
fact-checking (e.g. through Wikipedia) and was not seen as a resource for news gathering. Consequently, the journalists interviewed still relied on official sources – for instance, press officers working for the police, judiciary and local and national government – around which to construct news and meaning for their readers.

Cameron and Shin (2003) found that when journalists use online resources they have “very specific expectations …such as the availability of accurate, up-to-date, and easily searchable information ... Often dependent on the Web for background information to story ideas, most journalists remain skeptical of most Web sites.” These views were confirmed by the journalists in my sample - online sources were simply not trusted or understood.

In late 2007 I undertook a number of in-depth interviews with editors and journalists working for regional newspapers in the UK to discover the effect that social media technologies may be having on their news gathering decisions and whether this was changing the presentation or content of their outlet’s news output.

I was also interested to discover whether the use of social media as a news gathering tool was changing the ways in which public relations practitioners could engage or provide information to journalists – and whether these new sources would replace traditional ones or whether they would they simply patch in the holes in the ‘news net’ by allowing marginalized voices to have a voice in their local media channels alongside the traditional content.

This paper focuses on material collected from three in-depth interviews, covering a spectrum of opinions and experiences and demonstrating the somewhat inconsistent and fractured approach to the use social media technologies among journalists.

**Discussion**

One interviewee had worked for six years as a journalist with a daily regional newspaper in central England. The newspaper was owned by a media group which also has interest in national newspapers, radio and television. This journalist was unable to access most social media sites – including social networking sites and blogs - from his computer at work. Any research that he wanted to do on such sites had to be carried out from home or an internet café. While he felt that his employers had blocked employee use of such sites due to issues of trust, he did not feel negatively towards his employers for their stance and appeared to accept their authority to make decisions on the acceptability of such sites on his behalf. He also questioned the value of such sites for news gathering, in particular highlighting issues such as credibility and trustworthiness.

The second interview subject was editor of a weekly newspaper in the south of England – the Hemel Hempstead Gazette - who had recently returned from a secondment where he introduced digital newsrooms across his newspaper group’s titles; he now manages a fully integrated digital newsroom. My final interviewee was managing editor of an independent media group in the east of England, Lincolnshire Newspapers. This independent media group owns several newspapers and associated online editions.

The managing editor of Lincolnshire Newspapers was enthusiastic about social media content as not just as an additional source of news but as a way of making the newspaper relevant to non-traditional readers of local newspapers – in particular, the younger reader.

He believed that social media technologies could be used to form a dialogue with the reader, thus enabling the newspaper to perform a dual role of both providing entertainment and information *and* capturing stories which could then be used in both the physical and online editions of the newspaper. This takes the approach supported by Collins and Zoch (2001) who
recognized the need for any media form to be “consistent with the individual’s values, needs and past experiences as well as being consistent with the values or norms of the social system in which the individual lives” if it were to engage with them.

The managing editor of Lincolnshire Newspapers felt that social media sources had a ‘huge potential’ in terms of making the online edition of the newspaper relevant to non-traditional readers due to the amount of time that people who were not regular readers of the physical newspaper spent using the internet as an entertainment as well as an information source. Possibly reflecting his more strategic role within the newspaper group, he saw the newspaper as a ‘brand’ and provider of news and entertainment more than a physical printed entity. He believed that seeing the newspaper in this form would allow it to adapt to and survive in an (unknown) future.

Both editors saw the importance of creating a dialogue with on and offline readers to increase the relevance of the newspaper and to involve the community. This appears to be the crux of the issue in terms of using social media as a news source. On the whole, the journalists to whom I spoke didn’t proactively look at blogs, video sharing and social networking sites in the hope of finding something of value – newsroom praxis means that there isn’t time for this (although the Hemel Hempstead Gazette has a reporter who has a ‘virtual beat’). Instead, the journalists preferred the Google Alerts tool (RSS readers taking up too much bandwidth) to discover news relevant to their area drawn from both social media and more traditional online sources. Interestingly, this method allows journalists to unearth stories whose early release would normally only be available via subscription wire services or via rarely-checked organizational sources - the editor of the Hemel Hempstead Gazette cited a business story on local company which came through to them via Google Alerts from the Bloomberg news site – as a result they were able to publish the story on the newspaper website before it was widely broadcast on institutional Internet news channels (such as the BBC) and on TV and radio news.

My research did not demonstrate that newspaper journalists are abandoning organizational content in favour of user-generated content or content derived from social media sources. Instead, it suggested that while social media sources are becoming widely used by some newspapers for news gathering and providing entertainment, there is a tendency to rely on the institutional sources within or cited in these networks. Thus, journalists are able to use material from institutional sources which may until recently not have been easily accessible. Credibility of sources is still seen as important by all the journalists interviewed, which may explain why journalists still prefer to use material deriving from institutional sources. Matheson (2006) claims that a journalist who steps outside a set of journalistic conventions in terms of sources “risks stepping outside the claim to be able to ‘get at the truth’” – thus, even if a story comes as part of a tip-off from an individual or via a personal blog, the journalist would still normally confirm it via an institutional (and thus, possibly public relations-generated) source.

Most user-generated news is not proactively sourced but results from newspapers having an ongoing dialogue with their readers and making the exchange of information as simple as possible. The Hemel Hempstead Gazette’s relationships with its readers, via both its physical and online editions, were such that it received almost 100 pictures in December 2007 when a fire broke out close to the Buncefield Oil depot (where there had been a major fire attracting international media coverage two years before). Meanwhile the Grantham Journal created online and offline stories which actively encouraged reader participation. This included the story of the Grantham Gobbler – a heron (or several herons) caught feeding from residential fishponds, which also used Google Maps in a creative (although not altogether new) way to demonstrate
sightings of the heron. Google Maps was also used by the newspaper to highlight the location of burglaries in the area – much the chagrin of the local police.

The newspapers which saw social media as a source for engaging with readers actively encouraged reader engagement and made it possible for readers to comment on any story. Some even provided a platform for bloggers, thus providing additional resources for journalists in their news gathering as well as providing cheap and easy content for online editions.

The daily newspaper was the only one to heavily restrict and moderate comment in its online edition, for instance by removing the comment feature from court cases and contentious stories. The journalist working for this newspaper believed that people used the newspaper and its website as a source through which readers could acquire information of a certain standard – in his view, unmoderated comment and blogs could lessen the quality of the information provided. He took the view, also voiced by Matheson (2006), that online journalism “depend(ed) upon a different kind of authority …implying discernment, an ability to locate needles in the haystack of the internet and therefore a claim to breadth of knowledge, even comprehensiveness.” Moreover, journalists tend to value the ability to judge what readers should or would want to know as “the expertise that distinguishes them from nonreporters” (Zelizer, 1993).

Thus, despite the increasing amount of news emanating from social media sources, and the increased acceptance of such sources by journalists, this paper argues that this usage does not fundamentally alter the overall institutionalized focus of the newspaper – thus confirming the view of Gilmor (2001) who believed that “a million bloggers and e-mailers here and around the world won’t replace today’s news organizations.”

Despite their claims to attract non-traditional readers, even the more interactive of these newspapers are only in part what Haas (2005) would call “public journalism” …an explicit alternative to mainstream journalism’s deference to dominant commercial and political interests and to public journalism’s mediation of the public interest by professional journalists” - since the newspaper’s structure and content still heavily reliant on organizational sources. My research suggests that ‘public journalism’ is now another area of the reporter’s ‘beat’ and however the newspaper chooses to present its content, the journalist’s institutional sources – and the public relations practitioners who provide the information – are still required in order that journalists navigate a path of solid news through an infinite amount of unregulated comment.

Another interpretation, drawing on writings by Boczkowski (2002) is that any reliance on online sources could work in favour of public relations practitioners if it is the case that online newspaper content is often ‘shovelware’ (unedited content derived from another source) – suggesting that a journalist’s use of online sources actually does not change the relationship between journalist and provider of organizational information (often derived from public relations sources) but may make it a more distant relationship – with the public relations practitioner supplying information to one source which is used second hand (or third, or fourth hand) by other media channels.

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ACHIEVING STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT IN PUBLIC RELATIONS
THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACTION RESEARCH BASED
SOFTWARE PROGRAMME

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INTRODUCTION

In 2002, the authors of this paper met at the 9th BledCom International Public Relations (PR) Research Symposium that took place in Slovenia in conjunction with the European PR Education and Research Association’s Annual Congress (EUPRERA). The topic of this seminal event was “The Status of Public Relations Knowledge in Europe and Around the World”. This meeting led to the pooling of their research and ongoing research collaboration during the past five years to further develop the prototype of a comprehensive software program for the management of the PR function (Steyn & Bütschi, 2003, 2004; Bütschi & Steyn, 2006).

The authors are in agreement with Fawkes and Tench (2004) that theory is at the heart of defining the field of public relations/corporate communication and coherent theoretical structures can only be developed by academic investigation. Academics should therefore engage in theory building in order to produce new models, concepts and theories relevant to 21st century PR practice. They should be innovative, think outside the box, adopt ‘risky’ research strategies and try out new methods. Furthermore, in Bütschi and Steyn (2006), the authors expressed the opinion that academia should lead and support industry with their innovative solutions to practical problems, work closely with practitioners and form partnerships with industry. Problems in practice should be the inspiration for, and the testing ground of, new theories directed towards increased efficiency and effectiveness in public relations.

The major driving force for the development of the comprehensive software solution was thus to bridge the gap between PR scholarship and PR practice, graphically described by Van Ruler (2004) as PR professionals being from Venus and PR scholars from Mars. It is an effort to introduce and make accessible to practitioners and their managements (some important theories that form part of) the substantial body of knowledge in the PR domain usually not known to those without a tertiary education in the field. Strategy formulation, stakeholder engagement, issues management and evaluation are examples of processes developed in the software to apply these theories.

BACKGROUND ON THE SOFTWARE

The content of the software is strongly grounded in theory. It is based on academic publications and research studies in the PR field, as well as primary research conducted by the PR specialists in the developer team themselves. The latter includes research conducted before the software development started as well as an ongoing action research project to develop PR processes together with participant organizations for use in the software.
The software is being developed by a team of three PR specialists, supported by three IT specialists. All three PR specialists have a background in academia as well as practice. Dr Gerhard Bütschi from Switzerland (Author 1) is the project leader (having developed the software prototype based on his doctoral thesis) and builds the bridges between public relations and information technology. Benita Steyn from South Africa (Author 2) acts as the main theoretical and strategic advisor. Another South African PR consultant/practitioner/academic, Retha Groenewald, has mainly been responsible for content development, applying theory to practice.

The point of departure in developing the software was to provide practitioners not only with a sophisticated database and information management tool, but a digital planning tool for synchronising communication plans with enterprise and functional strategies as well as a coordination tool to monitor, track and control plan execution. It was to be a resources tool for managing people, time and money; a measurement tool for evaluating communication outcomes; a knowledge tool for best-practice benchmarking; and a learning tool for those who have not had the privilege of public relations education. For this reason, the software consists of two views/modes: (i) an explanation (theory) view that is supplemented by a glossary containing 630 terms and (ii) a data-entry view.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the software program offers eight core functions to enhance and optimise the organization’s communication performance:

**Figure 1: Eight core processes/functions supported by the software**

- The **Organization** function enables users to configure/customise the software to meet organisational needs. This process creates a virtual mirror of the user’s organization.
- Resources to create/implement programmes and plans, and evaluate
strategies/plans.

- **Stakeholders**: All groups affected by the decisions or behaviours of the organization, or whose decisions or behaviours impact the organization, are listed and described.

- **Strategies and Plans**: Formulating enterprise and communication strategy, developing communication plans and activities.

- **All Communication Channels**: available to the organization are listed and described.

- **Implementation**: Communication projects, budgets, and resources are coordinated, monitored and controlled through real time oversight.

- **Evaluation**: Methods and metrics are selected and applied to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of communication strategies, projects, plans and activities.

- **Reports**: Data are **consolidated** and reports prepared on predetermined schedules or ad hoc bases.

**PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES OF THIS PAPER**

A major criticism of the PR function is that it is not functioning on, or making a strategic contribution at the macro organizational level (Likely, 2002; Steyn, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2003a). Instead its practitioners seem focused on the tactical (implementation) level, developing communication plans and activities that are not always communicating key organizational priorities or achieving strategic goals; and often are not linked to, or focused on, solving key reputation risks and other strategic issues (Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997; Steyn, 2000a, 2000c, 2003a). Likely (2002) argues that it is no longer enough to be a good manager or even a great leader – senior PR practitioners and consultants must be legitimate strategists. However, it is difficult to find truly strategic senior PR managers. Groenewald (1998) concurs and found that there are gaps in skills and competencies amongst PR managers, especially at the strategic level.

According to Likely (2002), collective understanding of concepts like strategy or strategic management appears to be limited in the PR field. Not only is a strategy different from a plan, but strategy should also not follow the research/SWOT analysis and communication objectives in the communication planning template. Real strategy deliberations occur BEFORE the communication objectives are established. Furthermore, PR managers should/can contribute to the organization’s deliberate and emergent strategy, in addition to the unit/function’s operational strategy.

MacNamara (2006) is of the opinion that PR practitioners do not evaluate and measure their work, despite demand by management to do so. They cite their reasons as not having the money or time to do so. More fundamentals reasons are probably that professional development programmes and university courses are oriented towards practical skills development rather than teaching students ‘the theory of the business they are in’.

The findings of a study by Fawkes and Tench (2004) indicate an expectation by corporations for PR practitioners to accomplish more with less, i.e. to be more productive. There is an opportunity in the constant escalation of the volume of work for professional development and cross-fertilization of skills in order to make each PR practitioner more capable in all functional areas.

Toni Muzi Falconi (2004, p. 3), previous Chair of the Global Alliance, regards it as a major challenge for practitioners to be “more accountable for their day to day work, managing
with competent, sober and accurate care, the increasingly relevant resources assigned to them.” If PR is a management function, it should value and measure its employed resources against objectives -- in terms of efficiency as well as effectiveness. The findings of a survey in the UK also point in this direction, criticising the PR function’s inability to manage assigned resources efficiently.

In the opinion of the authors, every functional area in the organization - be it core operations or support -must respond to a continuously changing environment by constantly innovating and adapting its contribution to overall organizational effectiveness. Recent developments such as a focus on the triple bottom line, social responsibility, transparent communication and reputation risk management pave the way for PR to gain prominence, but practitioners are slow in taking advantage of this window of opportunity – possibly because they lack training, expertise and experience in the total communication function. They don’t fulfill the expectations of top management who increasingly expect them to be pro-active and play a strategic role at the macro organizational level by interpreting strategic issues and providing strategic guidance with regards to stakeholder communication (Steyn, 2000a, 2000c, 2003a; Steyn, in Toth, 2007, p.138). These issues are at the core of an effective contribution by the PR function.

In essence, many of the problems experienced in practice are theoretical problems (Steyn, 2000a). It is becoming increasingly obvious that a redefinition of the field is required. The PR function is in need of a new paradigm—a new pattern of thinking about and studying organizational and communication problems, and of evaluating practice (Steyn & Bütschi, 2004). A strategic approach is suggested by the authors as being one such an alternative. Theory is needed on how PR is to break through the strategy barrier to higher levels of strategic thinking and conceptualisation; its role in contributing to enterprise strategy; the activities to be performed by a practitioner in the role of the strategist; and on the development of PR strategy that supports enterprise/corporate strategy (Bütschi & Steyn, 2006).

Employing technology as a strategic tool to achieve functional synchronisation and vertical alignment--aligning reputational risks and other strategic issues with communication plans--also merit researchers’ attention. Technology is not sufficiently harnessed in the PR field. The few software solutions that are available are stand-alone solutions without process and system integration. There is also a lack of single database and management reports in the field of public relations. That might be one of the reasons why it is difficult for PR practitioners to prove their worth, or to come up with strategic information when needed by their top managements. This strengthens the perception that public relations is a technical activity without strategic value.

It would benefit PR practitioners to heed the advice of leaders such as the former Secretary General of the International Communications Consultancy Organization (ICCO) in stating: “The PR industry – including both inhouse and agency practitioners – is possibly now at the furthest point of divergence from the rest of the organization and must re-align so as to win the respect of senior management” (Quarendon, 2003, p. 3).

Based on the practical and theoretical problems stated above, the research objective addressed in this paper was to develop a process for, and use technology (the software) as a tool to facilitate the achievement of, vertical strategic alignment between the PR function’s activities and the organization’s reputation risks and strategic issues/goals/priorities. (Processes such as evaluation and horizontal alignment between the PR function and other organizational functions/units which are related to this research objective and facilitated by the software, do NOT form part of the research objectives of this study).
ACTION RESEARCH AS METHODOLOGY

With regards to the rationale for using action research, the social basis can be regarded as *involvement* while the educational basis is *improvement*—using action research implies/demands *changes* (McNiff, 1988, pp. 3-4). Classic action research was thus the ideal vehicle for the development of the strategic alignment process in the software since it is a way in which knowledge about a social system (strategic alignment within public/private/non-profit organizations) can be generated to develop a process for strategically aligning PR and embedding it within the software program while at the same time attempting to change the participant organization (i.e. to institutionalise new theoretical PR principles and processes).

One of the main tenets of action research is to improve practice and understand the process of improving practice (Stenhouse, 1975). Action research implies participation and suggests a particular complementary relationship between action and research, with the researcher(s) and participant community each contributing valuable resources. The participants in this action research study were the team of three PR specialists and organizations where the project has been piloted and used.

According to Smith (1988), the element of a research study is the basic unit or ‘thing’ about which information is collected. In this project, the element was the vertical strategic alignment process, and its incorporation into the software. With regards to the time dimension of the action research, the design is longitudinal since data generation was distributed over an extended period of time (Cooper & Emory, 1995, p. 116).

In action research, it is more accurate to speak of data generation than data collection, because most qualitative perspectives would reject the idea that a researcher can be a completely neutral collector of information about the social world. Instead, the researcher is seen as actively constructing knowledge about that world according to certain (theoretical) principles. Qualitative studies often combine several data generation methods over the course of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). As was the case with the development of the software in general, this specific study employed secondary research (academic publications and research findings) and primary research (participation, elite interviewing and review of documents). Data generation occurred under actual environmental conditions (a field setting).

There is no general formula for doing action research--*action and research* takes place alternatively in an ongoing learning process for everyone involved. The repeated cycle of research and action produces a process of ongoing learning for all the participants. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995, p. 59) suggest five stages in the action research process:

**Stage 1: Implementation begins with a period of research where the resources and needs of a community are systematically assessed and the necessary information to guide action is gathered.**

Based on secondary research (discussed in the problem statement) as well as a major quantitative study by Author 2 (Steyn, 2000b), the researchers became aware that a major dissatisfaction of organizational management was the fact that the PR function was focused on their own activities and techniques, and not regarded as providing solutions to key organizational problems (Esler, 1996; Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997; Likely, 2002). A review of the PR and strategic management literature was thus undertaken to find solutions to the problem of linking PR with the strategic management process and making it part of strategic decision making to assist in achieving organizational goals.
Stage 2: Some kind of action is undertaken together by the action research partners.
Based on the authors’ publications and other secondary sources, a process for vertically aligning communication activities with key organizational issues/priorities/goals was mapped and a framework developed, and this was incorporated in the software and applied in a hypothetical case study.

Stage 3: Thereafter the results of the action are to be assessed.
The framework was implemented in multiple participant organizations and the case study used to obtain understanding of the process in the various participant organizations.

Stage 4: A further period of research (of an evaluative nature) is initiated.
The process of vertical strategic alignment in the various participant organizations was compared and an evaluation undertaken across the participant community.

Stage 5: Depending upon the results of the research, it may be necessary to develop or completely redesign the original action undertaken.
Changes were made to the alignment process between objectives at the Communication Plan (3rd) level of the software and deliverables at the Communication Activity (4th) level. Except for the redesign of the aforementioned, the process has proven to be robust.

META-THEORETICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
It must be noted that the process of vertical strategic alignment is embedded in a comprehensive software program, the latter grounded in a synthesis of meta-theoretical approaches and theories, as indicated in Figure 2 below. A short explication of the various approaches will be provided before discussing the relevant theories such as strategic alignment which is the major focus of this research project.

5.1 Meta-theoretical framework

• Triple bottom line approach to strategic management (Niemann, in progress): The contribution of PR to strategic decision making focuses on the People and Planet components of the Triple Bottom Line, rather than the Profit component.

• Stakeholder and issues approach to strategic management (Freeman, 1984): Stakeholders are not only those groups that management thinks have some stake in the firm, but also those groups that themselves think they have a stake. An analysis of societal issues and trends is important because the values and beliefs of key stakeholders are derived from broader societal influences.

• Corporate social performance (CSP) approach to the role of business in society (Carroll, 1996): What is really important is not what organizations think they should do or the systems they put in place to act socially responsible, but what they can accomplish with regards to specifying the nature of their responsibilities, adopting a particular philosophy of responsiveness and identifying the stakeholder issues to which these responsibilities are tied.
• In a **societal approach** (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2002), public relations is a strategic process of viewing an organization from an ‘outside’ or public perspective – showing a special concern for broader societal issues, approaching any problem with a concern for implications of organizational behaviour towards and in the public sphere.

### 5.2 Theories in the PR domain

• **Mutual reflection** (Holmström, 1996) is the central concept of the European reflective paradigm, consisting of two tasks for PR: The *reflective task* in inward communication is (i) to select information from the public communication system on what is considered socially responsible behaviour in the public sphere and transmit it to the organization; and (ii) to encourage organizational members to balance their behaviour in relation to the expectations of public opinion. The *expressive task* in outward communication is (i) to create and provide regular, widely distributed information (based on reflection) on behalf of the organization, for use in the processes of public communication; (ii) to ensure that the public communication system operates with a socially responsible image of the organization; (iii) to help strengthen public trust in the organization; and (iv) to achieve greater understanding, empathy and support for the organization.

Figure 2: Theoretical framework of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta-theoretical framework</th>
<th>Triple Bottom Line Approach to Strategic Management (Niemann, in progress)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stakeholder and Issues Approach to Strategic Management (Freeman, 1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate Social Performance (CSP) Approach to Role of Business in Society (Carroll, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Societal Approach to Public Relations (Van Ruler &amp; Vercic, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domain</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical framework</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Holmström, 1996)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressive task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic PR Roles Theory</td>
<td>Strategic Alignment (Puth, 2002):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Steyn, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2003a):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR Strategist, Manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Technician roles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levels of PR Strategy</td>
<td>Planning terminology (Steyn, 2000a; Steyn &amp; Puth, 2000):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulation (Steyn, 2000a, 2000b; Steyn, in Toth, 2007; Worrall &amp; Steyn, 2006):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR function’s contribution to Enterprise Strategy formulation (macro level)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Concept</td>
<td>Strategic Alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR Strategy formulation (meso or functional level)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation Strategy (micro or operational level)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication planning concept (Bütschi, 1997; 1999):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- According to strategic PR roles theory (Steyn, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2003a), there are three roles for public relations practitioners: The PR strategist functions at the top management or macro organizational level; the PR manager functions at the meso or functional organizational level; and the PR technician at the micro or implementation level.

- **Levels of PR strategy formulation**: (i) The PR strategist makes a contribution to enterprise strategy formulation at the macro organizational level; (ii) the PR manager develops PR strategy at the meso level (including deliberate PR strategy that addresses the communication regarding key organizational positions/goals, as well as emergent PR strategy that addresses the communication needed/identified in the stakeholder and issues management processes); and the PR technician develops implementation strategy at the micro level (Steyn, 2000a, 2000b; Steyn, in Toth, 2007; Worrall & Steyn, 2006).

- **Communication planning concept**: Planning in the various communication functions/sub-functions is strongly influenced by the structure of the organization's communication planning function and its planning infrastructure. Three categories of variables that influence and determine the outcome of a given planning process and the success of all communication efforts are the following:
  - **The plan system**, which includes variables such as differences between planning areas, levels, plan horizons, hierarchies, and relationships among them.
  - The **planning organization**, which is really the management tier. It includes the formal planning function itself, planning responsibilities, plan review, and planning time schedules.
  - The **planning methods**, which is the action component of the planning process. It includes information resources, methods, tools, and evaluation techniques to be used. If an organization's plan system, planning organization and planning methods have indefinite validity, then the organization has a planning concept (Bütschi, 1997; 1999).

5.3 **Theories in the strategic management domain**
• **Levels of strategy formulation:** *Enterprise strategy* is the broadest level of strategy, known as societal-role strategy. It is the strategy level where the political legitimacy of the organization is addressed and involves the issues of how a corporation fits itself into the social environment and the body politic. It describes the level of strategic thinking necessary for organizations to be fully responsive to today’s complex and dynamic social environment, and influences the organization’s relationships with its environment, particularly the stakeholders. *Enterprise strategy* denotes the joining of ethical and strategic thinking about the organization, and has to do with the achievement of *non-financial goals*. *Corporate strategy* includes defining the set of businesses that should form the organization’s overall profile (e.g. taking decisions on mergers and acquisitions, strategic alliances, joint ventures) and focuses on the achievement of *financial goals*. *Business-unit strategy* defines an organization’s approach to competing in its chosen market/product/industry segment, and is *marketing oriented*. *Functional strategy* contains the details of how the functional areas should work together to achieve higher-level strategies and is most closely associated with strategy implementation. At the *operational level*, strategies are translated into action -- maximising the *productivity of resources* (Steyn, 2003b; Steyn, in Toth, 2007).

• **Strategic alignment** theory (Puth, 2002) presupposes that there is a *strategic line* – a clear overall strategic direction, intent, and a set of desired outcomes – that business units, divisions, and eventually every individual in an organization can align their actions to. The second implicit assumption of strategic alignment is that everyone is aware of this strategic line and that it is sufficiently ‘visible’ for alignment to take place. Successful organizations demonstrate a consistent pattern of achieving strategic alignment and focus.

• **Planning terminology** (Steyn & Puth, 2000)
  
  **Goal:** The broad outcome the organization wants to achieve; the end-state. Goals involve longer-term or continuing results, and do not have a specific time frame.
  
  **Objective:** Specific outcomes within the framework of the broader goals, the measurable steps by which one can judge whether the goal is being achieved. They relate to specific targets and time periods.
  
  **Strategy:** A rationale for all the actions aimed at achieving the organization’s goals, providing a framework/approach to guide and explain all activities.
  
  **Tactics:** The action plans by which strategy is implemented to achieve the organization’s goals and objectives.
Figure 3: Vertical strategic alignment process for BlueSky sample firm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise Strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identified Risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception: Bluesky has turned its back on educational problems.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For BlueSky to retain its reputation as a good corporate citizen by setting the record straight with regards to its withdrawal of resources from the educational sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do care about education, but we also have a responsibility towards our clients as a key strategic stakeholder in our business.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Plan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To provide information on the BlueSky Foundation and other BlueSky activities for the common good (such as the educational initiatives by the Innovation Centres) to key stakeholders at regular intervals during the months of April 2005 to March 2006 (informational objective).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To create/reinforce a positive attitude towards BlueSky as a responsible corporate citizen (attitudinal objective).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To prevent mistrust between BlueSky and the Department of Education (UK) or any other beneficiary of educational projects and/or to regain their trust during the timeframe April 2005 to August 2005 (behavioural objective).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deliverables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To produce a high quality sustainable development report in line with international best practices and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To set an example of honesty and openness in reporting (clarity on what has and has not been achieved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To reach the majority of BlueSky's primary stakeholders with the report and a customised/personalised cover letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To compile at least 15 case studies with anecdotal evidence of how BlueSky projects have impacted on the quality of life of these individuals or groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study are summarised in Figure 3 below. The four levels of strategy embedded in the software are portrayed by the four orange cylinders namely Enterprise Strategy (es), Communication Strategy (cs), Communication Plan (cp) and Communication Activities (ca). A case in the software on the sample firm BlueSky demonstrates the process of vertical strategic alignment between the four levels.

The case describes BlueSky as a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, committed to delivering innovation. BlueSky collaborates with its clients in co-creating a future characterised by high-performance and sustainable growth. They leverage leading-edge technologies and tools to identify new opportunities for business growth and to drive business process improvements. Extracts from this case denoting the concepts that effect vertical strategic alignment and their application to BlueSky are also presented in Figure 3.

These concepts are the following: Risks (Enterprise Strategy level), Issues and Goals (Communication Strategy level), Objectives (Communication Plan level) and Deliverables (Communication Activity level). The software automatically hands down the risks (identified in the Enterprise Strategy development process) to the Communication Strategy (2nd) level to be managed as issues. In the Communication Strategy development process, communication goals (and themes) are identified, for which communication objectives are developed at the Communication Planning (3rd) level. Deliverables (and tasks) to achieve objectives are identified at the Communication Activity (4th) level.

The arrows in Figure 3 above thus represent a vertical strategic line for the sample firm BlueSky -- starting with an identified risk at top level (a negative perception that ‘BlueSky has turned its back on educational problems’) through all the levels, culminating in activities (and tasks) at the lowest level that are intended to solve the problem/mitigate the risk. This alignment process in the software ensures that PR practitioners can demonstrate which organizational risk/issue their lower level activities are addressing, thus providing evidence of the value added by the PR function.

Figure 4: Top-down / bottom-up alignment
Figure 4 indicates how strategy formulation, planning and execution rolls down the vertical strategic line, as explained above. Although the evaluation process does not form part of the research objectives of this study, it is indicated below how evaluation rolls up the same strategic line since it entrenches the strategic alignment process. To elaborate on the summary on the strategic alignment process above, a number of screen shots from each level in the software are now presented. For reasons of brevity, and to achieve the specific research objectives of this study, only those steps that form the core of the strategic vertical alignment process at the different levels will be demonstrated, as applied to the sample firm BlueSky.

6.1 **Enterprise Strategy level**

The first (highest) level of strategy in the software is the Enterprise Strategy (es), consisting of seven steps (see left menu bar Figure 5). This screen shot illustrates the Data Entry View/Mode of the software. All seven steps can also be viewed in the Explanation View/Mode, which provides the theoretical background for the step.

**Figure 5: Steps in Enterprise Strategy Formulation and Reputation Risk Register**

![Figure 5](image)

Step 2 of the Enterprise Strategy formulation process (‘Identify Risks’) is the step that starts the strategic line at the top organizational level. In the centre screen, a list of identified risks for the sample firm BlueSky can be viewed. The last risk (circled) namely *Perception:*
BlueSky has turned its back on educational problems is the risk that has been selected by the authors to demonstrate the strategic alignment process followed in the software. When a user clicks on the Edit button next to the circled risk, the following screen prompts the user to further analyse the identified risk:

Figure 6: Enterprise Strategy – Reputation Risk Details

The Description of the Risk as portrayed in the centre of the screenshot above provides more detail on the emerging problem. To better understand the goals, objectives and deliverables that flow from this risk at lower levels, an extract from the Description is given:

... Reduced investment in innovation has impacted negatively on BlueSky’s Innovation Centers. To avoid a loss making situation the Innovation Centers made their knowledge, skills and facilities available at break-even rates to the UK Department of Education to assist in creating solutions for some of its toughest educational problems—thus enhancing BlueSky’s social performance. However, now that some of the world’s major economies are showing promising signs of recovery, the appetite for innovation has been rising again and BlueSky resources are being channeled to corporate clients again. This withdrawal of resources from educational projects has been met by negative press coverage, creating a perception that BlueSky is neglecting its corporate social responsibility in pursuit of higher profits...

BlueSky’s Strategic Approach to this situation, as indicated in the screenshot above, is the following: Engage with the relevant stakeholders to reassure them of BlueSky’s commitment to education. Communicate the sensitivity of the matter to employees. Enlarge the involvement of the BlueSky Foundation in education related projects.
6.2 **Communication Strategy level**

The second level of strategy in the software is the Communication Strategy (cs), consisting of eight steps (see left menu bar in Figure 7 below).

**Figure 7: Communication Strategy – Issue Map**

This screenshot above illustrates the Data Entry View/Mode of the software. Steps 1 and 3 of the Communication Strategy formulation process (‘Develop Deliberate Goals’ and ‘Develop Emergent Goals’) are the steps that represent the strategic alignment process started at the Enterprise Strategy level.

- **Deliberate** communication goals are the outcomes of deliberate communication strategy formulation, referring to the communication surrounding key strategic priorities and organizational positions/goals identified at the top management level. For reasons of brevity, this process will not be illustrated here.

- **Emergent** communication goals are the outcomes of emergent communication strategy formulation, referring to issues and concerns that recently emerged in the organization’s stakeholder and issues management processes and are not yet included in the planned communication re key strategic priorities and organizational positions. In the centre screen of the figure below, the identified risk (circled) that was handed down automatically by the software as an issue to be managed by the PR function on the Communication Strategy level namely *Perception: BlueSky has turned its back on educational problems* can be viewed. (According to an issue typology used in the software, this issue was identified as an Organizational Issue Type 1: Communication is not the cause of the problem, but can provide a solution e.g. organizational change such as transformation or mergers).
The following screen shot provides examples of an emergent communication goal and theme that addresses the reputation risk identified at the Enterprise Strategy level, and the list of stakeholders affected. Step 3 thus demonstrates the strategic alignment process on the Communication Strategy (2nd) level.

**Figure 8: Emergent communication goals and themes that address the identified reputation risk, and the stakeholders affected by the issue.**

A reference to evaluation being rolled up the same strategic line as strategy formulation and planning was made earlier. Deciding “what to measure” (the *metrics*) is often the most challenging part of evaluation. Step 6 in the Communication Strategy formulation process is designed to guide the user through important planning decisions to be made well in advance of the actual evaluation. Step 7 guides the user in planning the evaluation *methods* and specifying the tasks to be evaluated. Step 8 in the process commissions planning on the subsequent level namely the Communication Planning (3rd) level.

### 6.3 Communication Plan

Figure 9 indicates the Communication Plan selected (“*We Care*”) to address the previously identified *risk* and communication *goals* on higher levels. Step 3 on the Communication Planning level (To set *objectives*) is the step that provides the link to the goals...
set on the previous level. The centre screen displays the objectives, target audiences and messages for this communication plan.

As can be seen in Steps 8 and 9, evaluation metrics and methods are once again set during planning so as to facilitate evaluation rolling up the same strategic line. In Step 10, activities for the “We Care” project is generated.

**Figure 9: Formulating objectives on the communication plan (3rd) level**

6.4 **Communication Activity**

The fourth level in the software is the Communication Activity level (ca), consisting of five steps (see left menu bar in Figure 10). Step 1 of the Communication Activity development process (Define Deliverables) is the step that represents the strategic alignment process that started at the Enterprise Strategy level and ends at this 4th level. The screen shot below indicates the BlueSky Sustainability Development Report as the vehicle used to report on the social performance of the BlueSky company, according to international guidelines. It shows the Deliverables for this Activity.

**Figure 10: Defining Deliverables for the Communication Activity “BlueSky Sustainable Development Report**
The following screen shot (Figure 11) indicates the Tasks set under Step 3 of the Communication Activity, as well as the start and end dates, responsibility and budget. It is once again important to note Step 4 (Set Evaluation Metrics) and Step 5 (Set Evaluation Methods) that form part of the Communication Activity level and facilitates evaluation rolling up the same strategic line.

Figure 11: Setting tasks for the production of the BlueSky Sustainable Development Report
CONCLUSIONS

A software solution has been developed that (inter alia) embeds the process of effecting vertical strategic alignment between the PR function’s activities and the organization’s reputation risks/strategic issues/goals/priorities at macro level.

The software contributes to effectiveness by linking communication strategy to enterprise strategy; enhancing reputation, issues and stakeholder management; setting measurable communication goals and objectives; gaining continuous improvement through organizational learning; and measuring and reporting output and impact gains. It contributes to efficiency by avoiding duplication and redundancy; optimising virtual teamwork; improving budgeting and cost control; managing people, processes and funds; and measuring/reporting the use of funds. It contributes to transparency and control by vertical (and horizontal) plan alignment; demonstrating communication contributions to business objectives; meaningful management reports and a powerful knowledge database.

In order to achieve strategic alignment, multiple variables have to be managed on different levels organization-wide. The use of technology greatly facilitates this process. However, the real value of the software in achieving strategic alignment (and other key strategic goals and processes) lies in having harnessed theory for every-day use by PR practitioners – not only existing theory, but the development of new theory through research that matters to, and is needed in, practice. Making theory practical through a software solution enables PR practitioners to increasingly show their value and demonstrate a strategic contribution to their organizations.

The authors believe that the software solution is a vehicle to reconcile academia with industry, theory with practice. That is, it has brought Mars and Venus within easy reach of each other to the benefit of both.

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Introduction

Grief is a powerful emotion, characterized by one researcher as the “yearning and searching” for recollections of the deceased that are frequent and “bittersweet.” (Ng, 355). When amplified through media lens, the apparatus of grief can be a powerful tool for defining, mobilizing and constructing a community of publics through shared experiences. These publics, though singularly defined through a unique sense of shared loss, can nevertheless provide important insights into the strategic ways in which “audience” can define issues in lieu of organization. (Edwards) Inherently rhetorical, Aristotle described the grief-text of public loss as a form of epideictic oratory, in which men offer “praise or blame.” (1358b)

The national picture about violent crimes is multilayered and complex. A handful of key sources track the statistics as reported by law enforcement agencies or documented through citizen surveys. The most significant source is the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), which is an agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. Since 1973, the Bureau of Justice Statistics has annually administered the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) which generates data citizens’ crime victim experiences in all types of crime, including violent incidents, and those not previously reported to law enforcement. Another important source is the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) program, comprising data that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) compiles from nearly 17,000 law enforcement agencies throughout the country. According to this national agency, homicide, or murder, is more assiduously studied at the national level than any other category of crime. What the numbers reveal are patterned ebbs and flows of murderous assaults against people over the decades, statistically documenting both national apexes and lows.

In 1978, a bereaved couple founded the beginnings of a national organization, Parents of Murdered Children Inc. [POMC], to cope with the devastating loss and murder of their daughter. According to its current website, POMC exists not only to help survivors deal with “acute grief” but also strives to influence and impact the criminal justice system favorably regarding issues relevant to such survivors. After 25 years, the organization has grown from a handful of family members meeting in a home, to a broad-based alliance of over 100,000 members in more than 300 chapters.

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4 See Bureau of Justice Statistics web site, http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/
5 See the National Crime Victimization Survey web site, http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/cocon/NACJD/SERIES/00095.xml
7 Parents of Murdered Children, “history of POMC (25Years),” http://www.pomc.com/history.cfm
In 1978, when POMC began, the homicide rate per every 100,000 persons was 9 percent, compared to the 2005 rate of 5.6 percent, according to BJS figures. But, during the 27 years of this reporting cycle, the nation experienced a record-breaking period of violent assaults, reflecting a 1980 homicide rate of 10.2 percent that hovered within a percentage point or two through 1983. In 1982, Houston, Texas mirrored this trend with one of the highest murder rates in the nation, as it became the site of a nationally publicized case of serial murder of women and victim outrage, the Coral Watts case. Watts, convicted of no more serious an offense than aggravated assault despite his taped confessions of murder, faced time limits on his term of imprisonment in Texas. Consequently, members of the Houston chapter of the POMC used intermittent media tactics to raise public awareness about this case over several years. In 2002, near the 20th anniversary of the 1982 Watts trial, this grassroots organization hosted a special event aimed at calling attention to pending early release of Watts from a Texas prison. The resulting publicity from “A Call to Action” generated national media coverage and eventually led to Watts’ conviction on other crimes.

However, since the era in which POMC began, there has been a formalization of violent crime victims and their families as distinctive “interpretive” communities. The National Organization for Victim Assistance, established in 1975, is the oldest advocacy and support group. In 1984, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) created the federally funded Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) in the U.S. Department of Justice. And in 1985, the National Center for Victims of Crime established itself as a non-profit advocacy and support group, and now considers itself to be the “nation’s leading resource and advocacy organization for crime victims.” Most recently, the OVC has launched an “oral history project” whose goal is to document the story of the victims’ rights movement through multimedia texts. This growing archive is housed at the University of Akron.

Research Inquiry

Often thrust into the media’s glare suddenly as the result of an unexpected tragedy, crime victim survivors often develop a “love-hate” relationship with the media. They resent the unwanted intrusions into their private lives, while at the same time learn to rely upon the media for information and influence. Exploring how crime victims transition from unaware, to aware, to active publics through the interface with an advocacy group, such as POMC, are there unique characteristics about how this “public” constructs itself, and how that construction, in turn, influences how it engages in public relations efforts strategically through advocacy groups and organizations for crime victims? Is there a distinguishing rhetorical construct through which crime victims advocate communicate their messages?

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Future research

“Imagining the Victim” reflects one way in which a narrative is constructed that focuses on the victims’ lives and future potential, while minimizing the violent ways in which they died. “Imagining the victim” becomes both an individual and communal script, one that provides individual solace for grief, while reinforcing a shared text of praise, blame and consolation (see Edwards, Kent). For the profession, the structures of mediated grief may point to ways in which the problem of motivating a public to action may be found in audience experience.

Bibliography


Consumer Response to Mattel Product Recalls: 
Exploring the Concept of Involvement
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Abstract
Involvement is hardly a new concept in communication and consumer research. Surprisingly, however, little research exists on the role of consumer involvement in crisis situations (e.g., crisis responsibility, organizational reputation). To fill that void, the present study examines two hypotheses: 1) There is a difference between how highly involved consumers perceived the 2007 Mattel product recalls and how national daily newspapers covered those recalls in terms of crisis responsibility and reputation; 2) The frequency of emotion (e.g., anger) manifested among highly involved consumers will increase over time. A content analysis of the bulletin boards for two parent online communities and a content analysis of four major daily newspapers were conducted. The data were consistent with the hypotheses proposed. Practical and theoretical implications of the findings are discussed.

Crisis communication research has produced a body of literature that informs public relations managers how best to respond to a crisis. Some scholars have contributed to establishing the range of crisis response strategies (e.g., Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Benoit, 1992; Hobbs, 1995; Ice, 1991), whereas other scholars have explored how to match crisis response strategies to crisis types (e.g., Benoit, 1995; Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Coombs, 2004; Coombs, 2000; Coombs, 1999; Coombs, 1998; Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Hearit, 1996; Huang, 2006). Most notable of these is the development of situational crisis communication theory (SCCT, Coombs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). SCCT examines how a crisis situation influences crisis response strategies and how response strategies affect crisis responsibility, organizational reputation, and behavioral intention. A great deal of previous research has been devoted to how an organization should strategically choose its crisis response strategies, whereas little attention has been given to consumer variables, such as the responses of potentially affected publics (e.g., emotion, involvement), and how those responses can influence the dynamics of SCCT.

In recent years, a growing number of studies have explored consumer emotions in crises (e.g., Choi & Lin, in press; Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Coombs, Fediuk, & Holladay, 2007). The concept of involvement has just started to attract the attention of crisis communication researchers (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2005). Coombs and Holladay (2005) suggest that consumer involvement may influence emotions and crisis responsibility, which they argue, might result in a modification of SCCT. Some scholars argue that involvement is a determinant of the outcome of a company crisis (McDonald & Härtel, 2000), as consumer involvement will influence attribution (e.g., crisis responsibility), modify emotion intensity (Folkes, Koletsky & Graham, 1987), and influence crisis information processing and behaviors, such as purchases.
Involvement also affects the amount of attention and elaboration in message processing (Celsi & Olson, 1988), and consumers with high involvement were found to generate more counterarguments than were those consumers with low involvement (Wright, 1974).

In crisis situations, public relations professionals often pay major attention to how media portray the specific crisis the professionals are monitoring, and there is an assumption that publics will perceive a crisis according to how media portray the crisis. However, a body of research in involvement suggests that variations in consumer involvement can modify media effects (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979), and that consumers with high involvement are more likely to scrutinize and elaborate crisis information and generate more counterarguments, as they process the crisis information covered in newspapers. As previous studies suggest (e.g., Celsi & Olson, 1988; Folkes, Koletsky & Graham, 1987; McDonald & Härtel, 2000; Peter & Olson, 1990; Wright, 1974), if highly involved consumers are more likely to scrutinize information, process information more thoroughly, elaborate more, and generate more counterarguments when they process crisis information, it is reasonable to expect that there will be more differences than similarities between how mass media interpreted the 2007 Mattel product recalls and how highly involved consumers perceived the same recalls.

From both a theoretical and a practical standpoint, this is an important research question to be tested. The extent to which involvement influences key variables in SCCT (e.g., attribution, reputation) will likely provide an opportunity to improve the precision of the SCCT model and sophisticate crisis response strategies by offering involvement as a key variable to use to segment publics (e.g., high/low involved publics) during crisis communication.

Involvement is hardly a new concept in communication and consumer research. Over the past 60 years, the concept of involvement has proved to be useful in such research (Salmon, 1986). Surprisingly, however, little research exists that explores the role of consumer involvement in crisis situations.

The present study attempts to fill that void by content analyzing how consumers with high involvement (i.e., parents of young children) responded to the 2007 Mattel product recalls and compare that response to how mass media covered the same recalls. Two content analyses were conducted: 1) bulletin boards of two parents’ online communities; and 2) four major daily newspapers (USA Today, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, and The Washington Post) that covered the 2007 Mattel product recalls as news stories.

By exploring the concept of involvement in a real crisis case, the present study contributes to theory building of the SCCT model and serves as groundwork for future empirical studies that will examine the effect of involvement on crisis communication outcomes.

**Literature Review**

**Involvement**

There have been many approaches taken regarding involvement in communication and consumer research, ranging from involvement as a personality trait, an internal state, the salience of a stimulus, all the way to involvement as a stimulus property (see Salmon, 1986, for a review). In the crisis communication area, McDonald and Härtel (2000) introduced the concept of felt involvement and applied that concept to organizational crises. Felt involvement refers to an individual’s overall perceived personal relevance and has motivational qualities that direct consumer cognition, such as attention and elaboration, and overt behavior, such as search and purchase behaviors (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Peter & Olson, 1990). The degree to which consumers
perceive an issue or a situation to be personally relevant to them will determine their level of involvement with the issue or situation.

Scholars have argued that the level of felt involvement is a function of situational and intrapersonal or intrinsic factors (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Richins & Bloch, 1986; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Intrinsic sources of personal relevance (ISPR) refer to the relatively stable structures of personally relevant information or knowledge. For instance, child safety activists and parents with young children tend to perceive issues and events associated with children and their safety as personally relevant. Thus, they are more likely to experience high levels of felt involvement with these issues and events across different situations. Previous studies have found that felt involvement that is generated by ISPR affects an individual’s motivation to attend to and comprehend incoming information (Celsi & Olson, 1988); Individuals with high involvement pay more attention to the message compared to those consumers with low involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983).

A number of stimuli, cues, and events in a consumer’s environment can play the role of situational sources of personal relevance (SSPR). For instance, a crisis news break about Mattel product recalls could be SSPR to parents with young children. Most situational factors, however, are dynamic and easy to change. Therefore, the felt involvement created by situational factors tends to be transitory. As the situation changes, so does the level of felt involvement created by SSPR. In crisis situations, SSPR interacts with ISPR, such that situational factors (e.g., crisis news) activate ISPR, and those interactions will ultimately determine the level of felt involvement. Felt involvement that is a motivational state, then, affects attention, elaboration, emotions, and interpreted meanings in a crisis (Celsi & Olson, 1988; McDonald & Härtel, 2000).

**Involvement and Crisis Information Processing**

Prior studies have documented the role of felt involvement on cognitive process. Involvement is a central concept in Petty and Cacioppo’s elaboration likelihood model of information processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). According to them, involvement interacts with the characteristics of the message, such that highly involved consumers will process information that is central to the message (e.g., quality of the arguments). However, consumers with low involvement will process information peripheral to the message (e.g., source credibility), resulting in different message processing outcomes. Consumers with high felt involvement were also found to be more motivated to pay attention to and comprehend the relevant message compared to those consumers with low felt involvement (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). Higher felt involvement motivates consumers to exert more cognitive effort to comprehend the message; generate more elaborate meanings about the salient messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Richins & Bloch, 1986); form more inferences about the message (Celsi & Olson, 1988); and generate more counterarguments during the process of comprehension (Wright, 1974). Studies have also found that people with high involvement tend to process relevant messages in greater detail (Chaiken 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983); and that level of involvement leads the focus of cognitive processing and influences the interpreted meanings (Celsi & Olson, 1988).

McDonald and Härtel (2000) proposed the role of felt involvement in attribution, emotion, and purchase intentions in a crisis. In their model, felt involvement was proposed to affect attribution (i.e., crisis responsibility) and modify the level of emotion, which then influences purchase intentions and behaviors. The fact that variations in felt involvement could affect attribution and emotion is an important argument in a crisis for several reasons. First, attribution
is about those organizations people perceive to blame in a crisis. As McDonald and Härtel (2000) argue, if involvement could affect attribution, public relation professionals would benefit from using involvement as a segmentation tool to understand the target publics better and tailor key messages more effectively. Different crisis response strategies should also be used in a crisis when communicating with consumers with different levels of involvement. Second, involvement is found to influence the level of emotion. In involvement literature, a number of stimuli and cues in a consumer’s immediate environment are found to play a role as situational sources of personal relevance (SSPR) that activate intrinsic sources of personal relevance (ISPR). The 2007 Mattel product recall case, for instance, involved four consecutive product recalls within a three-month time period. Each product recall news break likely played a SSPR role, which ultimately increased the level of felt involvement. McDonald and Härtel (2000) suggested that communication managers reduce the amount of media coverage about a crisis (i.e., SSPR) because the more situational cues there were, the higher would be the felt involvement, resulting in increases in emotional responses (e.g., anger). Previous studies have found that anger and sympathy are one of the most frequently occurring emotions in a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). The 2007 Mattel product recall case can be categorized as a human-error product recall, associated with high crisis responsibility (see Background section below). Therefore, the relationship between involvement and anger is of particular interest in this study.

In sum, involvement was found to modify media effects in persuasive, political, and advertising areas (Fiske & Kinder, 1981; Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Previous studies suggest that highly involved consumers process crisis information more thoroughly, generate more elaborate meanings and counterarguments, and form more inferences about that information. Thus, it is expected that the intense information processing by highly involved consumers would likely result in more differences than similarities between how these consumers perceived the 2007 Mattel product recalls and how mass media covered those recalls in terms of crisis responsibility and reputation. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a difference between how highly involved consumers perceived the 2007 Mattel product recalls and how national daily newspapers covered the product recalls in terms of crisis responsibility (H1a); and reputation (H1b).

As there were more situational cues to increase the level of involvement (four consecutive product recalls within a three-month time period), the resulting emotional responses (e.g., anger) would likely increase over time. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: The frequency of anger manifested among highly involved consumers will increase over time.

**Background: The 2007 Mattel Product Recall**

Mattel is a U.S. toy manufacturer established in 1945 and produces famous brands, such as Barbie, Fisher-Price, and American Girl (Mattel, 2007a). Beginning in August 2007, Mattel announced toy recalls four times within a three-month time period. The toy recalls were triggered by two different causes: One concerned the use of lead paint by Mattel’s Chinese manufacturers; and the other concerned a Mattel design problem with loose magnets.

**First recall.** On August 1, 2007, Fisher-Price, a unit of Mattel, announced a voluntary recall of 83 types of toys, indicating the paint used on those toys contained excessive amounts of lead (Mattel, 2007b). The recalled toys were manufactured by Lee Der Industrial, using a non-approved paint pigment that contained lead. Lee Der Industrial was a contract manufacturer for
Mattel in China (Mattel, 2007b). In addition to the recall, Mattel apologized to people affected by the recall and started a thorough investigation of its product quality (Mattel, 2007b).

Second Recall. Two weeks after the first recall on August 14, 2007, Mattel announced another voluntary recall of their toys with two different problems. The first case concerned the recall of a specific toy (i.e., Sarge) that had a lead-based paint problem. This recall was a consequence of Mattel’s investigation following the recall of its Fisher-Price toys on August 1, 2007 (Mattel, 2007c). Mattel (2007c) indicated that the toy with lead paint was produced by a Chinese manufacturer, Early Light Industrial Co., Ltd., who used a painting vendor, Hong Li Da (HLD), in China. The painting vendor, HLD, bought lead paint from a non-authorized third-party supplier. At this stage, Mattel indicated that the Chinese manufacturers were the cause of the recall, communicated that the company was apologetic toward the consumers affected, and established and implemented a three-point check system to ensure the future safety of their products and better control over their vendors (Mattel, 2007c).

The second case was an extension of the toy recall in November 2006. The recall concerned loose magnets and was the result of a Mattel design problem, not a manufacturing issue (Goldman, 2007). However, the mixed recalls of toys with both loose magnets and lead paint confused consumers and caused an uncomfortable professional relationship to develop between Mattel and China.

Third recall. Mattel announced the third recall of 11 toys with lead paint on September 4, 2007. These recalled toys included Barbie and Fisher-Price brands. The company explained that the recalled products were produced by Chinese contract vendors (i.e., Holder Plastic Company, and Apex Manufacturing Company, Ltd.), which had subcontracted paint work to other vendors (i.e., Dong Lian Fa, Yip Sing, and Boyi Plastic Product Factory) in China (Mattel, 2007d). In its announcement of the third recall, Mattel indicated the recall occurred because of misconduct by its Chinese manufacturers and apologized once again to the affected consumers (Mattel, 2007d).

Mattel’s executives were called to testify before the U.S. Congress Committee and the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce. On September 19, 2007, the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Mattel, Robert Eckert, apologized for the recalls in his testimony before the committees. In addition, Mattel’s Executive Vice President for worldwide operations, Thomas A. DeBrowski, met with China’s product-safety chief, Li Changjiang, and apologized to the Chinese for making China take much of the blame for the recalls (Merle & Mui, 2007). Mattel also clarified that the magnet-related recalls resulted from a design problem at Mattel, not from lead paint or manufacturing failures in China (Goldman, 2007). In its statement issued on September 21, 2007, Mattel clarified that the majority of recalls were associated with Mattel’s design problem and its Chinese manufacturers were not “responsible for the design in relation to the recalled magnet toys” (Mattel, 2007e, p.1).

Fourth recall. On October 25, 2007, a month after the announcement of the third recall, Mattel announced a fourth recall of a single toy due to a non-permitted level of lead. The company reported this time that this recall resulted from Mattel’s extensive investigation of toys after the first recall (Mattel, 2007f). Mattel stated that the recalled product was painted by Hua Yi without mentioning the country of origin for the manufacturer.

According to Härtel, McColl-Kennedy, and McDonald (1998), there can be more than one attributional target in a crisis. In the 2007 Mattel product recall case, it is possible that Mattel and/or China or Chinese manufacturers could have been attribution targets. Thus, in testing the two hypotheses, attention in this study was given to both Mattel and China or the Chinese manufacturers.
Method

Study Context
The context selected for this study was two online parent communities in the form of a bulletin board where members post and read messages (Sharp, 2000). This context was chosen because parents with younger children were the most likely to be affected by the Mattel toy recalls (i.e., highly involved consumers). The importance of monitoring information posted on the Internet during a crisis also has been well documented (The Harris Report, 2006), as such information rapidly spreads to wider audiences. Four major daily newspapers that covered the 2007 Mattel product recalls were also analyzed for a comparison purpose. In particular, attention was given whether there is a difference between how mass media interpreted the 2007 Mattel product recalls and how highly involved consumers perceived the same recalls in terms of crisis responsibility and organizational reputation.

Data Collection

Online Bulletin Board. To identify the target online communities, we searched Google (http://www.google.com) and Yahoo (http://www.yahoo.com), using different search terms, such as “mom,” “baby,” “pregnancy,” “parenting,” and “toy.” To select the target communities from a list of communities identified, both the total number of postings and the number of postings per day were checked to make sure that the targeted online communities were indeed active. Then, the total number of postings concerning Mattel toy recalls was examined. This process led us to choose two target communities with the highest number of Mattel postings and the most active posting records. From August 1, 2007 (i.e., the first recall) to November 8, 2007 (i.e., two weeks after the fourth recall), a total of 277 postings related to Mattel’s toy recalls were obtained from the two online bulletin boards. The name of the target online communities was kept anonymous to protect the privacy of its members and adhere to Campus Review Board policies.

Newspaper. This study also collected news coverage on the Mattel toy recalls that was published in four national daily newspapers: USA Today, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, and The Washington Post. News articles were retrieved from Lexis-Nexis using the search term “Mattel” and the timeline from August 1, 2007 (i.e., the first recall) to November 8, 2007 (i.e., two weeks after the fourth recall). A total of 157 news items regarding Mattel toy recalls were obtained. The items consisted of news articles, feature articles, editorials, and bylined columns. Only five news articles were found after the fourth recall. Due to the limited number of news items after the fourth recall, a decision was made to include only the time period after the first recall (i.e., August 1, 2007) and prior to the fourth recall (i.e., October 24, 2007). This decision resulted in a total of 152 news articles and 242 postings analyzed for this study.

Coding Category
Each posting and news article germane to the Mattel toy recall case was a unit of analysis. For both postings and news articles, the categories of analysis included the posted/issued date, the online community/newspaper, length (i.e., number of words in a posting/news article), crisis responsibility, and organizational reputation. In addition, emotion (i.e., anger) was also coded by examining anger comments on online bulletin boards. This part of coding was conducted only for online bulletin boards because our particular interest was in analyzing emotions expressed by highly involved consumers themselves.
Crisis responsibility was coded, based on whether a specific organization was blamed for the 2007 Mattel toy recall case in the postings/news items. In the process of developing coding categories, various attributional organizations were identified, including Mattel, Chinese manufacturers, Chinese government, China, the U.S. government, and U.S. corporations (without mentioning a specific company name). It should be noted that consumers often used the term, “China” without indicating specific information, e.g., Chinese manufacturer or Chinese government. In order to increase the accuracy of the coding, China was added to the category of crisis responsibility and was used to report the finding for the online postings. Multiple options were used to code this category since there could be more than one organization blamed.

Huang’s (2006) coding method of organizational reputation was used to code reputation. Organizational reputation manifested in postings/news articles was coded based on six concepts of organizational reputation (Berens & van Riel, 2004): Product and service, customer treatment, vision and leadership, social and environmental responsibility, expertise, and trustworthiness. Coders were asked to judge each concept of organizational reputation as being negative (-1), neutral (0), or positive (+1). The final reputation score was determined by adding the reputation scores of six concepts for each posting. For instance, if the product and service was coded as negative (-1), and trustworthiness was coded as negative (-1), the final reputation score for that posting was -2.

Anger was coded by referring to the previous literature (Choi & Lin, in press; Izard, 1973) and by a careful examination of sample postings. In operation, sentences involving anger that were associated with the Mattel crisis case were coded by calculating the total number of anger comments manifested in each posting. As mentioned in the background discussion on the 2007 Mattel product recalls, anger could be directed toward Mattel and/or China. Therefore, whenever possible, anger toward both Mattel and China was coded separately.

Intercoder Reliability

Two trained coders completed the coding of online postings; a repeated coder and a new trained coder completed the coding of the news articles. In order to test intercoder reliability, coders independently coded 15% of the postings and news articles, respectively that were randomly selected from the samples. After discussion sessions between the coders, the tests of intercoder reliability showed a Scott’s Pi of .90 for crisis responsibility for the online bulletin boards and .92 for the newspapers. The Scott’s Pi was .99 for reputation for online bulletin boards, and .91 for newspapers. Anger was coded as repeated measures, and Scott’s Pi could not be used here because Scott’s Pi is calculated to assess intercoder reliability of categorical variables (see discussion in Huang, 2006, p.203). Thus, we used Holsti (1969)’s composite reliability and obtained an intercoder reliability of .91 for anger.

Results

A total of 152 news stories and 242 postings were coded for this study. The basic information of the samples is provided in Table 1.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicted there would be a difference between how highly involved consumers perceived the 2007 Mattel product recalls and how national daily newspapers covered the same product recalls in terms of crisis responsibility(H1a); and reputation (H1b). As shown in Table 2, there was a difference in crisis responsibility between the newspaper coverage and
the highly involved consumer online postings. Four major newspapers blamed the Chinese manufacturers almost more than twice as often ($N = 59$ news articles, 38.8%) than they did Mattel ($N = 30$ news stories, 19.7%), whereas the highly involved consumers blamed Mattel ($N = 37$ postings, 15.3%) most frequently, followed by China ($N = 32$ postings, 13.2%) for the product recalls.

Table 1. **Descriptive Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample 1: News Story (N = 152)</th>
<th>Sample 2: Postings (N = 242)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>52 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>45 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>39 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The USA Today</td>
<td>16 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online community A</td>
<td>139 (57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online community B</td>
<td>103 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between the 1st and the 2nd recall (August 1 to 13, 2007)</td>
<td>20 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between the 2nd and the 3rd recall (August 14 to September 3, 2007)</td>
<td>57 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between the 3rd and the 4th recall (September 4 to October 24, 2007)</td>
<td>75 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between the 1st and the 2nd recall (August 1 to 13, 2007)</td>
<td>34 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between the 2nd and the 3rd recall (August 14 to September 3, 2007)</td>
<td>49 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between the 3rd and the 4th recall (September 4 to October 24, 2007)</td>
<td>159 (66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M = 647$ words ($SD = 469.5$)</td>
<td>$M = 78$ words ($SD = 77.5$)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerning reputation, the reputation of Mattel that was portrayed in the four major newspapers started at $M$ first recall $= -0.89$ ($SD = .57$; $M$ second recall $= -0.89$, $SD = 1.14$) and went down to $M$ third recall $= -1.11$ ($SD = .78$). The reputation of Chinese manufacturers, however, was negatively covered in a consistent manner ($M$ first recall $= -1.20$, $SD = .77$; $M$ second recall $= -1.28$, $SD = .75$; $M$ third recall $= -1.24$, $SD = .78$). In contrast to this finding, there was a significant increase in the reputation of China in the highly involved consumer online postings over time $F (2, 88) = 10.78, p < .001$. The reputation of China started at $M$ first recall $= -1.70$ ($SD = 0.82$; $M$ second recall $= -1.43$, $SD = 0.85$), and increased up to $M$ third recall $= -0.76$ ($SD = 0.68$). The reputation of Mattel showed an overall decrease over time ($M$ first recall $= -0.76$, $SD = .89$; $M$ second recall $= -1.08$, $SD = 1.26$, $M$ third recall $= -0.94$, $SD = 1.11$). Thus, $H1a$ and $H1b$ were supported.

Hypothesis 2 expected that the frequency of anger manifested on online bulletin boards would increase over time. The result revealed that anger was more frequently manifested toward Mattel ($N = 200$, “I am so angry at Mattel and its sister company, Fisher Price!”; “It’s an outrage! These are our babies at risk…””) than toward China ($N = 46$, “They [China] are killing us slowly”; “What The Heck…every single flippin toy that she has is made in China”) among highly involved consumers. This pattern was also shown over time, such that anger was more frequently...
manifested toward Mattel than toward China \((N_{\text{mattel\_first recall}} = 15, 57.7\%, N_{\text{china\_first recall}} = 11, 42.3\%); N_{\text{mattel\_second recall}} = 43, 86.0\%, N_{\text{china\_second recall}} = 7, 14.0\%); N_{\text{mattel\_third recall}} = 142, 83.5\%, N_{\text{china\_third recall}} = 28, 16.5\%).

The chi-square results revealed that there was a significant difference in the frequency of anger manifestation toward Mattel and China over time, \(\chi^2(20) = 10.81, p < .01\). A significant increase was found in the frequency of consumer anger toward Mattel \((N_{\text{first recall}} = 15, 7.5\%, N_{\text{second recall}} = 43, 21.5\%, \text{and } N_{\text{third recall}} = 142, 71\%)\). There also was a general pattern of increase in anger toward China \((N_{\text{first recall}} = 11, 23.9\%, N_{\text{second recall}} = 7, 15.2\%, \text{and } N_{\text{third recall}} = 28, 60.8\%)\). Thus H2 was also supported.

Table 2. Crisis Responsibility in Online Bulletin Boards and Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Responsibility</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After the 1\textsuperscript{st} recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of Sample (%) within column</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattel</td>
<td>2 (10.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Manufacturers</td>
<td>13 (65.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Government</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Government</td>
<td>1 (5.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Corporations without specify any company</td>
<td>1 (5.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Organizations</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of Sample</td>
<td>20 (10.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Responsibility</td>
<td>Online Bulletin Boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After the 1st recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Sample (% within column)</td>
<td>No. of Sample (% within column)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crises Responsibility</td>
<td>Mattel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 (11.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(20.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total No. of Sample</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

There have been a growing number of calls for research on how publics interpret a crisis and different crisis response strategies (e.g., Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava, 2000; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Dean, 2004). Responding to that call, the present study proposed the concept of involvement as an important consumer variable in crisis communication and examined how highly involved consumers interpret a real crisis case, the 2007 Mattel product recalls.

In H1, it was predicted that there would be a difference between how highly involved consumers perceived the 2007 Mattel product recalls and how national daily newspapers covered the product recalls in terms of crisis responsibility (H1a); and reputation (H1b). The results revealed that in the newspapers, Chinese manufacturers were portrayed as a main culprit of the recall more than twice as often as Mattel, whereas highly involved consumers blamed Mattel most frequently, followed then by China. This finding is consistent with the argument made by McDonald and Härtel (2000), that is, felt involvement could affect attribution in a crisis; the finding is also in line with involvement research findings, that is, variations in consumer involvement can modify media effects (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). In crisis situations, publics learn about a crisis from the media. However, as the result of this study suggests, publics do not necessarily perceive a crisis in the same way that media portray the crisis. As was suggested in a body of research on involvement, consumers with high involvement are more likely to scrutinize and elaborate crisis information and generate more
counterarguments as they process the crisis information, as covered in newspapers (e.g., Celsi & Olson, 1988; Folkes, Koletsky & Graham, 1987; McDonald & Härtel, 2000; Peter & Olson, 1990; Wright, 1974). Considering that crisis responsibility is one of the essential components of the SCCT model, incorporating consumer involvement into SCCT seems to be a logical next step for future research in crisis communication. Experimental studies could test how different levels of involvement may influence attribution and other variables in SCCT.

This finding also offers an important practical implication for public relations professionals. Monitoring how mass media portray a crisis has been a key responsibility of public relations professionals in crisis situations. The finding from the present study implies that it may not be enough to monitor mass media to predict how publics perceive a crisis. Highly involved publics are likely to engage in thorough message processing, and therefore, their interpretation of a crisis might not be the same as the mass media interpretation of the crisis. Without a clear understanding of how key publics perceive a crisis, it is difficult to expect crisis response strategies to be effective.

Black and Nazzaro (2004) coined the term “consumer generated media” (CGM) to refer to online information vehicles, such as postings on discussion boards and forums, consumer rating websites, blogs, and consumer-to-consumer emails. They argue that CGM has emerged as a new source of news delivered to consumers. Their research found that consumers rated CGM as more credible and trustworthy than traditional mass media, demonstrating a growing importance of CGM in influencing consumer decision-making. Consumer comments posted on CGM rapidly spread to wider audiences, and can quickly damage the reputation of an organization (Boyd, 2000). Therefore, along with mass media monitoring, public relations professionals should pay closer attention to blogs and discussion boards where publics post their comments in crisis situations. In that way, public relations professionals can tailor their crisis response strategies for best effectiveness.

This study also found an interesting difference in the reputation held of China between highly involved consumers and media coverage (H1b). The reputation of Chinese manufacturers was negatively covered in newspapers fairly consistently across time. However, a significant increase was found in the perceived reputation of China in highly involved consumer online postings over time (from -1.70 to -0.76). Highly involved consumers process information central to the message (e.g., quality of the arguments) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), process relevant messages in great detail (Chaiken 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983), and elaborate interpreted meanings (Celsi & Olson, 1988). This active processing seems to result in highly involved consumer interpretations that are different from media coverage. Reputation is often considered as an essential dependent variable in a crisis. The finding in this study implies that involvement may influence how publics perceive an organizational reputation and that perception is often different from how media view the reputation of the same organization. Further investigation is definitely needed to better understand the relationship between involvement and reputation. A content analysis, such as this study, is descriptive in nature and does not directly test the effects of involvement on dependent measures. By using the present study findings as a baseline, future research can empirically test the effect of involvement on information processing and crisis outcomes.

Hypothesis 2 expected that the frequency of anger manifested on online bulletin boards would increase over time. Anger was more frequently manifested toward Mattel (N=200) than toward China (N= 46). As was hypothesized, there was a significant increase in the frequency of anger manifestation toward Mattel over time. The frequency of anger toward China also showed
a general pattern of increase. This finding is consistent with the suggestion of McDonald and Härtel (2000), that is, communication managers should reduce the amount of media coverage of a crisis (i.e., SSPR), since the more situational cues there are, the higher will be the felt involvement, resulting in increases in emotional responses (e.g., anger).

Limitations

A content analysis is descriptive in nature, and thus, the results of this study should be viewed not as a conclusive finding, but rather as a critical starting point for further research into the role of involvement in crises. For instance, although it is reasonable to view two online parent communities as highly involved consumer groups, this study did not manipulate the level of involvement as experimental studies often did, and thus it was not possible to measure the level of involvement. Future studies using different research methods should replicate our study finding in order to better understand the effect of involvement in crisis situations. Another limitation that should be noted is the way this study calculated intercoder reliability (Holsti, 1969) for repeated measures (e.g., anger). Holsti’s coefficient of reliability is not free from obtaining results from chance. Thus, the finding concerning the relationship between involvement and anger should be interpreted with caution.

Conclusion

The findings from the present study suggest that involvement is an important variable that should be incorporated into the SCCT model. Future studies should empirically test the effect of involvement on crisis responsibility, emotions, reputation, and behavioral intention in the context of SCCT. Such studies will help public relations professionals better communicate with their key publics in crises by selecting the most effective crisis response strategy.

References


The relationship between Crisis management system and Cross-cultural analysis in South Korea and U.S. multinational corporations
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Abstract
This research examined the comparison and analysis of crisis management system between multinational corporations having headquarters in South Korea and United States in terms of intercultural communication. To conduct this research, one of Hofstede’s four cultural dimensions (1980), power distance is applied to. There are three questions in this research project: 1) regarding Hofstede’s cultural dimensions(1980), How are South Korea/United States multinational corporations’ scores on degree of power distance? 2) How are differences between South Korea/U.S. multinational corporations’ crisis management system? 3) How is relationship between difference of scores on degree of power distance and crisis management system of South Korea/ United States multinational corporations?

The result indicates that the degree of power distance in the corporations is related to crisis management system of corporations. Furthermore, this study suggests what corporate culture and communication system should be needed for effective crisis management system in this age being exposed to various crises and localization of multinational corporations should be considered.

Introduction

As we know, not surprisingly, since more various crises occur, we are exposed to these many crises today. Therefore, compared to past, organizational environment thinks of crisis management as much more important thing today. Because of various environment change, organization is exposing to crisis easier and the loss from inexperienced response about crisis increases dramatically. Therefore, the importance of crisis management is emphasized. Today the trend of global corporate environment flows into uncertainty and globalization of market. These factors also emphasize the importance of crisis management. Owing to development of globalization, competition among corporations becomes high and fierce. Therefore, this trend gives corporations more opportunity and crisis.

When it comes to intercultural communication, recently, as technology in transportation and communication system such as Internet, broadcasting, and electronic devices has developed, people have encountered others different from themselves. Samovar & Porter(2000) stated that globalization has also resulted in multinational corporations participating in various international business. Moreover, changes in immigrant patterns have contributed to the increased intercultural contact. These changing environments where more frequent contacts among diverse culture take place all the time, make us take more account of intercultural communication. By the way, Kinzer and Bohn(1985) contended that multinational corporations should consider various factors, such as cultural and economic differences, and emphasize the need of intercultural trainings for professionals.
Like above things, many corporations can branch out many countries’ markets having various cultures. Naturally, many corporations have to face various crisis based on different cultures. Therefore, corporations are branching out international markets have to consider different cultural characteristics to overcome and manage a variety of crisis.

Hence, this research was intended to examine the comparison and analysis of crisis management system between multinational corporations having headquarters in South Korea and United States in terms of intercultural communication.

**Literature review**

*The definition and characteristics of Power distance*

The power distance dimension can be defined as “the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.”. In a high degree of power distance culture, everyone has his or her rightful place in a social hierarchy, and as a result acceptance and giving of authority is something that comes naturally. This cannot be compared with the Western concept of authoritarianism. Low degree of power distance cultures stress equality in rights and opportunity in the workplace. In the United States having low degree of power distance, it is assumed that superior and subordinate are basically equal. According to Hofstede (1980), in organizations, close supervision, fear of disagreement with authority, lack of trust among co-workers, and directed supervision are all manifested more in high power distance cultures than in low power distance cultures.

*South Korea Corporate Culture*

Relationships between employees and employers in South Korean corporations are based not only on a hierarchal structure, but also on a sense of social distance between management and employees. In other words, South Korean corporate culture is notable for the widespread feeling of relative deprivation and social distance among the organizational members (Kim, 2002).

Young and Franke (2000) found that unethical practices would be of less concern to top management in high power distance cultures such as Korea than in low power distance cultures such as United States. In addition, a top manager can regulate the communication system of the organization without interference and mandate the organization’s stance on issues (Kim, 2002).

*United States Corporate Culture*

Hofstede (1991) showed that United States culture is high individualism, the most individualistic of any country with a small power distance. Everyone takes care of himself or herself. Identity is based on individuality. Involvement with organizations is calculated. Relatively small power distance; inequality in society minimized. Superiors are accessible and on equal footing. In regards to the characteristic of power distance in United States, Okabe (1983) mentioned that Americans place great value on symmetrical relationships, minimizing differences that might suggest inequality. Kume (1985) stated that Decision-making in the United States is usually a business of an individual making up his or her mind-primarily an internal mental process within oneself. Kim (2000) concluded that United States corporations emphasize direct discussion and participation among problem groups or members in terms of problem-solving process.

By the way, changes in corporate culture in United States are also observed. Matsumoto et al. (1996) contended that economic changes have often forced a new vision of values in
business marked by increased conservatism, interdependence and collectivistic values in the United States corporate world.

Hence, based on previous research, a research question was formulated as follows: How are South Korea/United States multinational corporations’ scores on degree of power distance?

Crisis management system in South Korea and United States multinational corporations

First of all, crisis is defined as major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name (Banks, 2002). Banks(2002) also defined that Crisis management is a process of strategic planning for a crisis or negative turning point, a process that removes some of the risk and uncertainty from the negative occurrence and thereby allows the organization to be in greater control of its own destiny. When it comes to crisis management communication, crisis management communication is the dialog between the organization and its publics prior to, during, and after the negative occurrence. The strategies and tactics are designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization (Banks, 2002). Besides, Kim(2004) defined that crisis management manual is a general plan in order to react and manage crisis in case of crisis situation in corporations. When it comes to crisis management system in South Korea and United States corporations, in Kim’s(2004) study, the result from survey study among randomly selected corporations in South Korea indicated that many corporations still are insensitive to crisis situation. Kim (2004) also found that more United States multinational corporations have crisis management manual than South Korea multinational corporations. Based on this result, it can be assumed that United States multinational corporations in South Korea follow the policy and mission about crisis management of their headquarters.

Regarding simulation training based on Crisis management manual, only twenty-four South Korean Corporations have simulation training based on crisis management manual, whereas forty United States corporations have simulation training based on crisis management manual among eighty-eight corporations in South Korea( Kim, 2004). Regarding Crisis management communication response & behavior, in Kim(2004)’s study, in terms of response and behavior in case of crisis situation, there is little difference between South Korea and United States corporations in South Korea. That is to say, theoretically, employees in South Korea corporations are aware of way to response and manage crisis situation.

Regarding condition of crisis management recognition, Kim(2004) also found that more employees from United States corporations satisfied present condition of crisis management recognition than employees from South Korean corporations.

Besides, Shin(1996) mentioned that United States organizations have systematic crisis management communication plan, most corporations, schools, and public administrations have their own crisis management manual. In cases of South Korean corporations, Kim(1994) asserted that South Korean corporations have fewer crisis management manual than developed countries’ corporations such as United States,

Hence, the second research question was formulated as follows: How are differences between South Korea/United States multinational corporations’ crisis management system?

The crisis management system and communication system in South Korea/United States multinational corporations.
In Kwon (2005) study, there are two points in common based on corporations’ successful crisis management cases, first, they selected open-communication policy and performed that policy under the crisis, second, when crisis occurs, the fact was directly and quickly reported to CEO (Chief Executive Organizer). Furthermore, Grunig & Grunig (1992) asserted that only corporation having opened organizational structure, good communication system, organizational culture warranting democratic participation and opinion offer have been able to successfully perform crisis management.

Regarding Importance of internal communication, in Kwon’s (2005) study,

In terms of internal perspective, good internal communication system makes employees feel affinity for corporation, employees regard their affairs as important part to achieve corporation’s goal, moreover, through understanding relationship and process in corporation and integrating their own affair with whole work process, it makes employees’ ability show.

Regarding relationship between crisis and internal communication, Kwon (2005) concluded that when corporations always listen to employees’ opinion and ideas and accept their thoughtful suggestion, crisis situations can be prepared effectively. Kwon (2005) also concluded that in order to prevent crisis, internal public, employees’ role is important, for good relationship with employees, corporations have to have symmetrical communication system, and organizational structure of corporations have to have a culture inducing employees’ participations.

Shin (1998) stated that in case of occurrence of communication mistakes among employees or members in organizations, disconnection of internal communication causes accident creating crisis. That is to say, if effective employee communication in the corporations, crisis is able to be prepared easily (Shin & Lee, 2002). Besides, Yoo (2002) found that in case of planning of corporate management in South Korea, barrier factors are related to characteristics of internal communication such as lack of communication channel about crisis and crisis situation, top-bottom communication structure, and lack of conversation and communication outlet. On the other hand, Kim (2000) characterized that there is no differentiation of top and bottom among members in the United States corporations. Class of positions is only used to control, operate and manage work affair (Kim, 2000).

Hence, the third research question was formulated as follows: How is relationship between difference of scores on degree of power distance and crisis management system of South Korea/United States multinational corporations? To support above research question, a hypothesis was posed as follows:

Methodology

Respondents

Respondents were employees and staff (N = 140, N = 140) at randomly selected South Korea multinational corporations (N = 20) and United States multinational corporations (N = 20). The characteristics of respondents are employees and staff having been working for their workplace. The researchers selected South Korea and United States multinational corporations in South Korea at first, the researchers contacted employees and staff at both countries’ corporations by submitting official request form to conduct survey.

Once receiving approval from corporations, the researchers conducted survey study to employees and staff at corporations by face-to-face meeting and email.

Measurement of variables
The questionnaire was administered in the Korean language most, but, the questionnaire was administered in English language for foreign employees and staff at United States multinational corporations. There are two parts in the questionnaire. The first part was to measure people’s personal opinions about specific situations based on different cultural backgrounds. Hofstede’s (1980) power distance scale was employed and the 7-pont Likert scale items (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) was employed. The second part was to measure opinion and recognition about crisis, crisis management system program, crisis communication system, and organizational communication system.

Results

Comparison of respondents’ at South Korea/United States multinational corporations scores on cultural dimension, power distance.

T-test was employed in order to test the difference between respondents at South Korea/United States multinational corporations in scores on power distance. Respondents at South Korea multinational corporations scored significantly higher on the Power Distance (M=20.56, SD=3.80) than did respondents (M=16.97, SD=3.97), t(238)=1.32 at United States multinational corporations (Table 1).

Comparisons of respondents’ opinion and recognition about crisis, crisis management system program and crisis management & organizational communication system

By using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science), four variables (recognition of condition of crisis management, the condition of Crisis management manual, the condition of simulation training based on crisis management manual, and crisis management communication response & organizational communication system) were classified, and frequency analysis, Crosstab, and Multiple Response Analysis were employed.

Comparisons between the employees’ recognition about crisis management system in South Korea/U.S. multinational corporations

The 18.1% of respondents at South Korean multinational corporations dissatisfied present condition of crisis management system, whereas almost 0 % of respondents at United States multinational corporations do (Table 2).

Comparisons of crisis management manual in South Korea/ United States multinational corporations

82% of United States multinational corporations (N=16) have crisis management manual, whereas only 45% of South Korean multinational corporations (N=9) have that (Table 3).

Comparisons of simulations training based on crisis management manual in South Korea/ United States multinational corporations

65% of United States multinational corporations (N=13) have simulations training, whereas only 30% of South Korean multinational corporations have that (Table 4).

Comparisons of employees’ crisis situation response and organizational communication system in South Korea/ United States multinational corporations

By using Multiple Response Analysis, there was an interesting result regarding crisis situation response. There is little difference between employees in South Korean and United
States multinational corporations. It means that theoretically, employees in South Korea corporations perceive way to response and manage crisis situation. On the other hand, regarding organizational communication system, twenty five of frequency from employees’ United States multinational corporations perceive that open and participatory communication channels are always operated, whereas only ten of frequency of employees’ South Korean multinational corporations do (Table 5).

Correlations between power distance and respondents’ opinion and recognition about crisis, crisis management system program, and crisis management communication and organizational communication in South Korea and United States multinational corporations.

The relationship between scores in power distance and respondents’ opinion and recognition about crisis management communication and organizational communication and condition of crisis management system in South Korean multinational corporations was tested. The degree of power distance in the corporations is related to crisis management system of corporations (Table 6 & 7).

Respondents at South Korea multinational corporations

The degree of power distance has negative correlations with crisis management system program and crisis & organizational communication. There is no relationship between degree of power distance and respondents’ opinion and recognition about crisis.

Respondents at United States multinational corporations

The degree of power distance has negative correlations with crisis & organizational communication and crisis management system program. However, the degree of power distance has positive correlations with crisis communication system.

Discussion

The results of the survey indicate that the degree of power distance in the corporations is related to overall crisis management system and organizational communication of corporations. According to the survey results, most of the employees in United States multinational corporations scored lower on power distance than did employees in South Korean multinational corporations. It means that United States corporate culture affect employees even if corporations are not in their home countries. According to results about comparisons of overall crisis management system and organizational communication system, more United States multinational corporations have systematical and structured crisis management program than South Korean corporations. Therefore, more employees at United States multinational corporations satisfied crisis management system, crisis communication system, and organizational communication system than South Korean multinational corporations.

When it comes to relationship between degree of power distance and overall crisis management system and organizational communication system, employees of both countries’ corporations having lower power distance satisfied crisis management and organizational communication. However, employees of United States corporations have positive correlations with crisis communication system. Several things can be drawn from this result. First, this result can be related to multinational corporations’ localization in global economy. It also was supported by Matsumoto et al.’ (1996) study mentioned in literature review.
In sum, based on survey results, all of hypotheses were accepted. That is to say, employees at United States multinational corporations have lower power distance than do South Korean multinational corporations. it can assume that open and participatory communication system are always operated in United States multinational corporations. Based on this characteristics, it can be assumed that more United States multinational corporations have systematical, concrete and specific crisis management system than South Korean multinational corporations. Finally, the degree of power distance is related to the factors of corporate culture such as organizational communication system and crisis management system and crisis communication system based on corporate communication system. Furthermore, this study suggests what corporate culture and communication system should be needed for effective crisis management system in this age being exposed to various crises. By the way, it can be drawn from a result from employees of United States multinational corporations. Based on the characteristics of multinational corporations, the localization policy in global market can be considered.

References


Yoo, J. (2002). A study on Crisis management situation of 100 South Korean corporations *Korea Advertising Journal, 4*(1).


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**Table 1**

Comparisons of respondents’ at South Korea/United States multinational corporation’s scores on power distance: *T*-tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural dimension</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>South Korea</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>16.97(3.99)</td>
<td>20.56(3.80)</td>
<td>1.32*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p*<.05, **p**<.01. n.s=no significance, n=240.
Table 2
Comparisons between the percentage of employees’ recognition about crisis management system in South Korea/US corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Corporation division</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Korea(Headquarter)</td>
<td>United States(Headquarter)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat good</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat bad</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very bad</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X2=2.75, DF=3, P=0.25

Table 3
Comparisons between the number of South Korea/United States multinational corporations in South Korea having crisis management manual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Corporation division</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Korea(Headquarter)</td>
<td>United States(Headquarter)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having</td>
<td>45 % (9)</td>
<td>82% (16)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having</td>
<td>55% (11)</td>
<td>18% (4)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0% (20)</td>
<td>100.0% (20)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(X2=10.07, DF=4, P=0.39)

Table 4
Comparison between the number of South Korea/U.S. multinational corporations having simulations training based on Crisis management manual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Corporation division</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Korea(Headquarter)</td>
<td>United States(Headquarter)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having</td>
<td>30% (6)</td>
<td>65% (13)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having</td>
<td>70% (14)</td>
<td>35% (7)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0% (20)</td>
<td>100.0% (20)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X2=7.75, DF=5, P=0.26
**Table 5**

Comparisons between frequency of answer from employees’ crisis situation response & behavior in South Korea/U.S. multinational corporations (Multiple Response Analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Frequency of South Korea (Headquarter)</th>
<th>Frequency of U.S. (Headquarter)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. In case of crisis, should be reported to CEO directly</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. For preparing Crisis situation, the present condition of company, spokesman’s profile, and public statement are ready and in case of crisis, have a emergent contact network in organization</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Crisis management team and committee by public relations department are made up of within 24 hours. Manager or team leader is in charge of role of Spokesman for media relations</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Once crisis occurs, public relations department should meet journalists at first and try to minimize and defuse crisis as much as they can.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mainly Manager explains orally official viewpoint of company about Journalists’ inquiry.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. News letter about accident or incident and counterplan is distributed to Journalists only in case of Journalists’ inquiry.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. If crisis results from organizational big mistake or fault, acceptance strategy is used.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Official announcement about crisis situation is made to all employees and staff after situation completes.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Once crisis situation completes, prevention policy from recurrence is planned.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Open and participatory communication channel are always operated</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>143</strong></td>
<td><strong>169</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6
Correlations between power distance and respondents’ opinion and recognition about crisis, crisis management system program, and crisis management communication & organizational communication in South Korea multinational corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural dimension</th>
<th>Crisis management system and organizational communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>Opinion &amp; recognition about crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05., n=240

Table 7
Correlations between power distance and respondents’ opinion and recognition about crisis, crisis management system program, and crisis management communication & organizational communication in United States multinational corporations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural dimension</th>
<th>Crisis management system and organizational communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>Opinion &amp; recognition about crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05., **p<.01, n=240
Coorientation of the Public Relations Role within the Public Sector
Research idea in progress
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Howard University
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This research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how public administrators and public affairs officers view the public relations role within public sector organizations. Examining public relations practitioner roles is considered to be some of the most productive and significant theory-based research within the discipline (McElreath & Blamphin, 1994). From the impetus of the Excellence Study, public relations scholars have studied the manager role, role differences, the effects of gender on roles, and the counseling role (McElreath & Blamphin, 1994).

The Excellence Study found that knowledge to enact the manager role was the strongest correlation to excellence in public relations and communication management (Grunig, 1992; International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation, 1991). Public relations practitioner roles also have been studied in relation to the power of public relations units in organizations (Lauzen, 1992; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992). Additionally, public relations roles have been studied in relation to environmental scanning (Dozier, 1987, 1990), issues management (Lauzen, 1993), models of public relations practices (J.E. Grunig & L.A. Grunig, 1989), job satisfaction and salaries (Broom & Dozier, 1986), and gender discrimination (Dozier, Chapo, & Sullivan, 1983; Hutton, 1993; Creedon, 1991). Roles research has further determined whether public relations units participate in strategic decision making of the dominant coalition or has only implement decisions made by others (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier, 1986).

The present research will seek to address the lack of research that tests the myriad propositions set forth by public relations scholars related to the sub-specialization of public affairs. The most recent research put forth by Liu & Horsley (2007) argues that current public relations models do not consider the unique characteristics of the public sector environment (p. 377). To fill this void in the literature they reviewed existing literature on the public sector environment, identified eight attributes that affect government public relations politics, and reviewed five existing public relations models to determine their applicability to the public sector environment. Their study proposed a new model based on a review of that literature – the government communication decision wheel – designed as a tool for government communicators and as a framework for rethinking how public relations is practiced in government (p. 391). This research will extend the work of Liu & Horsley (2007) by studying public relations roles within the public sector from a coorientational approach. Three of the eight attributes that will be extended in this study are: politics, lack of managerial support for public relations practitioners, and lagging professional development. These three attributes are specifically under study because of the potential impact that the interpersonal relationships between a government organization’s public administrator and public affairs officer may have on these attributes. This potential impact will be studied from the coorientational approach (Newcomb, 1953; McLeod & Chaffee, 1973).

The present study addresses public administrators and public affairs officers’ cognitions of the role of public relations within their public sector environment. Using a coorientational approach, the present research seeks to determine the similarity in perceptions of the public
administrator and the public affairs officer of the public relations role in their particular public sector environment. (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973; Broom & Dozier, 1990). Research acknowledges that the public sector comprises unique environmental characteristics that differ from corporate and non-profit organizations (Liu & Horsley, 2007). Although public relations research has been conducted on the practice of public relations and government organizations, it has been studied from the perspective of government affairs for business organizations (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Dennis, 1996; Hoewing, 1998; Getz, 2002; Grunig & Dozier, 2002; Wilcox, Cameron, Ault & Agee, 2003; Chen, 2007).

Public affairs scholarship has additionally focused on relationships between corporations and their social and political stakeholders (Berkely, 1975; Dennis, 1996). Meznar (1993) in his doctoral dissertation looked at how the public affairs function is carried out in multinational corporations. He looked at how these organizations and their environmental characteristics affect public affairs strategies and the decision-making structure within multinational corporations and what coordination and control methods were used to handle the complexity of public affairs management within different decision making structures (Meznar, 1993, p. 845). Through a quantitative method of sending questionnaires to top executives of American multinational corporations, he found that effective public affairs management within multinational corporations requires tailoring public affairs activities to specific countries through centralized public affairs decision making (Meznar, 1993).

Petersen and Martin (1996) conducted an exploratory study of chief executive officers (CEOs) in Florida non-banking public companies to determine whether or not these executives perceived investor relations to be part of the public relations function (p. 173). The researchers found that CEOs favor financial affairs executives and departments to manage and conduct investor relations and considered public relations to be more of a technical rather than managerial function of the organization (p. 173).

Anderson (1992) studied activist groups as strategic publics in her case study that looked at a multinational company working in Belize that failed to identify activist publics at the beginning of its project. As a result, the study reported that the organizations had failed to identify these activist publics at the beginning of its project, and that the use of press agentry and public information models of public relations failed to foster a mutual understanding between the organization and these publics. The researcher also found that when the organization ultimately implemented a two-way symmetrical model of public relations after the pressure escalated, the organization became more successful in working with the activists (Anderson, 1992, p. 151).

Most recently, the coorientation approach was used to study public information officers in public health agencies and their relationships with health journalists and each other (Johnson Avery & Weaver Lariscey, 2007). The present research, along with Elizabeth Toth’s (2006) proposition of a theory of public affairs and Liu & Horsley’s (2007) literature review and proposal of a government communication decision wheel demonstrates the need to and interest in delving further into researching the role of the public affairs officer within the public sector environment. The present research seeks to address that need.

### Public Affairs Defined

Public affairs, a term that is used in various fields, carries different meanings within each. In 1965, one of the first organizations to define the term ‘public affairs,’ characterized it as consisting of “a significant and substantial concern by individuals, by labor, by foundation, and by other private institutions in the social, economic, and governmental processes that singly or through interaction shape and determine the environment within which the free enterprise system
exists domestically and internationally” (The National Industrial Conference Board [NICB], 1965, p. 9). At that time, this Board was concerned with the correlation between public affairs as they defined it and the role of a corporation in citizenship (NICB, 1965).

Corporations speak of public affairs as having five functions: to influence legislative and regulatory decisions in government, known as lobbying (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000); to serve as liaisons with government organizations, known as government relations; to implement community improvement programs or community relations; to encourage political activism, campaign contributions, and voting through grassroots efforts and through the development of political action committees known as PACs; and to volunteer their services in charitable and community development organizations (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p. 15).

Within the political and governmental realm, public affairs refers to the study of public policy. The term is sometimes used interchangeably with the term public administration, which is concerned with “how politicians in government and senior level, non-elected public sector employees devise public policy, sustain the machinery of government and ensure policies are put into practice” (Chandler, 2000, p. 2).

Public affairs within the public relations industry is defined as the specialization of public relations that concerns building public policy relationships between organizations (Toth, 2006). “Public affairs helps an organization develop and maintain quality relationships with the various groups of peoples (‘publics’) who can influence the future. Public affairs is the public relations practice that addresses public policy and the publics who influence such policy” (Paluszek, 1995, p. xvii).

Although the definition of the term public affairs varies slightly, the rationale for its existence remains consistent: to “establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000) between government organizations and the publics they impact through the policies created and implemented on their behalf.

When the elements that comprise the term public affairs are dissected, which include influencing decisions; serving as liaisons; building relationships with communities; and studying, devising, and enacting policy, the definition of public relations comes into focus. As a result of what is considered the “largest study ever of the public relations profession” (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002), the Excellence Study sought to answer the question of how and why public relations has value to an organization (2002, p. ix). The researchers describe the relationship between the management of communication and formulation of policy in this manner: Public relations/communication management is broader than communication techniques and broader than specialized public relations programs such as media relations or publicity. Public relations and communication management describe the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of an organization’s communication with both external and internal publics – groups that affect the ability of an organization to meet its goals…

Public relations managers should be involved in decision making by the group of senior managers (which the researchers term the dominant coalition) who control an organization. Although public relations managers often vote in policy decisions made by the dominant coalition, we argue that their specialized role in the process of making those decisions is as communicators (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002, p. 2).
In looking at public affairs from this perspective, a government organization’s strategic communication manager serves as one who is most likely to contribute to the effective shaping of its organization’s goals and, thus, should play as integral a role as those who serve at the highest levels within government organizations.

Grunig’s (1992) research efforts yielded a Theory of Excellence that outlines 14 characteristics of excellent communication departments and three effects of their communication program that explain how and why communication makes organizations more effective and what factors must be present to make them effective. The research team tested this theory by surveying more than 200 CEOs and management-level persons within corporations, government agencies, non-profit organizations and associations in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Grunig, 1992). The researchers additionally surveyed more than 200 senior-level public relations personnel within these organizations. In looking at differences in excellence by type of organization, the researchers found that government agencies have average scores on participation in strategic management (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). Specifically, Grunig, Grunig & Dozier (2002) found that:

The senior public relations personnel in a government agency are more likely to report in technician or media relations roles than in other types of organizations, especially in comparison with corporations. However, they are about average for the managerial role, for participation in strategic management, and for being in the dominant coalition. Such a combination of roles suggests that the historical public information or public affairs definition of disseminating information to the general population directly or through media persists in government. At the same time, the data suggest that government agencies are moving toward a more managerial and strategic role (p. 86).

These results give rise to the question of what hinders the government communicator from completely transitioning to a role of manager and strategic communicator within government. Elizabeth L. Toth (2006), in her theory that builds research on the public affairs specialization in public relations, suggests that “although the sub-specialization (of public affairs) is well established within the public relations domain, there still needs to be developed explanations of why public affairs is practiced as it is, the processes of public affairs, and public affairs’ contribution to organizational effectiveness” (p. 518). She states that public affairs theory should focus on how public policy relationships are built, taking into consideration the external relationships organizations have with their multiplicity of potential, different, and ever-changing groups, publics, and stakeholders (Toth, 2006, p. 518). In the attempt to empower the public affairs officer within public sector organizations, this need is constant.

The need for public relations is acknowledged and well documented in public administration studies. Berkely (1975), a public administration scholar, notes that public buy-in helps an organization to successfully formulate and implement its programs and generates the support necessary to gain the political approval and funding for these programs. Berkely (1975) recounts that James Forrestal, the country’s first Secretary of Defense after World War II, wrote in his diaries that:

The difficulty of government work is that it not only has to be done well, but the public has to be convinced that it is being done well. In other words, there is a necessity both for competence and exposition, and I hold it extremely difficult to combine the two in the same person. (p. 422)
Public administrators identify the need to strategically communicate to its publics. However, the present study is concerned with whether the unique environmental characteristics of public sector organizations -- which include the attributes of politics, lack of managerial support for public relations practitioners, and lagging professional development (Liu & Horsley, 2007) -- prevent public relations to be performed in an excellent manner Grunig (1992) within public sector organizations.

**Public relations’ role in the public sector**

Within the public relations industry, the specific function of public affairs is defined as community relations or governmental relations, where professionals of this industry work with officials within the community and with legislative groups and special interest groups to educate them about the policies and programs government implements on their behalf (Newsom, Scott, & Turk, 1989, pp. 7-8). History notes that public administrators have made use of public affairs as far back as President Andrew Jackson’s administration, when in 1829 he selected the first presidential press secretary Amos Kendall to serve in his administration. A former journalist and editor, Kendall performed nearly all White House public relations tasks including writing speeches, creating state papers, sending official messages and press releases, and conducting opinion polls (McKinnon, Tedesco, & Lauder, 2005). World War I sparked the inclusion of public relations within the federal government, as Woodrow Wilson was the first president to hold regular press conferences (Maltese, 1994). Eight days after America entered World War I, President Wilson instituted the Committee on Public Information, which was chaired by George Creel (Maltese, 1994), who is now considered a pioneer within the public relations industry. The committee was designed to “coordinate the flow of government news about the war and to rally public support for American intervention in the European conflict” (Maltese, 1994, p. 7).

During President Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency, Roosevelt attempted to win public support for his programs through a network of publicity experts, and publications designed to influence any member of Congress (Seitel, 1998). In an effort to dissuade possible unlimited persuasive presidential influence, the House of Representatives introduced the Gillett Amendment of 1913 to an appropriation bill stipulating that federal agencies could not spend money for publicity unless specifically authorized by Congress (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000; Seitel, 1995). This amendment stated that appropriated funds could not be used to pay a publicity expert unless specifically earmarked for that purpose (McKinnon, Tedesco, & Lauder, 2005). Several years later, Congress passed the gag law, which prohibited using appropriations for services, messages, or propaganda (Baskin, Aronoff & Lattimore, 1996).

Nevertheless, succeeding presidents continued to employ a public relations strategy to communicate to their publics. Herbert Hoover was the first to have an official press secretary on his staff (Baskin, Aronoff & Lattimore, 1996). However, according to Maltese (1994) Franklin D. Roosevelt formally created the White House Press Office, and his New Deal government and its emerging agencies began soliciting publicists to work in the Office of War Information created during World War II to simplify the information being distributed by these offices (Baskin, Aronoff & Lattimore, 1996). After the war ended, the office became the United States Information Agency (USIA) (Baskin, Aronoff & Lattimore, 1996). By 1949, nearly every state had established a state-supported public relations program to attract tourism and industry and since 1970, at least twenty new federal regulatory agencies have been created, all of them having extensive public information programs (Baskin, Aronoff & Lattimore, 1996, pp. 394-5).
During his presidential administration from 1969 to 1974, President Richard M. Nixon created the White House Office of Communications and every president thereafter has continued to use and alter the function of this office to reflect their administration’s goals (Maltese, 1994). The White House Office of Communications is considered different from the White House Press Office in that it is proactive in informing the public about the administration’s efforts versus the Press Office’s reactionary process of responding to media and public opinion (Maltese, 1994). On July 13, 1972, during the height of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal Maltese (1994), Congress reaffirmed its disapproval of the use of federal dollars for publicity by enacting Public Law 92-351, Section 608(a), which prohibits government spending on “publicity or propaganda purposes designed to support or defeat legislation pending before the Congress” (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000, p. 15). Because of these laws, government agencies use terms such as “public information,” “communications,” “constituent relations,” “legislative liaison,” and “public affairs” to describe building and maintaining relationships with their constituents (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000).

The public sector depends greatly on public affairs efforts when dealing in direct contact with their constituents, handling media, and facilitating public meetings (Seitel, 1998). At all levels of government, the need for public affairs support and guidance has increased as government continues to grow in its involvement and impact on the public (Seitel, 1998). Today, Americans see federal, state, and local government on similar ground in relation to efficient and effective service delivery (Henry, 1999). According to Henry (1999), publics perceive the competence of each level of government to be increasingly comparable as governmental revenues continue to decline (p. 415). As a result, federal, state, and local public administrators must compete to earn the respect and trust of their taxpayers in order to increase that revenue (p. 415).

Scholars in public relations are beginning to research the relationship between the need for greater government transparency and the role of public relations in satisfying that need. Jenille Fairbanks (2005) explained transparency in government communication through the lens of the federal government communicator. Using the principles of stakeholder management, models of public relations, and a model for government agency communication, Fairbanks conducted eighteen semi-structured interviews with professional communicators from various federal government agencies to gain a better understanding of the role of transparency in the federal government’s communication processes of agencies (p. 2). Her results indicated that government communicators recognize the need for transparency, but also that there is a need for further research beyond that which focuses on media relations and agency spokespersons (p. 2). Grunig and Grunig (2001) moved their scholarship beyond academia taking an applicable approach in applying the Excellence Theory to a white paper created for the Department of Energy Office (DOE) of Science. This white paper gave guidelines for a formalized system of research to plan and evaluate the DOE’s public affairs efforts (Grunig & Grunig, 2001, p. 1). Specifically designed for the DOE, the researchers’ study outlined the need to establish relationships with the agency’s stakeholders and provided methods for the agency to study its relationships and to move toward an improved method of communication management within the DOE (p. 2).

Still, no definitive research has been discovered by the present researcher that focuses on the perception of the public relations practitioners’ role in the public sector from the perspective of the public affairs officer or the public administrator. In fact, much of the scholarship related to public relations and government centers around politics, (McKinnon, Tedesco, and Lauder
The most comprehensive compilation of public affairs research in relation to public relations uncovered by this researcher is the *Practical Public Affairs in an Era of Change: A Communications Guide for Business, Government and College*, edited by Lloyd B. Dennis in 1996 and sponsored by the Public Relations Society of America. This book comprises “a comprehensive review of what is currently and largely known about the subject of public affairs in the context of the public relations profession (p. ix). In the introduction, Dennis (1996) states that this book is designed to “provide both wisdom and direction for public affairs and public relations professionals in the future (p. ix.)” Although the thirty chapters offer a broad historic to present-day view of public affairs, they only tell of the practice of public affairs from its current state. The book does not address the need for strategic communication management in public affairs, the role of the public affairs practitioner within public sector management, or the impact that government organization’s systems have on how public relations is practiced within the public sector.

Findings from the Excellence Study demonstrate that dominant coalitions within organizations must, “recognize and appreciate their dependency on the public relations function and value the need for management-level public relations.” (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002, p. 3) If they don’t, the public relations practitioner function within an organization will not be empowered to effectively develop and implement strategic communication management programs needed to build and maintain relationships with their constituencies.

**Power, politics, and the role of the public administrator**

Chandler (2000) defines public administration as a subject that is difficult to frame because “the boundaries of what is public and private are never clear cut - they fade into one another because both sectors are necessarily closely entangled in the complex network of relationships that form a social system” (p. 1). In its broadest definition, public administration is an industry concerned with how “politicians in government and senior level, non-elected public sector employees devise policy, sustain the machinery of government and ensure policies are put into practice” (Chandler, 2000, p. 2).

The public policy discipline is concerned with the process of government activity (Lester & Stewart, 2000). Public policy has been defined in various ways by public administration and government scholars. Harold Lasswell defined public policy as “a projected program of goals, values and practices.” David Easton defined it as “the impacts of government activity.” Austin Ranney defined it as “a selected line of action or a declaration of intent.” James Anderson defined public policy as “a purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern” (qtd. in Lester & Stewart, 2000, p. 4). According to Dye (2001), public policy is “whatever governments choose to do or not to do” (p. 2). Dye (2001) argues in his book *Top Down Policy Making*, that it is assumed that government actions must have goals in order to be labeled “policy,” but that we can never be sure whether any particular action has a goal and if it does, what the goal is. Policy is often defined as a continuing series of activities with a goal, objective, or purpose (Dye, 2001). However, Dye contends that public policy not only involves government action but also government inaction, and that government’s failure to act has just as great an impact on society (Dye, 2001, p. 2).

Mintzberg (1983) defined power as “the capacity to effect (or affect) organizational outcomes” (p. 4). In his seminal work, *Power in and Around Organizations*, Mintzberg prefaced his reason for studying power saying it “is a major factor, one that cannot be ignored by anyone interested
in understanding how organizations work and end up doing what they do” (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 10). Public policy is a combination of basic decisions, commitments, and actions made by those who hold authority or affect government decisions. The policy making process weighs and balances public values. Often there is no "right" choice or correct technical answer to an issue. To implement policies, the bureaucracy that makes up government organizations asserts its influence on the policy process either by depending upon external support, based upon the amount of information or expertise they possess, and based upon the internal characteristics of the agency (Denhardt, 1984).

The public administrator is placed squarely in the policymaking process (Starling, 1998). As leaders within the public sector, public administrators use their political resources to generate the individual power needed to secure the valued autonomy and resources required to maintain their organizations (Wilson, 1989). The head of a public agency is “judged and rewarded on the basis of the appearance of success, when success can mean reputation, influence, charm, the absence of criticism, personal ideology, or victory in policy debates” (Wilson, 1989, p. 197). Therefore, the success of a public sector organization is based upon achieving the organization’s goals, as well as maintaining the appearance of the executive (Wilson, 1989).

**The public affairs officer and the management role**

The power of public relations practitioners and their perceived roles within organizations has been extensively researched in public relations literature (McElreath & Blamphin, 1994; Dozier & Broom, 1995; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992; Lauzen, 1992; Serini, 1993; Plowmen, 1998; Judd, 1987; Broom & Dozier, 1986; Dozier, 1986; and Berkowitz & Hristodoulakis, 1999). Judd (1987) looked at how public relations practitioners viewed themselves within an organization (p. 58). His results specifically show the correlation of implementing formal research and evaluation in public relations practice to practitioners’ perception of themselves as managers within the organization (Judd, 1987). Lauzen & Dozier (1992) proposed that an organization’s environmental challenges determine the role of the management-level public relations practitioner (p. 205). Roles also determine whether the strategic decision making made by the dominant coalition involves the use of public relations or if practitioners are simply executing decisions that have already been made (Broom & Dozier, 1986).

Researchers have isolated variables such as implementing conflict resolution methods as a way to empower public relations managers (Plowman, 1998). Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis (1999) explained the way in which education and work experience impact the role public relations practitioners within organizations (p. 92). Additionally, studies examined how encroachment, which is the assignment of nonpublic relations professionals to manage the public relations function (Dozier, 1988) – affect the role and perceptions of the public relations practitioners’ function in organizations (Lauzen, 1990 & 1992). Gender in public relations has also generated an extensive body of research as it relates to breaking the “glass ceiling” (Cline, et al, 1986), to role performance and expectations (Dozier, 1986), and to power and sexual harassment (Serini, 1998).

Liu and Horsley (2007) cite the lagging professional development of public affairs officers as one of eight attributes impacting how public relations is conducted in public sector environments (p. 380). The researchers found that public sector communicators lag behind their private sector counterparts in the development of professionalism (Liu & Horsley, 2007). Gaining a deeper understanding of the public affairs practitioners’ views of their roles within the public sector will bring forth new insights into this proposition.
The need for public relations in the public sector

Grunig and Hunt (1984) recognized that “there is little justification for any practice of public relations unless practitioners are included in the dominant coalition.” (p. 57) Therefore, the first proposition within the Excellence Study in relation to how power comes to public relations practitioners is that “members of dominant coalitions in excellent organizations will come to value public relations as a critical managerial -- rather than merely technical – organizational function.” (Grunig, 1992, p. 485)

The role of participation in public administration has historically been one of ambivalence. Although the political system in the United States is designed to reflect and engender an active citizenry, it is also designed to protect political and administrative processes from a too-active citizenry. (Feltey, King & Susel, 1998) Increasingly, public administrators are realizing that decision making without public participation is ineffective. According to Thomas (1995), "the new public involvement has transformed the work of public managers... public participation in the managerial process has become a fact of life. In the future, this may become the case for even more managers, since the public’s demand for involvement does not seem to be abating" (1995, xi). Thomas suggested that under contemporary political and economic conditions, “we can no longer fail to include the public in public decision making” (qtd. in Feltey, King & Susel, 1998, p. 318).

Since the publishing of the Excellence Study, numerous scholars have built upon this proposition. Plowman (1998) used the Excellence Study’s two-way symmetrical model and mixed-motive approach to study power in conflict resolution within organizations to determine whether or not the use conflict resolution models could empower public relations managers to become an effective part of the dominant coalition (Plowman, 1998, p. 237). Plowman used the qualitative methods of case study and in-depth interviewing to study dominant coalition members, their public relations heads and another member of the public relations departments from 14 corporations (Plowman, 1998, p. 249). He found that the public relations professional will become a part of the dominant coalition if s/he has experience in Grunig’s two-way symmetrical model and applies this model to conflict resolution tactics (Plowman, 1998, p. 237). He also found that the dominant coalition directly affects the practice of public relations to operate according to its own agenda – in a two-way, mixed motive manner (Plowman, 1998, p. 237).

Scholars Lauzen and Dozier (1992) used the foundations of the Excellence Study to conduct research that looked at the relationship between the changeability of publics in an organization’s environment in relation to the public relations function (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992). They argued that environmental challenges create “a demand for enactment of the public relations manager’s role by the organization’s top communicator.” (p. 205) Lauzen and Dozier (1992) sampled 262 public relations practitioners in the United States, testing the relationships between organizational environments and the consequences external conditions bring to bear on the public relations function (p. 205). The results indicated that environmental variables, which included the range and changeability of publics, were positively related to the manager role (p. 215). Lauzen and Dozier conducted a subsequent study in 1994 to determine whether issues management practices mediate the relations between perceived environmental complexity and the type of public relations practiced within the organization (Lauzen & Dozier, 1994, p. 163). In this study, the researchers studied 182 public relations practitioners and issues management specialists within large U.S. corporations to find that what they termed as outer directed issues...
management is a proactive, open-systems approach fostered by participative organizational cultures (Lauzen & Dozier, 1994, p. 163). They found that this type of organizational culture increases the involvement of public relations practitioners in dominant coalition decision making and is positively related to the public relations practitioner serving in the management role (p. 163).

The dependent variables (conflict resolution, changeability in publics, and issues management) was researched to determine what would foster the public relations as manager role in organizations and the dominant coalitions’ inclusion of those public relations practitioners. The present study brings a different perspective to this issue, looking at public administrators’ and public affairs officers’ attitudes and beliefs about, and behaviors toward, the public relations role within their public sector organizations.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The excellence, power-control, and systems theories will provide the framework of the present research from a coorientational approach.

Excellence Theory

The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) - funded Excellence Study was designed to scientifically determine what constitutes good management in public relations (Grunig et al, 1992). Six variables of an excellent management public relations organization: political, level of activism, economic, level of development, culture, and media, suggested that societal culture and public relations are linked (Grunig et. al., 1992, pp. 222-223). The study found that societal cultures display lower levels of power distance, authoritarianism, and individualism. However, having higher levels of interpersonal trust are most likely to develop excellent public relations practices. Organizations in societal cultures that do not display these characteristics were found less likely to practice excellent public relations (Grunig et al., 1992).

Excellence Theory integrates systems theory and the situational theory of publics. Excellence theory proposes that managed communication helps achieve organizational goals because it helps reconcile organizational goals with the expectations of its relevant publics. Excellence theory purports that public relations is most effective when the senior public relations manager helps to shape organizational goals and helps to determine which external publics are most important strategically. Additionally, public relations management is most successful when it operates strategically by identifying active publics and developing symmetrical communication programs whose success can be measured (Grunig, et al, 1992; 1995; Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002).

Findings from the Excellence Study in public relations and communication management illustrated 10 generic principles in organizations that practiced excellence: (1) The involvement of public relations in strategic communication; (2) the empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition or direct reporting relationship to senior management; (3) an integrated public relations function; (4) public relations as a management function separate from other functions; (5) the public relations unit headed by a manager rather than a technician; (6) the two-way symmetrical or mixed-motive model of public relations practice; (7) a symmetrical system of internal communication; (8) the knowledge in the department needed to practice the managerial role and symmetrical public relations; (9) diversity embodied in all public relations practitioner roles; and (10) a strong sense of ethics and social responsibility (Grunig et. al, 1995;
Grunig et al. (2002). Within this framework, Dozier (1992) built upon Broom & Smith’s (1978, 1979) roles concept within public relations and extended it within the excellence theory to describe the practice of public relations. Excellence theory’s four communications roles: manager, technician, communication liaison, and media relations, (p. 327), will be studied and considered in relation to the public relations role within the public sector.

**Power-Control Theory**

In his chapter, “Public Relations and Organizational Power,” Berger (2007) found that: In addition to the many other contributions to public relations, excellence theory has spurred research into power issues in the profession and provided an important vocabulary of terms and concepts. Nevertheless, any number of areas of power research… require attention by the next generation of public relations scholars. Whether professionals see, understand, and engage power in organizations links to how they see, understand, and practice public relations, then there is more work to do on a number of research fronts and great urgency getting on with it. (p. 233)

Grunig’s (1992) Excellence Study determined that Hagan, Gillis and Simpson’s (1989) power-control theory is useful in determining why organizations implement inappropriate models of public relations for their environments. Grunig (1992) studied inter-organizational relationship and environmental theories to determine if there was a relationship between an organization’s environment, its structure, and the type of public relations practiced within that system (Grunig, 1992, p. 23). The researchers learned that those who manage organizations do not consider environments as their objective reality (Grunig, 1992). Instead, managers choose to only observe those parts of the organization that are “of their mind-set and organization culture” (Grunig, 1992, p. 23). These findings resulted in the need to study the impact that power and influence play in public relations practitioners’ roles within organizations.

Distinguishing between power and influence, Grunig (1992) cites the work of Katz and Kahn (1966) who stated that “influence is a transaction in which one person (or group) acts in such a way as to change the behavior of an individual (or group) in some intended fashion; where power is the capacity to exert influence (in Grunig, 1992, p. 486).” The development of the power-control theory provided a clearer understanding for why organizations practice public relations the way they do Grunig (1992), suggesting that people with the most power in the organization – the dominant coalition – “behave and choose the public relations programs they do within an organization because they choose that behavior (Grunig, 1992; Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). Power-control theory, as defined in the Excellence Study, is concerned with how dominant coalition members choose to practice public relations within their organizations based upon their values and beliefs (Grunig, 1992). Public relations literature indicates that public affairs departments within public sector environment typically practice one-way, asymmetrical, public information models (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2000). These models are counter to the preferred excellence model, which involves two-way symmetrical, strategic communication that facilitates mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (Grunig et al., 1992, 1995, 2002).

Within public administration research, Dye (2001) purports that policymakers running government organizations seek to “maintain and enhance their own power, wealth, status and lifestyle like everyone else (p. 16).” They, like the rest of society, are affected by the distribution of wealth and income in society, by the structure of institutional power, and by the stratification of social position (p. 16). Dye argues that policymaking happens within the constructs of
American society’s power and wealth, which all exist within such large institutions as media, conglomerates, insurance companies, investment firms, and corporations (Dye, 2001). This institutional societal structure determines policymaking decisions, which issues will be decided, and which issues will never become issues (p. 16).

Studies within the public relations, public administration and organizational management literatures demonstrate that an organization’s behavior is determined by the value of its dominant coalition (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002); that members of the power elite knowingly abuse their discretion to attain their own goals (Mintzberg, 1983); and that policymaking begins with what will be decided by those in power (Dye, 2001).

Power-control theory has not been studied within the context of the public sector, nor have public relations scholars studied public administrators as members of the dominant coalition. However, within public administration literature, power elite theorists such as Thomas Dye (2001) and William Dornhoff (2000) argue that those who run American government adhere to upper class values and perpetuate those values to maintain their class position. Dye (2001, p. 7) states that "6,000 individuals in 7,000 positions exercise formal authority over institutions that control roughly half of the nation's resources in industry, finance, utilities, insurance, mass media, foundation, education, law, and civic and cultural affairs." Only a small number of people direct the activities in these institutions (public administrators), giving each member of the elite a great deal of power, further enhancing the group's cohesion (Dye, 2001). Dornhoff (2000) argues that “social cohesion” allow the power elite to be bound together by their upper-class values and arrive at a consensus when dealing with a problem (p. 5).

Public administration’s concern with networks coming to dominate public policy (Peters & Pierre, 1998) is a concept shared by Grunig’s power-control theory. Therefore, power-control theory will frame the study’s objective to address the values and motivations of the public administrator within the context of public relations roles.

**Systems Theory of Organizations**

In the Excellence Study and Excellence Theory, Grunig and the research team looked at the systems theory as one of four theories of organizational effectiveness in relation to public relations (Grunig, 1992). Within this context, systems theory “emphasizes the interfaces between organizations and their environments, as well as between subsystems within the organizational system and between subsystems and the organizational whole.” (Grunig, 1992, p. 71) Systems theory is viable for exploring effectiveness in organizations in relation to public relations (Grunig 1992) since public relations helps to establish and maintain mutually dependent relationships between an organization and the publics with which it interacts (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1985).

The systems approach contends that the entire organization comprises interrelated subparts where the performance of any one subsystem will impact the entire system (Robbins, 1990). According to Robbins (1990), the systems approach to organizations focuses on the means needed to achieve end results rather than the specific end results themselves. Therefore, the public relations department, as one managerial subsystem, contributes to the success or failure of any one organization (Grunig, 1992).

Within the public administration discipline, scholars think about a system as an organization that converts inputs (stimuli) into outputs (Rosenbloom, 1998). When looking at government organizations, Rosenbloom (1998) offers examples of inputs as being demands for development or improvement of programs for such issues as crime control; while the conversion
would be the combination of these demands into a change in public policy, with the output being possibly more police patrols or community policing (p. 166).

In looking at closed versus open systems within government organizations, closed systems theory focuses on stability, controlled mechanisms, and predictable responses where open systems are viewed as too complex to be predictable but are viewed as adapting to and cooperating with their environment (Rosenbloom, 1998). Therefore, open systems theory is considered within public administration as one that “better fits the normative tenet of democratic constitutionalism that public administrators ought to be responsive to their stakeholders.” (Rosenbloom, 1998, p. 169)

Organizational theorists Charles Perrow and William Scott argue that organizations are often more oriented toward controlling their environment rather than adapting to it (Rosenbloom, 1998). In their chapter, “The Political Economy and the American Bureaucracy,” Fainstein and Fainstein (1984) argue that the deficiencies of government bureaucracy in the United States are rooted in the political economy and capitalism, which are the institutional and class contexts within which the state functions. Fainstein and Fainstein (1984) argue that poor governmental performance has not resulted from bureaucracy within these organizations but instead from class privilege and enormous concentrations of private power in the economy. The authors acknowledge the problems of governmental performance and accountability and state the need to view these problems within the totality of the public and private sectors (p. 309).

Grunig (1992) argues that excellent public relations is best implemented within an open systems environment. Normatively, government systems should be open, where public affairs departments within them could operate within an excellent manner. Through the systems theoretical framework, this study will seek to gain insight into the values placed by and understanding of the public relations role within the public sector system by public administrators and public affairs officers.

As this is a research idea in progress, primary research will be conducted involving the use of a Likert item scale questionnaire and an in-depth interview method to study eight public administrators and eight public affairs officers working within town, city and county municipalities.

The following research questions will be posed to determine the coorientation of the public relations role within a public sector environment between the public administrator and the public affairs officer:

RQ1. What is the public administrator and public affairs officer’s coorientation toward the public relations role within the organization?

RQ2. What is the public administrator and public affairs officer’s coorientation toward the value of the public relations function within the organization?

RQ3. What is the public administrator and public affairs officer’s coorientation toward the professional and educational qualifications of the public affairs officer?

RQ4. What is the public administrator and public affairs officer’s coorientation of the public sector environment’s impact on the public relations role within that system?

The variables of agreement, understanding and accuracy are measured, where agreement indicates the degree of similarity between a person’s own thought process, or cognition, and his
or her perception of the other person’s cognitions; understanding determines the similarities between each person’s cognitions about an object or behavior; and accuracy indicates how correct one perception of the other person’s cognitions as compared with his or her true feelings about what the other person really does think about the object or behavior under study (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973, pp. 485-488). The measurement of these variables will determine whether the public administrator and the public affairs officer “coorient to one another” (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973, p. 482) in relation to the public relations role within the public sector environment.

The Role of Public Relations in the Public Sector (X)

- **Public Affairs Officer's cognitions about the role of PR in their public sector organization (A)**
- **Perceptions of Public Administrator's cognitions (B)**
- **Public Administrator's cognitions about the role of PR in their public sector**

**A-B Agreement**

**A-B Understanding**

**Accuracy**

- Measure of the similarity between the PAO's view of the role of PR and the view the PAO attributes to the PA (congruency)
- Measure of the similarity between the PA's view of the role of PR and the view the PA attributes to the PAO (congruency)

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**Agreement** – The Public Affairs Officer and the Public Administrator have the same attitude toward the role of PR in the public sector organization.

**Understanding** – The Public Affairs Officer and the Public Administrator define the role of PR in the same manner.


Online Instructive Churn: One Recipe for Turning Lemons into Lemonade
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Activists are finding the Internet to be an exceptional canvas for pressuring organizations to change. When stakeholders oppose organizations, this can be termed churn. We posit in this paper that some churn is positive and activist websites can be used to locate potential instructive churn. This draft covers the basic arguments developed in the paper and very tentative results.

Stakeholder Churn and Activists
Organizations and stakeholders are in a symbiotic relationship; they both need one another. However, the relationship does not have to be exclusive. Organizations can find other stakeholders, and stakeholders can find other organizations. For instance, organizations do layoff employees and employees leave for positions in other organizations. Nor is the organization-stakeholder relationship always perfect. One role of public relations is to help address and to correct problems in the organization-stakeholder relationship. In fact, some argue that the public relations is most effective when it can prevent relationship problems from escalating and becoming “public” disputes (Grunig & Repper, 1992).

Stakeholder churn is a term used when stakeholders convert their displeasure into open opposition to an organization. Stakeholder churn has a negative connotation. Churn is disruptive. Stakeholders churn means that the organization’s environment is becoming hostile and problematic. The objective is to smooth the churn and to facilitate a more conducive environment for the successful operation of the organization.

Any stakeholder can create churn. Investors, customers, community members, and employees, for example, have all created churn for various organizations. Often churning stakeholders are viewed as activists. L. Grunig’s (1992) early definition of activists was influential in public relations, an “activist group is a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action” (Grunig, 1992, p. 504). Activists share a desire to pressure an organization for change.

Activists are composed of other stakeholders. Customers, employees, investors, community members, and even the media can become activists by seeking to make change happen. Customers can boycott a product or serve. Workers can strike. Investors can change the composition of the board of directors or pass new corporate governance rules. Community members can march in protest. Activist journalists can write negative exposes. However, there are professional activists whose job is to promote a social and/or political cause—engage in public relations. People who are employed by Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Oxfam, the American Family Association, and the Parent’s Television to Council, to name but a few, are professional activists. There are even those volunteers for a cause that see that cause as the defining element of their identities. So we could distinguish between professional and amateur activists but ultimately both result in churn (Monbiot, 2002).
All stakeholders have some connection or stake to the organization. Activists have a second-level to their stakes, their cause. Activists are concerned with more than just the performance of a product for the price, wages for their work, or return on their investment for stocks. Actions should matter and help to achieve the desired social and/or political objectives—reflect your values. The products insure a fair price for producers, the company you work for has a strong human rights record, or investments are in corporations working to improve the environment. The exchange relationship becomes more complex with activists.

Historically, public relations has treated activists as obstacles to overcome (L. Grunig, 1992). Activists make can constrain organizational actions making it more difficult to operate in one’s environment (Grunig, 1989). Essentially, the negative view of activists stem from their ability and willingness to create stakeholder churn. Activists are “active” and seek impose change on an organization if the organization is resistant to the change proffered by the activists.

The Internet has increased the potential of stakeholder churn. A number of researchers have argued the Internet is a key resource for building activist power (Coombs, 1998; 2023; Heath, 1998; Kucuk, 2008). Internet Contagion Theory explains how the Internet can be used to create power for activists and to raise their salience for organizations (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). The critical element is the various communication tools that facilitate coalition formation and the dissemination of mobilizing information. The Internet can be a communication platform for reaching other like-minded individuals, recruiting people to cause, facilitating the coordination of activist actions, and promoting a cause to other stakeholders including the news media. These and additional communication activities allow activists to be a more effective force when confronting organizations with their petitions for change.

Organizations have long recognized the potential influence stakeholders might leverage through the Internet. Web sites are the focal point but not the sole interest of these concerns. A variety of terms have been used to describe web sites that are critical of an organization including rogue web sites, attack sites, and anti-brand sites (Holz, 1999; Kuck, 2008; Middleberg, 2001). Regardless of the term, these sites pose a threat to an organization’s reputation, how stakeholders perceive an organization based on the organization meetings its expectations (Wartick, 1992). In turn, damage to a reputation affects a variety of financial interests such as sales and investment (Carmeli and Tishler, 2005; Davies, Chun, da Silva and Roper, 2003). A number of aggressive strategies have been recommended for combating these negative web sites including lawsuits to close the site and manipulation of search engine results, better know as search engine reputation management (Kucuk, 2008).

While the focal point, blogs and posts to discussion groups are also deemed reputational threats fermented via the Internet. The fear is driven by the potential of the Internet to generate negative word-of-mouth. Negative word-of-mouth can hurt sales, damage an organization’s reputation, and harm a valued brand. The Internet has great potential for the spread of negative word-of-mouth. Consider how an industry and an association, Word of Mouth Association, has been born from the Internet’s potential to spread messages virally. Public relations people now try to seed blogs and discussion groups with their positive messages. Negative messages can spread just as easily. With a few key strokes, a message can be posted for any one with online access to see and those draw to the message can use a few more key strokes to spread the message to others via e-mail, links, blog, or posts.

Clearly not all messages become viral and evolve into a pandemic. But the potential does exist. That potential drives organizations to carefully monitor what is being said about them on the Internet and to counter messages that are problematic. For instance, Procter & Gamble
aggressively counter the Internet rumor that Febreeze was harmful to pets. When pet owners are a primary target customer, the negative message the product kills dogs and cats had to be attacked. The bottom line is that Internet based activists can increase the stakes for organizations by providing power resources to a usually powerless segment of stakeholders.

Instructive Churn and Activists

We argue that activists and stakeholder churn have great potential to benefit organizations. Clearly, not all activists or all churn will be useful. This section develops the argument for the benefits of activists and instructive churn and begins to establish their parameters as well. Activists can be a bellwether for society. Corporate social responsibility is becoming a staple of corporate life. At its core, corporate social responsibility is the recognition that organizations have a responsibility to stakeholders beyond just financial concerns. Put another way, making money is not the sole responsibility a corporation has to society. Corporations have social responsibilities to a myriad of stakeholders including employees, the community, and the environment itself. Employees should have safe working environments, proper healthcare, fair wages, and basic human rights. Nike and others in the apparel industry have been and remain targets of activists because the sweatshops they used as suppliers violated all of those principles. Communities should not suffer health risks from a facility or have local natural resources depleted. The environment should not be savaged by a corporation’s operations.

We approach stakeholder churn from the perspective that the Internet is best viewed as a device for stakeholder expression. Public relations practitioners should focus on listening to what is being said. The insights gained form listening can be used to adjust organizational practices and policies and to serve as a foundation for future conversations with stakeholders. We prefer the phrase “instructive churn.” Instructive churn indicates what is valued by and the values of the stakeholders. Not all churn is instructive. Some people just want to rant and rave or have unrealistic demands that offer no insight into how to address the problem. We believe that instructive churn is a safety valve that allows public relations personnel a chance to see and potentially address problems.

Exploratory Examination of Activist Web Sites

The focus of this study was to examine activist web sites in order to understand who they are creating churn. The idea was search for patterns in the usage that could facilitate or preclude instructive churn. The pattern search was guided by the concepts of agitation and Internet contagion.

Agitation

Agitation is a concept from rhetorical theory. Agitation is when people outside of the normal decision making process meet with resistance when they try to change the status quo. People are dissatisfied with some situation and desire change (Bowers, Ochs, & Jensen, 1971). Activists are outside of the decision making process, either the organization or government, press for change, and frequently do meet with resistance. Organizational management represent the primary “status quo” for the activist agitation efforts on the web sites.

Seven strategies of agitation have been identified. The strategies represent a progression and become increasingly more confrontational. The strategies have been modified to fit the activist-organization relationship: (1) petition the organization, the activists ask organizational management to make changes; (2) promulgation, activists seek to increase the number of people supporting their concern; (3) solidification, is internal and builds commitment to the activist
group; (4) polarization, the situation is defined as either support for the activists or support for the organization; (5) nonviolent resistance, the law is violated in order to draw attention to an unjust situation; (6) escalation/confrontation, try to provoke organizational management into overreacting to the threat posed by the activist group; and (7) Gandhi and guerilla, combines nonviolent resistance (Gandhi) with physical destruction of property (guerilla) (Bowers et al., 1971).

Internet Contagion

Ideas have the potential to spread quickly on the Internet. When an issue gains momentum and spreads among people, it becomes a contagion. The change activists want is a form of issue as it is a point of contention between the activists and the organizations (Coombs, 1992; Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Jaques, 2006). Activists can leverage the Internet to establish that issue is salient to an organization and should be addressed.

When an issue becomes an Internet contagion, it can increase the power of the activist group. If an increasing number of people view an issue as legitimate, the issue gains power through the number of people connected to the issue (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). One way activists can increase power is by use a diverse set of channels used to reach other stakeholders. Using multiple channels also increases the number of links in the activist’s network of support and leads us to a discussion of centrality (Rowely, 1997)

Centrality is a function of an activist’s closeness and degree (Rowley, 1997). Closeness refers to the ability of activists to independently access others across the network. An activist displays closeness by being able to spread information quickly and directly without intermediaries. Degree centrality is the extent to which an activist is well connected. Degree is the number of ways a stakeholder can be linked to others in the network. An activist demonstrates the degree dimension of centrality by using a variety of Internet-based communication tools to facilitate access to others, including Web sites, discussion groups, e-mail alerts, Web logs, and posts to complaint portals (Coombs, 2002). Centrality can create power through direct Internet communication with other stakeholders.

Operationalizing the Concepts

A coding system was develop to analyze activist web sites for agitation and Internet contagion activities. Agitation was translated into four categories of stakeholder public relations tactics: traditional, non-traditional, civil disobedience, and direct action. Tradition actions reflect basic public relations tactics such as news releases, flyers, informational documents, and press conferences. The traditional public relations are akin to the promulgation strategy in agitation. Non-traditional tactics included, protests, demonstrations, rallies, visual humor/parody, consumer buying guides, and boycotts. Non-traditional tactics are also a type of promulgation. Civil disobedience relies of breaking the law to make a point. Activists are often arrested to bring attention to their causes. Civil disobedience is one of the seven agitation strategies. Direct action includes graffiti, sabotage, vandalism, and harassment of organizational members. The direct actions include agitation strategies of escalation/confrontation and Gandhi and guerilla.

Centrality was examined by identifying web links and the variety of online channels used to spread the activists’ messages. The variety of online channels included e-mails to corporate or government officials, online petitions/pledges, listservs, symbols for other web sites, and encouragement to post information on blogs, social web sites, or to e-mail a friend.

One other distinction that arises in the discussion of online activists is whether people are encouraged to become a part of the activist action or just take specific actions. Some experts
believe the Internet is best used to activate people for quick actions rather than making them an ongoing part of the activist effort. Only the leaders stay with the activist effort while other participate brief in events such as online letter writing efforts. Other rejected this limited view of involvement and feel members should be empowered and engaged. The web sites were coded to determine if materials were provided to empower others by allowing them to be a resource for activism. Examples would include advice on holding their own events, recommendations for media relations, and resources for educating others (e.g. DVDs, document files, and posters). Such engagement also contributes to centrality by supplementing online communication with face-to-face interactions and media coverage.

**Tentative Results**

We did not want to do simple counts and percentages for the results. We used the data to develop profiles for Internet activists. The idea is that the profiles can be used to determine the likelihood of instructive churn emerging from the Internet activisms. This follows the ideas developed by Kucuk (2005) in the analysis of anti-brand web sites. The study is also a foundation for further analyses that will include corporate responses to the activists based on an analysis of these exchanges.

At this point we must elaborate on the power, the ability to get someone to do something they otherwise would not due. Excellence Theory has been criticized for its poor attention to the role of power in the organization-stakeholder dynamic (Coombs, 1993; McKie & Munshi, 2007). More recently, Excellence Theory has tried to account for power through its discussion of activists. The activists force management to listen to them often resulting in change to organizational practices. Change occurs when management hears the activist’s concerns and recognizes the value of those concerns. We refer to this as the activist-organization dialectic. The activist group stands in opposition to the organization. Management decides to listen to the activist and may decide to collaborate with activists so as to reformulate organizational behavior related to the activist’s concerns—there is instructive churn. Examples of instructive churn include Chiquita and the Rainforest Coalition, Unilever and Oxfam, and Starbucks and TransFAir USA.

Public relations tactics, activist engagement, and Internet contagion potential can help us to understand when instructive churn is more or less likely. The public relations tactics are arrayed in order of increasing agitation from tradition to non-tradition to civil disobedience to direction action. Engagement ranges from deep involvement in the activist issue to activation for specific actions. There are four categories of activists based on public relations tactics: conservative, moderates, diehards, and extremists. Conservatives utilize traditional tactics thereby limiting their ability to reach an influence others. Moderates utilize a wide range of traditional and non-traditional tactics that are viewed favorably by most stakeholders. Diehards are willing to be arrested an extend tactics to those many stakeholder would deem inappropriate. Still, there is a strong global tradition that supports civil disobedience and views it as a legitimate form of communication. However, it is easy for message to get lost as the media and other stakeholders focus on the event. Extremists engage in direct actions that most stakeholders would reject. Harassing the homes of executives, occupying building, or destroying equipment are very extreme tactics. The direct actions can drown out the message and alienate rather than attract other stakeholders.

Drawing a parallel to politics, extremists are not candidates for instructive churn. Such activists have issues that would involve radical changes organizations are unlike to address. Nor
are direct actions effective entries into instructive churn. However, extremists do open doors for more moderate activists to them negotiate with organizations. Conservatives, Moderates, and Diehards all have instructive churn potential. Each of these groups works for change within a more acceptable framework. Moderates would have the highest potential because they are seeking greater power resources by using a variety of tactics, express urgency while maintaining a strong sense of legitimacy in their actions. Diehards express strong urgency and use a variety of tactics but risk losing some legitimacy with the more their more aggressive agitation.

Engaged verses event focus of potential supporters offers some guidance as well for instructive churn. Organizations may view events as something to be weathered. They do not need to change, just ride out the storm or storms they may encounter. A sustained opposition, facilitated by engaged activists, posses a greater risk. Engaged activists are trying to grow more adherents to their cause thereby increasing their power. The pressure in consistent as additional allies are recruited and add their voices to the debate. The growth is a sign that the concern is spreading among stakeholders and is an urgent concern for them. Engaged activists have greater instructive churn potential than event activists.

Finally, the potential for Internet contagion can affect the likelihood of instructive churn. Ultimately, we hope to develop a scoring system based on the coding of Internet channels and traditional channels. A rough version was developed for the study but not reported in this draft. The idea is that the higher the Internet contagion potential score, the increased likelihood of instructive churn. The Internet contagion potential would indicate that the power of the activists could or is rising. High scores suggest it would be dangerous and perhaps counterproductive to ignore the activists.

Conclusion

Internet activism will only increase in the future. The Internet provides a low cost venue for communicating one’s message, attracting supporters, and pressuring organizations for change (Coombs, 1998; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001; Thomas, 2003). We must resist the knee jerk reaction to activist web sites. Public relations must learn to embrace and to learn from activists, not just to view them as obstacles. Various theories posit that power is key to activists being heard. Greater power makes activists a more dangerous threat when they create churn. Organizations will benefit from the identification of activists that can provide instructive churn. Our analysis of activist web sites provides a rough set of guidelines for locating activists for instructive churn. Moderate activists that seek to engage their members and have high scores of Internet contagion potential are the best opportunity for instructive churn. Moderates are generally open to discussing their issues with management and are building power base that could eventually force an organization change. Better to announce a change derived from working with activists than announcing a change the organization was forced into accepting. As with other organizational actions, voluntary behavior is viewed more positively than forced behavior.

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Recall Communications:  
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This paper is a preliminary draft of a chapter to be included in Smudde and Courtright, Public Relations as Genre: Creating Powerful Messages (Hampton Press, 2009).

An unfortunate reality over the years is that product recalls have been featured in the news, and the frequency with which they have occurred has waxed and waned. In 1990, product recalls and defects were the focus of 5.4% of all organizational crisis news articles. News reports gradually increased in the 1990s, rising to over 14% in 1999 (Institute for Crisis Management, 1999). The recall percentage of crisis news peaked at 16.7% in 2000 and remained in double digits through 2003 (ICM, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004). In 2004 and 2005, figures dropped to 6%; in 2006, 4% (ICM, 2005, 2006, 2007). From benign, almost mundane recalls to those of crisis proportions, product recall messages have become an important part of the American consumer landscape since the 1970s. Over the decades the basic communicative components have stabilized, with some variations within them.

We contend that product recall messages embody organizations’ strategic choices to temper public impressions and satisfy consumer concerns about the existence of product defects, the rectifying of the defects, and the organizations’ continuing focus on quality. Such discursive actions constitute genres—formal tactics that involve rhetorical strategies. After a brief discussion of genre theory applied to public relations, we then situate product recalls historically and within the broader research literature regarding corrective action taken in crisis situations. An analysis of product recall messages issued in 2007 reveals the genre to be comprised of theory-based substantive characteristics, stylistic choices related to language intensity, and pragmatic concerns for projecting an organizational image focused on quality. We close the paper with implications for theory, practice, and future research.

A Brief Introduction to Genre Theory Applied to Public Relations

As Smudde (2004) has noted, there are a variety of discourse forms that public relations may enact. Undergraduate majors with adequate training should be able to label such tactics, recognize their formats, identify their basic components, and apply the rules for using them without much trouble. Yet the labeling of media choices as “tactics” in many of our public relations education texts belies an important insight: All tactics are discourse conventions that embody (at least implicitly) strategic imperatives. Taking our cue from Hearit and Courtright (2003, based on Harrell & Linkugel, 1978), public relations discourse conventions may be understood in at least three ways: de facto, structural, and motivational.

De facto labeling of genres is something anyone can do. Employees learn what a memorandum looks like long before they write one (if ever). Consumers receive newsletters from utility companies and recognize them as such, even when they are tossed unread into the
wastebasket. Audiences accept public service announcements (PSAs) to be for the public good, and aired without payment on broadcast outlets (even though some public service campaigns pay for placement to ensure that key audiences hear them). If rules governing form and purpose are violated, everyday audience members may recognize that something is wrong but may not be able to put their fingers on it.

Public relations academics and professional mentors teach the fundamentals of genres as structures, as identifiable forms. For example, news releases follow the newspaper genre convention of the inverted pyramid pattern, by now familiar to the reader. Still, trade publication authors sometimes provide additional insights with rules and recommendations for better writing to improve a release’s chances of news placement (e.g., McCleneghan, 1999; Steward, 2005). However, such approaches reduce the crafting of messages to a matter of fitting them to mere media channels and message format—a tactical focus and not truly strategic. (The same may be said of many textbooks on public relations writing.)

A motivational approach to genre brings strategy to the fore, capitalizing on the structural approach’s concern for form and combining it with a focus on content—both within the context of the message’s purpose and the situation it is designed to address. There are, however, many perspectives on what factors should be considered. In linguistics, Miller (1984) makes the argument, based on speech-act theory, that genres are defined by the social action that they accomplish. Orlikowski and Yates (1994) argue that genres shape—and are shaped by—social actors, and are adapted in response to community norms, specific events, time pressure, and media channel capabilities. In rhetoric, Campbell and Jamieson (n.d. [1978]) maintain that genres are interactions of substance and style in response to recurrent situations. (“Substance” includes strategies and form; in 1992, linguists Yates and Orlikowski stated a similar position, though expressed as substance and form.) Ware and Linkugel’s (1973) factoral approach to *apologia* played a part in Benoit’s (1995a) more extensive typology of image repair strategies. In contrast, Rowland (1991) posited that genres are best understood as a set of strategic constraints created by needs, purposes, and societal limitations related to the situation. Regardless of the source, strategy is central to using genres.

A motivational approach, therefore, would move public relations theory and practice away from mere tactical considerations in message design. A genre approach to public relations necessarily concerns form and function. Situational constraints, sound theoretical message design choices, and the purposes for the message are critical to the effective combination of formal, stylistic, and substantive considerations. Although we contend that such an approach would be useful to the practice in general, a focus on these concerns should prove particularly helpful in understanding product recall messages and the truly important, strategic role that they play in today’s marketplace and society.

**Relevant Literature Review**

Although many crisis communication studies refer to the use of product recall messages, they situate the use of the form as one choice among several strategies to create an organization’s defense (i.e., studies of corporate *apologia*; e.g., Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002; Hearit, 1999; Sellnow, Ulmer, & Snider, 1998). As such, many scholars have relied on Benoit’s (1995a) descriptive Image Restoration Theory to identify a variety of strategies, which can and should be applied more prospectively (cf. Smudde & Courtright, 2008). In Image Restoration Theory, product recalls fall under the category of corrective action strategies. Since many studies that apply the strategy of corrective action also provide insights that may be applied to the specific
study of product recall messages, we review relevant research related to corrective action prior to a review of literature specific to recall messages per se.

Studies of Corrective Action

Corrective action figures in a variety of ways in the corporate *apologia* and crisis communication. In their study of a 1994 salmonella outbreak in Schwan’s ice cream, Sellnow et al. (1998) write that the company followed up a full-scale product recall with consumer refunds, home pickup of the contaminated product by Schwan’s delivery drivers, extension of its consumer hotline to service 24/7, and compensation for customers who wanted to have diagnostic medical exams.

In 1997, Mercedes-Benz offered free installation of an Electronic Stability Program (ESP) in its A-class car models (Ihlen, 2002). This strategy, coupled with denial, excuse, and ingratiation, did not satisfy customers – and angered those car owners who already had installed the ESP at their own expense. Sears also staved off taking responsibility for its shady auto repair practices through a variety of image repair strategies, only at last taking multiple corrective actions: a change in company policy, appointment of an independent consumer watchdog, invitation to government officials to review Sears’ practices, and organization of an industry standards workgroup (Benoit, 1995b).

What is also important to recognize is that several case studies mention the need for product recalls when organizations instead opt for strategies designed to help the organization avoid taking responsibility for product harm, whether their fault or not. For example, Audi resisted calls for recall of its Audi 5000 vehicle after cases of sudden acceleration had occurred (Hearit & Courtright, 2003). In that case, the company was justified since government findings eventually determined that the fault was driver error, just as Audi had argued.

On balance, across these and the other recall studies we used (Benoit & Brinson, 1994; Benoit & Czerwinski, 1997; Benoit & Dorries, 1996; Benoit & Hirson, 2001; Benoit & McHale, 1999; Blaney et al., 2002; Brinson & Benoit, 1996, 1999; Cowden & Sellnow, 2002; Hearit, 1996, 1999; Hearit & Brown, 2004; Pauly & Hutchison, 2005; Pompper & Higgins, 2007; Sellnow et al., 1998; Thomsen & Rawson, 1998; Tollefson, 2000; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000), there is a subtle but important difference in the approaches using the concept of corrective action: researchers either define the concept rather precisely (most dominant, N=12), they do not define it and assume a general understanding of the concept (N=8), or they do not use the term at all but it is implied (N=2).

The perspective of corrective action advanced by William Benoit (and his coauthors) prevails among those who choose to define it formally/operationally in either their own words or by directly quoting a source. For example, Benoit and Czerwinski (1997) define corrective action this way:

> The accused promises to correct the problem. This action can take the form of restoring the state of affairs existing before the offensive action, and/or promising to prevent the recurrence of the offensive act…. Unlike compensation, which seeks to pay for a problem, corrective action seeks to prevent or correct it. (p. 44)

Among those who use the term and do not define it in any way, the sense and reference of corrective action is assumed and is generally the idea of remedying a bad situation. An example of this usage is Ulmer and Sellnow (2002) who simply say that corrective action is “similar to what occurs in any crisis” (p. 363). Among the rare few who do not use the term, they assert that some form of remedy is needed. For example, Hearit (1999) explains that Intel corrected the
problem of the Pentium chip by redesigning it and offering to replace it upon customers’ requests. In spite of the differences in precision when using the concept or term of “corrective action,” there is enough common ground among them, and it is clear there are multiple strategies that can be employed in such action. One strategy of particular importance is product recalls and the communications associated with them.

**Studies Focused on Product Recalls**

Public relations people have a penchant for making sense of what is going on and for categorization. Basic texts provide convenient labels for types of publics, and many writings on crisis communication provide a typology of crisis types (for three such classification schemes, see Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). The same is true of product recalls. Coombs and Holladay (2004), following Lerbinger (1997), uses two general categories: product recalls caused by a technical error and those caused by human error. In the business literature, Berman (1999), from three different sources, generates seven categories: design flaw, production defect, new scientific data about dangers from products or materials originally sold as safe, accidental contamination, product tampering, unforeseen misuse of the product by consumers, and failure to meet safety standards. However, our focus in this section concerns the choice of media channel (i.e., discourse type), the issue of formal message pattern, and the purposes and functions of product recall messages.

**Matters of Media**

Studies of product recall messages take three forms in the literature: organizational messages directed to consumers; press releases and other tactics that contain information for the mass media; and the mass media’s publication of the information. Interestingly, organizations enact messages in certain discourse forms for the mass media so that they put out the messages broadly. Product recalls, then, do not ever involve the media as the primary or even sole audience—they are an intermediate audience companies use to get messages to the ultimate audience of consumers. This relationship between companies and the mass media calls into question the traditional (but flawed) dichotomy of controlled and uncontrolled media.

Controlled media involves a company’s target public getting exactly the communication it created for them and in the way it wanted them to get the communication (e.g., annual reports, brochures, websites). Uncontrolled media involves a company’s target publics not getting exactly what it would like them to get because a third party—the mass media—makes the choices on what, how and if any messages would be sent from any discourse a company provided the media (e.g., news releases, press conferences, interviews). When we think of product recalls within the broadest context of all public relations efforts, they rely largely on uncontrolled media. This reliance makes sense because the best interests of the general public are of the utmost importance. Once we examine other kinds of public relations efforts, however, the dichotomy breaks down and becomes a continuum.

Most practitioners know there can be a certain amount of cooperation between them/their companies and media outlets so they both get something of what they want. An easy example is a feature story pitched and ghostwritten for an executive by a public relations professional and acquired, edited and illustrated through an editor at a top trade publication that meets readers’ needs while highlighting a company’s offerings. Video news releases also exhibit a fair degree of give and take, as companies provide a finished piece and extra footage (“B-roll”) that news organizations may use or even add their own footage. Such cocreation of discourse for a
company’s ultimate publics results in a middle ground of what we call semi-controlled/semi-uncontrolled media, depending on how far toward one end of the continuum one goes with the creation and dissemination of public relations discourse. This continuum, then, becomes much more strategically valuable as practitioners consider what discourse forms may best convey the messages and best fit the occasions they face on behalf of their organizations, publics, and stakeholders. The medium should be appropriate to other generic considerations, so we now turn to matters of message organization.

**Matters of Form**

Writings regarding the form and structure of product recall messages range from the formulaic to the sophisticated. How to conduct a product recall and how to structure the accompanying message are the stuff of government documents (e.g., Great Britain, 1999, cited in Gurău & Serban, 2005). A Google search of “product recall procedures” results in documents available from, among others, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (1999), the Food and Drug Administration (U.S. FDA, 2007), and state government agencies (e.g., State of California, 2007). Likewise, step-by-step procedures and tips for handling and communicating recalls can be found in many trade/academic publications (e.g., Berman, 1999; Gibson, 1995, 1997, 2000; Smith, Thomas, & Quele, 1996).

Although somewhat focused on more obvious components of product recall messages such as the size and “official” look of the message, Gibson (1997) does suggest four other elements that unify product recall advertisements: “limited apology, minimization of risk or harm, provision of consumer instructions . . . and reassuring tone” (p. 46). Although his article is based on a very small convenience sample of four different media channels, Gibson’s first three characteristics suggest substantive elements of the product recall genre, and reassuring tone may be one choice or one component of the genre’s style.

**Matters of Purpose**

Closely related to a product recall message’s discursive elements is the purpose the message must accomplish. Gurău and Serban (2005), based on the assumptions of discourse analysis, argue that product recall messages embody action, knowledge, and situation. First, product recall texts tell publics the “what, why, when and how” of the product and its recall; second, these texts transmit information to consumers about potential dangers; third, the message must be carefully designed and disseminated in order to respond to—and shape—the situation and “have the desired impact on the target audience” (p. 327). Smith et al. (1996) make similar recommendations regarding media channel usage, also, as part of their emphasis on planning, include communicative concerns, e.g., to “keep customers properly informed and persuade them to complete the necessary changes” (p. 109). A second key concern for the authors is that recall planners recognize that “customer communications can reinforce the company’s image as a responsible organization” (p. 109). After a recall, the authors recommend a focus on image repair and reputation maintenance: “restoring and strengthening the company’s reputation and the reputation of the product in question” (p. 109). Taken together, the purposes of product recall messages can be reduced to two main points: Product recall messages simultaneously attempt “(1) to provide practical nature regarding the defective product, and the operational process of recalling it; and (2) to defend the reputation of the affected firm” (Gurău & Serban, 2005, p. 328, citing Jefkins, 1995).
In addition to the prescriptive recipes presented in several articles mentioned earlier, case studies in the public relations and organizational rhetoric literatures—even those that center on discourse with application of Benoit’s (1995) Image Restoration Theory—have focused most on these pragmatic concerns and have demonstrated how to do them more or less than adequately. The success stories illustrate how to keep customers informed (Benson, 1988; Thomsen & Rawson, 1998; see also Taylor & Kent, 2007, recommendations for the use of websites), and many provide examples of how to present clearly the information consumers need to participate in the recall (e.g., Sellnow et al., 1998). Negative cases reveal failures to do so (e.g., Blaney et al., 2002; Ihlen, 2002; Venette, Sellnow, & Lang, 2003). Perrier, for example, after the discovery of benzene in its sparkling water, withdrew the product completely from grocery shelves but failed to offer a coherent, single explanation as to why the recall was necessary (Pratt, 1994).

Matters of Function

The results of product recalls vary widely, of course, but the literature reveals two major concerns: the timing of the recall message and the effects the recall has on the organization as well as consumers. Timing of a product recall often has wide-ranging effects in crisis communication. Wylie (1997) links the tardy recall of British beef during the BSE (“Mad Cow”) disease scare to a Hobson’s choice of risk communication. The older “Leadership Model,” which the British government employed, assumes that the experts know more than the public and that they must have solid scientific data before raising an alarm. A more proactive “Partnership Model” of risk management may make a recall premature, thereby frightening publics before it’s determined that the recall is truly necessary.

Matters of Effect

Product recall messages have impacts on publics, the organization, or both. For example, Gurău and Serban (2005), citing Jefkins (1995), observe that public relations messages are designed to turn public hostility to sympathy, prejudice to acceptance, apathy to interest, and ignorance to knowledge. In the case of food, there already is a general disconnect between what organizations know about their products and the lack of information consumers have in making purchases (Verbeke, 2005), and the literature reviewed thus far indicates that product recalls draws attention to that asymmetrical relationship and focuses consumer uncertainty.

Effects on Publics

Unsatisfactory recalls result in “pain, suffering, and even death” (Gibson, 1995, p. 230). Even so, government-mandated recalls may have limited influence on publics. Gibson also reported that NHTSA recall response rates varied widely from 1975 to 1993. We have not located more recent information, but audience awareness could be weak for several reasons, according to Gibson (1995): editors’ perceptions of newsworthiness, consumer perceptions, the number of recalls per year (which may lead to salient messages getting lost in the information overload), and matters of publicity – reliance upon it alone for success, the type and quality of publicity.

How audiences might perceive recall messages, of course, is also of concern. Van Waes & van Wijk (2000/2001) show how companies faced with a product recall are in a precarious position that must balance public concern with corporate image to maintain relationships. In particular, the authors argue that being more direct with audiences regarding not only the harm of the situation but the request of audience action (e.g., in recall messages are critical to capturing
Effects on Organizations

In general, in the words of Burnett (1998), “crisis may produce gains as well as losses” (p. 477). Stakeholders may hold organizations more accountable when a product recall is the result of human error (Coombs, 2006). In contrast with technologically induced recalls, publics may harbor strong attributions of crisis responsibility rather than moderate ones. Burnett (1998) lists seven (see p. 477), but only a few of these are reflected in the literature.

It is clear from the corporate *apologia* literature that organizations may use product recalls as a part of broader efforts to maintain audience focus on product quality and relate it to a positive corporate reputation. For example, cooperation with government agencies is a dominant theme in food safety and recall literature (e.g., Sellnow et al., 1998; Tompkin, 2000). In general, product recalls, like other organizational crises, may be turned into opportunities (Smith et al., 1996). Johnson & Johnson’s introduction of sealed packaging of Tylenol and introduction of childproof caps being but one examplar (Berg & Robb, 1992). In such cases, product recall and subsequent messages may allow organizations to use model/antimodel arguments (Sellnow & Brand, 2001). The organization’s past practices—and perhaps the industry’s—become the antimodel, the old way of doing things. The organization’s corrective actions beyond the recall itself, such as implementing new policies or procedures to prevent a recall situation’s reoccurrence, becomes the model argument that establishes the organization as an industry leader rather than the scapegoat.

Negatively, the downside of a product recall certainly includes calculations of cost, in terms of both losses of sales (e.g., Hearit, 1999) and other concerns related to the bottom line. Gibson’s (1995) study found that “the empirical research on recall devaluation of stock value is mixed” (p. 230), and Salin and Hooker (2001) found that food contamination and their associated recalls did not necessarily adversely affect the financial market’s view of the affected companies because of the companies’ long-term financial picture and the situation being a short-term matter. This differs from mass media coverage of food contamination, which can focus on personal illness, death and loss. Ultimately, Salin and Hooker prescribe complementary yet different approaches to communicating about a food contamination to the stock market and the general public.

Additionally, Dawar (1998) and Dawar & Pillutla (2000) related the impact that product crises (and their recalls) have on brand equity. In particular, Dawar (1998) found that the impact of corrective action is measurable for variables like perceptions and, especially, brand-enhancement opportunity: “product recalls and other brand-supportive responses to crises are as much signaling mechanism as they are safety measures” (p. 116). Dawar & Pillutla (2000) found consumers’ prior expectations about a firm moderate consumer interpretations of the firm’s response to a crisis, which translates into the possibility of consumers’ responding in kind based on the effectiveness of an organization’s corrective action, including recalls.

Product Recall Messages Clarified, Not Just Classified

These concerns reflected in what we would argue to be the discourse conventions of product recall messages parallel Rowland and Jerome’s (2004) reconceptualization of organizational *apologia*. The actual recall serves an image-repair function—to rectify the problem, decrease consumer uncertainty, and provide accurate information so that consumers
can follow clear instructions on how to participate in the recall. The recall message also serves
an image-maintenance function—to improve credibility with consumers, strengthen product
position, and maintain or even improve the organization’s reputation.

One consideration hidden in this literature is the fact that many, if not most, of the recalls
catalogued by federal agencies do not rise to the level of public awareness that product recall
crisis situations entail. Certainly more information about product recalls today is communicated
via the Internet or through direct contact (electronic or otherwise) with affected consumers.
Moreover, not all recalls are considered newsworthy. If we are to understand the dynamics of
recall messages as a genre driven by strategic use of tactics, recalls of all levels of importance,
not just the newsworthy or critical, warrant our attention.

**Discourse Conventions of Product Recalls**

Product recalls are skillfully planned, executed, and evaluated. Even the most
experienced public relations officials and corporate executives must think long and hard about a
recall situation and its implications on the public, the organization, and stakeholders. Strategy,
then, is everything, and this point means that the communication campaign about a product recall
must cover everything from a thorough situation analysis to key messages to objectives to budget
to evaluation and follow-up. The nature of a strategic plan for product recalls or other crises or
issues is not within the scope of this paper. The heart and soul of a recall communications
campaign—and any public relations effort, large or small—is its key messages. This component
of a strategic communications plan comprises two basic things: (1) a theme, thesis or slogan that
is the single idea around which all communications revolve and (2) copy points that serve as the
basic proof or substance for detailed arguments that support the theme/thesis/slogan. For product
recalls, two approaches have been especially potent in organizations’ key message platforms—
fear appeals and language intensity—and, in turn, play a vital role in the selection and use of
particular public relations discourse types to fulfill strategic objectives.

**Fear Appeals**

Although the public relations literature has emphasized product recalls of crisis
proportions, the number of recalls per year would suggest that not all recalls are dramatic. Over
the past 35 years the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (2008), for example, has issued
4,006 recalls, which averages nearly 115 recalls a year—and the large majority of them were not
high-profile. In this section we employ modest, routine recalls as well as the dramatic, highly
publicized ones in recent years as examples.

We observe that all product recall messages fundamentally address four components of
fear appeal: danger and urgency, which demonstrate the level of harm; and response efficacy and
self-efficacy, which function to control fear (Witte, 1992). This quartet of fear appeals is ironic
because the idea of a product recall often is to manage fear through a reasonable presentation of
the problem and provision of a clear, logical solution in the best interests of people and the
organization. In the first pair of components for fear appeals, danger and urgency correspond to
the classic stock issue arguments (cf. German, Gronbeck, Ehninger, & Monroe, 2004;
Ziegelmueller & Kay, 1997) of jurisdiction, harm and inherency: who has responsibility for the
problem precipitation the recall, how harmful is the situation, and will the problem disappear by
itself? The second pair of response efficacy and self-efficacy corresponds to the classic stock
issue arguments of blame, cure and cost: how did the organization allow the situation to come
into being, what will be done to remedy the problem, and how much will people and the
organization benefit? Recall communications, then, exhibit the classic problem-solution pattern to allay the audience’s fears while simultaneously assert why the audience must become involved in the situation.

This rhetorical nature of recall communications underscores the motives behind and effects sought by an organization and constitute the classic argument stock issue of solvency. We suggest that proper documentation of the problem precipitating a recall lends credibility to the organization because it is taking responsible action (jurisdiction, harm and blame). This responsible action then extends to the essential tasks of providing a solution that will address the level of harm to the public and the organization (inerency and cost). The product recall itself provides affected publics with clear instructions that they can perform (cure), such as contact a physician, return products to the store of purchase for refund, etc. Taken together, then, the fear-control elements of recall communications assign responsibility to (1) the organization to cure the ill and (2) the consumer to participate in the cure.

Sometimes the recall message may be necessary but not sufficient to control public fears, such as the recall of Dole packaged spinach in the summer of 2006. In such cases it is essential that the recall message document the harm credibly and ethically. Reducing ambiguity for audiences may not be that hard for some recall messages, but to get an audience’s attention the messages must be targeted carefully and crafted so as to address risk with the appropriate level of fear inducement and ability to reduce audience uncertainty. Matters of language intensity are paramount at this level, and there are means for effectively using it for recall communications.

Language Intensity

Product recalls of any ilk are naturally startling. People do not like to find out that something they purchased and used has some defect or, worse, an element of danger. Stylistic considerations about the tone of the communication about a recall are critical. A problem-solution framework that frames the recall and its corrective action depends on an effective pattern of language intensity that garners attention to the problem, inspires cooperation, and then elicits participation in the solution.

High language intensity (e.g., emotional appeals, startling statistics) can increase the likelihood of media coverage and audience compliance. This approach is typical of the most dramatic and publicly notable of product crises, including those typically seen in the corporate apologia literature. Communicators must be careful, however, not to overemphasize facts and statistics at the expense of honestly communicating the level of harm and/or inerency. Next, neutral language intensity can be used to communicate factual information so audiences know what procedures they should follow in the recall, which cures the problem. Proper use of the fear-appeal elements coupled with stylistic choices may help to cut through all the other competing messages to reassure audiences, emphasize the idea that things will be righted, and focus on product and organizational reputation.

Discourse Types

In the field of public relations there are approximately 30 types of discourse that practitioners may use (Smudde, 2004; see Figure 1). Those discourse genres are made all the more publicly usable, useful and used because of the Internet and organizations’ application of it to manage much of its recall communications in addition to traditional mass media. In the recall literature the dominant genres for recall communications falls into the realm of media relations, which is reasonable because of the need to inform large numbers of geographically diverse
people. The key discourse genres typically used in product recalls include press releases, video news releases, advertisements (print and broadcast), prepared statements, news conferences, fact sheets, frequently asked questions (FAQs), interviews, and media kits (printed and online/electronic).

Figure 1. Public Relations Discourse Genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prepared statements</th>
<th>Biographical statements</th>
<th>Newsletters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Press releases</td>
<td>Press conferences</td>
<td>Video news programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media advisories</td>
<td>Press kits</td>
<td>Corporate reports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video news releases</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Corporate image pieces</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photo news releases</td>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>Pitch letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio news releases</td>
<td>White papers</td>
<td>Pitch calls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact sheets</td>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Written correspondence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Backgrounders</td>
<td>Speeches</td>
<td>Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAQs</td>
<td>Public service messages</td>
<td>RSS feeds (Blogs, Podcasts, V-casts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tip Sheets</td>
<td>Advertorials</td>
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</tbody>
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*Smudde (2000, 2004)*

The most important aspect to remember about the use of any discourse type is its strategic value, not just how well it can carry a message and how well an audience might respond to it. These are the aspects of strictly tactical thinking, if they are focused on just “getting the word out.” But truly effective and successful communications depends on strategic thinking that focuses on the bigger picture, making tactics subservient to larger objectives that tie directly to an organizational mission and vision. Being mindful of and enacting an organization’s overall strategic plan is the responsibility of all organizational members, especially its leaders and, in particular, its public relations professionals.

Strategy is necessary in the full range of public relations efforts, from the simplest announcement to the most complicated crisis. In terms of recalls, public relations professionals must have and act in accordance with (1) an annual plan for the operation of all communications efforts that is synchronized with the organization’s strategic plan, (2) ad hoc or campaign plans tied to the annual public relations plan, and (3) contingency plans for unplanned but high-risk situations like crises, issues and recalls that can put an organization’s image, reputation and financial position in jeopardy.

Specific discourse types must be prescribed and drafted in template form in contingency plans so that key information can be added and arrangements can be made depending on the situation. For example, the case of syringes found in Pepsi cans in the 1980s has stood as the quintessential approach to handling a product problem precisely because contingency mechanisms were in place, including video documentation of the production process and other information that clearly showed such product tampering was impossible. The public’s fears were quenched through Pepsi’s communications through the media and, ultimately, quelled when criminal investigations found and convicted the person who placed syringes in her own cans of the soft drink.
A product recall then, is more than just a series of steps or a matter of filling in the discursive blanks. Strategy, not just tactics, is key. We strongly disagree with the following contention:

The final guideline for consumer product recall press releases is this; remember, the coverage ultimately will be commensurate with the seriousness of the risk, or actual inflicted harm, of the product being recalled. This means that no matter how professional or persuasive your print product recall information may be, the amount and nature of coverage will be determined by how serious the product-induced danger is, not by your communication efforts. (Gibson, 1997, p. 43)

The limitation of print media aside, strategic considerations of genre as part of an organization’s communication efforts are not pointless. Attention to fear-appeal elements and issues of style to address situational constraints (e.g., the seriousness of the risk from the mundane to the critical), media formats, and audience uncertainty can improve rhetorical efforts to manage product and corporate reputation.

Implications and Prospective Musings

Product recalls reach deep into society because they affect tens of thousands of people at a time. Our work here marks the beginning of a project that we’ve begun that focuses on the creation, use and results from public relations discourse. The following items outline the various steps to be taken in this work:

- Further mapping of the genre: More systematic studies of large samples of product recall messages may verify our observations and elucidate more specific similarities and differences. Since much of the extant product recall research has focused on food safety (e.g., Sellnow et al., 1998; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007; Teratanavat, et al., 2005a, 2005b) and pharmaceuticals (e.g., Benson, 1988; Berg & Robb, 1992; Hearit, 2006; Pauly & Hutchison, 2005; Vlad, Sallot, & Reber, 2006), might there be subgenres that are field-specific (Rowland & Jerome, 2004)?
- The interplay of genres: Recall messages are a genre in their own right; future research should investigate the relationship of such messages to other discourse conventions employed to address crisis situations and efforts to deal with product defects in a timely manner. (It also might be interesting to trace the history of the genre: How did it develop, to what extent has the genre stabilized [see Jamieson, 1973], and what latitude do practitioners have in shaping substance and style to adapt it to situational constraints and account for its possible interactions with other strategic choices within a communication plan?)
- Issue management: How do you build that rhetorical bank account of credibility? “Clearly it is important to build the organization’s credibility in the eyes of those stakeholders in anticipation of the need for a recall” (Smith et al., p. 109). More study focused on recall message components and their relationship to product and corporate reputation would be valuable to the field.
- Corporate apologia: Genres are part of the strategic tools used in crisis communication, and product recall messages are but one
- Missed opportunities: Future studies might focus on missed opportunities for the use of recall messages. Timing of recall messages can be a key to curtailing the length of a crisis, reducing publics’ uncertainty and fears, and addressing concerns for product and organizational reputation.
Ethical concerns: In addition to the issues associated with timing, risk communication, and politeness, what are the implications for message design regarding the uses of the fear-appeal components and language intensity? We would caution practitioners to use information in this study to create honest, open communication that considers the public interests of safety and taking reasonable action as well as the organization’s responsibilities for correcting harm, reassuring publics (including investors), and managing product and corporate reputation.

Notes

1Hereafter, the Institute for Crisis Management will be cited as ICM.

2Harrell and Linkugel (1978) posit a fourth approach to genre, the transcendent, but that approach is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a transcendent approach would yield, according to our reading, universal metaphors employed within messages, e.g., the characterization of the cause of a health-related product recall as “a deadly villain.”


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Introduction and Review of Literature

There is little question that the study of public relations is well established on a university level. Thousands of students a year leave universities and colleges-- both the bricks and mortar variety and the electronic versions – with degrees in communication with a focus on public relations. There are more than 300 chapters of The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) at American colleges and universities.

The kinds of skills and capabilities that these newly minted PR would-bes should bring to the professional world has been the subject of much debate. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) has addressed this issue with a set of curriculum standards that must be met in order for a PRSSA chapter to be present on a campus. In order to establish a chapter, a school must include the following courses in its public relations curriculum: an introductory course; a writing/production course; a strategic implementation course; a research course; and a supervised internship (PRSA requirement).

The course of study is designed to teach and enhance communication skills. If public relations faculty members are doing their jobs, when students graduate, they will take with them elevated capabilities in strategic oral and written communication competence. They will be different in their skills levels from students who graduate with degrees in English or mathematics or education. It is relatively easy to evaluate the effectiveness of a given curriculum by testing students before and after a course of study and matching up the results. But such a process does not answer the questions “Are public relations students innately different in their communication competence from a student interested in earning a degree in English, or mathematics or education?” and “Is there a way to identify those students?”

Importance of question

Screened majors are not uncommon in universities and colleges. Screening provides a way for departments to husband their limited resources, helping to ensure a higher level of quality by limiting the number of students who can get into a major by accepting those who are more likely to succeed in their academic programs. Why allow students to major in mathematics when they are unable to pass a basic mathematics test? Few argue with the concept screening in this day and age of limited budgets in higher education. The question remains as to which set of questions best assess capabilities?

Writing, including spelling and grammar, are essential skills in the
PR profession yet more and more often, strategic communication is coming to the forefront (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006). How to measure strategic communication capabilities becomes an important focus of concern.

Yet another consideration in favor of the screening process is the need to better advise a student into, or out of, a particular field of study based on the likelihood of satisfaction and success. Does it make sense to permit students to spend two to three years, and thousands of dollars, studying a major that will not result in any rewards—tangible or otherwise?

This is not to say that screening programs should represent an iron gate that is slammed in the face of supplicants to a major but test scores can provide a clearer picture to a perspective major about the road ahead and the chances of arriving at a satisfying destination.

**Communication Competence**

Exactly what is communication competence has been at the heart of extensive scholarly debate but, there has been general agreement that whatever else communication competence may or may not be, it does have three domains—affective, cognitive and psycho-motor (Spitzberg, 1983; Spitzberg, 1990). And while communication competence has been conceptualized in several ways, adaptability has become a universal component in defining the concept (Hale & Delia, 1976).

Greene (1984) identified two types of knowledge that are important components in effective communication—conceptual and procedural—with procedural knowledge based on past outcomes and experiences in communication events. Communicators are able, to varying degrees, to cognitively use that ever-growing repository in subsequent communication interactions.

Duran and Spitzberg (1995) identified three components of the cognitive process involved in communication: (1) perception and anticipation of situational variables; (2) monitoring of the interaction as it takes place; and (3) reflection immediately following the interaction. Based on this conceptualization of the cognitive process, the researchers developed and tested a measure of cognitive communication competence which included five separate mental activities present in successful communication interactions: (1) planning cognitions which include mental rehearsal of communication; (2) presence cognitions or awareness of how participants are reacting to the encounter; (3) modeling cognitions which deal with the ability to use contextual variables; (4) reflective cognitions which provide assessment of the encounter and ways to use that experience for future communication interactions; and (5) consequence cognitions which is a person's assessment of the effects of his or her own performance in the communication encounter (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995).

In a recent study, Algren and Eichhorn (2006) found significant difference in the scores between public relations technicians and managers on the cognitive communication competence. It has long been accepted that managers are more likely to engage in the strategic communication process than are technicians (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2004). Therefore this study was interested in examining what was occurring at the university level. It makes sense that students drawn to the public relations curriculum and students who partake in the public relations and communication coursework would establish higher cognitive communication competence when compared to non-majors. Therefore, the following hypothesis was posed:
Hypothesis 1: Public relations majors will have significantly higher scores on a measure of cognitive communication competence compared to non-public relations majors.

Method

This study proposed that there would be a significant difference in cognitive communication competence between public relations majors and non-public relations majors. A quantitative survey was distributed to 362 undergraduate students in two northeastern, public universities. From this sample, a random sample of 100 public relations majors and 100 non-public relations majors were chosen for the analysis.

Participants

Participants included 34.5% (69) males and 65.5% (131) females. There were 37.5% (75) freshmen, 19.5% (39) sophomores, 25.5% (51) juniors, and 17.5% (35) seniors. Public relations majors made up 50% (100) of the sample while non-majors mostly included, Broadcasting 18% (36), Communication Studies 5.5% (11), Computer Science 3.5% (7), and 4% (8) Undeclared. Other majors represented in this sample were Health Science, Chemistry, Advertising, Kinesiology, History, Cognitive Science, Philosophy, Business Administration, Physics, Graphic Design, Music, Math, Marketing, Public Justice, English, Education, Psychology, Meteorology, and Journalism.

Instrument

Duran and Spitzberg’s (1995) Cognitive Communication Competence Scale (CCCS) was used to measure cognitive communication competence. This scale is composed of 27-items. These items are Likert-type items with answer categories ranging from “never true of me” (1) to “always true of me” (5). There are five dimensions; 1) planning cognitions (“Before a conversation I think about what people might be talking about”); 2) presence cognitions (“During a conversation, I am aware of when a topic is going nowhere”); 3) modeling cognitions (“When I first enter a new situation I watch who is talking to whom.”); 4) reflection cognitions (“After a conversation I think about what the other person thought of me”); and 5) consequence cognitions (“Generally, I think about how other might interpret what I say”).

Results

Cognitive communication competence seems to be a necessary component for success in the public relations discipline. This study set out to measure the extent to which there is a difference between cognitive communication competence between public relations majors and non-public relations majors.

Hypothesis one investigated whether public relations majors would have significantly higher cognitive communication competence scores than non-public relations majors. It was found that indeed, public relations majors did score higher \( t(197) = 2.295, p < .044 \). The mean for the public relations majors was 3.54 and the mean for the non-public relations major was 3.37.

To examine these findings more closely each of the five dimensions were analyzed. Two of the five dimensions of cognitive communication competence showed significant differences. Modeling cognitions \( t(198) = 2.67, p < .008 \) and consequence cognitions \( t(198) = 3.09, p < .002 \) were significantly higher for public relations majors. While the planning, presence and reflection dimensions did not show significant differences, the means scores for the public relations majors were all higher than the non-public relations majors.
Discussion

Screening has become a tool by which university and college departments, often stressed by too many majors and not enough resources, limit the number of students who will be accepted into the major.

The question remains what is an appropriate focus of screening? Because writing is cited as an essential skill needed for success in the public relations profession (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006) it seems logical to screen with the use of a grammar or writing tests. This approach would, unfortunately, paint only part of the picture. In addition to excellent writing skills, successful practitioners need to be able to communicate strategically in order to rise to the top of the profession (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2006). Many argue that writing and grammar skills are commodities that all graduating students should possess, basics that need to be required of every major. These skills are, and can be, taught to everyone in a classroom setting.

In order to effectively screen students interested in becoming public relations majors, a more discriminating standard needs to be applied. Strategic communication requires communication competence. Earlier research (Algren & Eichhorn, 2007) has shown that public relations managers score significantly higher on the cognitive communication competence (CCC) scale than do public relations technicians. The scale identifies five separate mental activities present in successful communication interactions: (1) planning cognitions which include mental rehearsal of communication; (2) presence cognitions or awareness of how participants are reacting to the encounter; (3) modeling cognitions which deal with the ability to use contextual variables; (4) reflective cognitions which provide assessment of the encounter and ways to use that experience for future communication interactions; and (5) consequence cognitions which is a person’s assessment of the effects of his or her own performance in the communication encounter (Duran & Spitzberg, 1995). All these components are a part of what makes a communicator strategic.

Results of this study indicates that public relations majors do have a higher level of CCC than non-majors. Two dimensions, modeling cognitions which deal with the ability to use contextual variables and consequence cognitions which is a person’s assessment of the effects of his or her own performance in the communication encounter, specifically stood out. Therefore, public relations majors are more likely to consider the environment and use contextual cues to adapt their communication behavior and they are also more likely to analyze their own behavior by thinking about how they could have done better in the communication interaction. While one study should not dictate the future of screening mechanisms in public relations programs, this study does provide a focus in examining effective screening tools.

Future research:

The question of how faculty can better teach strategic thinking skills is much debated in education. A little more than a third of the public relations students in this study were freshmen. Since this study has found that CCC is a discriminating characteristic of public relations majors, a longitudinal study examining levels of CCC from freshman year through graduation could help provide insights as to what, and how much of, strategic communication skills students are learning from a given curriculum. Additionally, while the overall scores of CCC were higher for majors than non-majors, when analyzed, only two of the components, modeling cognitions and consequence cognitions, were significantly higher for public relations majors. While the planning, presence and reflection dimensions did not show significant differences, the means
scores for the public relations majors were all higher than the non-public relations majors. These results suggest additional study to examine factors that could be impacting the results of this study.

References
PRSSA requirements from the World Wide Web:
West Meets East: Cross-cultural Look at American and Russian Public Relations Students’ Perceptions of Leadership Style and Ethics

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Abstract

This survey explored perceptions of 377 American and Russian PR students regarding professional ethics and leadership styles. First, Russian participants appeared to be less likely to follow ethical codes than were American respondents. Second, the more respondents believed in the effectiveness of the transformational style, the more they appeared to follow professional ethics, or vice versa.

Much of the research on public relations has been done in the United States and reflects its social and cultural environment. Meanwhile, the public relations field has globalized (Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Hachten & Scotton, 2007), and thus there is the need for more extensive research on public relations in the global environment. In such multicultural settings, it is crucial to understand diverse cultural expectations, including prospects of a leader and ethical norms, to help avoid miscommunication or poor decision-making, which might have a negative impact on employee satisfaction and productivity (Ayman, 1993). Cross-national public relations research can help assess similarities and differences in the meaning of leadership styles and ethics in different cultures, contributing to the development of public relations theory and practice.

Grunig (2000) pointed out that the ethics of the public relations profession might be different from ethics of individuals and organizations. It might be implied that if there is diversity in the beliefs of “what is right and what is wrong” within the country, there would be differences in ethics perceptions between two countries as well. However, others might argue that belonging to a common profession—public relations—might stimulate the development of a common vision among practitioners from various countries. Such an outlook might be formed through many ways, including PR education. For example, Russian PR textbooks and university curricula are largely based on the Western model (Azarova, 2003). The question arises, whether this phenomenon influences students’ values and beliefs rooted in the Russian culture. As an example, American scholars believe that even though the majority of PR graduates enter technician roles, they still have their right to examine management’s questionable decisions, and they should try to influence ethical organizational action (Shick, 1996). It might not be the case in Russia, where PR students tend to conform to the authorities rather than challenge them (Berger & Erzikova, in press). However, regardless of cultural values, it is never too early to adhere to ethical conduct. This might be considered a rationale for ethics education: To help students to develop ethical awareness and skills in ethical decision-making before they face ethical issues in the workplace (Hutchinson, 2002).

This study explores perceptions of 377 American and Russian public relations students regarding professional ethics and leadership styles. The study found that Russian participants appeared to be less likely to follow ethical codes than were American respondents. As for a leadership style, there was a correlation between participants’ adherence to ethical conduct and
their beliefs in the effectiveness of the transformational leadership style. The more respondents believed in the effectiveness of the transformational style, the more they appeared to follow professional ethics, or vice versa. Significant differences on the basis of gender were not present in both samples. However, significant differences were found between American and Russian females and males. The discrepancies were more pronounced between female participants than male participants on the ethical scenarios and the Leadership scale. The results of this study call for greater emphasis on ethics education in university public relations programs.

**Relevant Literature and Research Questions**

*Public Relations Ethics and Culture*

Public relations was conceptualized as a “multicultural field that entails an ongoing competition and cooperation among a finite number of cultural voices” (Leichty, 2003, p. 277). Such a cacophony of voices calls for shifting attention from reaching consensus to managing dissensus in a global village (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). Thus, sensitivity to cultural diversity and pluralism becomes a synonym of ethicality in PR.

The importance of national context was reinforced by Spicer, Dunfee, and Bailey (2004) in their investigation of ethical evaluations of American managers working in Russia. The researchers found that national context influenced managers’ ethical decision-making process by attuning them to local norms.

While recognizing the significance of beliefs and customs within a particular culture, it is also necessary to discover traits and characteristics that would serve as a common denominator in the process of cross-cultural comparison. As for public relations, there are different opinions about a universal ethics code. Wright (1993) argued that such a code has inherent problems, whereas other discussants proposed that a general code is feasible because many moral values are shared globally (Marshall, 2002; Roth, Hunt, Stavropoulos, & Babik, 1996; Kruckeberg, 1993; 1989). This suggests the possibility of developing effective and mutually beneficial relationships not only among international communicators but also between a company that “going global” and publics in a host country. However, such an optimistic theoretical assumption is constantly challenged by immediate international experiences. Both anecdotal and empirical evidence suggest that often times, companies’ public relations professionals lack cultural competency, and they view foreign cultures from the ethnocentric perspective (Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005; Nelson, 2003; Roth et al., 1996; Gruban, 1995; Botan, 1992). As a result, such public relations practice might fail to bridge cultural norms.

Public relations is one of many human activities affected by globalization. Curtin and Gaither (2007) argued that cultural relativism and disparities between the rich and poor are ethical challenges posed by international public relations practice. The researchers noted that what defines ethical behavior—norms and customs—varies by culture, and this is why there no “more ethical” or “less ethical” cultures. In the United States, for example, bribery is a criminal act and it is not valued by cultural norms; whereas in India, a gift giving practice is a cultural norm (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). In Russia, although the law prohibits bribery and the general public considers this practice unethical, bribery is tolerated due to its widespread and unavoidable character. According to Curtin and Gaither (2007), new ethical approaches teach public relations practitioners to perceive absolute principles and situational particulars as a continuum (not dichotomies) to avoid condemnation of practices that do not fit their own cultural values.
It might be argued that to teach ethics means to make students understand and appreciate different cultures, along with other outcomes. Almost 20 years ago, Stacks and Wright (1989) noted that the academic community generally agreed that “ethics can be taught” (p. 54). They expanded Ryan and Martinson’s (1984) study of ethical values of PR practitioners with media students, intending to determine the effect of teaching ethics at a university. Stacks and Wright argued that facing an ethical dilemma, PR practitioners made judgments on the basis of their experiences, whereas students did not have such experiences and thus, their ethical choices should stem from an ethics course. The researchers found that compared to practitioners, students did not have the same degree of decision-making confidence.

In general, studies that have examined the impact of ethics instruction on university students brought mixed results. Ludlum and Mascaloinov (2004) noted only modest differences in ethics perceptions between business students who took an ethics course and those who did not have ethics education. Nevertheless, the authors advocated ethics courses by arguing that years in a college might be the only time when students engage in ethics discussions. These years are crucial because the views shaped in the college would reflect industry’s climate for the next 30 years.

Gale and Bunton (2005) surveyed 242 alumni with majors in public relations or advertising and found that graduates who had completed a media ethics course were more likely than those who had not to value ethics more highly, better identify ethical issues, and view personal and professional ethics as undistinguishable.

Hanson (2002) in his study of journalism students and professionals found that both groups prioritized the workplace before the classroom as the best place to learn about ethics, whereas Surlin (1987) found that media ethics course made issues of freedom and equality more salient to students at the end of the course.

Although international public relations has become a significant domain in public relations research (Sriramesh, Kim, & Takasaki, 1999), few studies have examined public relations practice through the prism of societal culture and ethics in countries other than the United States. Meanwhile, the contemporary generation of students has more chances to work abroad or in multiethnic companies in a home country than the cohort that entered the PR profession ten years ago (George, 2003). Public relations students as prospective professionals should not be overlooked by scholars who intend to theorize about the future of the PR profession. The first research question, therefore, is:

**RQ 1: How are students’ perceptions about professional ethics alike and different in Russia and the United States?**

*Culture and Leadership*

Conceptions of leadership have been classified in numerous schemes, which might be grouped into three broad sets: authoritative or transactional; pluralistic; and charismatic or transformational (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; McWhinney, 1997). The last one was conceptualized as almost synonymous with the notion of the “ethical leadership” (Ciulla, 2003). However, McWhinney (1997) argued that liberal Westerners are not comfortable with charismatic leadership because “the presence of such focused energy typically threatens liberal (social) agenda” (p. 120). In this regard, are American PR students comfortable with transformational style? Do they accept it as the most appropriate for PR field?

Meanwhile, Russians have demonstrated an inclination toward a strong, or charismatic, leader for many centuries. Simons and Strovsky (2006) noted that in Russia, deep authoritarian
tradition is partly rooted in harsh living conditions. Russians preferred to rely on a strong leader to survive. Choldin (1985) argued that Russian rulers have been ambivalent toward the Western influence since the end of the 17th century, when Peter the Great “cut through the window on the West.” Russian incumbents have welcomed Western technologies, and, at the same time, they have resisted Western values and ideas. In light of this complicated attitude, it is worthwhile to take an empirical look at the way public relations is grafting in Russia.

Lowe, Kroeker, and Sivasubramanian (1996), performing a meta-analysis of the transformational leadership literature, found that this style was associated with work unit effectiveness. They argued that in the past, organizations focused on the development of leaders at the upper level, whereas new organizational paradigms, emphasizing a more active involvement in decision-making process, imply the development of leaders across organizational levels. This suggests that interviewing practices would involve not only the assessment of technical skills of prospective lower level leaders but also the evaluation of their interpersonal abilities. An implication for teaching public relations is that more attention should be paid to development of leadership qualities in students who might be expected to be effective leaders at their work place despite of their young age.

Although hundreds of studies on leadership have appeared in the social science literature (Pavitt, Whitchurch, McClurg & Peterson, 1995), there has been little research on leadership and leadership styles within the public relations field (Aldoory & Toth, 2004). It also unclear to what degree culture affects the perception of PR leadership styles in different countries. Thus, the second research question is:

**RQ 2: How are students’ perceptions of effective leadership style alike and different in the United States and Russia?**

**Method**

**Participants**

The purpose of this study was to investigate student perceptions about professional ethics and leadership style. The sample included 377 American and Russian students who were studying public relations in U.S. and Russian universities. The researchers selected a student sample to assess knowledge and perceptions of professional ethics and leadership among those who will begin practicing PR in the near future. In addition, this sample and approach can provide PR educators with some insights into ethics pedagogies to help create programs that favorably influence professional ethics and enhance understanding of leadership in the classroom.

Identical questionnaires were administrated to convenience samples of PR students in Russia (n=181) and the United States (n=196). The total sample included 87 males and 290 females. The average age of the students was 20.41 (SD=2.12).

The Russian data were gathered in a Russian university with 510 public relations majors in June, 2007. Overall, 181 Russian public relations students participated in this study. Ages ranged from 17 to 37, with a mean of 20 years old (SD=2.45). The majority of participants (87/177) were 18 and 19 years old. The sample consisted of 19 freshmen, 55 sophomores, 60 juniors, 14 seniors, and 33 fifth year students (higher education in the Russian Federation requires completion of five years). The fact that only 11 percent of the overall participants were males reflects the general situation in the public relations field in Russia, where the majority of practitioners are women (Tsetsura, 2005). In addition, statistical data from the university in which the surveys took place indicate that 12 percent of all PR majors in the university were male.
In September 2007, 196 American public relations majors (67 males and 129 females) participated in the same study. American students were recruited from an introductory PR course and two upper-level PR courses at a large southeastern university with more than 500 PR majors. The majority of students completed the survey outside of class time and received credit for their participation. Similar to the Russian sample, the American pool was a convenience sample with a predominance of females (66%). According to statistical data, about 73% of all PR students in this university were females in 2007. This number also is consistent with the overall figure of females (70%) in the public relations field in the United States (Aldoory & Toth, 2002).

Participant ages ranged from 18 to 29, with a mean of 20 years old ($SD=1.74$). The majority of American participants (108/196) were 19 and 20 years old. The sample consisted of 20 freshmen, 65 sophomores, 63 juniors, and 48 seniors.

Various courses at both universities include discussions of ethics, and a specially designed ethics course was mandatory for Russian PR majors in their third year of study.

**Questionnaire**

The questionnaire included three parts. First, to measure respondents’ ethical inclinations, eight hypothetical scenarios were developed. The scenarios were grounded in PRSA code of ethics’ provisions such as free flow of information, competition, disclosure of information, safeguarding confidences, and enhancing the profession. Several scenarios were borrowed and adapted from Sowa (2006) and Wilcox (2001); all cases were based on reasonably well-known issues in public relations practice, though they were modified to eliminate direct associations with the actual cases. The focuses of the scenarios were: a false rumor about a city official contracting HIV; a deceptve campaign targeting teenagers as potential smokers; a company president’s unlawful possession of marihuana; a bribery of a journalist; an excessive level of lead in children toys; disclosure of a company’s confidential information; setting up a “false” independent organization; and an unethical action of a member of the Public Relations Society of America or the Russian Association of Public Relations.

Each situational ethical dilemma used in this study had a possible solution, which consisted of four statements based on individual and collective levels of cultural values (the third value—universal—was excluded) (Hofstede, 1984). For example, in the second scenario, a PR professional was offered an opportunity to develop a promotional campaign for allegedly safe cigarettes for minors. A self-worded provocative assertion, which followed the scenario, was: “You should carry out the campaign as described because the new business is important to your job.”

Two other statements aimed to assess respondents’ collective values as they are defined within American and Russian cultures. The participants’ tendency to sacrifice ethical standards to the prosperity of their companies was measured by an assertion: “You should carry out the campaign as described because it is important for your company.” To investigate an inclination toward an unethical behavior that might hurt society, the next challenging phrase was proposed: “You should carry out this campaign because society benefits from new products and services.”

Finally, to examine students’ legal versus ethical perceptions, the following assertion was created: “You should carry out this campaign because it is legal to do so.”

The construction of the statements—Self, Company, Society, and Legal Issues—was similar for all scenarios. Respondents used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to indicate the degree of their agreement or disagreement with
proposed solutions. The order of the scenarios was randomly varied in to ensure that order was not a compounding variable.

Second, to investigate students’ preferences of leadership style, the researchers used a modified Leadership Attitude scale that first was employed by Aldoory and Toth (2004) in their study of current members of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). Their research examined relationships between leadership perceptions and gender. The modified scale consisted of 16 statements that measure students’ perceptions of transformational leadership style, which is a synonym of ethical leadership (Ciulla, 2003). The scale included 16 questions that participants responded to based on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). In March 2007, the reliability of the scale was checked with 280 students majoring in political science and communication in a large south-eastern university, and the Cronbach’s alpha was .77.

The third part of the questionnaire asked for demographic data. The questionnaire was translated into Russian by one of the researchers. Two Russian English-speaking university PR instructors then examined both versions, English and Russian, independently and offered several suggestions for improvements, which were incorporated into the final survey instrument.

Results

The first research question examined whether there were similarities and differences in students’ perceptions of professional ethics based on the country of origin.

To perform T-tests, first, eight additional variables were computed by combining individual scores on each scenario in both samples. Second, four additional variables were computed by combining respondents’ scores on Self, Company, Society, and Legal Issues’ statements throughout all scenarios to investigate whether there were differences between American and Russian students on the basis of individual and collective levels of cultural values. T-tests showed a significant difference between two samples on each variable (Table 1). Russian PR students demonstrated that they were more likely to disregard ethics in their professional lives than their American counterparts.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Russians</th>
<th></th>
<th>Americans</th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Scenario # 1</td>
<td>8.49 2.67</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.89 2.83</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario # 2</td>
<td>9.78 2.99</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.23 3.09</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.95*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Scenario # 3</td>
<td>10.84 2.62</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.66 3.30</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Scenario # 4</td>
<td>11.12 2.28</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.80 3.07</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.72*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Scenario # 5</td>
<td>7.57 2.49</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.64 2.86</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Scenario # 6</td>
<td>9.82 2.57</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.80 3.08</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Scenario # 7</td>
<td>11.66 1.83</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.70 3.23</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Scenario # 8</td>
<td>10.00 2.17</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.50 2.70</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.86*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Self</td>
<td>21.30 3.64</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.45 4.83</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.67*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Company</td>
<td>22.77 3.41</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.39 4.99</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.87*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Society</td>
<td>21.16 3.20</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.77 4.77</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Legal issue</td>
<td>21.25 3.62</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.95 4.67</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.94*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: df=375; *Significant at \( p < .001 \).

For hypothetical ethical scenarios, the minimum score would be 4.00 (the strongest disagreement with an ethical behavior) and the maximum result would be 20.00 (the strongest agreement with an ethical misconduct). Russian respondents showed the strongest disagreement with ethics violation in a dilemma concerned with the detection of an excessive level of lead in children’s toys (\( M=7.57; SD=2.49 \)), whereas American participants’ strongest worry was about teenage girls targeted by a tobacco company (\( M=5.89; SD=2.83 \)). Importantly, both samples revealed their strongest concerns about minors put at risk in the scenarios grounded in such a provision of PRSA code of ethics as “Disclosure of information.”

The situation, in which a PR manager had to decide whether to bribe a media person to assure a promotion for a product, appeared to be the least harmful for American respondents (\( M=9.80; SD=3.07 \)). As for Russian participants, they perceived as the least harmful the scenario in which a PR professional was expected to set up a supposedly independent organization to show a public support for a project (\( M=11.66, SD=1.83 \)).

For variables constructed to measure individual and collective levels of cultural values (Self, Company, Society, and Legal Issues) the minimum score would be 8.00 (the strongest disagreement with an ethical behavior) and the maximum result would be 40.00 (the strongest agreement with an ethical misconduct). Compared to American respondents, Russian participants scored significantly higher on these variables, identifying themselves as individuals who were less likely to follow ethical standards while making decisions in their professional lives (Table 1).

T-tests did not show significant differences on the basis of gender within both samples (Table 2). In the Russian sample, the difference was found in males and females’ perceptions of the transformational leadership style (\( t=-2.33, df=179, p<.001 \)). Russian females reported a higher degree of its acceptance with the mean of 5.23 (\( SD=.77 \)), compared to Russian males (\( M=4.88; SD=.63 \)). The only statistically significant result in the American sample was the “bribery” scenario (\( t=2.02, df=194, p<.001 \)). American males indicated they were more likely than American females to bribe a journalist to receive publicity for a product.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Russian males (n=20)</th>
<th>Russian females (n=161)</th>
<th>American males (n=67)</th>
<th>American females (n=67)</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>5.91 2.65</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>9.87 2.95</td>
<td>8.48 3.02</td>
<td>8.10 3.02</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario # 3</td>
<td>10.62 3.23</td>
<td>9.87 2.95</td>
<td>8.67 3.48</td>
<td>8.66 3.22</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario # 4</td>
<td>11.10 2.85</td>
<td>11.12 2.21</td>
<td>10.41 3.02</td>
<td>9.48 3.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario # 5</td>
<td>8.15 2.12</td>
<td>7.51 2.53</td>
<td>6.84 3.06</td>
<td>6.53 2.76</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario # 6</td>
<td>9.18 3.34</td>
<td>9.90 2.46</td>
<td>8.19 3.30</td>
<td>7.90 2.97</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario # 7</td>
<td>11.19 1.95</td>
<td>11.71 1.82</td>
<td>9.70 3.40</td>
<td>9.70 3.14</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario # 8</td>
<td>10.25 2.10</td>
<td>9.97 2.19</td>
<td>7.46 2.91</td>
<td>7.52 2.59</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
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<td>21.36 3.50</td>
<td>17.75 5.07</td>
<td>17.30 4.71</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>22.06 4.50</td>
<td>22.86 3.26</td>
<td>18.65 5.47</td>
<td>18.25 4.73</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
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<td>21.11 3.13</td>
<td>18.35 5.15</td>
<td>17.47 4.55</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal issue</td>
<td>21.60 4.71</td>
<td>21.21 3.48</td>
<td>17.31 5.02</td>
<td>16.76 4.48</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>4.88 .78</td>
<td>5.23 .62</td>
<td>5.59 .58</td>
<td>5.74 .52</td>
<td>-1.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: df=179 (Russian sample); df=194 (American sample). *Significant at \( p < .001 \).
A T-test indicated a significant difference between Russian and American females. First, they scored differently on the Leadership Attitude scale ($t=-7.44, df=288, p<.001$). Compared to American females ($M=5.74; SD=2.65$), Russian females ($M=5.23; SD=.63$) showed a less favorable attitude toward the transformational leadership style. Second, Russian females’ scores on eight hypothetical scenarios and Self, Company, Society, and Legal Issue variables showed that they were less likely than American females to follow ethical codes (Table 3). Compared to Russian and American females, significant differences between Russian and American males were not so pronounced. T-tests revealed similar attitudes in five out of eight scenarios (Table 3).

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Russian females (n=161)</th>
<th>American females (n=129)</th>
<th>Russian males (n=20)</th>
<th>American males (n=67)</th>
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<td>5.91 2.65</td>
<td>8.10*</td>
<td>9.30 3.59</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8.10 3.02</td>
<td>5.03*</td>
<td>9.06 3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>8.66 3.22</td>
<td>6.62*</td>
<td>10.62 3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5.31*</td>
<td>11.10 2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6.53 2.76</td>
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<td>8.15 2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario # 6</td>
<td>9.90 2.46</td>
<td>7.90 2.97</td>
<td>6.28*</td>
<td>9.17 3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario # 7</td>
<td>11.71 1.82</td>
<td>9.70 3.15</td>
<td>6.84*</td>
<td>11.18 1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario # 8</td>
<td>9.97 2.19</td>
<td>7.52 2.59</td>
<td>8.73*</td>
<td>10.25 2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
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<td>Company</td>
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<td>22.06 4.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>21.11 3.13</td>
<td>17.47 4.55</td>
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<td>21.59 3.81</td>
</tr>
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<td>Legal issue</td>
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<td>9.52*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>16.76 4.48</td>
<td>9.52*</td>
<td>21.60 4.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: df=288 (Sample of Russian and American females); df=85 (Sample of Russian and American males). *Significant at $p < .001$.

However, such variables as Self, Company, Society, and Legal Issue showed significant difference between male participants from the two countries. Russian male participants seemed to be likely to act selfishly, disregard ethics in behalf of the company’s interest, possibly hurt society, and act unethically if the law is not being violated. Also, Russian males ($M=4.87; SD=.77$) differed from American males ($M=5.59; SD=.57$) on the Leadership Attitude scale, revealing themselves as future professionals who were less supportive of the transformational leadership style (Table 3).

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between participants’ beliefs in the transformational leadership style and their perceptions of ethics. A high score on the leadership scale meant a higher degree of acceptance of the transformational leadership style. A low score on hypothetical scenarios indicated participants’ adherence to ethical conduct. A moderate negative correlation was found ($r(375)=-.288, p < .01$), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables. The more respondents believed in the effectiveness of the transformational leadership style, the more they appeared to follow professional ethics, or vice versa.
Multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the extent to which attitudes toward the transformational leadership style might be predicted by such variables as age, education level, experience in PR, the reason why students were interested in PR, their intentions after graduation, and nationality. A significant regression equation was found ($F(7,369)=13.127, p<.001$) with $R^2$ of .199. Four out of seven variables appeared to be significant predictors (Table 4).

Table 4
**Multiple Regression Analysis Results for “Leadership” as the Dependent Variable**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1=male)</td>
<td>.202</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>2.667*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level (1=freshman)</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>-.063</td>
<td>-1.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience in PR (1=worked as a PR professional)</td>
<td>-.113</td>
<td>-.102</td>
<td>-2.071*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in PR (1=PR is a well-paid job)</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>-.378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentions after graduation (1=to work as a PR practitioner)</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>-.138</td>
<td>-2.850*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country (1=Russian)</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td>.449</td>
<td>8.712*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>4.615</td>
<td>11.063</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *Significant at $p<.001$; $R^2$ is .199.

First, female participants were more likely than male respondents to follow the transformational leadership style. Second, the more PR experience surveyed students had, the more they believed in that style. Third, those who decided to work as PR practitioners after graduation were more likely to adhere to the transformational style. Fourth, as with the T-test results in Table 1, American participants were more likely to choose the transformational style as the most appropriate for public relations practice.

The effects of the independent variables mentioned above (Table 4) on such dependent variables as Self and Company (Table 5), Society and Legal Issues (Table 6) was also determined by employing multiple regression techniques. Significant models emerged in all four cases: ($F(7,369)=12.381, p<.001$) with $R^2$ of .190 for “Self;” ($F(7,369)=14.317, p<.001$) with $R^2$ of .214 for “Company;” ($F(7,369)=10.367, p<.001$) with $R^2$ of .164 for “Society;” and ($F(7,369)=14.616, p<.001$) with $R^2$ of .217 for “Legal Issues.” The variable, Country of origin, was found to be significant in the prediction of whether participants intended to act ethically while pursuing self- and company’s interests, weighing chances to hurt society, and choosing the legality of the action over its ethicality. In the four cases, Russian participants appeared to be less likely to follow ethical codes than did American respondents. Participants’ age appeared to be helpful in the prediction of their intentions to follow the professional ethics when they make decisions about personal gain versus ethics violation. The older respondents were, the more likely they indicated respect of an ethics code.
Table 5
Multiple Regression Analysis Results for “Self” and “Company” as the Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Company</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.354</td>
<td>-.159</td>
<td>-2.712*</td>
<td>-.137</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>-1.039</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.417</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>-.755</td>
<td>-.185</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>-.331</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.836</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.214</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience in PR</td>
<td>.392</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.987</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>1.094</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in PR</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>-.078</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>-.298</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensions</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.461</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>-3.835</td>
<td>-.408</td>
<td>-7.873*</td>
<td>-4.378</td>
<td>-.454</td>
<td>-8.900*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>31.213</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.247</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Significant at p<.001; R² is .199 for Self; R² is .214 for Company.

Table 6
Multiple Regression Analysis Results for “Society” and “Legal Issues” as the Dependent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Society</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Legal Issues</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.153</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>-1.229</td>
<td>-.121</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>-.942</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.935</td>
<td>-.089</td>
<td>-1.770</td>
<td>-.609</td>
<td>-.055</td>
<td>-1.119</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.477</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience in PR</td>
<td>.579</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>1.527</td>
<td>.419</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>1.072</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in PR</td>
<td>-.045</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>-.183</td>
<td>-.192</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>-.747</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensions</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>-3.570</td>
<td>-.404</td>
<td>-7.674*</td>
<td>-4.334</td>
<td>-.460</td>
<td>-9.038*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>27.991</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.621</td>
<td></td>
<td>28.023</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Significant at p<.001; R² is .164 for Society; R² is .217 for Legal Issues.

The second research question asked whether students’ perceptions of effective leadership style depend on the country of origin—the United States or Russia.

A T-test indicated a significant difference between the two samples on the Leadership Attitude scale ($t=−8.09$, $df=375$, $p<.001$). The overall mean for the Russian sample was 5.19 ($SD=.65$), whereas the same statistics for the American sample was 5.69 ($SD=.55$). Data in Table 7 demonstrate the differences in means and standard deviations between Russian and American participants regarding perceptions of leadership style. In general, Russian participants appeared to believe in the effectiveness of the transformational leadership style less than did American respondents.
Table 7  
*T-test Comparison between Russian (n=181) and American (n=196) Participants’ Perceptions of the Transformational Leadership Style*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Russians</th>
<th>Americans</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Effective leaders think outside the box.</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>-4.71*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Good leaders need to change self-interests into group needs.</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>-2.01*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Today’s leaders need to challenge traditional ways of doing things.</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>-.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Effective leaders know that good rapport with employees is a key.</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. An effective leader puts others’ needs first.</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>-7.62*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Leadership is about creating personal connections with employees and others.</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>-6.04*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The best leaders are those who share decision-making power.</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>-1.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Successful leaders practice participative management where employees have a strong decision-making role.</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Successful leaders build good relationships with their employees.</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>-7.52*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A successful leader sacrifices himself/herself to the company and employees.</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>-8.75*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. To be successful, a leader doesn’t need to have good relationships with his/her subordinates.</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>-5.46*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. To be a successful leader, it is not necessary to create a cooperative environment.</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>-2.45*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. A good leader goes beyond self-interest for the common good.</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>-6.89*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Before making a final decision, a good leader finds out opinions of his/her subordinates.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>-4.44*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. An effective leader has a creative solution for a complicated problem.</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>-2.04*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. For leaders, it is important to be conservative and follow traditions.</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Statements # 11, 12, and 16 were reverse coded due to its negative phrasing. *Significant at p < 0.001.

After data were entered in SPSS 15.0 for Windows, the reliability of the Leadership Attitude scale was checked again. Cronbach’s alpha in the actual sample was higher than in the pre-test sample (.78 versus .77). After the statement #16, *For leaders, it is important to be conservative*, was removed, the Cronbach’s alpha grew to .80.

Discussion
Cohorts of public relations professionals entering the profession at a different point of time might produce some differences in ethical norms (Shamir, Reed, & Connell, 1990). This study aimed to examine ethical perceptions of American and Russian public relations students found that students of one age studying in different countries might have fairly dramatic differences in their perceptions of ethics.

In accordance with previous research on students’ attitudes toward ethics (Erzikova & Berger, 2007a; Erzikova & Berger, 2007b), this research found that the country of origin predicts professional values best. In general, American public relations students appeared more ethically grounded and supportive of the transformational leadership style than their Russian counterparts. However, keeping in mind Curtin and Gaither’s (2007) statement that there are no more or less ethical nations, it is necessary to address the reasons that might have influenced Russian students’ self-reports.

Presumably, Russian students’ attitudes toward ethics were determined by at least three factors: (1) a difficult economic situation in the country; (2) Russian authoritarian culture (Bahry, Boaz, & Gordon, 1997); and (3) the developmental stage of public relations in Russia (Guth, 2000). It might be implied that these factors do not work separately from each other and their interplay leads to their reinforcement.

The willingness to sacrifice ethical standards for success was more pronounced in the Russian sample than in the American sample presumably due to the atmosphere of the survivorship in Russia. Except for large oligarchic corporations, small and average size enterprises struggle to remain in business because of the tax system and corruption (Spicer et al., 2004). Previous research found that in Russia, companies that face financial crisis fire PR managers among the first employees (Erzikova & Berger, 2006).

A low level of social activism in Russia also might have contributed to students’ perception of ethics. In the West, organizations must not only satisfy consumers with products but also consider their long-term desires to avoid negative publicity. As an example, a public protest made tuna producers stop killing dolphins in the process of catching tuna (Chandler, 2007). Such a victorious campaign is hardly possible in Russia. Despite of the fact that the level of social dissatisfaction with current governmental reforms, for example, might reach the level of 70-80 percent of the population, the percentage of Russians who participate in protest actions would be 0.5 (Chuvashova, 2007). It might be argued that compared to American students, Russian students felt little virtual support from the general population if they ring the bell, making information about unlawful activities described in hypothetical scenarios available to the public.

As for the second factor, the Russian predominantly collectivistic culture presumes that employees tend to obey the leader’s decisions rather than challenge him or her. What makes this relationship even more complicated is that the Russian mass conscience perceives a person who does not mind using violence in a critical situation as the “real” leader (Gaman-Golutvina, 2005). The author argued that if the president of the U.S. directed tanks to attack the Congress, he would be immediately dead as a political leader. Meanwhile, the rating of the Russian president Yeltsin, who was responsible for a military attack of the Russian parliament in 1993, was not significantly affected by the violent event. Gaman-Golutvina (2005) argued that in Russia, the usage of coercion and violence as the management model for more than 500 years has promoted the formation of the tradition in which “violence became the most effective technology of the political communication” (p. 19). This suggests that authoritative leadership has remained dominant in the contemporary Russia (Lipman & McFaul, 2001). Despite significant political,
economic and social changes the country has undergone in the last two decades, it is still a time of cynicism with no apparent values or ideology (Aslund, 2007).

If in the United States public relations is considered a young profession (Marsh, 2001), then in Russia the profession is an infant. However, Russian PR was not tabula rasa. From its initial stage in the late 1980s, Russian PR has carried a negative Soviet “heritage,” being associated with propaganda (Tsetsura, 2001). Although the image of the Russian PR recently has improved (Tsetsura, 2004), there is still a belief that the most effective PR is “black,” or manipulative and deceptive. Such “PR” is practiced predominantly in the political sphere and often times employs efforts to ruin a rival’s reputation instead of creating a client’s positive image.

The managerial role is presumed in the public relations profession (Guth, 2000). However, both empirical and anecdotal data suggest that Russian public relations practitioners are currently following the model role of communication technician (Guth, 2000). Moreover, company managers tend to disregard PR practitioners as members of the decision-making team (Erzikova & Berger, 2006). This aspect also might have contributed in Russian students’ attitudes toward ethical conduct. Efforts to be moral might not make a difference when a PR professional’s activities depend on an unethical authority. Compared to American PR practitioners who have made significant progress in taking on a management role in organizations, Russian PR practitioners still have a long way to go before they are recognized as decision-makers.

Public relations majors like other students who study at universities might be considered “individuals in between.” They are not the general public anymore, and they are not professionals yet (Hanson, 2002). This position needs to be taken into account while analyzing results of the present study. Hanson suggested that students still might think like the general audience in spite of university’s effort to acculturate them. Thus, students’ self-reports might have reflected low-level expectations the general public has about public relations (Baker & Martinson, 2002). Moreover, Bowen’s (2003) study of PR undergraduates of two American universities showed that students might have negative perceptions of the profession even if they chose public relations as a major.

Like previous research (Stacks & Wright, 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1984), this study found that the nature and depth of concern for the public depends on the extent to which people are put at risk by a decision to conceal or to withhold information. Both American and Russian students reacted more negatively to life- and health-threatening scenarios than to vignettes about “back-stage” activities with a distinct flavor of corruption (bribery of a TV person and setting up an allegedly independent organization).

Traditionally, females were found to be more ethically grounded than males (Bowen, 2005; Ludlum & Moskaloinov, 2005). Previous research on PR majors in these American and Russian universities also supported the phenomenon (authors’ names are deliberately omitted here). However, the present study did not indicate a well-pronounced gender difference in ethics perceptions in both samples. An explanation for this might lie in the specific survey instrument or in a particular sample configuration.

Although it has been argued that moral values are developed at the age of seven (Pratt, 1991), scholars have paid increasing attention to the importance of teaching professional ethics in education and to what ought to be taught (Gale & Bunton, 2005; Hutchinson, 2002; Coombs & Rybacki, 1999; Neff, Walker, Smith, & Creedon, 1999; Stacks, Botan, & VanSlyke Turk, 1999). Heath (1991) argued that when the discipline is on its way toward professionalism,
It might be argued that the impact of education on the profession comes from educators’ dedication to frame each class as an ethical issue, regardless of whether a free-standing course in ethics is present in curriculum or not. Hutchinson (2002) opined that educators should focus “more on what we morally should do” instead of emphasizing “what we legally can’t do” (p. 308). In other words, more value should be attached to developing obedience to ethics codes than to teaching students to comply to avoid lawsuits.

Acknowledging the fact that public relations professional ethics is largely based on personal ethics, the Commission on Public Relations Education (2006) nevertheless called for an emphasis on ethics in all content of public relations professional education. Although scholars’ opinions about the best methods to teach ethics vary, they agreed that ethics should be taught across the curriculum (Elliott & Koper, 2002; Hutchinson, 2002; Toth, 1999; McInerny, 1997-1998; Bivins, 1991; Pratt, 1991; Harrison, 1990).

Importantly, Russian PR professionals also are concerned with the quality of education (Tsetsura, 2001). Erzikova and Berger (2006) surveyed the top of Russian PR practitioners and found that their biggest concern was the weak value of PR education in the country. The professionals said that one of the reasons business people and the general public disrespect the profession is the poor job performance of PR graduates.

Ethics education starts with ethical self-identification. To deal with world diversity, a public relations practitioner first needs to have a sense of self-identity and understand his or her own values (George, 2003; Allert, 1999). This task is consistent with the role of PR professionals as the consciences of their organizations (Pratt, 1991). The fact that PR executives do not become the “consciences” over night, calls for more thoughtful and rigorous pedagogies that will help students realize that ethics is the foundation for decisions and strategies in their professional lives. According to Bowen (2008), moral philosophy provides PR practitioners with ethical decision-making guidelines to solve complex moral dilemmas with integrity.

**Conclusion**

Triandis (1993) stated that when it comes to scientific investigation, “culture is the greatest of all moderators” (p. 168), and cross-cultural research, indicating differences and highlighting similarities, helps researchers understand a phenomenon that might not have looked so fascinating until it was investigated in different social and cultural contexts. The findings of the present study indicate that culture, economy, and the degree of development of public relations, including professional education, may have influenced the ethical perceptions of American and Russian students.

This study is a reflection of the need for research on international public relations articulated in number of studies (see the special section of Public Relations Review, 33, 2007). Today PR graduates or entry-level practitioners go to work in foreign countries (Neff, the public relations panel at the 2007 National Communication Association’s annual conference), but the concern is that public relations scholarship has not provided them with models to deal with socio-cultural differences (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2007).

The importance of the present study is in its attempt to examine ethical inclinations of PR students who will define the industry profile in the near future. Perception of an ethical issue is regarded as an important prerequisite for the ethical decision process (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). Although the investigation of ethical attitudes of respondents provides a valuable insight into their perceptions of professional ethics, one should be careful with any conclusions about future behaviors of the respondents. First, beliefs may not determine behaviors. Second, a country
cannot be taken as a culturally homogeneous group but rather as a collection of diverse cultures (Ludlum & Moskaloinov, 2005; Tsetsura, 2001); this is why a study of PR students in other U.S. and Russian regions might bring different results. Third, like similar studies (Hanson, 2002), this study did not control for the tendency to give socially desirable answers to questions about sensitive issues. Fourth, the respondents represented a convenience, not random sample. The next step of investigation might be to see how students’ reported beliefs translate into actual behavior.

References


Organizational image, identity, and reputation:
Disentangling their meaning for application
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Abstract
One of the primary concerns of public relations research and practice is reputation management. Of great interest is how to measure reputation. One of the problems in assessing reputation is that the literature is not clear on how reputation differs from other constructs. Three interrelated concepts (i.e., organizational identity, organizational image, and organizational reputation) are often connected to the discussion of reputation. The main purpose of this paper is to disentangle the concepts of organizational image, organizational identity, and organizational reputation. The paper examines the different conceptualizations of these three constructs and the implications of the lack of clear conceptualization for both academics and practitioners. Ideas for differentiation and future research are also included.

The concept of organizational and corporate reputation has seen a rise in the relevance and prevalence in business as well as in the public relations literature. Forbes magazine has an annual report on organization reputation and compares organizations based on these reputation scores. Course textbooks have begun to view reputation management as central to public relations (Argenti, 2007; Cornelissen, 2004; Doorley & Garcia, 2007). Corporate Reputation Review is a journal which has a primary focus on reputation (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997). In the last few years, numerous articles that focus on reputation have appeared in Journal of Public Relations Research (Kiousis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007; Wan & Schell, 2007; Yang, 2007), Public Relations Review (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007; Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006; Park & Lee, 2007), and Public Relations Quarterly (Gibson, Gonzales, & Castanon, 2006; Healy & Griffin, 2004; Nakra, 2000). Reputation is also treated as a key construct in the literature on crisis communication (Coombs, 2007; Kaman Lee, 2004; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007). Given all of this attention to reputation at the academic and practitioner level, the need to examine how reputation is defined and measured is of great importance in order to understand and navigate this complex area of study.

In order to examine organizational reputation, it is important to include a discussion of two related constructs: organizational identity and organizational image. While public relations scholarship has not focused as heavily on these two constructs as they have on reputation, a significant body of work has appeared in other disciplines that talks about organizational identity and organizational image when describing organizational reputation (Albert & Whetten, 1985; John M.T. Balmer & Wilson, 1998; Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006; Fombrun, 1996; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Wartick, 2002). As a multi-disciplinary field, the study of reputation has one main problem: different disciplines approach the definition of reputation in different ways. One limitation with this multi-disciplinary approach is that these different disciplines only include
research being conducted in their disciples (Mahon, 2002). And this can be a problem because people might be talking about similar constructs or ideas in different ways, so a common vision and a common voice are difficult to create (Barnett et al., 2006). Another challenge is that while reputation is a key construct under investigation, often no one clear definition offered (Barnett et al., 2006; Bennett & Kottasz, 2000; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Helm, 2007). In our investigation of the public relations literature, we found evidence that supports this claim.

As researchers continue exploring the nature of organizational reputation, its antecedents, and its impact on organizational outcomes, many scholars have pointed out the fact that the literature on reputation is not clear or consistent in the definition of reputation (Barnett et al., 2006; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Further confusing the conceptual landscape is that researchers often use the terms of organizational identity and organizational image to define organizational reputation. Identity and image are sometimes treated as the same as reputation, a part of reputation, or conceptually different than reputation. These inconsistencies are enough to trouble both those who are beginning their exploration into this body of research as well as those versed in these works. It is no surprise that practitioners step cautiously when entering into these conceptual minefields.

The aim of this article is to disentangle the concepts of organizational identity, organizational image, and organizational reputation. We do not propose or advocate for a new definition of these constructs. Rather, we take existing literature and extract key components to help scholars and practitioners navigate the rich areas and components of identity, image, and reputation. To do this, the paper will first explain how differing scholars have conceptualized the terms reputation, identity, and image in the contexts of organizations. Focus will be on the main components of each definition, and in no way proposes to be an exhaustive review of the literature (for such examinations see: Barnett et al., 2006; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Next, the paper will examine how the tangled conceptualizations impact research and practice. This includes addressing construct validity and measurement issues that have been observed in the literature as a result of this confused conceptualization of image, identity, and reputation in the organizational literature. Finally, suggestions relevant to practitioners and scholars are made regarding considerations for differentiation and measurement of these three constructs.

**Defining Reputation, Identity, and Image in the Organizational Context**

**Organizational Reputation**

Organizational reputation is an important characteristic of organizations (Barnett et al., 2006; Fombrun & van Riel, 1997). An organization’s reputation is said to affect the competitive positioning of an organization, thus it is important for researcher and practitioners to better understand how to examine and evaluate the reputation of the organization, and how to build, maintain, and defend those reputations (Hall, 1992). Despite the number of articles defining organizational reputation (for review see Barnett et al., 2006), many scholars have adopted the definition of reputation similar to that advanced by Fombrun and van Riel (1997). They define organizational 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. It gauges a firm’s relative standing both internally with employees and externally with its stakeholders, in both its competitive and institutional environments” (p. 10). This definition is meant to be integrative, thus it also includes components of the organizational image and identity definitions.

In their review of the different definitions to organizational reputation Barnett and colleagues (2006) identified 49 different definitions. They grouped these definitions into three
clusters: reputation as awareness, reputation as assessment, and reputation as an asset. They identified three different clusters to describe organizational reputation. The awareness cluster describes organizational reputation as the general or aggregate perception that stakeholders and general observers have about an organization. This cluster also includes references of reputation as representations of knowledge or emotions that stakeholders have about the organization. The assessment cluster describes organizational reputation as a judgment, an estimate, or an evaluation that of the opinions and beliefs that stakeholders have about the organization. The asset cluster describes organizational reputation as an intangible economic or financial resource that has value for the organization.

The main idea from these definitions is that reputation encompasses the overall impression or evaluation about what an organization is, what an organization communicates, and the perceptions that people have about an organization. These perceptions provide information about future performance (Vendelo, 1998). The perceptions are the aggregate feelings about an organization, that spans across stakeholders and topics (Fombrun, 1996; Zyglidopoulos, 2001). This allows for one score assessing how stakeholders feel about an organization. This allows for comparison of organizations to determine their relative standing compared to other organizations. (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Fombrun & van Riel, 1997; Shenkar & Yuchtman-Yaar, 1997). And the idea is that organizations with stronger reputations will have a competitive advantage over those organizations that have a low reputation (Fombrun, 1996).

Organizational Identity

Organizational identity is a concept that has often been used interchangeably with organizational reputation (Wartick, 2002). Organizational identity has been defined different ways. Some researchers argue that organizational identity refers to what an organization is (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gray & Balmer, 1998). Thus, organizational identity is how an organization defines what it is doing. This definition often includes the mission, vision, and culture of the organization (Cornelissen, 2004). Some additional factors included in this definition of organizational identity include the organization’s business strategy, corporate philosophy, culture, and organizational design (Gray & Balmer, 1998).

Other researchers define organizational identity as how an organization communicates or presents itself to various stakeholders and the means by which it distinguishes the organization from other organizations (Argenti, 2007; Marwick & Fill, 1997). Some literature also suggest that identity is perceptual, in that it is related to how some stakeholders view the organization (Fombrun, 1996). Additionally, identity can be assessed from how outside stakeholders view employee actions (Cornelissen, 2004).

From all of these definitions the reader can see that identity has been defined as what an organization is, how it is communicated, and how it is perceived. This seems to be very similar to the way researchers have defined what reputation is: (1) a perception stakeholders have about the organization (i.e., reputation as awareness); (2) judgment that stakeholders have about the organization (i.e., reputation as assessment); and (3) reputation as an asset. As we will discuss later in this paper, this similarity in definitions can be problematic for researcher and practitioners specially for developing communication plans for organizations.

Organizational Image

A third concept that has often been used interchangeably with reputation is image. Organizational image has been described as the internal collective state of mind that underlines
the organizations efforts to communicate itself to others (Bromley, 2001), and it has also been
described as what an organization wants its stakeholders to understand about what is important,
enduring, and distinctive about the organization (Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Others suggest that
organizational image is a consequence of or what follows organizational identity (Gray &
Balmer, 1998). The majority of the definitions of organizational image include general feelings
toward the organization. However, there is no agreement as to the nature of organizational
images. Some indicate that image is how an organization communicates about itself (Whetten &
Mackey, 2002), as a differentiation component (Argenti, 2007), and some even suggest that
images form over time.
Many definitions of reputation are similar to definitions of image, in that they relate to the
perceptions of stakeholders have about the organization. A key demarcation between image and
reputation is the notion of time (Argenti, 2007; Cornelissen, 2004; Fombrun, 1996; Gray &
Balmer, 1998). In this case, reputation is the perceptions stakeholders have about an organization
over time.
As it can be seen from the past two sections, although researchers use the concepts of reputation,
identity, and image, there is a great confusion as to how these constructs are similar and
different. In the following section we describe some problems associated with this confusion.

Problems with Conceptualizations of Image, Identity, and Reputation

After reviewing the different conceptualizations of identity, image, and reputation, it is clear that
the definitions have great overlap across the central constructs. The next section will discuss the
implications of having the key constructs confounded and having no clear demarcation points
regarding to construct validity, reputation as one dimension that is collapsed across topics and
stakeholders, and reputation as including the concept of time in its definition.

Construct Validity

The first problem that we discuss regarding the conceptualizations of identity, image and
reputation is the notion of construct validity. Construct validity refers to the degree that a
definition of a construct attempts to capture the relevant components of the latent variable, and
nothing else (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982; John & Benet-Martinez, 2000). In other words, a
definition is to include what actually identifies the object under observation, and remove other
factors that cloud the picture of the unit under observation. A commonly used analogy is a
person trying to determine their weight by stepping on a scale. In order to try to gain a valid
assessment of our weight, we know to step on the scale with as few peripheral objects as possible.
We would not try to assess our weight by carrying a large, packed backpack or invite our friends
to jump on the scale with us. We must have similar cautionary processes when we try to capture
the key constructs under investigation (in that we want the construct only, without its related
friends).

An examination of the previously discussed conceptualizations reveals that past
investigations of identity, image, and reputation are not only challenged by construct validity
issues, but seem to have invited all of their friends to the party. In the following paragraphs the
authors will take the previous discussion further by examining these construct validity issues. We
will focus on understanding how definitions of identity, image, and reputation have introduced
more than one idea into the construct under investigation.

Identity has been defined as both what the organization is as well as how the organization
communicates itself to its publics. Sometimes the perceptual component is also included. The
key issue with including these multiple ideas into one construct is that one component does not necessarily have to align with another component. What this means is that the actual identity of an organization does not have to match the communication efforts of the organization. It is not uncommon for public relations personnel to be called in after an organization behaves in less than desirable actions. Rather than correcting the nature of the organization (the actual), communication professionals are called in to use communication to explain away the action or promote the organization in ways other than actual behavior (Doorley & Garcia, 2007). Other examples include advertising efforts designed to portray an organization one way, but may not be aligned with the actual identity of the organization.

Some scholars also treat identity as the perceptions that internal stakeholders (employees) hold about what the organization is (Fombrun, 1996). Such a conceptualization includes three key ideas: the actual nature of the organization, how the organization chooses to communicate about itself, and how audiences perceive both the actual organization as well as the communication choices of the organization. In our consultation with various organizations, we sometimes run into incidents where employees perceive that management is not consistent with what they claim they do and what they actually do. Other times, we have found instances where employees indicate that a practice does not exist in the organization; while management holds out the documents showing evidence that a practice or policy does exist. What we see is a mismatch somewhere in the relationship between the actual identity of the organization, the communication about a policy or action, and the perceived components by the employees. We advise clients in such incidents that one of two things is happening. There may be a mismatch between the actual and the perceived, or somehow communication is not getting through or believed by the audience. In any case, the organization has an issue to resolve.

Identity is a singular term that is treated as including anywhere from one idea (what an organization actually is), two ideas (the actual and how an organization communicates itself), or three ideas (the previous two plus the perceptual component). To remove such construct conflict, we point to the literature treating organizational identity as what an organization actually is (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gray & Balmer, 1998), without adding the communicated or perceptual components.

The construct of image has similar confounding issues. A glance at the definitions indicates that image can be confounded with the elements of the actual, the communicated, and the perceived. Image has often been defined as both the way an organization communicates about itself as well as how stakeholders perceive the organization. The same misalignment issues are prevalent as those discussed for identity. How an organization chooses to communicate about itself is not necessarily how stakeholders perceive the organization.

The most difficult construct to capture is reputation. Consistent across the literature is the notion that reputation is perceptual and in the eyes of the audience. Of interest is how reputation differs from image. Based on the literature, there appears to be three key differences that separate image and reputation: a generalized, overall evaluation about an organization, the notion that these overall evaluations can be captured by collapsing image components across topics and stakeholders, and the addition of time to the definition. Each of these will be discussed in the following sections.

One general reputation

A second issue regarding the problems with this entanglement of identity, image, and reputation is the fact that reputation is often aggregated across people and stakeholders, ignoring
the concept of image and identity as separate ideas. This can be a problem because different stakeholders may have different perceptions about the organization. Thus we need to differentiate between the perceptions that different stakeholders have about the organization.

A question arises as to whether an organization has one overall reputation, or are there many reputations. According to some scholars, organizations do have one overarching reputation (Argenti, 2007; Fombrun, 1996; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). This can be captured in overall assessments such as positive or negative reputation. The overall assessment is viewed as how an individual generally feels about the organization. Collapsing scores into one general reputation score is desirable in that it allows for the comparison of organizations on the reputation score. Annual reputation issues are central to magazines such as Forbes. These reputation scores can be looked at across all organizations or divided by different industrial sectors. In ways, it becomes a scorecard and baseline figure for comparison of the reputational progress of an organization.

Some scholars indicate that these reputation scores can act as the differentiation component that separates related organizations and brands (Fombrun, 1996). However, others caution that reputation should not be confused with brands, or that reputation is not a differentiation component. In the next section we address how reputation varies across situations and stakeholders. We believe that these ideas can help us better understand reputation and how it differs from other constructs.

**Stakeholders and topics**

Scholars have also pointed out the limitations of one overall reputation assessment (Barnett et al., 2006; Wartick, 2002). Reputations vary by stakeholder group who evaluate over multiple characteristics of a firm (Cornelissen, 2004). Corporate reputations are developed by a set of attributes that are perceived and ascribed to the firm, including product quality, corporate initiatives, and even corporate culture (Weigelt & Colin, 1988). Reputations also are seen to be both knowledge and emotions about an organization and its activities (Zyg lidopoulos, 2001). These scholars acknowledge that stakeholders hold many different perceptions about an organization. The perceptions depend on who is asked and about what topic. Reputations can also be based on individuals, such as the CEO or other executives (Mahon, 2002). Reputation could also focus on relationships and interactions with various stakeholders, independent of organization attributes.

Fortune magazine, based on Fombrun’s criteria, uses eight topics to evaluate reputation. These eight dimensions include quality of management; quality of products or services; innovativeness; ability to attract, develop, and keep talented people; long-term investment value; financial soundness; use of corporate assets; and community and environmental responsibility. While each of these components may be interesting in themselves, there is no reason that all stakeholders consider all of these factors when assessing their perceptions toward an organization. Some of these dimensions are more salient than others. There is also the possibility that some dimensions may be opposite in perceptions. For instance, I may perceive that the organization attracts talented people, but that does not mean that they can develop or even keep these talented people. In an ideal situation, all of the factors would be correlated and positive in people’s minds. However, these eight dimensions, which are often collapsed into one factor across multiple stakeholders, is in fact orthogonal, in that each are independent of the other dimensions listed. Collapsing would be unsound psychometrically and unproductive practically.

It is important to note that stakeholders may have reputational components in common. However, the relevance in attitude formation may differ. Different stakeholders hold different
reputation components as important in their assessment about an organization (Bromley, 2002; Fombrun, 1996; Zyglidopoulos, 2001). For instance, shareholders value issues like profits and organizational management as important components when they assess an organization. Employees may also hold these issues as important, but of greater importance may be how an organization treats its employees. Also of importance are wage and benefit issues. Community members may consider how an employer treats its employees, but of greater concern may be how an organization acts as a member of the community.

The previous example is just a small snapshot of three stakeholder groups with a small sample of issues. Obviously, there are many more stakeholder groups and issues. However, the small subset of stakeholders and topics are plenty to point out the issues that plague treating reputation as one overarching construct across stakeholder groups and topics.

Consider a situation where an organization announces layoffs at a plant in a small community. News of the layoffs is expected to greatly impact the three stakeholders under examination in this example. Employees may be expected to react with some anger and anxiety as to the impact it will have on them and the work that they do. The community is also impacted in that unemployment may increase in the community. However, shareholders react positively on the news, as a reduction in employees is expected to have a positive impact on earnings and increase the stock price of the organization. Collapsing the scores that these three stakeholders into one overall reputation score would not capture these differing perceptions about the organization.

Let us take the example further. In response to some negative publicity to the layoffs, the organization announces investment in corporate social responsibility programs designed to benefit the community. It is expected that the community would welcome such an investment. However, the corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts would not be expected to alleviate the anxiety over job issues in the organization. Shareholders may find such news as a negative event, in that these efforts impact earnings of the organization.

But the ideas presented in this example are more complex. For instance, some shareholders invest in organizations that are engaged in CSR programs. Imagine administering a reputation instrument assessing shareholder reactions to the CSR news. For simplicity to make a point, we will use a 5-point Likert measurement that varies from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Again, for simplicity, we will use a single item to assess perceptions of the CSR, although there are great pitfalls in using single item scales to measure relevant constructs. The question may be “I am pleased with the CSR activities proposed by the organization”. Shareholders that are primarily concerned with profit will be expected to respond negatively, while investors who view CSR as a positive, even at the expense of profits will be expected to respond positively. Aggregating these results would indicate a neutral score on this measure. However, this result would be completely inaccurate. Therefore, treating shareholders as one unit that is homogenous is not advisable.

Let us take this example even further. Imagine conducting similar measures across all other stakeholder groups. In our assessment, we will of course want to survey our publics across multiple topics. Now imagine aggregating all of these scores across topics and across stakeholders to indicate one overall reputation of the organization. To what degree would this reputation score truly indicate how relevant stakeholder groups view our organization?

Given the situation we just presented, we believe it is important to differentiate between stakeholders and topics when we talk about reputation. This differentiation can help public
relations practitioners and academics develop and target better messages to different stakeholders
in different situations.

Time

Time is also a problem that arises when trying to differentiate image, identity, and reputation. Some researchers argue that reputation is the collection of perceptions, or images about an organization held over time (John M. T. Balmer & Greyser, 2002; Fombrun & van Riel, 1997; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). A key issue with the addition of time is that there is no discussion of how much time is needed for an image or a perception to change to a reputation. Time needs to be conceptualized so that every person agrees to how much time is needed for the transition from image to reputation.

By including time into a definition of reputation, a contradiction occurs. Reputations are seen to be difficult to establish, but easy to destroy. This suggests that reputations are fragile and dynamic. But the addition of time suggests that reputations must be stable. Taking a psychometric examination of the inclusion of time raises different issues. It is unclear as to how to measure time, given the ambiguous nature of the inclusion in the construct. Also, we cannot think of another construct (outside of time itself) where time is used as a component of a definition of a latent construct. Constructs can be dynamic and change over time, or they can be stable and remain constant over time. But time is not part of the definition.

The literature presents the advantages of holding positive perceptions about an organization over time. Greater trust is granted to organizations with a history of positive associations. Such duration presents an organization as a stable organization. Rather than including these components into the definition of reputation, we suggest investigating constructs such as duration of perceptions and stability of perceptions as relevant factors to understanding reputation. Perhaps these are antecedents or moderators of relationships between identity, image and reputation. Treating these as separate constructs removes the psychometric challenges while keeping the relevance of these concepts to understanding stakeholder perceptions.

We suggest that reputation be viewed as perceptions held by stakeholders. We agree with authors that suggest that an organization does not hold one reputation. Rather, stakeholders may hold many perceptions about an organization. This could vary due to the topic under consideration and the role of the individual in stakeholder groups. The main point is that a reputation is a perception that is held about one specific topic, not the aggregate across topics. Time can be addressed by considering perception stability and/or duration of the perception. Stability can also examine the strength of the perception over time.

Disentangling Identity, Image and Reputation in the Organization

In the past sections we have seen how the concepts of image, identity and reputation have defined as similar concepts, and the problems that this lack of differentiation brings to the practice and research of public relations. In this section we suggest ideas of how to differentiate these three concepts, and make recommendations of issues to consider when exploring image, identity, and reputation (see figure 1).

We suggest that reputation, image and identity are three different constructs. Organizational reputation refers to the perception that stakeholders have about the organization. This perception varies by stakeholder, and by issue. These perceptions are formed from the actual involvement with the organization, what is communicated by the organization in controlled messages and channels, as well as information received from uncontrolled channels
such as the media, opinion leaders, and other members of the organization. On the other hand, organizational identity refers to what the organization actually is, as it can be seen in the organization’s mission, vision, and culture. Finally, we suggest that organizational image is what is communicated about an organization in controlled and uncontrolled channels.

As indicated in the example above, different stakeholder groups have different perceptions about the same action. Because of this, we argue for keeping stakeholders separate. If we continue to collapse reputation across all stakeholders we will not have an accurate representation of what the stakeholder’s perception of the organization is. Borrowing from the example above, there are some stakeholders that might have positive perceptions of the organization, while there are others that have negative perceptions of the organization. If we averaged these two perceptions it would show that stakeholders have an average perception of the organization, when this is not really the case. In a similar fashion, we also argue for keeping issues separate. Reputation can be affected by the situation, and as practitioners and scholars it is important to also acknowledge these differences to be better prepared to communicate with different stakeholders.

Finally, we argue for a better understanding of the role of time when exploring reputation in the organization. We think that time is an important aspect for future research because it is important to understand how long do perceptions of an organization last, do positive perceptions last longer or about the same that negative perceptions, and issues about the possibility of changing negative perceptions of the organization. In the public relations area it is important to better understand the role that time plays in reputation because it can better help practitioners and academics understand how to manage, build, and maintain the organization’s reputation.

**Implications for Theory and Practice**

*Implications for Theory*

Addressing the limitations of aggregating stakeholders and topics into one reputation score assists basic research in theory development and testing. Propositions of relationships can be developed and tested about specific constructs. For example, if a theoretical proposition is generated about how shareholders react to certain communicated messages, then relevant dependent measures can be constructed that are not confounded by other dimensions lumped into a reputation score. If the proposition is that CSR messages will be viewed negatively by shareholders, the perceptions of the company can be more directly assessed by measuring perceptions of the organization as an investment opportunity without the confounding factors such as product quality (which may be relevant, but treated as a covariate rather than a component of the dependent variable). At the same time, the proposition of the last example can be falsified if the experiment finds contrary results.

Separating audiences and topics can also help to uncovering boundary conditions, mediating factors, and moderators. For instance, investors interested in CSR are expected to react different than investors who are not interested in CSR. Separating these factors would help us understand these differences in ways that aggregating across stakeholders and topics would not.

*Implications for Practice*

Reputation management is a key tool in public relations practice. In order to manage perceptions of stakeholders, it is important to identify and monitor how different stakeholders view the organization across many topics. Rather than clarification and identification, collapsing multiple topics across multiple stakeholder groups clouds the practitioner’s understanding of
reputation issues. We agree with Dowling (1988)(Dowling, 1988), who suggests that a measurement model for reputation needs to be created for each relevant stakeholder group. We also suggest separating the key topic area as well. Separating stakeholders and topics allows the practitioner to understand the issues of importance to stakeholder groups. These are the issues that generate perceptions of the organization.

Developing an assessment plan that captures different stakeholder views on different topics would assist in finding inconsistencies between actual identities and perceived identities as viewed by stakeholder groups. Practitioners can then develop communication plans designed to address these inconsistencies.

Based on the previous discussion, we advise the practitioner and theorist against the collapsing of different topics across multiple audiences in order to produce one reputation score. Doing so removes most disadvantages in reputation assessment practices. One limitation of this proposed practice is that the comparison component of reputation is removed. If different stakeholders use different salient criteria to assess how they perceive an organization, then how can we compare across groups? However, some issues are consistently prioritized across stakeholders of an organization. Some topics may be consistent across industries and organizations. Comparisons can be made across these groups on the salient topic. But this requires more detailed and targeted research.

We feel that the advantages of separating stakeholders and topics outweigh the loss of comparison scores. The practitioner can discover inconsistencies in perceptions across stakeholder groups. Topic discrepancies can also be uncovered. Thorough stakeholder mapping across different topics will help the practitioner in generating more targeted and impactful communication campaigns that helps the organization accomplish organizational goals or address stakeholder issues prior to reaching crisis levels. A clear stakeholder reputation program would also help the practitioner in considering the impact different strategic management decisions and communication campaigns would impact different stakeholder groups. Communication campaigns could then be developed addressing the areas of concern for each stakeholder group, while eliminating those issues that may be irrelevant or viewed negatively by those stakeholders.

References


Figure 1. Identity, Image and Reputation- Disentangling these Concepts

Identity
- What an organization is
  - Includes business strategy, organizational design, corporate philosophy, and culture

Image
- Communicated
  - Communication activities by the organization. Includes logos, branding, and other controlled activities

Reputation
- Perceptions of an organization
  - Varies across stakeholder group and topics

Identity, Image and Reputation are entangled. Disentangling them involves understanding:
- Identity: What an organization is
- Image: Communicated
- Reputation: Perceptions of an organization

Communication activities by the organization include logos, branding, and other controlled activities, which affect perceptions of the organization.
Perception of Sport Celebrities Among College Students: Are high-risk sport celebrity endorsers more negatively perceived than low-risk sport celebrity endorsers?

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Abstract
Organizations using celebrity endorsers take huge financial and reputation risks. How can corporations and public relations professionals choose celebrity endorsers who will not reflect poorly on an organization’s reputation? This research attempts to distinguish between high and low risk endorsers using measurements of college students’ explicit and implicit attitudes.

Many contemporary advertising and public relations campaigns rely heavily on one key factor, the use of celebrity endorsers. These individuals can serve as opinion leaders and key influencers to persuade others to purchase certain items or to donate to a worthwhile cause. Organizations using celebrity endorsers take huge financial and reputation risks. If these individuals are portrayed negatively in the news, their association with an organization can impact future finances as well as overall reputation among key audiences, such as stakeholders and employees. Given the risks, several questions arise. How can corporations and public relations professionals choose celebrity endorsers who will not reflect poorly on an organization’s reputation? To what extent does the personal life of a celebrity endorser really affect the public’s attitudes and opinions about them and the products and services they represent?

Many case studies suggest that celebrities cause more trouble than they are worth, especially sports celebrities. Looking at some of the more well-known cases such as Kobe Bryant, Marion Jones, and Michael Vick—we might ask what personality characteristics these endorsers have in common. What makes these endorsers different from athletes with more positive reputations, like Tiger Woods or Peyton Manning? Can we learn to predict which celebrities will maintain a positive reputation and which are likely to be a poor risk in the future? In order to explore these questions among a prime audience for sports celebrities, we will ask the following: Do college students perceive high-risk sport celebrity endorsers more negatively than low-risk sport celebrity endorsers?

Before embarking on our search for answers, it is helpful to consider existing theories of the role of a message’s source on its persuasive value. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), proposed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (1986), provides a useful framework for predicting the persuasive power of a celebrity endorser. According to the ELM, people process persuasive messages by either central or peripheral routes. A central route of processing occurs when a person is well-informed, attentive, and motivated to process information. The peripheral route of processing is used when a participant is not giving a persuasive message his or her full attention. Consequently, the participant using the peripheral route may be more influenced by superficial cues, such as the attractiveness of the speaker. This distinction parallels the contrast between explicit, or conscious processing, and implicit, or relatively subconscious processing. In order to assess the central route of processing, participants will fill out an attitudes questionnaire developed by the investigator. This questionnaire, which represents a measure of explicit or
conscious attitudes, will include items such as intent to purchase merchandise endorsed by a particular sports celebrity. In order to explore the impact of using peripheral routes to persuasion, implicit attitudes towards a set of sports celebrity endorsers will be assessed using the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Lane, Banaji, Nosek, & Greenwald, 2007). These implicit measures will then be compared with the results of the explicit attitudes questionnaire.

In addition to comparing the explicit and implicit attitudes of participants towards celebrity endorsers, this research will also try to identify characteristics of sports celebrities that correlate with being a high-risk endorser. In other words, the personal lives of high-risk endorsers are more likely to have a negative impact on the organizations they represent. Many of the characteristics that are required for successful competition at elite levels of sport, such as the ability to remain calm in a stressful situation and a willingness to take risks, might also lead athletes into negative lifestyle choices. Consequently, one of the working hypotheses of this research is the expectation that high-risk sports celebrities are more likely than low-risk celebrities to be perceived as having tendencies towards psychopathy, specifically a lack of empathy and a lack of remorse. In order to explore this aspect of risky endorsers, attributes taken from the Psychopathy Checklist—Revised (PCL—R) developed by Robert Hare in 1991 will be incorporated into the study’s research methods. Using items based on the PCL--R, participants will rate a set of sports celebrities. These results will be integrated into an evaluation of the explicit and implicit attitude measures.

Individuals participating in this study will be college students at a major southeastern university. College students will be selected through a convenience sample, but will include a group that has some athletic experience or background. The results of this study should expand our understanding of differences in perception of high-risk celebrity endorsers compared with low-risk endorsers among an important target audience, college students. The investigator hopes to provide practical suggestions for using celebrity endorsers effectively and to identify the need for future research in this area.

**Literature Review**

This research attempts to pull together and evaluate possible interactions among a number of important factors in celebrity endorsements. Consequently, the literature review will be broken into separate sections for celebrity endorsements, psychopathy, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and the use of the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

**Celebrity Endorsers**  
What exactly is a celebrity endorser? Who are these individuals? What makes them famous or recognizable? According to McCracken (1989, p. 310, as cited in Biswas, Biswas, & Das, 2006, p.18), a celebrity endorser can be labeled 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) also describes how the impact of celebrity endorsers can result from their being expert in their respective fields or being associated in some way or fashion with the product being endorsed.

From advocating a global issue to selling the latest sneaker, many organizations use famous individuals to promote their issue or product. An estimate of the frequency of the use of celebrity endorsers in all television advertisements is about 20 percent (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995). Celebrity endorser use is expensive. Many of these individuals are paid many millions of dollars to promote products, such as Michael Jordan for Hanes and Nike and Tiger Woods for Buick (Bush, Martin, & Bush, 2004). In return, celebrity endorsers supply many benefits to an organization. Celebrity endorsers ensure that key messages from advertisements reach the public
more effectively. People remember the product or issue that the celebrity endorser is promoting in the particular advertisement (Biswas, Biswas, & Das, 2006).

Two major factors separate celebrity endorsers from the everyday person, making the endorsers unique and highly effective in reaching the mass majority. According to McCracken (1989), these two factors are source credibility and source attractiveness. Source credibility occurs when celebrity endorsers are perceived as being “expert” in what they are trying to endorse to the business’s primary audiences. In addition, they must persuade others to “trust” them as a credible source of information and guidance (McCracken, 1989; Maddux & Rogers, 1980, as cited in L’Etang, 2006). Consumers might also be impressed, not just by the endorsers, but by how much they are costing the company to appear in the advertisement (Kirmani, 1990). Many news stories focus on how large of an endorsement some of these celebrities are getting to wear a certain type of shoe or drink a certain type of beverage.

Source attractiveness can be defined in several ways. A celebrity endorser doesn’t necessarily have to be physically attractive to the respective audiences, but there has to be a sense that the audience members can relate to the endorser in some way or fashion. McCracken (1989) states that the attractiveness of celebrity endorsers is based on familiarity, similarity, and likeability. For celebrity endorsers to serve as effective spokespersons for a company, they have to be able to communicate and relate to the audiences that they are trying to persuade to purchasing their product or donate to their cause. In order to do this, celebrity endorsers must be aware of their overall image and ensure their target audiences know who they are, are able to relate to them not only as celebrity endorsers, but as people. However, it is also important for the celebrity to provide a good fit with the product being endorsed.

How do we know whether or not a particular celebrity endorser will be an effective spokesperson? Determining the suitability of a particular celebrity endorser for a produce or cause is challenging. McCracken (1989, p.312) points out that the “number and variety of the meanings contained in celebrities are very large. Distinctions of status, class, gender, and age, as well as personality and lifestyle types, are represented in the pool of available celebrities, putting an extraordinarily various and subtle palette of meanings at the disposal of the marketing system.” Celebrity endorsers have been assessed on a number of attributes: how trustworthy they appear to be, how well they are liked, and how much people believe them in the advertisement (L’Etang, 2006). Priester and Petty (2003) state that people are more influenced by a spokesperson that they deem to be trustworthy, honest, and sincere than a spokesperson that does not share these qualities. Other characteristics that should be considered when addressing a target audience include how accessible the person is and how knowledgeable the person is about the issue, product, or company they are representing (Funk & James, 2004).

Not all celebrity endorsers are perceived equally. Some current celebrity endorsers are perceived positively, and others are perceived negatively, or considered to be a high-risk to businesses. When discussing what makes a celebrity endorser a risk, Mitchell and Greatorex (1993) stated that risk could be classified in many ways, including the overall image of the celebrity endorser in the public sphere and how the media portrays them. Another risk associated with the use of celebrity endorsers is the possibility that a celebrity’s personal life and challenges affect their overall image during an expensive advertising campaign. Instead of being in the media for having a high-profile celebrity endorser, the business in question will instead find itself entangled in a public relations crisis. For example, Pepsi advertising has featured a long line of celebrity endorsers, including Britney Spears and Janet Jackson. Pepsi’s response to crises resulting from their endorsers’ behavior has been to quickly announce a replacement.
Many organizations simply refuse to take on the risk associated with using celebrity endorsers. Businesses should anticipate the impact of emerging “negative information” about a celebrity endorser on the brand, product, or issue they are trying to publicize (Till & Shrimp, 1998). Businesses should anticipate the possibility that endorsers could bring “embarrassment” and “injury to the brand,” and that their brands will be forever linked to these particular celebrity endorsers (Till & Shrimp, 2006, p.67).

One of the most frequent sources of celebrity endorsers is the world of sports. From promoting the Super Bowl game with football player Peyton Manning to showcasing a new fashion line by Serena Williams, the sports industry relies heavily on famous individuals to influence the general population. Gilchrist (2005, p. 126, as cited in L'Etang, J., 2006, p. 391), stated that “Sporting heroes therefore offer themselves as products of the ‘culture industry,’ to be fashioned into sports stars . . . The modern sport star . . . is . . . both cultural product (as a brand to be sold) and process (part of the chain of advertising and brand or product endorsement that underpins the regime of capital accumulation).” A special distinction between sports celebrity endorsers and other celebrity endorsers (actors or musicians) is the fact that they are viewed not only as great athletes, but are also considered as role models for others, including children. This factor raises both the potential for influence and the risks of using sports celebrities as endorsers.

All celebrities face unique challenges as a result of being in the spotlight. Athletes experience exposure to high levels of pressure and media attention (Storch, Storch, Killiany, & Roberti, 2005). Storch et al. also claim that there is a transition for athletes as they go from competing at one level at their sport to competing at an elite level; they have to deal with increased pressure to perform as well as changing relationships with the athletic staff and their fans. Perhaps in response to these pressures, levels of “psychological maladjustment as compared to non-athletic peers have suggested that intercollegiate athletes experience greater psychopathology” (Storch et al., 2005, p.88). Athletes are also more likely to be perfectionists, and tend to ruminate about their overall performance levels and fear of not meeting external expectations (Koivula, Hassmen, & Fallby, 2002). In addition to stress, it is possible that the same characteristics that allow a person to compete at an elite level of athletics might also lead that person into personal behavior that can provoke a negative public reaction. In the following section, the overlap between the personal characteristics required for success in elite athletics and those that may lead to a negative reputation will be explored further.

Psychopathy

Herve, Mitchell, Cooper, and Hare (2004, p.137) define a psychopath as someone who has a “pathological condition defined by a unique constellation of affective, interpersonal, lifestyle, and antisocial characteristics, including egocentricity, manipulativeness, callousness, impulsivity, shallow emotions, and lack of remorse for repeatedly violating the rights of others.” Louth, Williamson, Alpert, Pouget, and Hare (1998) state that psychopaths do not have a real sense of what emotions are. Instead, they recognize just the face values of emotional words, but not the feeling, of an actual emotion. Psychopaths “engage in impulsive anti-social behavior and have unstable relationships with others because of a blunted capacity for experiencing and understanding emotion” (Kosson, Suchy, Mayer, & Libby, 2002). Kosson et al. (2002) state that psychopaths are not able to fully understand what their actions will do to other people, and they keep repeating their actions without fear of the consequences that might arise from what they do to others. What makes psychopaths so dangerous and hard to fully understand is the fact that they are masters in masking their emotions to others involved. Maibom (2005, p.237) states that
psychopaths are rebels who do not follow the guidelines set by society when it comes to interpersonal interactions with others. When they are involved with others, they do not show any remorse or guilt for their negative actions towards others.

Why would we consider psychopathy in a discussion of celebrity endorsers? As discussed in the previous section, negative personal behavior on the part of a celebrity endorser can have significant repercussions to the organizations they represent in the public mind. Unfortunately, many of the same characteristics found in psychopathy are also useful in elite athletics. For example, heroes and psychopaths have a major feature in common—low fear (Lykken, 1995). In addition, psychopaths typically show a reduced sensitivity to pain (Lykken, 1995), which would also be very helpful in dealing with the inevitable injuries that accompany the profession. According to Lykken, the major difference between heroes and villains is their interaction with the environment. If a fearless child is given good socialization and prosocial outlets for his or her energy, all will be well. On the other hand, if the fearless child does not learn about consequences for behavior, he or she might act in ways that are truly harmful to others.

This does not mean that we are accusing elite athletes of being psychopaths, but simply that we should not be surprised to find people with these characteristics among their ranks. Why would one athlete act as an excellent role model while another thinks it is okay to electrocute dogs? Can we learn to anticipate which athletes will go in one direction or another?

Robert Hare and his colleagues developed the Psychopathy Checklist--Revised (PCL--R) to see if a person shows any of these characteristics. According to Hare et al. (1990, p. 339), characteristics on the PCL--R include the following: “Grandiose sense of self-worth, Need for stimulation, Pathological lying, Conning/manipulative, Lack of remorse or guilt, Shallow affect, Callous/lack of empathy, Parasitic lifestyle, Poor behavioral controls, Promiscuous sexual behavior, Early behavior problems, Lack of realistic goals, Impulsivity, Irresponsibility, Failure to accept responsibility, Many short-term relationships, Juvenile delinquency, Revocation of conditional release, and Criminal versatility.” To this list, Kosson et al. (2000) add violence, substance abuse, personality disorders, and recidivism. A common misconception suggests that psychopaths are violent criminals. While some are, the vast majority are not. Nonetheless, they can and do wreak havoc in the social world (Babiak & Hare, 2006).

In order to assess participants’ perceptions of sports celebrity endorsers, the PLC—R items will be used as the source for a questionnaire constructed by the researcher. For example, the participant will be asked to consider a particular celebrity, such as Peyton Manning or Marion Jones, and rate to what extent certain attributes are characteristic of that celebrity. Attributes such as “this athlete is responsible,” or “this athlete is easily bored” will be used with a Likert scale.

It is unclear to what extent negative, psychopathological attributes in sports celebrities are perceived by the public, nor do we know if these attributes influence the public’s response to endorsements by celebrities with these characteristics. It is possible that a person buying a golf club endorsed by a professional golfer is able to separate the golfer’s expertise on the links from his or her personal life. However, a more empirical understanding of the impact of these personality traits on an endorser’s reputation and impact would help public relations and advertising personnel make more prudent choices when hiring an endorser.

**Elaboration Likelihood Model**

In order to provide a firm theoretical structure for exploring the public’s response to sports celebrity endorsers, it is helpful to explore the psychological literature on persuasion. One of the theories that have proved useful in the fields of advertising, marketing, and public
relations is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) proposed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (1986). The main goal in these fields is to change people’s attitudes and perceptions about an issue or product, and the ELM theory provides a framework for researchers and businesses to find out the most effective way to change people’s attitudes and opinions. Petty and Wegener (1999, p.2) describe the ELM as a theory that can be “used to understand how any external or internal variable has an impact on, some evaluative (e.g., good/bad) or non-evaluative (e.g., likely/unlikely) judgment.” As our question revolves around evaluative judgments of sports celebrity endorsers, the ELM provides us with a great deal of insight.

According to the ELM, a person can be influenced by persuasive communication by going down one of two routes: the central route or the peripheral route. In the central route, an individual focuses on the communication message at hand and not on other external references (Petty et al., 2004). In the peripheral route, the person in question is not influenced necessarily by the persuasive message being conveyed, but by other factors that are linked to the message (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). For example, personal experiences may influence a person to either listen or to ignore the message.

The current research is designed to explore the ability of certain sports celebrities to persuade the public to buy endorsed products. Consequently, we would expect to see the influence of central or peripheral routes in this process. The impact of the celebrity endorser, according to the ELM, should be greatest when people are using the peripheral route. However, that impact can include the negative impact of a problem endorser as well as a positive impact. In other words, a person using the central route to buying a Nike product endorsed by Michael Vick is less likely to be influenced by Vick’s personal problems than a person using the peripheral route. The person using the central route should concentrate on the quality of the product instead of the person endorsing it.

The concept of the peripheral and central routes is compatible with current thinking in cognitive psychology about implicit and explicit processing of information. Explicit attitudes towards an object, person, situation, or idea can be assessed directly by asking participants to respond to questions. This direct, conscious processing of information is more likely to characterize a person’s use of the central route to persuasion. In contrast, implicit attitudes are less direct and conscious, and are not easily assessed by direct questioning. These implicit attitudes may be more relevant to a person’s use of the peripheral route to persuasion. Although it is very helpful for public relations and advertising professionals to know how explicit attitudes about an endorser correlate with intent to purchase, given the multiple routes to persuasion posed by the ELM, it is also helpful to understand the less conscious, implicit attitudes a person might hold. In order to assess these implicit attitudes, we will make use of the Implicit Association Test (IAT), described in the following section.

The Implicit Association Test (IAT)

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is a tool researchers can use to look at differences between a person’s states and true attitudes regarding a person or issue (Brunel, Tietje, & Greenwald, 2004). Amodio and Devine (2006, p.652) state that the implicit association tests are used to “assess implicit stereotyping and implicit evaluative race bias.” Much of the research using the IAT has explored racial or gender stereotypes, but the current research will attempt to assess the usefulness of this technique for distinguishing high-risk versus low-risk sport celebrity endorsers.

The IAT is a research test tool that is a “procedural format for measuring implicit
cognition rather than a single measure of a specific construct… the IAT can be adapted to measure the constructs of stereotypes, self-esteem, identity, and attitudes toward concepts” (Lane, Banaji, Nosek, & Greenwald, 2007, p. 61). This test is unique compared to other tests in that it measures the “real” attitudes of individuals based on measuring their reaction timing for specific questions (Lane et al., 2007). The reason why the IAT is defined as an implicit measuring tool is due to the fact that “it does not depend on participants’ awareness of the existence or strength of the associations being assessed” (Maison, Greenwald, & Bruin, 2004, p. 406). Another reason why the IAT focuses on implicit responses is its ability to “void requiring introspective access, decrease the mental control available to produce the response, reduce the role of conscious intention, and reduce the role of self-reflective, deliberative processes” (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2007, p. 267). The IAT has also served as a useful tool “to generate new methods that would demonstrate large effect sizes and maintain reasonable reliability” (Greenwald et al., 1998; cited in Lane et al., 2007, p. 61).

Previous research using the IAT has included measurements of people’s perceptions and attitudes towards sensitive issues such as death as well as how people feel about celebrities (Lane et al., 2007). One of the better-known studies using the IAT to measure people’s attitudes regarding a sensitive issue was Hugenberg and Bodenhausen’s 2003 study that focused on the issue of race. These researchers measured perceptions of white individuals and black individuals (Lane et al., 2007). Lane et al. (2007) have outlined 17 different IAT tests and the different issues and attitudes they have measured.

The IAT is conducted on a computer, and asks the participants in the study to respond to several categories, including “two contrasted target concept categories pertaining to the attitude objects being evaluated (e.g., flowers and insects or racial Black and White); and (b) two contrasted attribute categories (e.g., pleasant and unpleasant words)”(Maison et al., 2004, p. 406). When the participants start the IAT survey, they will be presented with either a picture or word that describes one of these four categories and then choose and attribute to fit each category (Maison et al., 2004). Reaction time becomes the significant dependent variable. For example, if a person has an implicit negative attitude about obesity, we would expect her reaction time to be faster when associating obesity with negative words, like hate, than when associating obesity with positive words, like love.

Reaction time results are assumed to reflect an implicit attitude, which can then be compared to the same participant’s response to an explicit questionnaire. In some cases, a person claiming to have no racial biases towards African-Americans in an explicit questionnaire might in fact show definite bias in the IAT. In other cases, we might see that a person’s explicit attitudes are quite congruent with their IAT results. In the current research, we will explore which of these scenarios best describes participants’ responses to sports celebrity endorsers. If there is a difference between participants’ implicit and explicit attitudes towards sports celebrity endorsers, we will be interested to see which type of attitude best predicts participants’ intent to buy products endorsed by the sports celebrities.

**Case Studies**  In preparation for selecting sports celebrities to present to participants, exemplar case studies have been developed. Two athletes with positive reputations and two with negative reputations will be presented:

**Positive Reputations: Peyton Manning and Tiger Woods**

Peyton Manning came from a family that was very involved with the sport that he is still playing today. His father, Archie, played in the NFL for the New Orleans Saints and his younger
brother, Eli, is playing as quarterback for the New York Giants (“Peyton Manning Biography”). Before enjoying success in the NFL, Manning was also a well-recognized collegiate football player: he was the runner-up for the Heisman Trophy while at the University of Tennessee. Many people, especially football fans, consider Manning to be a “football hero” and “football genius” for his ability and presence on and off the field (Jenkins, 2004). Manning was drafted by the Indianapolis Colts in 1998, where he has been successful as their starting quarterback (“Peyton Manning Biography”).

Not only is Manning a talented football quarterback, but he also makes sure that he contributes to society through his non-profit organizations. The Peyback Foundation was started by Manning in 1999, and the goal of the organization is to “promote the future success of disadvantaged youth by assisting programs that provide the necessary leadership and growth opportunities for youth who are at risk” (“Information about the Peyback Foundation”). Manning’s image as an approachable guy with southern charm has earned him the respect from the football community as well as from the business industry. If there were more down-to-earth athletes like Manning, the world would be a better place.

Considered to be the Michael Jordan of golf, Tiger Woods has dominated the sport for years. Woods has won 61 PGA tournaments, including the Masters Tournament, US Open, British Open, and the PGA Championships (“Tiger Woods Official Web Site”). Woods is also one of the most sponsored athletes currently playing today. Some of his major sponsors include Nike, Buick, and EA Games. Other sponsors of Woods include Accenture, Gillette, and Tag Heuer (“Tiger Woods Official Web Site”). Woods has also put his name and image into good use by promoting his own brand of golf equipment and his own golf video games with EA Games.

Even with all of his success over the years and dealing with many challenges, Woods tries to keep everything in perspective. In an interview with CyberGolf, Woods states the following, “I’ve put myself in so many different scenarios and have been successful and have failed, and I’ve had to learn from both. Why did I fail? Well, because of this. Why did I succeed? Well, because of this. You have to analyze, you have to be critical and you have to understand that you have to take hard looks at yourself. Over the years I’ve done that, and I think that’s one of the reasons why I’ve been able to keep progressing through the years. Trust me, it’s not always easy, but my father has always harped on me, always be honest with yourself, true to yourself, look yourself in the mirror and be honest. Some days are tougher than others. When you know you’ve absolutely messed up, you have to admit it and move on and learn and apply. And I’ve done that” (“CyberGolf Interview with Tiger Woods”). Woods is classified as a good example of a sports celebrity endorser for being not only a superb athlete, but presenting himself professionally in both positive and negative situations. Whether he won the PGA tour or lost a tournament that he was supposed to win, Woods comes across as a role model for other athletes and sports endorsers to follow.

**Negative Reputations: Michael Vick and Marion Jones**

Michael Vick, quarterback for Virginia Tech and the Atlanta Falcons, made national news for his involvement in dog-fighting activities. Vick “was charged with competitive dogfighting and conducting the venture across state lines” (Maske, July 18, 2007). Compounding his problems, Vick failed a drug test for marijuana (Czarnecki, September 27, 2007). This is not the first time that Vick has been in the news for a negative event or crisis. Vick made news for his obscene gestures to the Atlanta Falcons fans and for his suspicious water bottles. Vick was banned indefinitely from the NFL by the commissioner on August 24, 2007 for
participating in the dog-fighting crisis ("NFL suspends 'reprehensible' Vick indefinitely," August 24, 2007).

Vick’s reputation among football fans and the nation has been impacted severely. Texas A&M tried to sell shirts with Vick’s image and a dog before their game against Virginia Tech early this year ("Texas Tech bans T-shirt of Vick likeness hanging Texas A&M's dog mascot," October 9, 2007). The NFL and other organizations are asking Vick for reimbursement for their contracts with him, along with other fees ("NFL suspends 'reprehensible' Vick indefinitely," August 24, 2007). This is a case where a celebrity endorser in sports is involved in a crisis, and everyone associated with him wants to put their distance between the celebrity and their organizations.

When people think of Marion Jones, they picture the face of the sport of track and field for the 2000 Olympics, where she won three gold medals and two bronze medals for the United States. Jones had many sponsors during her reign, including Nike, which is unusual in a sport such as track and field.

Jones’ serious problems began as a result of the BALCO scandal in San Francisco in 2003, where the public was introduced to undetectable steroids. The owner of BALCO, Victor Conte, dropped a name of one of his main clients, Marion Jones ("BALCO Boss: Marion Jones used steroids," December 3, 2004). Jones denied that she had ever taken steroids and insisted that she was clean. Jones was called along with other athletes to testify at the grand jury hearing for the BALCO case and she stated that she has never used steroids. After the case, she filed a lawsuit against Conte for defamation and damage of character due to his comments about her regarding the BALCO scandal.

Jones maintained her innocence up until October 5, 2007, when she finally admitted to everyone that indeed she had cheated and used steroids ("Olympic gold medalist Marion Jones please guilty in steroids case," October 5, 2007). Jones made the following statement after pleading guilty, “It's with a great amount of shame that I stand before you and tell you that I have betrayed your trust. I have been dishonest, and you have the right to be angry with me. I have let (my family) down. I have let my country down, and I have let myself down. I recognize that by saying I'm deeply sorry, it might not be enough and sufficient to address the pain and hurt that I've caused you” ("Olympic gold medalist Marion Jones please guilty in steroids case," October 5, 2007).

With this public statement about using steroids, Jones is about to face other penalties besides her damaged reputation. According to an article that appeared in the Baltimore Sun, Jones faces the following consequences that will be overseen by the International Olympic Committee: her name removed from the track and field record books, her medals from the Olympics and other international events taken back, and possible banning from competing at the Olympics ("Jones faces more penalties from IOC in doping scandal," October 10, 2007). Jones now faces six months in jail for lying to prosecutors during the BALCO trial.

Research Questions  There have been numerous public relations nightmares in athletics in particular in just the past couple of years (Kobe Bryant, Marion Jones, Michael Vick, Floyd Landis, Bode Miller). If public relations and advertising professionals are able to predict a problem with an endorser ahead of time, they will be more proactive than they currently are. This information will also be relevant for companies that want to determine how one of their core consumer groups (college students) feel regarding high-risk versus low-risk celebrity endorsers.
This research has several goals. From determining which type of sport celebrity endorser is the most effective among college students to seeing if risky endorsers share characteristics of psychopaths based on the PCL--R scale, a number of different questions need to be addressed:

- **To see if college students do perceive high-risk celebrity endorsers differently than low-risk celebrity endorsers.** For this research study, it is important to determine and address the main research question. The researcher wants to see if there is a difference between how college students perceive these celebrity endorsers. If there is a difference, it is important to see if there are any differences between college students and collegiate athletes, and between genders (male versus female students).

- **To find out if people’s attitudes of these individuals are based on the person’s personality or overall image in the media.** The researcher wants to see if the good or bad perceptions of the sport celebrity endorser are due to the individual’s personal views and attitudes, or are they influenced by how the information is presented in the media, or by how people they know are persuading them to think about these individuals.

- **To determine if high-risk celebrity endorsers are perceived as having some of the characteristics in the PCL scale for psychopathology.** Another goal of this research study is to determine if the high-risk celebrity endorsers are viewed by college students as sharing some of the characteristics that are presented in the PCL--R scale for psychopaths.

- **To measure the effectiveness of persuasive communication used by the sport celebrity endorsers among college students.** For this goal, the researcher wants to see if there are any differences between how the celebrity endorsers that are low-risk and have a positive brand image compare with high-risk and a negative brand image among college students. By using the ELM theory, the researcher will be able to predict the effectiveness of the persuasion routes (central and peripheral) of the sport celebrity endorser’s messages in their advertisements and overall media presence.

- **To evaluate the results and see if athletes view these celebrity endorsers differently from regular college students.** Not only will it be interesting to see how college students view these celebrity endorsers, it will be interesting to see if there are any differences between regular college students and college athletes. College students may be participating in club sports and be fans of sports, but the athletes have a more insight view into the athletic industry that regular college students may not have. These individuals might become the future elite sport celebrity endorsers, so they might be getting the training and experience they would need from their college sports information department and athletic support staff.

- **To see if explicit attitudes towards particular sports celebrities are the same or different from implicit attitudes towards them.** The ELM implies that when people use the peripheral route, they may be more influenced by less explicit, conscious evaluation of a persuasive attempt. We can explicitly say that we are disgusted by Michael Vick’s treatment of dogs or Marion Jones’ use of performance enhancing drugs, but is that how we really feel? If our implicit attitudes towards Vick or Jones are still positive, we may respond to their messages differently than if both explicit and implicit attitudes are congruent. If our implicit attitudes remain positive, we may be particularly vulnerable to persuasion when using the peripheral route.

**Hypotheses** Based on the literature review, six hypotheses have been developed:

- **H1: Celebrity Endorsers that are considered to be higher risk will be viewed more negatively compared to low-risk celebrity endorsers by college students.** The researcher
predicts that college students will indeed be more aware of the roles that celebrity endorsers play in the media, but they will also perceive there is a negative difference between those endorsers that are classified as high-risk and those that are low-risk. The researcher makes this statement due to the fact that college students are educated and are at an age to make their own decisions based on critical thinking, so it should be assumed that they will be able to look at celebrity endorsers and determine if they are effective or not effective based on their advertisements.

- **H2**: High-risk celebrity endorsers will be perceived as having more characteristics from the PCL—R scale (Hare, 1991) than low-risk celebrity endorsers. After determining if college students view high-risk celebrity endorsers differently than low-risk celebrity endorsers, it is important to see if they project the same characteristics to their various audiences that are found in the PCL--R scale. The researcher predicts that the college students participating in this research study will see some of the characteristics that appear in the PCL--R scale among some of the sport celebrity endorsers, particularly the high-risk ones.

- **H3**: Male students will view celebrity endorsers differently compared to female students. For the most part, the majority of sports fans are male, but it all depends on the sport. But in this study, the researcher believes that the male participants of the study will view these celebrity endorsers differently from their female compatriots. There are many different possibilities that could arise in this situation. The male participants may look more favorably towards the high-risk celebrity endorsers, or they might perceive these individuals more negatively. But, the researcher does predict that there will be a difference in attitudes and perceptions among the male and female participants in this study.

- **H4**: Results from the IAT will reflect the participant’s true feelings about the celebrity endorser. One of the main parts of this research study is to have the participants participate in an IAT, which will measure their implicit attitudes towards the celebrity endorser. The researcher predicts that the results from the IAT survey will show the true feelings and attitudes of the participants regarding the sport celebrity endorsers. The researcher will measure this by comparing the results from the participant’s pre-test and post-test and analyze them according to the responses from the IAT survey.

- **H5**: College athletes will view celebrity endorsers differently than regular college students. The researcher predicts that the college athletes surveyed in this study will view the celebrity endorsers differently compared to regular college students. College athletes are part of the athletic community, and they are aware of the pressures and expectations that come along with being a university athlete. Plus, these individuals are preparing themselves for becoming future elite athletes and can possibly be in the same position as the sport celebrity cases presented earlier in this research study. They might be more sympathetic with the high-risk sports celebrities.

- **H6**: The high-risk examples of C.E. will be recognized quicker in the IAT testing compared to the bad examples. In the IAT survey, the participants will be presented with images and names of well-known sport celebrity endorsers, and the researcher predicts that the participants will recognize the pictures and images of the high-risk celebrity endorsers faster than the low-risk celebrity endorsers.

- **H7**: The persuasive communication messages and information will be more effective if it goes through the central route of the ELM compared to the peripheral route. The researcher believes that college students will be more persuaded if they have an invested
interest in a product, team, or issue will be more likely to follow the central route in the ELM model.

- **H8**: Collegiate Athletes and College Students will interpret the persuasive communication message differently by going down different routes of the ELM model.
- **H8a**: Athletes will be more likely to use their previous experiences and interactions to make their judgment about these celebrity endorsers (central route in ELM). Athletes do have an advantage over college students on having an inside view into the athletic industry and what challenges and obstacles it faces. The researcher believes that the college athletes surveyed will be influenced on their own experience in the athletic industry and use that to make their decision.
- **H8b**: College students will be more likely to follow the peripheral route in the ELM Model and be influenced by the persuasive message itself instead of other sources. The researcher believes that college students will be more likely to be persuaded by the message being communicated by the celebrity endorser than other external sources.
- **Important item to find out**: The researcher believes that it is important to find out the effectiveness of persuasive messages and the role that the celebrity endorser plays in the final decision by the consumer (or in this case, college students).

**Method**

**Participants**

Approximately 150 college students attending a large, southeastern public university will be recruited to participate in this study. A convenience sample of approximately 75 participants will be drawn from both undergraduate and graduate courses in order to assess the attitudes of students who do not participate in athletics. A quota sample of approximately 75 participants will be recruited through the university’s athletic and recreational departments. An “athlete” will be defined as someone who has actively participated in club, recreational, intercollegiate, or professional athletics for a minimum of one previous year. Ideally, approximately equal numbers of males and females from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds will participate. It is expected that participants will be young adults (18-25) representing a variety of academic majors on campus. Participants will be offered a small incentive (a snack) for their participation.

**Materials**

The required materials include a pre-test and questionnaire designed by the researcher and an instrument known as the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, Banaji, & Nosek, 2003).

The pre-test will present participants with a list of current sports celebrities, and will ask participants to rate each celebrity on reputation (positive versus negative) and familiarity.

The questionnaire will address several factors. A demographic section will include participants’ age, sex, year in school, years of athletic experience, “fan” status (ranging from “not a fan” to “superfan”), and media viewing habits. This section will also present critical action questions in Likert scale format: How likely are you to buy a product endorsed by this sports celebrity? A second section of the questionnaire asks participants to rate how well certain attributes describe particular athletes using a Likert scale. For example, when a participant thinks about Michael Vick, is the attribute “charming” highly characteristic or not characteristic at all? Thirty attributes are based on the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) developed by Robert Hare and his colleagues (Hare, Harpur, Hakstian, Forth, & Hart, 1990).
Administering the Implicit Associations Test (IAT) requires the use of computers running Windows XP or above and Microsoft Word 2003 or above. The test also requires installation of Inquisit laboratory software, commercially available from Millisecond Software. The IAT requires the researcher to select target labels, attribute labels, and attribute stimuli that are appropriate for the research question. In the current research, the target labels to be used are “Good Reputation” and “Bad Reputation,” as this dimension captures the main theme of the research: How do university students perceive the reputations of sports celebrity endorsers? Stimulus items refer to the names of particular endorsers, whose status as positive or negative endorsers will be identified in the pre-test stage of the research project. For the purpose of example, we might include Michael Vick and Marion Jones as having “negative” reputations and Peyton Manning and Tiger Woods as having “positive” reputations. The specific endorsers used as stimulus items should be approximately equally recognizable to participants, as determined by the pre-test phase. “Safe” and “risky” will be used as attribute labels, as once again, the major research question involves the perception of sports celebrity endorsers as either high-risk or low-risk. Finally, attribute stimuli are chosen to represent the attribute labels. The “safe” label is associated with the following attribute stimuli: good, stable, cautious, honest, ethical, and sympathetic. The “risky” label is associated with the following attribute stimuli: bad, unstable, reckless, dishonest, unethical, and unsympathetic.

Design

The current research will attempt to discover the relationships between a number of independent and dependent variables.

Independent Variables

Among the independent variables of interest are the following:
- Implicit versus explicit attitudes: Will these two approaches to attitude measurement produce the same or different results?
- Athlete participants versus non-athlete participants
- Men versus women
- High-risk versus low-risk celebrities: Will perception of athletes as positive or negative have an influence on their serving as effective persuaders?

Dependent Variables

Key dependent variables include:
- Explicit attitudes towards endorsers
- Implicit attitudes towards endorsers
- Responses to intention items: “I would be likely to buy a product endorsed by this person.” “I would be likely to buy a product endorsed by this person for a child in my extended family.”

Statistical Analysis

Both within-subjects and between-group analyses will be conducted on a variety of measures relevant to the proposed hypotheses. For example, we can investigate the possibility that men and women are differentially influenced by a celebrity sports endorser’s reputation when deciding to purchase an endorsed product.

The IAT output, in the form of reaction times, occurs in a format that is compatible with analysis using SPSS software. The primary outcome of the IAT is a \(d\) statistic, which represents differences in latencies to respond to combinations of concepts and attributes (Lane et al., 2007). For example, faster responding to combinations of insect-bad and flower-good than to
combinations of insect-good and flower-bad indicates an implicit preference for flowers over insects.

The $d$ statistics generated by each participant’s IAT can be compared to responses on the questionnaire in order to address the proposed hypotheses. For example, we might ask if a participant’s $d$ score correlates with his or her likelihood to buy a product endorsed by a “risky” sports celebrity.

Procedure
The research will be conducted in two phases, a pre-test and the administration of the main questionnaire and IAT.

Pre-test
In the pre-test, 50 recruited participants (25 athletes and 25 non-athletes) will review lists of current sports celebrities and rate them according to familiarity and reputation. The researcher will use these responses to select the four celebrity endorsers (2 positive and 2 negative) for use in the questionnaire and IAT. Efforts will be made to balance factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sport. After ranking these endorsers, the participants will be asked open-ended questions about what characteristics and personality traits they believe these sport celebrity endorsers present for their overall brand image.

Questionnaire/IAT
Students recruited for the main part of the research will be asked to meet the researcher in groups of about 15 in a campus computer lab. Half of the groups will complete the questionnaire first, followed by the IAT, and the other half will complete the IAT before the questionnaire. All participants will be debriefed at the conclusion of the experiment. This part of the procedure should take about 30 minutes.

Results and Discussion
The data collected in the proposed study should provide a greater insight into the perception of sports celebrity endorsers among a key target audience, college students. These data should allow us to compare both explicit and implicit attitudes towards sports celebrity endorsers, and the contribution of these attitudes to the critical action question—would I buy something endorsed by this person?

Results from the questionnaire should allow the researcher to construct a profile of sports celebrities that will assist public relations and advertising professionals to distinguish potentially risky endorsers from relatively safer choices.

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What Research Tells Us? An Analysis of Research and Evaluative Research of the Entries of ‘Golden Compass Awards’ organized by the Turkish Public Relations Association

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is an analysis of the research and evaluative research methods of public relations campaigns submitted to the Turkish Public Relations Awards called ‘Golden Compass Awards.’ ‘Golden Compass Awards’ has been established in 2001 and it is a public relations award program that recognizes the best practices of public relations campaigns that is been conducted by Turkish practitioners. The awards are organized annually by the Turkish Public Relations Association (TUHID).

The study analyzed the entries of 6th Golden Compass Awards submitted to categories ‘internal communications,’ ‘marketing communications,’ ‘crisis communications,’ ‘event management,’ ‘social responsibility,’ ‘e-communication,’ ‘non-governmental organizations,’ ‘public sector’ and ‘other.’ The research excluded only the ‘Young Communicators Awards’ category. Only public relations students submit their projects to this category and although research and evaluation are also required steps in their submissions, they are not asked actually to implement them. In the study, a total of 94 entries in 9 categories are analyzed in terms of research and evaluative research that had been mentioned in the submissions.

‘Golden Compass Awards’ carried out by TUHID is the only public relations competition that has been taking place in Turkey. It is young, but is prestigious, well-respected and national. Although the main structure of the awards has remained the same, there had been changes in the categories and submission requirements. Also the number of entries is increasing every year showing an interest of the professional world. For example, in the first year, there had been 19 submissions, followed by 19 entries in the following year. The 3rd ‘Golden Compass Awards’ entries for best practices are 48 in year 2003. The 4th one organized had 67 submissions and the 5th year the number of entries reached to 46.

The questions of the study are:

R1: What research families are used?
R2: What evaluative research methods are used to understand the public relations impact?
R3: Is there a difference of evaluative research methods across various categories?
R4: Are output measurements the frequently used evaluative research?
R5: What are the winning cases’ (category winners) evaluative research methods?

There are limitations of the study. In research analysis, it looked at only whether the initial planning research is primary or secondary. It did not look at the research techniques used for analysis such as type (attitude or opinion research, motivation research, marketing research, copy research readership research) or qualitative or quantitative measures. That analysis has been done by one coder. The evaluation has been made by looking at output and outcome categories, not methods. Also outtake measures are analyzed as outcomes. The coding schema is from IPRA’s Gold Paper number 11 published in 1994 and the paper titled “Using Evaluation Techniques and Performance Claims to Demonstrate Public Relations Impact: An Australian
Perspective” is largely used for this study (Xavier et al, 2005). The results of the study tell us that event management and internal communication categories of 6th Golden Compass Awards used less research to guide their projects/campaigns compared to other category entries. Overall the CSR category submissions had reported to have more research and when we look at the research family used, it was more secondary research than primary research used in that category. The research family for all submitted cases was mostly based on secondary research. Only one largely used outcome method had been remarked and it is media monitoring. AVE is also used in some cases although its value is a controversial topic. The winning cases are reported to have a good mixture of both output and outcome measure; the grand winner having used the most output and outcome measures. Also public sector, NGO and e- communication category (also a public sector institution) winners used more outcome measures than output measures.

**What is Public Relations Research and Evaluation?**

The Accreditation Sourcebook defines research as ‘the systematic gathering of information for the purposes of describing and understanding situations, and checking out assumptions about publics and public relations consequences’ (1995, p. 68). Walter K. Lindenmann (2006) defines public relations research as a tool for fact and opinion gathering and that systematic effort is aimed to discover, confirm and/or understand the facts or opinions about a specified problem, situation or opportunity.

Research can be classified as informal and formal research. The basic difference between the two is that the results of informal research can be used for description, but not prediction. It is conducted without generally agreed rules and is conducted for confirming or denying concepts based on intuition or experience. (Newsom et al, 2007 p. 182). Formal research provides ‘objective and systematic data gathered from scientifically representative samples (Accreditation Sourcebook, 1995, p. 68)

There are several research techniques, but two types of public relations research which are primary and secondary. Primary research is about doing an original study and secondary research is about examining already existing data.

Secondary research/methodology is an informal research method that examines data that already exists to draw conclusions. This is often used in benchmarking and benchmark studies (Stacks, 2006).

Primary research is either qualitative or quantitative or it could be both. Qualitative studies are subjective and exploratory (descriptive), but quantitative studies are highly objective and projectable. They rely on statistics and numerical measures (Lindenmann, 2006). It is finding out the information you want at first hand.

Qualitative studies are focus groups, in depth interviews, convenience polling, and ethnographic research and inquiry studies. Surveys (via email or web-based, telephone, mail) omnibus surveys/polls, panels all fall under quantitative studies. It is possible to use both qualitative and quantitative measure because they give the answers to ‘how’ and ‘what’ people think as well as ‘and ‘why ’they think like that. Lindenmann says that it is better to put more emphasis on quantitative data collection. Qualitative is exploratory, but quantitative research is descriptive and explanatory (Lindenmann, 2006).

Ann Gregory (2000) says that research could take place at both micro level and macro level. Through PEST and SWOT, organization, environment and stakeholder analysis could be made. Situation analysis which is described as “an impartial, often third party assessment of the
public relations and/or public affairs problems or opportunities, that an organization may be facing at a given time” (Stacks, 2006 p. 2) can be conducted by various methods. Some of the primary research techniques are self-completion questionnaires, one-to-one interviews, telephone interviews, focus groups, internet groups. In addition to those formal techniques there are some informal techniques such as encounters and discussions with different groups of people related with your company or issue. They can be important people or just ordinary people. Also reading press, listening or watching programs or talking the matter among friends can help a lot. Media research and communication audit are useful tools for analysis of the organization/problem or opportunity (Gregory, 2000).

There are reasons to justify research and evaluation. As mentioned in ‘Importance and Use of Formal Research and Evaluation,’ they are:

1) The need of clients and companies to have accurate information on where they stand in the eyes of their publics,
2) Concern by management that public relations should be accountable and therefore measurement is necessary,
3) For public relations to be included in the management level, research and evaluation are a must,
4) Finally to develop a knowledge base as a foundation for achieving professional status (Judd, 1990, p.17).

Research makes the public relations more responsive, effective, useful and professional. Research is the scientific approach in answering questions, providing more reliable answers in most situations than authority, personal experience and historical record.

There are five major approaches to public relations management. These are:

1) **No research approach:** In this approach PR practitioners do not use research to plan, monitor or evaluate their programs. The goal is to generate public relations output in the form of communications from the management to its publics.
2) **Informal approach:** This approach does not have any rules. In public relations, explorations or pretests providing tentative answers, pre-scientific questioning helps, but the results of informal research should not be used for managing a program.
3) **Media event approach:** In this approach, research is conducted to generate newsworthy information because public relations people know that media people are interested in polls on topics that are of interest to its publics.
4) **Evaluation only approach:** This results from the need for accountability.
5) **Scientific management approach:** In that approach, research is first used to define the problem for developing public relations program. Secondly, research is done for systematic monitoring, to monitor program implementation for accountability and strategic adjustments. Third, research is done to measure program impact with respect to goals and objectives set (Broom and Dozier, 1990 p. 14-18).

As stated in *Evaluation Research*, evaluation is an elastic word that may imply many things and cover many different aspects. For example, people talk about the evaluation of an employee’s work performance, evaluation of a movie script, evaluation of a sales potential of a detergent. All the uses that word evaluation has one thing in common and that is the notion of judging a merit. ‘Someone is examining and weighing a phenomenon (a person, a thing, an idea) against some explicit or implicit yardstick’ (Weiss, 1972 p. 1).
The report on Public Relations Research prepared by the Professional Standards Committee of International Public Relations Association mentions seven common methods of applied research in public relations of which one of them is evaluation research.

The list is as follows:
1) **Attitude or opinion research** is designed to find out how people feel or what they think about a particular institution, business or subject.
2) **Motivation research** is done to find out why people think or do certain things.
3) Research can be conducted to identify trends that may affect a PR program or an institution.
4) **Marketing research** is designed to find out what products people buy/use or prefer over the others.
5) **Copy research** is designed to find out whether certain communications will be read and understood.
6) **Readership research** is designed to find out whether people have received and retained information from communication materials that have been distributed.
7) Finally, **evaluation research** measures the success or failure of a program in terms of intended objectives (Bateman, 1979 p. 2).

Public relations evaluation is proving what you have done. It is talking with solid data: it is not saying only that it is important that we evaluate. As stated in ‘Measurement in Public Relations-an Overview’, public relations practitioners are more often ‘doers’ than researchers. They know how to do things but they have not been asked often if the results of the programs justify the money spent on them (Grunig, 1977, p. 5). Although this stage may have changed with time, the majority of public relations practitioners may not still be equipped with knowledge in evaluation research.

In communication schools in Turkey, research methods in social sciences are an obligatory course, but for a new generation of public relations practitioners who understand measurement and evaluation as applied in their discipline, there should also be a specific course integrated in the public relations curriculum with respect to research and evaluative research.

Conducting public relations evaluation is considered as one of the attempts to advance the public relations profession. It demonstrates whether you have achieved your objectives, it guides you where to go next and it justifies your efforts to the management. Evaluation is also a trendy and a preferred word in public relations because from the agency side, it attracts clients and it fills a gap in the sector if you claim to concentrate on evaluation as a consultant. Also from the corporate side, if you emphasize evaluating the impact of public relations, you are regarded as more scientific and it is likely that your public relations budget will not be cut if you prove progress.

**Objectives and Evaluation, an Important Link**

Evaluation is an ongoing process of monitoring and assessment of stated objectives of public relations program as stated in *Public Relations Cases* book by Hendrix. There is a distinction between **output** objectives and **impact** objectives which could be informational/attitudinal/behavioral. Output objectives are described as the objectives that involve the distribution of controlled and uncontrolled media. They are evaluated by keeping records of numbers of news releases sent, the number of contacts made by media people, speeches given, publications distributed and the number of meetings held. These are easily achievable objectives, but they do not measure audience impact.
Informational objective measurement includes message exposure, message comprehension and message retention. Message exposure is measured by publicity placement. Message comprehension is understood by the application of readability formulas to test the messages of PR programs. Message retention is measured mostly by survey method and it tests the knowledge of target audiences about the client’s message. Attitudinal objectives are measured by Likert scales and the Semantic Differential. Measurement of behavioral objectives could be done in two ways. One is simply observing the behavior of the target audiences and this could be before, during and after a public relations program. The measurement of behavioral objectives is similar to the measurement of attitudinal objectives except for the questions would differ. In evaluating behavioral objectives, close-ended multiple choice questions and checklists are used to determine audience behavior (Hendrix, 2001, p. 41-43).

Another terminology for objectives comes from Broom and Dozier. In their book Using Research in Public Relations they differentiate between process objectives and impact objectives. Process objectives show program efforts and look at workflow, effort, timeliness, productivity, costs, etc. Impact objectives look at intended outcomes and they are related what people know, feel and do. When measuring program impact the general research question should be ‘how effective was the program in achieving what we intended?’ (Broom and Dozier, 1990, p. 74).

To measure public relations impact, an organization first should:

1) Clearly describe at the beginning as exactly as possible the specific goals and objectives of their publicity, promotional and public relations activities,

2) They should decide upon the levels of impact or change that are important for them to achieve through their public relations programs or activities.

Lindenmann says that organizations should take into consideration three levels of PR impact measurement. The first one which is the basic and the very elementary measurement is called the output. The intermediate measurement is categorized as measuring the outgrowths of a public relations campaign and advanced and more sophisticated measurement is called as the outcome of a public relations campaign (Lindenmann, 1995 p. 35).

The Institute for Public Relations Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation differentiates between public relations outputs which are short-term and on surface such as media coverage received, exposure of a particular message with measuring public relations outcomes which are more long-term and with more impact. They look at change in awareness, attitude or behavior patterns (IPR, 1997, p.3).

According to the Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation Report, there are four components for any PR evaluation research. Two of them are:

1) **Measuring PR outputs:** For media relations and for other tactics of public relations, both the quantity and quality of outputs can be measured. It could be media content analysis or evaluation of an event in terms of attendance, etc. They count and analyze things.

2) **Measuring PR outcomes:** Measuring PR outcomes is considered more difficult and more expensive than measuring outputs, but there is an important distinction between the two. Outcomes measure if the target audiences receive the messages directed to them, paid attention, understood and retained them. Also the outcomes measure whether the efforts of the public relations campaign planner have resulted in opinion, attitude or behavior change on the target audience. Therefore outcome measurement requires more sophisticated techniques (IPR, 1997, p. 4-5). In other words it looks into changes in the
thinking and awareness level, changes in attitude or opinion level and changes in behavior (Lindemann, 2006).

In addition to output and outcome measures, there are other measures such as input, outgrowth and outtake.

**Input measure** is very briefly defined as what a public relations person does and how these are distributed. Prof. Stacks describes inputs as “the research information and data from both internal and external sources applied in the conception, approval and design phases of the input stage of communication production process” (2006, p. 10). **Outtake** is in between output and outcome. Prof. Stacks defines it as “measurement of what audiences have understood and-or responded to a communication product’s call to seek further information from PR messages prior to measuring an outcome…” (2006, p. 11) This is audience reaction showing itself in favorability of the product, recall and retention of the message whether the audience responded to a call for information or action in the message. This is sometimes used as an outcome. **Outgrowth** is “the culminate effect of all communication programs and products on the positioning of an organization in the minds of its stakeholders a publics…” defined by Prof Stacks (2006, p. 14) in the *Dictionary of Public Relations Measurement and Research*.

It is suggested that whatever the public relations practitioners are doing in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of their efforts, they should be careful to link the public relations accomplishments to the ultimate goals and objectives of the organization as a whole. The underlying thought is that most businesses take the position that public relations objectives do not have value unless they have an impact on the business program. But, relating public relations outcomes to organizational outcomes and measuring may not be that simple (IPR, 1997, p. 6).

Jim R. McNamara claims that one of the reasons public relations is often not measured is lack of SMART objectives. Objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely are not set to facilitate evaluation (McNamara, paper presented at World Congress, IPRA 2002).

Dozier distinguishes between pseudo planning and pseudo evaluation. According to him, true evaluation measures changes in attitudes, knowledge levels and behavior of the target publics. Moreover, true evaluation involves measures where the efforts of the cause of change in the target audience could be attributable to program efforts. Therefore, the planning is very much linked with evaluation. Measuring programs that have no solid goals is difficult to conduct. Pseudo planning is described as the goal of program activities is communication itself. Practitioners in that respect should clearly differentiate between process and outcome. Although communication products are important components of the public relations program, they are not sufficient for success because communication is not considered as the measurable impact and outcome of a successful public relations program (Dozier, 1985, p. 17-24).

Typical objective measures mentioned in Ann Gregory’s (2000) book *Planning and Managing Public Relations Campaigns* book are: changes in behavior, responses, changes in attitude, opinion and awareness, achievements, media coverage, budget control and value for money. She also classifies evaluation measures into subjective category which are enthusiasm, efficiency and professionalism, creativity, initiative, an instinct on what is right in a given situation and people chemistry (p.173- 174).

Benefits of evaluation are that it focuses efforts, demonstrates effectiveness, encourages good management and facilitates accountability. There are some principles of evaluation and that is they are linked to objectives. Evaluation should not be considered at the end. It should be scientific and objective. It should also fulfill the management results. Tom Watson in his study
with IPR members pointed out that confidence in promoting evaluation methods to the clients and employees is missing (Gregory, 2000, p.165)

**Evaluation Techniques**

A number of evaluation techniques have been developed. These are:
1) Cutlip, Center and Broom’s Evaluation Model called PII Model including planning, implementation and impact in its title. (See Appendix A)
2) The Continuing Model for Evaluation proposed by Tom Watson in UK,
3) The Unified Model of Evaluation outlined by Tom Watson and Paul Noble,
4) The Pyramid Model of PR Research by Jim M. McNamara,
5) The PRE Model FOR Planning Research and Evaluation published by UK IPR Evaluation Toolkit,
6) The PR Effectiveness Yardstick developed by Dr. Lindenmann in US (Watson and Noble, 2007). (See Appendix B)
(All of these techniques have their advantages and disadvantages and for a detailed description of each technique, refer to p. 80-106)

To measure the impact on the three levels; output, outgrowth and outcome, there are six techniques that could be used as mentioned by Lindenmann (1995) in ‘Measuring Public Relations Impact’ presentation. These are:

1) Analyzing the Publicity Content: Content analysis is a technique that measures public relations outputs. It is the process of studying and tracking what has been written and said in all sorts of media and translates this qualitative material into quantitative form through coding and classifying of specific messages.

2) Using Focus Groups: Focus groups can be used to measure public relations outgrowths and outcomes. It is a technique in which 8 to 12 participants are encouraged to discuss as a group all their concerns, feelings and thoughts on the topic with the help of a moderator. This is a low cost and efficient method to use especially to understand possible target audience reactions before actual public relations promotional materials and approaches are used widely. For example, testing the reaction of target audience to planned printed materials such as brochure, pamphlet, booklet or presentation of an organization.

3) Before and After Research: This is a technique for measuring public relations outgrowths and outcomes. As the name suggests, it involves pre and post research. Before any activity takes place, a sample of the target audience is surveyed. After the event takes place a follow-up research is used with the same sample group applying the same interviewing approach.

4) After Research: This technique measures both PR outgrowths and outcomes and involves only post research. The reason for conducting only post research only may be because the organization lacks funds or does not have time to do initial survey prior the public relations activity.

5) Measuring Impact with After Research Using Test and Control Groups: It measures PR outgrowths and outcomes. This approach also involves post research only; however the research takes place in two different locations. This is a technique in which the organization does not have enough time to conduct pre research prior the PR event. After the PR activity, research is conducted to understand to views of individuals who are exposed and who are not to see the impact of that is carried.
6) A Timed Series of After Research: This technique measures public relations outgrowths and outcomes and it involves two or even more post research activities. This approach is valuable to assess the effectiveness of messages sent out to target audiences at an activity by looking at it over time. To achieve this, either the target audience is interviewed right or shortly after the event and several months later (two to six months). Same group of people will be surveyed and by doing this long term retention of messages will be understood (Lindenmann, 1995, p. 38-39).

These techniques vary in their difficulty and budget as well.

**Some Studies that look at Public Relations Evaluation**

The actual use formal research and evaluation in the field is difficult to determine. It may have increased since 1975. Lerbinger, in 1977 cited several corporate programs and reported an increase in the use of public relations research (Judd, 1990, p. 17).

In 1982 Chapman and Finn conducted studies on the use of research and evaluation. Chapman sampled Chicago practitioners and found that nearly one half of the respondents measured 25 percent or more of their PR programs. Finn surveyed senior communication executives at Fortune 1000 companies and found that 48 percent used research and 38 percent conducted program evaluations. In 1986, Booth reported growth in the research departments of major companies. In 1987, Judd sampled Texas practitioners and found that 64 of the individuals and 77 of the organization use formal research and evaluation (Judd, 1990, p. 18-19).

Dozier in 1981 conducted a survey to find out emerging styles of program evaluation. He found that there are three major styles of public relations evaluation among the PR practitioners he has studied. Seat of pants style emphasize personalized and subjective checks of all parts of the public relations process. Scientific impact style emphasizes quantitative or scientific measures of program impact including before and after program evaluation. Some practitioners also specialize in numeric analysis of clip files. The study reported that the common practice of judging public relations success by clip file audits has become old fashioned among top level managerial practitioners. They use both their intuition and also apply scientific techniques to check on their public relations programs. The other important finding of the study is that practitioners with technical roles in public relations are not likely to use any style of evaluation (Dozier, 1984, p. 13-20).

A study by Don Hill done to analyze the Silver Anvil Awards entry of 1980 found that 70 percent did not provide any measures of the result. According to Hill, none of the 1980 entries provided what Hill described as complete measurement of program impact (Dozier, 1985, p. 17). It was found that the most popular techniques in formal research and evaluation applied by public relations practitioners are in depth opinion or focus group, formal clipping analysis and public opinion survey (Judd, 1990, p. 17).

Tom Watson and Paul Noble, in *Evaluating Public Relations* summarize all the studies done on both parts of the continent and they divide them into large scale studies and small scale studies.

**The large scale studies are:**

David Dozier among PRSA and IABC members (1984, 1988)
Walter Lindenmann among a selected group in USA (1990)
Tom Watson among Institute of Public Relations members in UK (1994-1996)
Gael Walker in Australia (1994 and 1997)

Of the small scale studies are Silver Anvil study by Blissland (1990) of the Public Relations Society of America’s ‘Silver Anvil Awards’ and of Australian practitioners’ national “Golden Target PR Awards” in 2004 with the winning cases. European research on evaluation has been undertaken by Germany mainly and Baerns (1993) researched on attitudes of German in-house- public relations managers. McNamara’s study (1999) in Australia and ICO/GPRA’s survey (1996) with public relations consultancies are some other small scale studies conducted.

The Benchpoint Report by Gaunt and Wright (2004) prepared for 2004 Annual Measurement Summit in USA reported similar results to studies that had been done almost a decade ago. (Watson and Noble, 2007, p. 38-45)

About Turkish Public Relations Association and the ‘Golden Compass PR Awards’

Turkish Public Relations Association had been founded in 1972. Although up till now it had been representing the largest body in public relations, by 2005 it had been acknowledged as the Public Relations Association of Turkey with the largest membership. Of its projects, the ‘Golden Compass Awards,’ similar in the sense to PRSA’s Silver Anvil Awards or IPRA Golden Awards for Excellence (international) has been going on for only six years and it is the only public relations award that is being taking place in Turkey. In that respect, it is very prestigious and well-respected. Although the main structure of the awards has remained the same, there had been changes in the categories and grading structure. For example, public relations campaigns in the public sector have been added as new categories. The jury consists of experts who are academics and who represent nonprofit organization, media, professional world, public sector and the public relations association. The projects that are submitted for evaluation require a standard format. The submissions are evaluated on the basis of steps of campaign planning which has been set by TUHID and in the recent years modifications have been done to the entry requirements. The submission requirements of current ‘Golden Compass Public Relations Awards’ is shown in Appendix C. Also a total of all entries including young communicators are included in Table 1. ‘Young Communicators’ category has been established for the first time with the 3rd one organized.

| 1ST GOLDEN COMPASS PR AWARD | 19 ENTRIES |
| 2ND GOLDEN COMPASS PR AWARD | 19 ENTRIES |
| 3RD GOLDEN COMPASS PR AWARD | 48 ENTRIES |
| 4TH GOLDEN COMPASS PR AWARD | 67 ENTRIES |
| 5TH GOLDEN COMPASS PR AWARD | 46 ENTRIES |
| 6TH GOLDEN COMPASS PR AWARD | 114 ENTRIES |
| TOTAL | 313 ENTRIES |

Table 1: ‘Golden Compass Entries per Year’
The 7th Golden Compass Awards took place 21 April 2008. In the 7th one, there had been 100 submission of which 17 of them are to the ‘young communicators’ category.

**Method**

The evaluation of each public relations campaign’s research and evaluative research has been done thorough the CDs that have been submitted to TUHID. All the cases have been copied to a CD, sent to the researcher and analysis has been done on this electronic format. The evaluation parts written by the campaign submitters have been classified according to the outline used in Gold Paper number 11, 1994.

The questions of the study are:

R1: What research families are used?
R2: What evaluative research methods are used to understand the public relations impact?
R3: Is there a difference of evaluative research methods across various categories?
R4: Are output measurements the frequently used evaluative research?
R5: What are the winning cases’ (category winners) evaluative research methods?

Due to different standard of submission of the campaigns and different wordings, the case, research and evaluation part of the cases has been read two times. The researcher gave time between the readings of the cases. Although in the coding there was concentration to research and evaluation titles, the overall case was read through because in some cases there were not included under those headings.

**Results**

Table 2 shows the number of categories and number of entries at each category for the 6th Golden Compass Awards which honors the 2006 best Turkish public relations campaigns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Entries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Management</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Communications</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Communications</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Communications (MC)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO’s</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>94</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: 6th Golden Compass Award Categories and Entries

R1: What research families are used?
Table 3: Research Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Families</th>
<th>CSR 27 ent.</th>
<th>E-com 3 ent.</th>
<th>Event Man. 13 ent.</th>
<th>Crisis Com. 3 ent.</th>
<th>Internal Com. 3 ent.</th>
<th>MC 14 ent.</th>
<th>NGO 6 ent.</th>
<th>Public Sector 20 ent.</th>
<th>Other 5 ent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the analysis of research, it has been noticed that one project sometimes used more than one type of research in those cases where two different kinds of research or mixed research have been used, they are counted separately. The overall results of the research analysis are as follows:

- CSR category is the category with many primary and secondary methods of research.
- The winning case in that category has used mixed research methods.
- E-Communication category entries are mostly did a situation analysis. One case used media coverage analysis and analysis of letters, phone calls.
- Event management category entries talk about the event. One primary research is quantitative and it is not the winning case. That category has not used research as the other cases have.
- Two of the crisis communication cases are related with the same issue which is ‘bird flu.’ One of them is about the poultry corporation’ campaign and the other is the project of NGO formed to deal with bird flu issue/crisis. The third crisis campaign is about product recall of a local drink. There is primary research in the product recall case.
- Internal communication entries have mostly used situation analysis.
- In marketing communications category, 3 cases indicated primary research and one of them did two different types of primary research. Also 3 cases did secondary research and one case reported to use two secondary research sources. 2 cases gave information on activity and 1 case explained the reason why they have conducted the campaign.
- In NGO category, of the 6 cases submitted, there is 1 primary research and that NGO has also conducted secondary research. The winner did not conduct primary research.
- In Public sector entries, there is 1 primary research and 8 secondary research mentions. 1 public sector case used 3 different secondary research methods. Some cases (three submissions from the same institution) used just situation analysis. 1 submission had no research at all.
- In the other category, situation analysis is done mostly. 1 case has done primary research. That case is the winner of that category as well.

R2: What evaluative research methods are used to understand the public relations impact?
R3: Is there a difference of evaluative research methods across various categories?
R4: Are output measurements the frequently used evaluative research?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Entries</th>
<th>Total Output</th>
<th>Total Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-communication</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Management</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Use of Output vs. Outcome Measures across Categories of Entries

Although the number of submissions is 20 to the public sector, the entries widely used output (71) measures. The output measure is used mostly by CSR submissions and that is followed by public sector. Event management entries (13 cases) have used widely output measure (46) This is followed by NGOs.

Outcome measures are not used as much as output measures. Of all the categories, NGOs outcome measures are more than output measures. (15 to 11) and also in the ‘other’ category this is 9 to 5. However, this is because of a case that used many outcome measures.

2 cases in event management did not have an evaluation part. 1 case in NGO did not have evaluation either. In crisis communication, the outcome measures were related mostly with institutional goals such as sales, market share, production or stock price.

**R4**: Are output measurements the frequently used evaluative research?

Of the output measurement that is widely used, media monitoring as a technique has come forward. Table 5 summarizes the media monitoring and AVE technique used across categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Entries</th>
<th>Media Monitoring</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-communication</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Management</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Com.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Com.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Use of Media Monitoring as an Output Measure

AVE is used by 3 category submissions. Those are in event management category mostly (4 out of 13 cases) followed by CSR (1 out of 27 case) and MC (1 out of 14 case) categories. From the table it is possible to say that each category has used media monitoring except for internal communications category.
R5: What are the winning cases’ (category winners) evaluative research methods?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY AND THE WINNING CASES</th>
<th>OUTPUT</th>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Our each Girl is our Star’ Mercedes-Benz Turk A.S (education)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Bicycle The Road is Open Against Cancer (health)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEMA ‘Take Action Campaign (environment)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alacahoyuk Hitit Dam, Yuksel Construction (culture and arts)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Support to Turkey’s Promotion’ DHL Worldwide (other)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A joint venture of Metro Group, Metro Cash &amp; Carry and the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion for Reforestation and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Award</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising Gaziantep: Target 2010 Sanko Educational Institutions Jury Special Award</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-communication Prime Ministry Information Office</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Management Petrol Ofis and Formula 1 and Motorsports Sponsorships Turkish Power</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Com. Healthy Chicken Information Platform for Bird Flu</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Com. Turkcell Academy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC Pegasus (airline) Brand Positioning and Value Added PR</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO Innovation Valley, Gaziantep</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector Ankara Police New Approaches to School and Violence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other McDonald’s Balanced and Healthy Life Style</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Use of Output vs. Outcome Measures used by Category Winners

When we look at the 15 award winning cases, we notice that three of the categories used more outcome measures than output measures. They are NGO, public sector and e-communication category winners. In 3 of the categories which are CSR (education), MC and other, the output and outcome measures are equal. The grand award winner entry had the most output and outcome measures indicated in the entry.

Discussion and Recommendations for Future

Based on a previous study conducted to look at only the evaluation step of public relations entries submitted to Golden Compass Awards of four years (2001-2004), some general statements can be made with respect to evaluation all the four year entries. In that study, the
evaluation has been done using the system mentioned at Institute for Public Relations, Guidelines and Standards for Measuring and Evaluating PR Effectiveness. Of all the cases, media content analysis, an output measure has been widely used. There is not a standard in the media content analysis across the categories mentioning it. Some cases just included examples of press coverage with no mention of any evaluation. Also advertising equivalency is mentioned in some cases submitted. As an outcome measure, behavior measure is widely used and the least used outcome measure is recall and retention measure (Gorpe and Saran 2006). The fifth year analysis has not been done in the paper.

The current study looked both the research and evaluation methods of the cases without taking into consideration the research and evaluation techniques used.

In the analysis whether the campaigns are ongoing or just started, that aspect has not been taken into consideration, but it would be better also to take this into consideration. With media monitoring which is an extensively used output method, more analysis should be done on how it is reported and how sophisticated that measure is. There had been many mentions of this technique, but variations in how they were presented. For example, in some projects there were only clipping mentions. Also who undertook the research could be taken into consideration: a research company or in-house. When the cases interpreted the research or evaluative research findings, they did not sound very scientific. Also looking at evaluation and research methods of short and long period ongoing campaigns could be of interest. Since this work is case based, it would be interesting to know the approaches of the in-house practitioners/consultants related with research and evaluation. This study did not look into the objectives in detail and compared and contrasted it with the evaluation categories used. There are many benefits of setting measurable objectives and then measuring the impact for public relations programs. It helps to build the public relations into a profession.

For public relations to be accepted as a profession, impact evaluation will play a crucial role. Old way of thinking about public relations may be just communications, but the new way of thinking about it includes more than disseminating information. It has to be understood and acted upon it in the long run. There may be several reasons for not measuring the impact. They may range from limited budgets, time constraints or even not knowing what to do. Setting ‘smart’ objectives is the most important ingredient in any kind of evaluation.

Public relations professionals may not now how to conduct research, but that should not mean that they do not use any research or evaluation. The younger public relations force should definitely be educated in public relations research and evaluation techniques.

By looking at the results of the analysis, we could conclude that Turkish practitioners used outputs measures more than outcome measures although in some categories there was more uses of initial research and impact evaluation. Another thing that usually gets a negative criticism especially from the academics is the use of Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE). However, they have been used as an evaluation in the cases submitted for an award. The 7th Annual Strategic Public Relations Conference produced a booklet in which there had been several articles supporting AVEs. Although its advocates are not emplaning the extreme, they suggest using only positive mentions and not to use the published advertising rates which are more than the real ones (McNamara, 2002). As stated, public relations people should have a better understanding of the limitations of AVE and when asked to do this, they should be able to discuss it in detail and suggest alternative methods (Fox, 2003).

Also, the way the research used or the evaluation done is not communicated thoroughly in the submitted entries. It is not presented as if it is done at academic settings. Of course the
writing of it should be different than of a scholarly paper, but when one goes over the data, it becomes harder to follow it. Generally the evaluation looks fine, it is there, but when you read it, you realize some vital information such as sample size, etc not mentioned. Maybe due to page limitations of the entries, the evaluation has been summarized such giving the striking results.

One expected finding is that the public sector campaigns giving importance to evaluation. One possible interpretation of it is that they have to prove what they are doing and being scientific is the way for achieving it. Their style of telling about evaluation is very detailed compared to the rest of the entries. It is also more of a composition style.

In Turkey, the public relations teaching has started in 1960’s at educational institutions, the first public relations agency has been founded in Istanbul in 1974. We have a body of our profession from 1970s. The studies with respect to evaluation and measurement in the field remain as an unpublished graduate work academic environment. These should be shared with the greater community and the experience of the industry on that topic should be shared with the students as well.

Research, evaluation are not words or fields that may attract people, students. It may be boring to study or time consuming to do or difficult to conduct. However, educators should share with their public relations students how important research and evaluation is for the future of public relations profession and also it is a way of showing what they could accomplish for themselves. Instead of working as technicians, they could be strategic planners. Students of public relations have to have measurement and evaluation built in their educational curriculums and knowing that should be a priority.

By using survey method or in-depth interviews the research and evaluation methods used by Turkish public relations practitioners could be explored more.

‘Golden Compass Awards’ can give a special award for the ‘Best Evaluated Campaign. This could also motivate the practitioners as well. Since TUHID is representing the largest professional body, the incorporation of such special award will be beneficial.

The study is a good step to look into what is out there in the Turkish public relations professional world in terms of evaluation and research. Although many readings of the cases and evaluation have been done, due to the fact that the cases differed from one other widely may be the weak point of the study. However, it gives a general picture of the evaluation and research methods used by Turkish practitioners. We assume since these entries are debating for an award they are good practices to start with. We have to do further research both qualitative and quantitative to understand the dynamics behind research and evaluative research.

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Lindenmann, W.K. (2006). Public relations research for planning and evaluation, Published by Institute for Public Relations.


www.instituteforpr.org
The researcher wants to thank TUHID President Fugen Toksu and Association Coordinator Selin Yasar

APPENDIX A

Techniques for Evaluating INPUT (Preparation)
1. Analyzing of existing data
2. Benchmark research
3. Focus group discussions
4. Pilot questionnaire
5. Communication audit
6. Review of case studies
7. Readability tests
8. Expert review
9. Survey of publics
10. Network analysis

(In input objectives are set for quality, cost, and time. Also establishment of benchmarks for objective setting, selection of best medium, activities and establishment of message content)

Techniques for Evaluating OUTPUT (Implementation)
1. Statistics on distribution
2. Media monitoring
3. Media Content Analysis
4. Audience Analysis
5. Statistical Analysis
6. Response Rates
7. Coding Material
8. Attitude and Image Studies
9. Communication Audit
10. Organizational culture study
11. Analysis of complaints

(They generally relate to QUANTITY, QUALITY, and PERFORMANCE. For example, number of people affected by communication, acceptance of the message, planned activities taken in a satisfactory way). Number of messages sent and published including quality, appropriateness and circulation. Number who responded to that message and how. )

Techniques for Evaluating OUTCOME (Impact)
1. Focus group discussions
2. In depth interviews
3. Surveys
4. Pre and post tests
5. Unobtrusive data collection
6. Quasi experimental study
7. Activity outcome
(The success of the program is assessed against objectives. Looks at action, behavioral change, opinions and attitudes knowledge acquired and problems solved) (Pritchitt, 1994, p.18-19)

APPENDIX B

OUTPUTS
Placements in the media
Number of impressions
Assessment of the overall content
Media content analysis
White papers
Speaking engagements
Number of times a person is quoted
Specific messages communicated
Positioning of an issue
Any number of quantifiable items
Assessment of a specific event……
Number of people who participated
The appearance of contents of a brochure.

OUTCOMES
Quantitative surveys
Qualitative depth surveys
Prepost tests
Experimental and quasi experimental studies……

INSTITUTIONAL OUTCOMES
Increasing market penetration
Improving market share
Meeting recruitment expectations
Fund raising campaign…..

(Lindenmann, 2006, p. 14-15)

APPENDIX C: CURRENT ENTRY SUBMISSION OUTLINE OF GOLDEN COMPASS PUBLIC RELATIONS AWARDS

The projects are evaluated on the basis of five criteria, of which each criterion is 20 points. For any project to be taken into evaluation each criteria should have at least 5 points and the submitted entry should have overall minimum 60 points.

1. Situation Analysis/Research
2. Planning
a. Goals  
b. Communication Objectives  
c. Target Audience  
d. Stakeholders  
e. Strategy  
f. Main Messages  
g. Tactics  
h. Timing  
i. Channels  
j. Tools  
k. Budget

3. Implementation  
   Detailed explanation and difficulties if encountered, changes made.

4. Creativity  
a. Uniqueness  
b. Memorable

5. Evaluation  
The measurement of stated objectives.

(http://www.tuhid.org/6_altin_pusula.php)

APPENDIX D: WINNERS OF THE 6th GOLDEN COMPASS AWARDS

Grand Award: A JOINT VENTURE OF METRO GROUP, METRO CASH & CARRY AND THE TURKISH FOUNDATION FOR COMBATING SOIL EROSION FOR REFORESTATION AND THE PROTECTION OF NATURAL HABITATS (TEMA)

Jury Special Award: Rising Gaziantep: Target 2010 Sanko Educational Institutions

Internal Communications: Turkcell Academy

Crisis Communications: Healthy Chicken Information Platform for Bird Flu

Marketing Communications: Pegasus (airline) Brand Positioning and Value Added PR

Event Management: Petrol Ofis and Formula 1 and Motorsports Sponsorships Turkish Power

CSR:  ‘Our each Girl is our Star’ Mercedes-Benz Turk A.S (education)  
      Blue Bicycle The Road is Open Against Cancer (health)  
      TEMA ‘Take Action Campaign’ (environment)  
      Alacahoyuk Hitit Dam, Yuksel Construction (culture and arts)  
      ‘Support to Turkey’s Promotion’ DHL Worldwide (other)

E- Communication: Prime Ministry Information Office

NGO: Innovation Valley, Gaziantep

Public Sector: Ankara Police New Approaches to School and Violence

Other: McDonald’s Balanced and Healthy Life Style
Extending Situational Theory to Internal Publics:  
Q Methodology Within a Strategic Management Process  
Justin Guild  
Ball State University  
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INTRODUCTION

Public relations has often been described as a strategic management function to a business or organization’s operational structure. Others have associated public relations as a necessary and additional contribution to a strategic management process. Adopting a strategic perspective to public relations will enable it to be “institutionalized more broadly as a bridging activity so that public relations as a strategic management function becomes standard operating practice in most organizations” (Grunig, 2006, p. 172).

Plowman (2005) defined strategic management as a way to accomplish goals and solve problems. “It is a coordinated effort by elements such as public relations in long-range planning to achieve organizational goals” (p.131). In addition, Plowman also outlined elements of effective strategic thinking in the management of public relations including: boundary span the open systems environment with strategic stakeholders; incorporate the mission, goals and objectives of the organization; and take a long-range view of the effects of the organization (2005).

Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) conducted research among CEO’s and communication managers and found that communication excellence could not be achieved unless there is a common understanding of a communication’s function. The authors stressed the importance of adding strategic management skills to the communications process, not just relying on the traditional technical roles of writing, editing, etc. By making sure the communications department is strategically focused, it is well positioned to contribute to strategic planning as an equal, relative to the other departments of a business. Strategic planning is “the balancing of internal processes of organizations with external factors” (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, p. 27).

If public relations is to be taken seriously, it must prove its value to an organization. Grunig (1995) developed a way to add value through the two-way symmetrical model of communication. This model looks at communication through negotiation and compromise with a public. According to Grunig, “When symmetrical communication practices prevail, communication and public relations make valuable contributions to society as a whole” (Grunig, p. 13).

Grunig (2006) argued that the strategic management role of public relations is a theoretical edifice that “both describes and prescribes the role of public relations in strategic management” (p. 153). According to Grunig, the edifice:

1. Explains how public relations contributes value to organizations, publics, and society;
2. Explains how an empowered public relations function makes a unique contribution to strategic management and distinguishes its role from that of other management functions, especially marketing;
3. Prescribes techniques that public relations managers can use to fulfill their role in strategic management;

4. Explains the critical role of relationships in the planning and evaluation of public relations programs;

5. Identifies different models of communication and explains which models are the most effective strategies for cultivating relationships with publics;

6. Incorporates ethics into the strategic role of public relations;

7. Explains how to apply the theory globally (p. 154).

Smith (2002) argued that public relations is shifting toward more of a management role, not just a technical role. Practitioners in the field must use research and planning techniques to assist them in segmenting publics, as well as utilizing the best tactics for each public. According to Smith, “We look to public relations for leadership and insight in the practice of strategic communication” (p. 3).

Bringing communication into the strategic planning process is seen by many scholars as a worthy goal that will enable public relations to grow. Fleisher (1998) studied how prevalent corporate communications management was in organizations and if having communications managers involved in the strategic planning process made a difference. By mailing surveys, the author studied seventy-two Canadian companies whose directors of communications belonged to a professional association, then separated them between strategic and non-strategic categories. His findings revealed that more strategy needs to be woven into the communications process. “Strategic units were far more likely to claim outcomes centered on the organization and market as opposed to their own functions and units” (Fleisher, 1998, p. 172). Another main difference Fleischer noted between strategic and non-strategic units were strategic units focused more on outcomes and process, whereas non-strategic units focused more on outputs and products.

The movement to bring strategic management into communication planning needs to be supported by research into how formal communication is approached by internal publics within a strategic management process (research, planning, implementation, and evaluation). The situational theory of publics, developed by Grunig (1984), is an appropriate theoretical framework to address this topic.

Situational Theory of Publics

The situational theory of publics is useful in predicting the differential responses most practitioners of public relations consider to be of high importance: responsiveness to problems and issues; amount and nature of communication behavior; effects of communication on cognitions, attitudes, and behavior; the extent and quality of organization-public relationships; and the likelihood that publics will participate in collective behavior to pressure organizations (Grunig & Hunt 1984). The theory consists of two dependent variables, (active and passive communication behavior) and three independent variables (problem recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement). The two dependent variables also can be called information seeking (active) and information processing (passive). Grunig (1997) called information seeking “the planned scanning of the environment for messages about a specific
topic” (p. 8). Information processing, according to Grunig, is “the unplanned discovery of a message followed by continued processing of it” (p. 8).

The situational theory’s independent variables are situational variables “in the sense that they describe the perceptions that people have of specific situations, especially situations that are problematic or that produce conflicts or issues” (p. 10). Therefore, Grunig defines the three independent variables as follows:

- **Problem recognition** – people detect something that should be done about a situation and stop to think about what to do.
- **Constraint recognition** – people perceive that there are obstacles in a situation that limit their ability to do anything about the situation.
- **Level of involvement** – the extent to which people connect themselves with a situation.

According to Grunig, the situational theory states that “high problem recognition and low constraint recognition increase both active information seeking and passive information processing. Level of involvement increases information seeking, but it has less effect on information processing” (p. 10). In other words, the situational theory states that people do not seek information about situations that do not directly involve them.

Many researchers have used the situational theory of publics to help reveal why and when people communicate (Cropp, Pincus, Rimmer, & Rayfield, 1993; Major, 1998; Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006; Cameron, 1992; Aldoory, 2001). Grunig (1984) theorized that publics form when organizations make decisions that have consequences on people inside and outside the organization who were not involved in making the decision. Grunig based his own theory on the work of Dewey (1927) who said, “Publics arise around problems that affect them. Publics organize into issue groups to pressure government to constrain or regulate those organizations.” The situational theory groups publics as either active or passive, based on how they seek or process information.

Vasquez and Taylor (2001) categorized publics into four perspectives: mass, situational, agenda building, and homo narrans. The situational perspective has been the most useful to scholars advancing public relations theory (Vasquez & Taylor). For example, scholars and practitioners have used the terms stakeholders and publics interchangeably. Grunig (1997) noted distinct differences between the terms. According to Grunig, stakeholders are general categories of people affected by the actual or potential consequences of strategic organizational decisions. Stakeholders emerge as publics when they collectively organize.

The nature of publics in the field of public relations has been the focus of study by many scholars. Scholars have tested the situational theory of publics in health communication (Aldoory, 2001), bioterrorism (Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006), natural disasters (Major, 1998), investor relations (Cameron, 1992), classrooms (Keyton, Leichty, Metzger, & Springstons, 1992), and political races (Hamilton, 1992). Findings indicate that the higher a public’s problem recognition and level of involvement, and the lower constraint recognition, the more publics will actively seek information, increasing potential effects on an organization.

The situational theory of publics has been studied using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. These have included telephone surveys, mail surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. Researchers using quantitative methods have supported the situational theory of publics based on response data. For example, the situational theory of publics has helped define a “hot-issue” public. Grunig (1997) defined this as a public active only on a single problem that involves nearly everyone in the population and that has received extensive media
coverage. The quantitative use of the situational theory of publics has helped provide practitioners with research they can use in the planning and implementation of campaigns.

Recent studies seem to indicate the employment of qualitative research methods in studying publics. Qualitative methodologies were used in studies by Berger (2005) and McCown (2007) who explore internal publics. Berger interviewed 21 public relations executives to see how dominant coalitions share power relationships internally. This study revealed that advocacy and shared power can help better understand activism, a crucial area related to publics. McCown went a bit further in her analysis of employee activism within an organization. She studied a small, Eastern U.S. college undergoing a change in leadership by interviewing employees, public relations staff, and presidents over a two month period. Her findings revealed that employees organized activist strategies similar to external publics. She suggested that “future research with other organizations in similarly ‘heightened’ communication situations may help to clarify the potential for more widespread existence of internal activists and the effectiveness of their strategies in forcing changes in communication” (p. 65).

**Purpose and Rationale**

Internal publics have received little attention in academic research. According to McCown (2007), “Although the body of public relations knowledge is significantly growing, scholarship exploring internal public relations remains relatively undeveloped” (p. 47). Exploring internal public’s attitudes and approaches to communication behavior in a strategic management process is another undeveloped research area. Internal publics in this study are defined as dominant coalition members who have strategic and managerial oversight in organizational policy: an executive director, senior managers, and board of directors.

If public relations wants to be a member of an organization’s dominant coalition, then knowledge of the strategic management process is a critical element to research. Using situational theory to better understand this process can help practitioners in their communication planning, by segmenting publics internally and planning strategies to effectively communicate with them. As more scholars and practitioners advocate bringing strategic management processes into communication, studying how dominant coalition members approach communication and mediation of differences within such a process is also necessary. The dominant coalition members have different attitudes and behaviors that can be studied to see if their behavior can be organized into distinct publics, similar to external publics. Using the situational theory’s active and passive behavior as a framework, the following research questions will guide this study:

**RQ1:** How do active and passive publics approach problems within a strategic management process?

**RQ2:** Do active publics interpret problems differently than passive publics?

**METHODOLOGY**

The research method that will be employed in this study is Q methodology. Q methodology is an appropriate method to understand the relationships between individual opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. The subjectivity of individuals studied by Q methodology is self-reflexive and seeks to provide an empirical basis through controlled techniques (Robbins 2005).

In order to examine dominant coalition attitudes within a strategic management process, a Q sort survey will be developed. The survey will ask dominant coalition members to rank a series of forty-eight statements concerning their attitudes and behavior within a strategic management process on a nine-point, Likert-type most agree/most disagree scale.
The statements will be developed through Grunig’s (1997) definition of the independent variables of the situational theory of publics and from goals identified as important to the strategic management process by the dominant coalition members participating in the study. In addition to the three independent variables, a fourth area, dominant coalition, will also be covered in the list of statements for the Q sort. Dominant coalition was included to see how the members themselves view active and passive communication using coalition concepts defined by Stevenson, Pearce, and Porter (1985). The statements were balanced positively and negatively.

What is currently referred to as Q methodology was introduced by psychologist and physicist William Stephenson in a letter to Nature in 1935, and spelled out in more detail in his major statement, *The Study of Behavior: Q-technique and Its Methodology* (1953). Brown (1993) presented a simplified introduction to Stephenson’s methodology:

Fundamentally, Q methodology provides a foundation for the systematic study of subjectivity. Most typically in Q, a person is presented with a set of statements about some topic and is asked to rank-order them (usually from “agree” to “disagree”), an operation referred to as Q sorting. The statements are matters of opinion only (not fact), and the fact that the Q sorter is ranking the statements from his or her own point of view what brings subjectivity into the picture. There is obviously no right or wrong way to provide “my point of view” about anything. Yet the rankings are subject to factor analysis, and the resulting factors, although they have arisen from individual subjectivities, indicate segments of subjectivities that exist. (Brown, 93-4)

Some scholars have used Q methodology for use in strategic planning (Popovich and Popovich 2000). The authors conducted a study among internal stakeholders at a small Indiana hospital during its strategic planning process. These internal stakeholders included 68 board members, physicians, and administrators. The Q method revealed that rankings of sorted statements by stakeholders could be used by senior officials to determine objectives. Each stakeholder group could also be analyzed independently of one another. The study helped hospital administrators stop pursuing objectives deemed not worthy by stakeholders in the planning process.

Maxwell (2000) examined the benefit of using Q methodology as a tool to resolve conflict at the county level by using a case study of a county visitors and convention bureau conflict between 20 citizens and policymakers. The conflict led to a strategic planning process where she used Q method and Nominal Group Technique. While the results showed NGT are significantly slanted in one direction toward a particular stakeholder, the Q method reflected viewpoints of all groups. According to Maxwell, Q sorts can help bring about common ground, important in managing conflict.

**Population and Sample**

This study’s research will be conducted within the strategic management process of an Indianapolis, Ind. based non-profit organization with nineteen members of a dominant coalition including one executive director, four senior managers, and fourteen board of directors. This organization was selected because they will begin a formal strategic planning process in the next few weeks and will include all members of the dominant coalition. The organization specializes in before and after-school programs at elementary and middle schools across ten school districts in central Indiana and employs about 100 people.

**Experimental Design**
A Q sort administered in person with each member before and after the organization’s strategic management process will be the most effective method of obtaining the data desired. A before and after data collection process will help determine if members change their approach or interpretation of problems related to the strategic management process.

The condition of instruction will be: *Which statements about the strategic planning process are most closely aligned with your beliefs, based on your position?*

In addition to the Q sort, dominant coalition members will be asked to comment on why they chose the top six most agree and most disagree statements.

**Analysis**

The Q sort results will be entered into the computerized PQMethod program that was downloaded from the public-domain, http://www.rz.unibw-muenchen.de/~p41bsmk/qmethod/downpqx.htm.

A principle components factor analysis with a varimax rotation will be conducted. The Q sort will present factors of people who align with active or passive statements.

**REFERENCES**


Instructions for performing the Q sort

1) Read through all 48 statements first so as to get an impression of the range of opinions at issue and to settle into the situation. Eventually you will place the corresponding number of each statement into the distribution grid on the Q Sort Data Collection Sheet from most agree (+4) to most disagree (-4) based on the following question:  
   *Which statements about the strategic planning process are most closely aligned with your beliefs, based on your position?*

2) As you read the statements, begin the sorting process by initially dividing the statements into three piles: those statements experienced as agreeable in one pile, those statements experienced as disagreeable in a second pile, and those statements about which you have no strong opinion in the third pile.

3) From the agreeable pile, place the corresponding numbers of the two statements you most agree with in the appropriate column (+4) and continue placing statements based on your level of agreement into the grid working toward the center. Follow the same approach for the disagreeable pile, placing the corresponding numbers of the two statements you most disagree with in the appropriate column (-4) and working toward the center. Finally, sort the remaining pile from most agree to most disagree and complete the grid with the corresponding numbers. Those statements about which you have no strong opinion should be placed in the neutral column.

4) Answer the questions posed on the Data Collection Sheet. You may use the back of the sheet to provide additional comments or opinions pertaining to the questions or any of the 48 statements in the Q sample.
Q Sort Data Collection Sheet

*Which statements about the strategic planning process are most closely aligned with your beliefs, based on your position?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Most Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(-4)</td>
<td>(-1)</td>
<td>(+1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-3)</td>
<td>(+0)</td>
<td>(+2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(-2)</td>
<td>(+1)</td>
<td>(+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-1)</td>
<td>(+2)</td>
<td>(+4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Why did you select the six statements with which you MOST AGREE? Please comment for each statement, identifying the number of the statement first.

2. Why did you select the six statements with which you MOST DISAGREE? Please comment for each statement, identifying the number of the statement first.
Shame: Its Place in Society and in Communication Strategies
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Introduction

“You should be ashamed of yourself!”

We seldom hear (or say) that anymore, because it sometimes seems that as a society we are shameless. A celebrated, illustrative case in point occurred on March 13 of 2006, when players on the Duke Lacrosse team threw a party that got out of hand. Three players were charged with raping one of the two strippers who had been hired to entertain the otherwise stag party. Those charges eventually were dropped, and university and public officials seem to be pushing each other out of the way to apologize to members of the lacrosse team. But that is not to gainsay the misbehavior that occurred, which undeniably included underage drinking, the hiring of strippers, and the shouting of racial insults at those strippers – African-Americans – by some of the all-white male partygoers.

Beginning the day after the party, “I did nothing wrong” and “We did nothing wrong” were the blanket, defiant statements by the lacrosse players, sometimes mouthed to the cameras with their parents nodding agreement in the background. Not just denials of rape! No, these were denials of any misconduct whatsoever. Not a single participant expressed (or showed) any sense of shame.

The Duke Lacrosse players may have stood out because of their boorishness, but their shamelessness certainly did not distinguish them. Debra LaFave, a young, extremely attractive school teacher, last year pleaded guilty to having sex with an underage male student of hers. She was sentenced to three years – house arrest. Smiling for the cameras on her way out of court, she said that, since it is unlikely she will ever teach again, she is going to pursue a career in the media. Does anyone doubt that is a possibility for her? In a shameless society, we don’t hide our faces; we use the event to make our faces better known and to gain what passes for prominence. Being known is a goal to be achieved at any cost to civility and decorum.

In the 1950s, film start Ingrid Bergman was forced to leave Hollywood and return to her native Europe after becoming pregnant out of wedlock. Years passed before she worked again in Hollywood. Fast forward to 2005. Super Model Kate Moss allowed herself to get photographed nearly nude and snorting cocaine in a London recording studio. Three weeks in rehab and she emerged to an increased schedule of modeling assignments, media interviews, and endorsements. Rehab (followed by seemingly endless appearances on television talk shows) has become the font of absolution. Ask Rep. Foley of the congressional page scandal or a host of other celebrities and politicians. No need for forgiveness from a Higher Power, and certainly no need for any further atonement in a society that understands so completely – and increasingly accepts – behavior that is, or at least used to be, shameful and even sinful.

More than a decade ago, no less a personage than Colin Powell called attention to the situation, saying “We’ve got to restore a sense of shame to our society. Nothing seems to shame us or outrage us anymore” (Stacks, p. 24). This paper examines the nature of shame, its relationship to guilt, its role in our society today, and its role in communication strategies.

The Nature of Shame
“Shame is best understood as an intense negative emotion having to do with the self in relation to standards, responsibility, and such attributions as global self-failure. Shame is elicited when one experiences failure relative to a standard (one’s own or other people’s), feels responsible for the failure, and believes the failure reflects a damaged self” (Lewis, p. 127).

Lewis, then, argues that standards accepted and adhered to by society as a whole need to be in place for shame to exist as a deterrent to agreed-upon aberrant behavior. No standards, no aberrant behavior, and the result is a shameless society. Sure, there are standards today, but they amount to what Twitchell (1997) calls *codes of consumption* – “Want to feel shame today? Wear a fur coat, smoke in public, have breasts too small or a nose too big, don’t recycle, eat meat” (p. 1). *Codes of behavior*, meanwhile, are practically nonexistent, Twitchell contends – using vulgar language or being drunk in public, or having a child out of wedlock, seldom cause an eyebrow to be raised. Since behaviors such as those – or incidents like the one involving the Duke Lacrosse team – are not viewed as aberrant or standard-violating, no societal reprobation is levied for failing to take responsibility for the behavior.

Externally imposed, internally accepted standards are a crucial element in the nature of shame, because it is a reflexive emotion, an involuntary emotion. “You either have the capacity for it, or you don’t” (Gilbert & Andrews, p. 102). Tomkins (1963), considered the foremost psychologist in explaining and understanding emotion, cites the innate affects of shame, including eyes down, head down and averted and, of course, the blush. Nathanson (1992) adds to that, recognizing that “shame can be expressed by a gesture – sudden withdrawal of the face from the view of others – accompanied by the automatic display of blushing and a brief period of apparent confusion. It is neither subtle nor suggestive. … (It is) the plain, unvarnished undisguised face of innate affect” (p. 153). He uses the word *affect* to “describe the strictly biological portion of emotion. … When we have been affected by something we have experienced an emotion because of it” (p. 49).

“We need to consider how it feels to have an attenuator, a limiting device that you can’t control, one that simply takes over when you least expect. … (T)he nature of shame is as an affect that limits the expression of other affects and (as such) shame can interfere with any human activity.” (Nathanson, p. 155).

Shame forces us to recognize our failures, our incompetence, and the script of biological and emotional responses we follow in response to shame “interferes with every pleasant way we know ourselves” (Nathanson, p. 211). Lewis (1998) writes about *hubris*, “the sin of pride,” and says it occurs “when we lose the idea that there is a difference between an attribute (a small part of us) and our whole self.

“In hubris, we think of ourselves as elevated in toto – as a better person deserving of different status – simply because we have won a game or a prize. … In both pride and shame, these most self-related of the emotions, the depth of the emotional experience will be related to the importance-to-the-self of whatever has been magnified or impeded” (Lewis, pp 136-137).

Self-importance, certainly self-esteem, is intimately involved in the nature of shame, because “psychiatrists and developmental psychologists agreed to define shame as the absence of self-esteem” (Lasch, p. 198). The several-generations-old emphasis at building and preserving self-esteem (at all costs, it seems at times) has contributed to the emasculation of shame, destroying its effectiveness as a disciplining emotion and for all intents and purposes making it irrelevant to modern society.

“We do children a terrible disservice by showering them with underserved approval. The kind of reassurance they need comes only with a growing ability to meet impersonal standards of
competence. Children need to risk failure and disappointment, to overcome obstacles, to face down the terrors that surround them. Self-respect cannot be conferred; it has to be earned” (Lasch, p. 206).

The emphasis on building self-esteem that began in the 1970s has taken root and now has produced a population reluctant, if not unwilling, to believe itself capable of committing shameful acts – so, anything goes. In fact, Lasch says, perhaps facetiously, that “The only thing forbidden in our culture is the inclination to forbid” (p. 198).

Shame and Guilt

In contemporary America, self-esteem receives a heightened priority and shame a lower priority at least in part because of the individualistic nature of the society. “Individualist societies have been described as guilt cultures. Collectivist societies, on the contrary, are shame cultures” (Hofstede).

“Persons who infringe upon the rules of society will often feel guilty, ridden by an individually developed conscience which functions as a private inner pilot (while) persons belonging to a group from which a member has infringed upon the rules of society will feel ashamed, based upon a sense of collective obligation. Shame is social in nature, guilt individual” (p. 60).

Tangney and Dearing (2002) address these issues fully in their aptly titled book Shame and Guilt. They explain that the nature of self-conscious emotions is shaped in childhood. Thus, high self-esteem establishes a wall against intrusions from shame, and that is easier to accept in an individualistic society which is less prone to intrude – less inclined to forbid, as Lasch points out (1996). They stress the important differences between guilt and shame, two reactions often misunderstood and often used interchangeably – and wrongly. “Shame involves negative evaluations of the self (Who am I?), while guilt involves more of a condemnation of a specific behavior (What I did)” (p. 79).

Miller’s (1985) writings concur. She feels “shame is a belief about the self – ‘I am spineless’.” It is “an enduring quality belonging to the self” (p. 43). Miller adds: “Guilt is defined as the feeling that one has violated some rule of conduct to which one attaches value. Guilt is a response to transgression, to stepping across. I use ‘guilt’ to designate any manner of transgression. … Although feelings of shame and guilt may arise from the same situation, their foci differ. The ashamed person is concerned with the diminution of self-esteem that follows from what he has done. He focuses attention on himself, as the kind of person who would perform this or that imperfect action, and he recoils from these self-images. The guilty person is concerned with the experience of his action as wrong; he feels he should not have committed the act” (p. 46).

Guilt, then, is what Miller defines as “a wish to undo the deed,” while shame is a wish to undo the self, to change not the act but the person (p. 46). That feeling is deeper in a collectivist society because often “…whether shame is felt depends on whether the infringement has become known by others. Becoming known often is more of a source of shame than the infringement itself” (Hofstede, p. 60).

Shame and Society

As noted above, disclosure of what might once have been considered a shameful act seldom is looked upon as shameful in contemporary America, a fact many people, including but not by any means limited to Colin Powell, find deeply disturbing. Former U. S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan hit a nerve when he accused society of “defining deviancy down” (1993), saying
we’ve become accustomed to behavior that once outraged us and shamed the perpetrator. Yet, the discussions following Moynihan’s seminal article in The American Scholar have focused primarily on criminal acts and not violations of public mores, which tend to be hotly debated and not easily agreed upon in individualistic societies. Nor did the debate raise the specter of shameful side effects of legal wrongdoing, of regretting the *self* as well as the *act*.

In his play *Troades*, Seneca wrote “What the law does not forbid, let shame forbid,” which is the underpinning of the concern of Powell and others, including Bennett, who places much of the blame for the rise in shamelessness on former President Bill Clinton. “Part of our contemporary vox populi has it that, whatever the president’s character may be, our real concern – especially for the future – is the state of the national economy” (p. 31). Noting the overriding concern with the economy, with self-interest, Bennett quotes novelist John Updike as saying, “The fact … that we still live well cannot ease the pain of feeling that we no longer live nobly” (p. 35). Bennett adds:

“National prosperity, as it happens, is largely dependent upon lots of good private character. If lying, manipulation, sloth, lack of discipline, and personal irresponsibility become commonplace, the national economy grinds down. A society that produces white-collar criminals has to pay for prison cells. A society in which drug use is rampant must pay for drug treatment centers. The crack-up of families means many more foster homes and lower high school graduation rates. A society that is parsimonious in its personal charity (in terms of both time and money) will require more government welfare.” (p. 35)

Note that Bennett calls for “lots of good private character, not a change in the American ethos. He concludes that, “Just as there are enormous financial benefits to moral health, there are enormous financial costs to moral collapse” (p. 35), and to establish the link Bennett quotes Rev. Jesse Jackson, who advised Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky scandal: “I can work with him (Clinton), but I know who he is, what he is. There’s nothing he won’t do. He’s immune to shame” (p. 46).

To Twitchell (1997), however, the lack of shame goes deeper than economic consequences. He calls shame “a social taproot, perhaps even the master emotion” in a civilized society. Shame is but one direction point on the compass of self. Shame points one way, honor points the other.” Twitchell calls these “social leashes, or electric fences forever being dug up and replanted” (pp. 23-24). Thus, if you readjust shame – if you define it down – you lessen honor. Changing the bar for one means changing the bar for the other and society as a whole, not just its economic structure, can collapse.

That is perhaps even truer for individualistic societies. Hall (1976) claims that what is self-evident in a collectivist culture needs to be spelled out in an individualistic culture. (As an example, he notes that Japanese business contracts are considerably shorter than American business contracts.) Therefore, more vigilance to setting and observing standards is required in individualistic societies, where shame-evoking behavior can quickly go from taboo to normal. Witness the children-out-of-wedlock situation, where unwed celebrities are lauded for being responsible parents.

### Shame – Help and Hindrance in Communication

Shame can have an ameliorating effect (and affect) on society. But communicators need to keep in mind its reflexive nature. Until standards are accepted broadly, violating them is unlikely to garner a public outcry and, therefore, unlikely to result in the violator being ashamed, because shame is not voluntary. The Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, involving the president’s affair
with a White House intern, serves as an illustration. When the evidence against him mounted, the
president “went on television and offered defiance where so many had hoped to see
contrition. He never admitted he had lied at all. He never apologized. And he angrily attacked”
his critics (Herbert, p. A23). While so many people, friends as well as foes of the president,
waited for mortification – for shame, if you will – Clinton, try as he might, was unable to satisfy
them because he apparently (as Rev. Jackson said) was incapable of feeling shame.

Clinton did admit to shame, but he did so only after the scandal deepened and the
evidence piled up. And it never seemed sincere, because, again, shame is not a reflective
emotion, one to be dragged out for public relations purposes; it is a reflexive emotion. When it
finally came,
“His mea culpa speech functioned more to attack his accusers than to offer the mortification that
was clearly necessary after such inexcusable behavior. Attacking (Special Prosecutor Kenneth)
Starr was an inappropriate choice in this particular speech, which should have been wholly
contrite. … (O)ne could plausibly argue that his sequence of actions – denial, attacking,
transcending, reluctantly admitting, attacking, transcending – indicated that he was not really
contrite about the affair, only sorry that he was caught. As such, his scarcity of mortification was
further exaggerated” (Blaney & Benoit, 2001).

Blaney and Benoit were referring to image restoration strategies developed by Benoit
Benoit’s strategies include denial, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, and
mortification, the path Clinton traveled – but traveling that path is not the point, because the
strategies do not represent a smorgasbord. From a strategic communication standpoint, it is
important to choose the strategy that fits the crime, so to speak. Denial of an act actually
committed – a lie – delays but only prolongs the inevitable repercussions of the act, although the
knee-jerk response is one we all understand. “Shame is well understood to be an aversive
experience, relating to feeling demeaned, reduced, disgraced, or diminished, which people are
highly motivated to avoid” (Gilbert & McGuire, p. 99).

Gilbert and McGuire say “strategies are context-dependent,” that is, responses normally
are reactive to the surrounding environment. “Social strategies are complex because it is others
who provide the salient signals about which strategy to use and whether a strategy is working or
not. Thus, the success of a strategy depends on what others are doing” (p. 101).

Communicators need to be alert to the signals. For instance, the expression of shame, if
deeded to be authentic, “is regarded as submissive and an appeasement display, designed to de-
escalate and/or escape from conflicts” (Gilbert & McGuire, p. 102). In a public issue struggle,
failure to recognize or to inappropriately react to the display of shame could lead to increased
and prolonged hostilities. For example, trying to impose shame on another party likely will
result in anger and counterattacks. “Subjects who claim to feel no shame or very little shame
often achieve their shame-free states by reflexively attacking anyone who stimulates an incipient
shame experience” (Miller, p. 129).

A display of shame on the part of an adversary can be viewed as a willingness to end
hostilities, which in a public issues struggle could lead to a policy victory and substantial
campaign cost savings. Gilbert and Andrews (1998) note:
“The ability to de-escalate a conflict (or avoid escalating it) and thus avoid serious damage
depends on a variety of behaviors. One is flight/escape – one simply runs away. Another
strategy is appeasement (where) the aim is to turn off the ‘attack’ strategies of the attacker. …
Shame signals (a sincere apology, an admission of being ashamed) are generally regarded as submissive and are designed to de-escalate and/or escape from conflicts” (p. 102).

The Republicans continued to attack Clinton, making it more difficult for him to more toward appeasement and allowing him to frame the situation as a political struggle rather than a moral lapse; this frame allowed Democrats, critical of Clinton early on, to argue the issue as a partisan political one. The result was that two Republican Speakers of the House resigned, and the Democratic president stayed firmly entrenched in office.

Nathanson (1992) mentions the “…reactive phase of shame,” which involves all the habits, defenses, tricks, strategies, tactics, excuses, protections, buffers, apologies, justifications, arguments, and rejoinders that we have devised, witnessed, or stored over the highly personal series of events we know as our lifetime” (p. 309).

Knowing that shame cannot be imposed is important. Recognizing it when it appears in oneself or in others is just as important, and reacting to that reflexive emotion, rather than trying to sublimate it via a different reflexive emotion, such as anger, also can increase the effectiveness of communications. Plus, accepting shame not only as a communication strategy but also as a legitimate, socially important emotion could benefit a culture teetering on the brink of shamelessness.

References


Crisis and Risk Approaches to Emergency Management Planning and Communication:
The Role of Similarity and Sensitivity

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Abstract
To advance crisis communication theory and research, this paper features communities of concern as the focal point and examines whether multiple voices are best to supply crisis information, evaluation, and advice to make communities more fully functioning. A funded study was conducted (606 completed calls) in three counties of a Southwest state. The project features these concepts: Concern/perception of risk and knowledge of response protocols, risk management/communication, crisis management/communication (pre-crisis, crisis event, post-crisis), cognitive involvement, fear/denial/efficacy (self, expert, and community), and communication infrastructures. The basic question addressed was whether a diverse community becomes more fully functioning by having community emergency management planning and communication (law of requisite variety) that reflect that diversity. Results indicate that approximately half of the persons surveyed do not feel adequately prepared to respond during these emergencies. Of those who do, a variety of voices (source similarity and message sensitivity) increases residents’ sense of self, expert, and community preparedness. Thus, the study reveals that multiple voices increase requisite diversity in emergency planning, response, and communication as a foundation for successful crisis planning, management, and communication.

The Role of Similarity and Sensitivity
Imagine being caught in Katrina, whether in New Orleans, along the Louisiana coast or Mississippi coast. Imagine that you are a poor person of color. Imagine that you are white, well educated, and more affluent. Is emergency management planning and communication more sensitive to the interests and needs of one category of person than the other? Is one more able to navigate the perils of getting correct and timely information that allows for effective action?

Next imagine being in the Greater Houston, Texas area, during the approach of Hurricane Rita. Imagine a scorching September afternoon with temperatures reaching 106 °F degrees. You and members of your family are nearly out of gas, poking along behind a car that is overheating. You suffer from lack of air conditioning. At your side in the backseat, an elderly relative has drifted off into at first appears to be a nap but turns out to be the eternal slumber caused by heat exhaustion. Imagine thinking that the dogs caged in the back of a pickup truck seem to become more listless as they go hours without water and relief from the heat. Are those conditions as
likely to affect poor the same as rich, and persons who are underserved by society the same as people with more emergency response options and capabilities?

Such questions focus on strategic emergency management that public relations scholars can address with insights from crisis and risk management and communication. Emergency management is a key to preventing and responding to risks, while managing related issues to make society more fully functioning (Heath, 1997; 2006). An infrastructural approach to crisis and risk reasons that individual, expert, and community efficacy are focal points for determining whether a community is properly organized to plan and communicate about various risks. Emergency management theory and practice fit nicely into the discussion of crisis, risk, and issues.

Community theory postulates that planning and response compliance increase as multiple voices join to provide requisite diversity in planning and response. Information intended to empower a community must be disseminated, vetted by various voices, and tested against past experiences. Rather than featuring an organization as the focal point of analysis, a managerial bias to crisis (Waymer & Heath, 2007), this study regards community efficacy as the focal point. Although the effectiveness one or more emergency management planning and communication agencies is a variable predicting the quality of community response (e.g., compliance with expert advice), messages from various sources—including interpersonal contacts—carry, translate, contradict, augment, and amend expert advice. Analysis can address the harmony or cacophony of the voices that express concern and propose response plans, as well as enact those plans.

Concern: Emergency Management and Public Safety

Emergency risk management follows the central argument advanced by Mary Douglas (1992; see also, Beck, 2004) that the essence of society is individuals’ collective ability to manage risk. That premise is captured in the mission statement of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (2007):

…to reduce the loss of life and property and protect the Nation from all hazards, including natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters, by leading and supporting the Nation in a risk-based, comprehensive emergency management system of preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation.

A risk, by this logic, is a probabilistic event that can have predictable effects on various risk bearers (Palmlund, 1992). When a risk will manifest itself and whom or what it will affect can be studied, mitigated, and even prevented. How it manifests itself depends on individuals’, organizations’, or communities’ willingness and ability to exert proper control in the face of the risk. Crises, as manifested risks, can either lead to or result from issues (Coombs, 1999, in press; Heath, 1997; Heath & O’Hair, in press).

The risk and crisis literature argues that the strongest components are partnerships that respond to community members’ need for information and bring collective wisdom and judgment to bear. In the private and public sectors, emergency managers are challenged to plan, manage, and communicate in ways that help protect public health, safety, and welfare. This stress on "we" gives a community grounding for dialogue and partnership (Chess, Salomone, Hance, & Saville, 1995). Community infrastructures arise or are created to discuss, challenge, and make decisions relevant to prevailing risk and crisis tolerance, mitigation ability, and communication practices.

Conceptualizing crisis communication in pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis stages corresponds to how to practice emergency management and communication (Coombs, 1999, 2007; Millar & Heath, 2004; Seeger, Reynolds, & Sellnow, in press; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger,
in press). Pre-crisis emergency management teams develop a mitigation plan and communicate to reduce the likelihood that if, or when, a risk manifests itself it will not mature into a crisis. As the event develops, emergency managers offer advice about the trajectory and intensity of a storm and how to prepare for and respond to it. Afterward, post hoc analysis focuses on lessons learned.

An emergency, by this rationale, only becomes a crisis if the legitimacy of the organization suffering the crisis within a community of interest is called into question (Coombs, in press). Reputational assets are threatened in times of crisis; “a reputation is an aggregate evaluation stakeholders make about how well an organization is meeting stakeholder expectations based on its past behaviors” (Coombs, 2007, p. 164). Whereas in a business context, poorly managed crises may cost a company business, failure of an emergency management team can lead to a public health/safety crisis, loss of property and life.

Concern (Intense and Passive as Well as Informed and Uniformed)

The centerpiece of emergency management communication is the persuasiveness of the experts’ advice: Willingness of people to receive and yield to advice—use it for personal response. Such concern can exhibit at least two dimensions: One, intense (including panic) and passive (including indifference); two, variously informed/uninformed on relevant emergency response protocols. The degree of concern may well motivate willingness to receive and interpret information as well as put it into action. The persuasiveness of a public health/safety message depends on perception of how persuasive others perceive the message to be (Dillard, Shen, & Vail, 2007).

Decades of research have found that information acquisition and processing intensity depend on cognitive involvement. Individuals become ready for communication as they realize that to make a decision/cognitive response to maximize rewards and minimize harms, they need an appropriate attitude (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, 1986b). This theory defines cognitive response as "a unit of information pertaining to an object or issue that is the result of cognitive processing" (Cacioppo, Harkins, & Petty, 1981, p. 37). However intense or passive (central or peripheral), varying efforts are devoted to getting, understanding, evaluating, and remembering messages.

Topic relevant information gathering and processing by community members who can be bearers of various risks is likely to be influenced by what Kasperson (1992) called the social amplification of risks. How willing individuals are to receive and process information relevant to a specific risk is influenced positively or negatively by the type and amount of media and individual discussion that has occurred in that community in recent memory on that specific risk. Thus, people along the Gulf Coast were highly motivated to get tracking and emergency response information on Hurricane Rita because of the hours of dramatic coverage Katrina received just weeks before.

To understand pockets of concern, we view community members as clusters of publics. Each public has a shared sense of a matter (problem recognition, involvement, and constraint recognition) such as emergency response safety. Demographics is one heuristic for thinking about such publics, especially in the case of emergency management. Viewed this way, elderly people may want tailored messages because they have different levels of risk tolerance and response options. Effects of such communication (cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral) tend to change from situation to situation. Publics engage in idiosyncratic information acquisition and processing (Grunig, 1997).

As cognitive involvement/elaboration likelihood theory defines incentives people have to receive, process, and yield to information and evaluation to form predispositions, so too do
people experience and react to the fear/dread (intense-passive) content in such messages idiosyncratically. Individual’s sense of self, expert advice, and the community where they live predicts how they interpret fear and whether it leads to functional or dysfunctional outcomes. As Witte (1992) reasoned, “threat determines the degree or intensity of the response, whereas efficacy determines the nature of the response” (p. 345).

Pre-crisis messages express various degrees of fear about some risk event. Media play up the drama of the event (social amplification of risk), whereas emergency response information might work to provide efficacy cues. If fear arousal is sufficient, it may result in denial. Under such conditions, emergency management planning and communication can fail dramatically. Katrina is case study of that theme since many people did not evacuate for various reasons: Lack of mobility, unwillingness to abandon family and pets; and unwillingness to abandon caches of drugs and money. Some would not leave their property to looters; others stayed to be looters.

Threat is potentially counterproductive if statements do not translate fear, that cannot be managed, into dread that can be. Connecting risk perception and self-efficacy, Rimal (2001) found “a significant interaction between risk perception and self-efficacy on individuals’ (a) motivation to think about CVD [cardiovascular diseases] issues, (b) use of health information, and (c) knowledge acquisition” (p. 633). Coupled to these explanatory/predictive variables are perceived susceptibility, response efficacy, and self-efficacy (Roberto, Goodall, & Witte, in press).

Emergency management communication is likely to be more strategic when it understands and respects targets’ sense of likelihood of an event, likelihood that they or a loved one will be harmed, and perception of how well prepared they are and how well prepared the community is, including the perception of the efficacy and persuasiveness of the emergency management protocol. Fear control, including denial and avoidance, is predicted when perceived threat is high and efficacy is low. In contrast, danger control is likely when threat and efficacy both are high—the desirable condition for emergency management communication. Pre-crisis communication may serve best when it includes details sufficient to create a sense of personal and societal efficacy; as the threat looms, if people see messages as persuasive to others, they find them to be personally persuasive (Dillard el al., 2007).

Risk management and communication center on matters of uncertainty that invoke fear or dread, and require varying degrees of trust. Althaus (2005) offered a provocative comparative analysis of various disciplines’ approach to risks by starting with “economic conceptualizations that distinguish risk from uncertainty and argue that risk is an ordered application of knowledge to the unknown” (p. 567).

Decades of related risk management and communication research argue for an infrastructural, community-based approach (Palenchar & Heath, 2007). A fully functioning society knows risks and develops plans tailored to community conditions. These messages need to survive experiences and conversations of people in each community. “An organizational culture of transparency acknowledges and respects the information, communication and decision-making expectations and demands of all its stakeholders and stakeholders, and does not stage-manage them by limiting access to, propagandizing information about or manipulating decision-making regarding risk” (p. 124). Several concepts predict effective risk communication, emergency management planning and execution: Social accountability, knowledge/understanding, cognitive involvement, harms/benefits, control, trust, narrative enactment, and identification (Heath & Abel, 1996a, 1996b; Heath, Bradshaw, & Lee, 2002; McComas, 2003; Palenchar & Heath, 2002).
Requisite Diversity: Multiple Voices

A growing assumption is that multiple voices add value to dialogue. Hon and Brunner (2000) argued that diversity in public relations adds value to society’s discourse because it increases the likelihood that concerns will be heard and given regard. In relevant research in Florida, Peguero (2006) found that “Latino homeowners prefer to utilize friends and family as sources of disaster preparation information” (p. 5).

A central theme in the multiple voice paradigm is the virtue of requisite variety (Weick, 1979, 1995). As Hon and Brunner framed Weick’s (1979) theme: “Organizational effectiveness is maximized when internal variability keeps pace with external variability” (p. 313). Heath (1994) used narrative theory to suggest that a dominant community or organization narrative is a sum of the sub-narratives existing in the organization or community. Thus, if voices engage collaboratively, individuals who need the information are likely to find it to be similar to and sensitive to themselves.

Communicators: Similar and Sensitive

Emergency management planning and communication follows the mental models approach to risk (Morgan et al., 2002). This approach to communicating risks begins from a sound science perspective and works to “provide information that people need to make informed decisions about risks to health, safety, and the environment” (p. ix). By this line of analysis, the gap between what experts know and the plan they develop versus what key publics know and prefer is the “mental models” gulf to be bridged. Sound advice is valued because “the stakes riding on public understanding are high for those who create risks, as well as for the public that bears them” (p. 3). Done properly, emergency management planning as crisis and risk management brings sound scientific knowledge to be the servant of the public interest. It requires “authoritative and trustworthy sources” (p. 4). Those who engage in this endeavor need to realize that they may meet opposition from scientists who doubt the goal of making an informed public, which is “mostly a waste of time,” they think (p. 7).

However, as is soundly demonstrated by Mary Douglas (1992; see also, Beck, 2004; Tansey & Rayner, in press), the sound science aspect of risk management and communication cannot function adequately if it is at odds with sociocultural institutions and interpretations of the risk, the risk analysts, and the persons engaged in the planning response.

Scherer and Cho (2003) have reasoned that an individual cognitive approach to risk perception ignores myriad social influences. Featuring network contagion theory, they found “that social linkages in communities may play an important role in focusing risk perceptions” (p. 261). Control, individual and societal, influences how risk messages are absorbed into a community and vetted for efficacy (individual, expert, and community). When risk bearers do not trust risk advisors or believe they are at their mercy, their response is to refuse to accept those expert evaluations (Heath, 1997). Reflecting on this quandary, Covello, Sandman, and Slovic (1988) concluded,

A risk that parties at risk have some control over is more acceptable than a risk that is beyond their control. A risk that the parties at risk assess and decide to accept is more acceptable than a risk that is imposed on them. (p. 6).

Themes of credibility, including identification (Burke, 1969), and trust frame the rationale for how to communicate risks in a diverse community, featuring the themes of source similarity and message sensitivity. The degree of concern (intense/passive as well as
informed/uninformed) is likely to be different for various residents in a community experiencing each of many risks.

Emergency managers, as well as other professional communicators in such situations, know that communication is likely to suffer varying attentiveness, understanding, agreement, and compliance. Cultural biases and interpretive heuristics make their effort both quite easy and daunting. To assist in understanding some of these challenges, a research project addressed the following research questions (RQs) and hypotheses (Hs).

**RQs**

RQ1: To what extent community members receive emergency response information prior to a major storm/hurricane?

RQ2: To what extent community members receive emergency response information during a major storm/hurricane?

RQ3: How easy is it for community members to obtain useful information?

RQ4: To what extent the information will help community residents to be familiar with evacuation guidelines?

RQ5: Which sources are likely to be used to get emergency response information prior to a major storm/hurricane?

RQ6: Which sources are likely to be used to receive emergency response information during a major storm/hurricane?

RQ7: How does the community role of the source of information make a difference in terms of the likelihood of their being a communicator during such event?

RQ8: When handling emergencies, how likely will residents follow an expert's risk advice?

RQ9: How likely will residents follow a friend or family member's risk advice?

RQ10: How does concern relate to the willingness to comply with risk advice?

**Hs**

H1: The more individuals are concerned, the more they are likely to expect that message sources will be similar to them demographically.

H2: The more individuals are concerned, the more they are likely to expect that messages will be sensitive to them demographically.

H3: Source similarity will be positively correlated to message sensitivity.

H4: When people perceive that sources are more similar to them, they are more likely to comply with the advice.

H5: When people perceive messages are more sensitive to them, they are more likely to comply with the advice.

H6: Perceived source similarity is positively related to perceived self-efficacy, expert efficacy, and community efficacy toward emergency situations, respectively.

H7: Perceived message sensitivity is positively related to perceived self-efficacy, expert efficacy, and community efficacy toward emergency situations, respectively.

Emergency management planning and communication is initiated by officials in government agencies or companies that may affect internal and external publics. These experts are expected to understand emergencies, determine how they can be predicted and mitigated. The emergency management plan that works well because it was correctly developed and implemented can prevent some dire event from becoming a crisis.
Methods

Sample

As part of a larger research study, a professional data collection firm contacted local residents in the Houston area, Texas. A total of 606 residents from three counties—Harris (n = 366), Galveston (n = 150), and Fort Bend (n = 90)—participated in this research. Approximately 50% were male (n = 300) and 50% female (n = 306). They were typically about 40 years old (Mean = 39.80 years, SD = 16.75). About 60% were European Americans, 17% African Americans, 20% Hispanic Americans, and 3% Asian Americans and others. About 25% had annual household income $25,000 or less, 30% $26,000 - 45,000, 20% $46,000-65,000, and 25% over $65,000. About 35% had high school education or less, about 40% some college or community college degrees, and 25% bachelors or higher degrees. About 90% reported that they resided in the Houston area during Hurricane Rita; about 55% (n = 330) evacuated.

Measurements

Most measures in the study were developed to observe varying levels or amounts of variables. Due to the paucity of earlier study and relevant operationalizations of variables in this area, it was essential to self-develop appropriate measures for this research. In particular, our new variables such as concern, source similarity, message sensitivity, and willingness to follow advice had to be newly operationalized in a way that was appropriate to emergency contexts.

Concern. The level of concern was operationalized by 6 items. Three items were expectations related to risk/crisis situations such as a major storm/hurricane, chemical event, and terrorist attack. The other 3 items were about potential harms that incur to self and loved ones in such situations. They were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “very unlikely” (1) to “very likely” (5). Respondents reported typically having a moderate level of concern (Mean = 3.23, SD = .78). A reliability score of this measure was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha = .71). Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of major variables, including reliabilities, means, and standard deviation scores.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: Reliabilities, means, standard deviations, and correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>α</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Concern</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Source similarity</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Message sensitivity</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self-efficacy</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Expert efficacy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Community efficacy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Willingness to follow expert’s advice</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Willingness to follow family/friend’s advice</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes.

α is Cronbach’s alpha.
Correlations equal to or larger than .11 are significant at the 0.01 level. Correlations between .10 and .08 are significant at the 0.05 level. Correlations smaller than .08 are not significant at the 0.05 level.

**Source similarity.** Source similarity was operationalized by a measure developed for this research. Participants were asked to respond to the extent to which they think the crisis communicator will be similar to their demographic background including such common areas as race/ethnicity, age, gender, income, and education (e.g., Green, Anderson, & Shivers, 1996; Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989; Turban & Jones, 1988). Respondents on average perceived a moderate level of communicator similarity (Mean = 3.52, SD = .87). Reliability of this measure was high (Cronbach’s alpha = .82).

**Message sensitivity.** Like source/communicator similarity measure, this study operationalized message sensitivity with a self-developed measure by asking whether respondents believe the emergency-related “message” will be sensitive to their race/ethnicity, age, gender, income level, and education level. Overall, participants expected a moderate level of message sensitivity (Mean = 3.44, SD = .88). Reliability of this measure was high as well (Cronbach’s alpha = .85).

**Efficacy.** Bandura (1994) suggested that self-efficacy is “people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (p. 71). Efficacy seems to be largely about one’s belief that one is prepared to achieve functional outcomes (e.g., Witte, 1992). Following this view of efficacy, we operationalized self-efficacy by asking participants to respond in terms of how well they are prepared to handle emergency situations such as a major storm/hurricane, chemical plant event, and terrorist attack and how familiar they are with evacuation guidelines and ways to be safe during these situations. This measure (4 items) had acceptable reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .69). Likewise, expert efficacy was measured by participants’ perception of how well experts are prepared to help people be as safe as possible handling emergency situations. Community efficacy was also observed by one item that asked about how well the community will respond to emergency situations in a way that really works.

**Willingness to follow advice.** The diffusion model of innovation suggests that interpersonal sources serve as opinion leaders (e.g., Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948; Rogers, 2003). Recommendations regarding emergency situations often come from such interpersonal sources as various experts in the community, friends, peers and family members. Willingness to follow advice was operationalized in two ways: (a) extent to which participants are likely to follow emergency response experts’ recommendation and (b) extent to which participants are likely to follow family and friends’ recommendation. Please note that the two methods or items were not combined to form an overall measure of willingness to follow advice due to low reliability.

**Results**

RQ1 addressed the extent to which community members receive emergency response information prior to a major storm/hurricane. To answer this question, we asked participants whether they have ever been told or got information on how to be safe in a storm. About 68% (n = 414) answered in the affirmative and the rest (about 32%, n = 192) in the negative. This indicated that nearly 1/3 of the respondents said they have never been told or received information on how to be safe during a major storm or hurricane.
RQ2 probed the extent to which community members receive emergency response information during a major storm/hurricane. Participants were asked on a 5-point scale ranging from “very unlikely” (1) to “very likely” (5) that, during emergencies, they are warned so they can take appropriate action. Respondents reported that, on average, they are somewhat likely (Mean = 3.54, SD = 1.22) to receive emergency response information. On the other hand, nearly 40% of the community members (n = 243, a sum of frequencies of the categories of very unlikely, unlikely and maybe) have some doubt that they will get emergency response information for proper action.

Regarding RQ3, responses to a question how difficult/easy it is to get useful information on a 5-point scale ranging from “very difficult” (1) to “very easy” (5) indicated that it will be relatively easy to get useful information (Mean = 3.91, SD = .90). Yet, overall frequency distributions suggested that about 30% of the community members find it not easy (n = 122 for the three categories of very difficulty, difficult, and unsure) to get useful information.

To answer RQ4, residents were asked about the extent to which they were familiar with evacuation guidelines on a 5-point scale ranging from “very unfamiliar” (1) to “very familiar” (5). Responses indicated that all the emergency-related information processing seems to help residents be somewhat familiar with evacuation guidelines (Mean = 3.56, SD = 1.24). On the other hand about 40% residents still felt unsure or unfamiliar with such guidelines (n = 246).

RQs 5 and 6 were concerned about information sources prior to and during a major storm or hurricane, respectively. For RQ5, respondents were asked to recall as many information sources as they can through which they are likely to get emergency response information prior to a major storm/hurricane. TV is most likely to be utilized to get emergency response information prior to a major storm/hurricane, followed by radio, family/friends, newspaper, Internet/Web, companies, government sources, and least likely local police/fire departments (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/family</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet/Web</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companies</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police/Fire</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1193</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ6 was explored by responses about information sources respondents are likely to use to receive emergency response information during a major storm/hurricane on a 5-point scale ranging from “very unlikely” (1) to “very likely” (5). Again, TV is the most likely source of information during a major storm/hurricane, followed by friend/family, radio, Internet/Web, newspapers, and much less likely local police/fire departments (see Table 3).

A series of paired t-tests were conducted to see if there are any significant differences between/among likely information sources. Results indicated that out of 21 possible pairs, two pairs were not significant at the 0.05 level or more: radio vs. friend/family phone calls and
newspaper vs. police/fire departments. All other pairs were statistically significant.

Table 3. Information sources likely to be used to get emergency response information during a major storm or hurricane

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/family - telephone calls</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/family- face-to-face talks</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet/Web</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police/Fire</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ7 asked how the community role of the source of information may affect the likelihood of their being a primary communicator to a resident during an emergency event. Residents’ responses to a question related to role (e.g., TV weather or news person, spokesperson, emergency expert, or politician) with respect to the likelihood that residents will be communicating with such personnel during emergencies indicated that TV weather and newssources are likely to emerge as the primary person who communicates with community residents, followed by company spokespersons, response experts, and elected political figures (see Table 4). All paired t-tests were significant at the 0.001 level or less, indicating that all roles are significantly different from one another in terms of emerging as the primary communicator.

Table 4. Likelihood of being the primary communicator to residents during emergencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television weather or newssource</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A professional communicator, a spokesperson</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An emergency response expert, such as a police or fire official</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A politician such as a mayor, county judge, or governor</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQs 8, 9, and 10 addressed the issue of willingness to follow risk advice. Residents were asked to indicate the extent to which they are willing to follow an expert’s and a friend/family member’s recommendations regarding emergencies on a 5-point scale ranging from “very unlikely” (1) to “very likely” (5). Residents were typically quite likely to follow expert’s recommendation \((Mean = 4.21, SD = .91)\) and likely to follow friend/family member’s risk advice \((Mean = 3.87, SD = .98)\). Result of a paired t-test indicated that residents are likely to follow expert’s risk advice significantly more than friend/family member’s risk advice, \(t(605) = 6.86, p < .000\).

Further, for RQ10, results of correlation analysis indicated residents’ level of concern was significantly positively related to following expert’s risk advice \((r = .10, p < .05)\) and friend/family member’s advice \((r = .11, p < .01)\).

Next, results related to hypotheses are presented. Hs 1 and 2 predicted that concern with risk/crisis events positively relates to emergency communicator similarity and message
sensitivity, respectively. Results of correlation analyses supported both hypotheses with \( r = .20, p < .00 \) for the relationship between concern and communicator similarity and \( r = .21, p < .00 \) for the relationship between concern and message sensitivity.

H3 predicted a positive relationship between communicator similarity and message sensitivity. This hypothesis was supported as well, \( r = .58, p < .00 \).

Hs 4 and 5 predicted a positive relationship between communicator similarity and compliance with advice and between message sensitivity and compliance with advice, respectively. As noted earlier, compliance with advice or willingness to follow advice were operationalized by two measures of expert advice and family and friend advice. Results of correlation analyses revealed that communicator similarity was positively and significantly correlated with both expert advice, \( r = .17, p < .00 \) and family and friend advice, \( r = .08, p < .00 \). Likewise, message sensitivity was positively and significantly correlated with both expert advice, \( r = .15, p < .00 \) and family and friend advice, \( r = .11, p < .00 \). Thus, H4 and H5 were supported.

Hs 6 and 7 featured a positive relationship between communicator similarity and efficacy in handling emergencies and between message sensitivity and efficacy, respectively. Results of correlation analyses revealed that while communicator similarity is significantly positively correlated with only self-efficacy, \( r = .20, p < .01 \), message sensitivity was significantly and positively correlated with self-efficacy, \( r = .15, p < .01 \), expert efficacy, \( r = .11, p < .01 \), and community efficacy, \( r = .10, p < .05 \), respectively.

**Discussion**

In answer to the research questions, individuals reveal different perceptions of the amount, source, and quality of information they expect to receive prior to and during a crisis event. They reveal varying expectations as to the ease of getting information and being familiar with evacuation guidelines. As a community, citizens express preferences for different sources of communication before and during a crisis event, as well as seem variously willing to follow advice by source. Expert advice seems to be preferred. Hypotheses addressed similarity, sensitivity, concern, willingness to follow advice, and efficacy. These variables are mostly intercorrelated with one another significantly and positively.

Findings in this study point out that emergency management experts need to understand potential crises, plan appropriate response protocols to mitigate damage, exert appropriate control measures to guide and recommend personal and collective responses, and communicate in ways that provide expert advice (mental models approach to risk communication) sensitive to cultural concerns. Done properly, recommendations are more likely to be sustained rather than contradicted or dismissed by various publics.

The baseline descriptive data generated in this community indicate varying degrees of being informed/not being informed on key aspects of the potential crisis, emergency response planning, and personal response options. We also found differing levels of concern (intense/passive) measured by the degree to which people believed they or loved ones would be harmed in the event of each of the kinds of emergencies examined in this study. For the storm, 53% believed they or their loved ones may be or are unlikely or very unlikely to be harmed in such event. For terrorist attack, the percentage (maybe, unlikely, very unlikely) soared to 72%. For chemical release, the percentage was 61%. Thus, it is likely that both the communication before and during an event as well as the personal and collective response to the event will be shaped by the sense of concern (informed/uninformed and passive/intense) shared in each
community at risk. The concept of community concern seems foundational based on these results, and pockets or seams of potential dysfunction were identified.

Knowing the various channels of information/advice available to them, key publics have preferences as to which ones are likely to provide the best information and advice. Channel use is situational and strategic. Members of the community were not uniformly convinced that getting information would be easy. They were variously convinced, for instance, that they knew current evacuation guidelines. In this regard, it is worth noting that in this sample, respondents preferred expert advice to that of friends and family although they are likely to be a channel that can and probably would provide expert advice. These results demonstrate the usefulness of community level analysis (Heath & Abel, 1996a, 1996b; Heath, Bradshaw, & Lee, 2002; McComas, 2003; Palenchar & Heath, 2002). It consists of many channels and sources of advice, where individual judgment and behavior become collective behavior however expertly organized and executed. The more intense the concern, the more likely people are to turn to and use the advice of experts thereby becoming more informed.

A crucial factor in the willingness to follow expert advice appears to result from source/resident similarity and the predicted likelihood that similarity would result in messages sensitive to the resident. That conclusion is reinforced by analysis of infrastructures as consisting variously of experts as well as friends and family. These results appear to agree with the law of requisite variety and the findings of Peguero (2006).

Message source similarity and sensitivity are not merely matters of identification, although that is important. They relate to the likelihood to follow advice and a general belief that similarity and sensitivity lead to efficacy. Source or communicator similarity and message sensitivity correlated positively to self-efficacy of residents. Sensitivity, but not similarity, correlated with self-efficacy, expert efficacy, and community efficacy.

Such findings, however positive, need to address the amount of dysfunction that is potential in the sample communities. The metropolitan community has approximately 4.5 million people. If 1/3-1/2 do not feel informed and guided, that could translate into 2 million people responding in ways that do not follow professionally developed emergency response protocols. Crises of many sorts, shapes, sizes, and permutations can come from uncoordinated and inappropriate choices (e.g., Coombs, 1999; Millar & Heath, 2004).

One limitation is the lack of other studies on emergency management discussed in terms of public relations, crisis communication, and risk communication. In that regard, the paper is pioneering, but it is difficult to assess its accomplishments comparatively.

A second limitation is the nature of the specific community in which the data are generated. What is its ecological reliability? Even, for that matter, different counties in this study scored differently (e.g., willingness to follow advice). Although the finding suggests that the variables work to explain differences, their generalizability needs more research.

The findings appear to depend on demographic differences. Demographics are an excellent focal point for this analysis; census data and mere observation can help understand the richness or paucity of diversity and how it is represented in a community. In this study, the persons who feel less well served by emergency planning are Hispanics, lower income, and younger residents. Residents by county, knowledge of evacuation procedures, and perception of harm/risk were most able to predict who would or would not evacuate in the event of a crisis. Hispanics are less likely to predict a crisis/emergency event will occur. They feel significantly less familiar with safety procedures and guidelines. They believe that they are less likely to be warned appropriately. Lacking longitudinal data, or comparisons to other communities, we
cannot determine whether the sensitivity to demographics is generic or situational. Using the reasoning presented above, one can only wonder whether lower prediction of some event is “fact” based or a reflection of denial in the face of fear.

Conclusion

These findings suggest that emergency management planning and communication is less likely to experience crisis if diversity of opinions is brought into planning and communication that are sensitive to residents’ perception of the world. Such observations have a pollyannish quality to them. No response is likely to be foolproof; plans fail and people fail to follow plans. Nevertheless, the prospect of realistic findings suggests that scholars interested generically in crisis and risk have conceptual and theoretical tools that not only advance research in ways that have relevance to “the real world.” Public relations can, for these reasons, add value to communities, the organizations and citizens that compose them.

Endnotes

1 What is typically called the Houston-Galveston region (under the planning umbrella of various municipalities, counties, and agencies such as the Houston-Galveston Area Council) has an MSA population of 4.5 million people. Based on 2000 census data, the demographic profile of the most vulnerable counties is as follows: Harris in which most of Houston exists, 3.4 million (W 58.7%, B/AA 18.5%, Asian 5.1%, Hispanic 32.9%, family income at or below $25,000 23.4%); Galveston 250,000 (W 72.7%, B/AA 15.4%, Asian 2.1%, Hispanic 18.0%, family income at or below $25,000 21.8%); Brazoria 242,000 (W 77.1%, B/AA 8.5%, Asian 2.0%, Hispanic 22.8%, family income at or below $25,000 17.9%); and Ft. Bend 355,000 (W 58.9%, B/AA 20.4%, Asian 12.0%, Hispanic 21.1%, family income at or below $25,000 17.9%). These profiles become more relevant as one realizes a fact proven by Katrina: Low income and diversity demographics often factor badly or inadequately into the planning for crisis and emergency response.

2 A Category 5 storm at sea, Hurricane Rita is the fourth-most intense Atlantic hurricane ever recorded. The storm caused $10 billion in damage. It made landfall near the Texas-Louisiana border as a Category 3. Wind and storm surge killed seven people directly and others indirectly. During the hurried—even panicked—evacuation in the face of Hurricane Rita, many people put their lives at risk in 100+ degree weather; 33 lives were lost, as were the lives of countless pets (estimates exceed 1000).

References


“Taking the Table Top Drill One Step Further: A learning fest for industry, corporate communications, and the community”

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Abstract
An analysis of the communication practices of corporate communications, corporate environmental, health and safety, and plant management during six chemical manufacturing operations’ simulated crisis emergency drills necessitating off-site response efforts was compared with Wang’s (2008) Integrated Model of Organizational learning for crisis management. The findings from the analyses are used to generate an Emergency Response Best Practices for companies contemplating scaling up a table-top drill.

Introduction
Managing crisis is a process of maintaining change that involves unlearning, relearning and learning at individual, group, and organizational levels” (Wang, 2008, p. 435). Crisis has been studied in diverse contexts by researchers from multiple disciplines. According to Pearson and Clair (1998), “[A]n organizational crisis is a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly” (p. 60). In essence, management failure or environmental forces are the root causes of crisis. Lerbinger (1997) identified eight crisis types: 1) natural, 2) technological, 3) confrontation, 4) malevolence, 5) skewed management values, 6) deception, 7) management misconduct, and, 8) business and economic. The timing factor associated with the crisis also impacts an organization’s response efforts. Reinhardt’s (1987) three specific time frames were enhanced by Cutlip, Center and Broom (2006), and include: 1) immediate crises which prevent sustained research and planning; 2) emerging crises which can be addressed with corrective action; and 3) sustained crises, which despite numerous response strategies, leave the organization prey to rumors promulgating misinformation for long periods of time.

Manufacturing sites in the chemical industry manage emerging and sustained crisis daily. Due to the nature of the products produced, the industry must always be positioned for an immediate crisis. The concentration of companies in a geographic area dictates the level of efficiency and effectiveness of crisis response efforts. For example, Galveston, Texas features streets lined with chemical manufacturing operations. The response effort is meticulously coordinated by Local Emergency Management representatives and all manufacturers participate. Lock Haven, Pennsylvania boasts one chemical manufacturing site with a competitor situated approximately 20 miles west. Plant emergency responders are trained on-site to ensure the community’s safety and because the community doesn’t have sufficient funds to equip a response truck. Moreover, as recommended by Mitra, Falk and Barczyk (2003), training for a chemical release response is costly; many companies situated in rural areas need to include local police, fire fighters, local emergency planning committee members and emergency responders in the emergency training effort.
Hurricane Katrina honed the reality that emergency plans must be practiced in real time to determine their effectiveness. While cost is a significant consideration with respect to preparedness initiatives, Bitto (2007) stated that multidisciplinary collaboration on preparedness training is a critical need that hasn’t been addressed. Further, Bitto (2007) suggests “environmental health specialists may also benefit from interdisciplinary training shaped with other first responders, especially when the training focuses on the need for multidisciplinary collaboration among teams of professionals responding to crisis situations (p.28). Complying with the need to better orient and prepare emergency responders, a voluntary national outreach consortium of chemical-related companies, transport/carrier companies, and industry associations, Transportation Community Awareness and Emergency Response (TRANSCAER) has launched an effort called the TRANSCAER Training Tour sponsored by Dow Chemical company, and Union Pacific Railroad to provide hands-on training to 10 communities along their shared transportation route (April 1, 2008 PR Newswire). In essence, the community of individuals dealing with crisis response efforts has come to realize that emergency plans must be scaled up from the table-top drill setting to the real world.

The research reported here is part of a larger data collection effort on myriad aspects of communication practices during crisis emergency response efforts. This paper focuses on an organization’s efforts to learn from the scale-up of table top drills at six locations across the United States. The first section will discuss organizational learning and its relationship to excellence in public relations. The second section focuses on the organization and the crafting of the drill protocol. The third section applies the conceptual model of integrated organizational learning to the outcome of the drills and is used to generate best practices for management of crisis from an organizational perspective.

Literature Review

Literature in the area of organizational effectiveness derived through human resources established a typology for the effective management of crises which supports Grunig’s (1992) characteristics of organizational excellence in public relations. Further, Grunig’s and Grunig and Repper’s (1996) early work and subsequent research efforts (Grunig & Huang, 2000) focused on identifying, managing and maintaining relationships with publics and stakeholder groups in the internal and external environments. Current literature in public relations offers prescriptive lists to effectively manage crisis and ascertain the effectiveness of the crisis communication plan through diverse measurement techniques (Hagan, 2008) and relationship management with stakeholders (Coombs, 2000; Hung, 2005). However, literature in the area of public relations offers limited discussion surrounding the learning process during crisis management but more on evaluation of messages, stakeholder reactions and spokespersons’ performances. For the purposes of this discussion, learning is achieved when an organization and its members demonstrate the skills and ability to analyze crisis events experiences and based on the outcome of such analyses; generate change (Stern & Sundelius 2000).

Mitroff’s (2005) research focused on the internal environment and identified the components of crisis that an organization must attend to in order to ensure effective management of crisis: 1) detection of early warning signals, 2) test prevention, 3) preparation mechanisms for weaknesses, 4) test short-and long-term recovery mechanisms, 5) continuously learn and reassess crisis management practices, and, 6) utilize new information to restructure and improve current systems. This cyclic structure encompasses the major components of systems theory (Miller, 1996), specifically, the system characteristic of feedback. If an
organization has permeable boundaries between organizational units and attends to the
information conveyed between units, the organization’s culture and business practices reflect
on-going change leading to negative entropy. If an organization’s units dismiss feedback
between and across units, the organization is likely to experience entropy.

Bitto (2006) suggests that crisis management lends itself to ‘silo building’ due to the
diversity of the players involved in the effort. “Silo building...may be so deeply ingrained in
the institutional memories of organizations that people unwittingly erect barriers to
development of interdisciplinary initiatives needed for appropriate community response to
catastrophe” (p. 28). Bitto suggests this practice creates “vertical conceptual silos” and prevents
interagency collaboration and coordinated response. Allen & Patrick (2008) writing about
concerns the law enforcement community confronts when dealing with hazardous materials
and/or weapons of mass destruction and emergency responders concluded that even the
language used to manage a crisis can be different. “All involved agreed that definitions should
be universal and levels of responders should be clearly defined but still allow for mission-
specific flexibility (p. 17). Wang (2008) developed a model of managing organizational crisis
through organizational learning which will serve as the theoretical framework for this research
and will be discussed. Wang does not distinguish between emergency planning and crisis
response protocol development or bona fide crisis response efforts in her discussion of the
parameters of her model. The researcher has taken the liberty to extend her model to the first
stage of crisis response planning to ascertain if organizational learning is identified during that
process resulting in culture change.

**Integrated Model of Organizational Learning for Crisis Management**

Wang (2008) provides an extensive review of the literature on crisis and concludes
cri ses generate threats and opportunities for an organization and when effectively managed,
create organizational flexibility and opportunities for improvement and learning. However, the
timing and use of the lessons learned during the management of crises situations and the
relearning of behaviors is typically limited to during and after a crisis. Wang states, “[T]hough
the relationship between organizational crisis, learning, and change is identified in the literature
to a varied degree, the dynamics and interconnectedness among them is not adequately
explored or clearly articulated” (p.435). As a result of the analysis, Wang developed an
integrated model for organizational learning utilizing critical learning constructs and processes
and the phases of crisis management.

As reflected in Table 1, the similarities in learning and the steps in crisis management
are learning, reflection(recovery) and change or redesign. However, how the learning occurs
and the process by which the information is analyzed for usefulness leading to refinement or
dISCarding typically occurs within the organizational units, and ultimately triggers change
organizationally or within the unit. A review of the current research supports that changes
within each organizational unit impair the organization’s ability to sustain meaningful, long-
term change. Wang’s integrated model of organizational learning posits that

[P]romoting organizational learning before, during, and after crisis will most likely put
organizations in a better position in detecting crisis signals, developing action plans for
preventing and handling a crisis situation, effectively learning from a crisis experience,
and applying new learning to improve future practice in crisis management (Wang,
The model identifies the following areas in organizational crisis management.

Table 1: Comparison of Learning Constructs/Processes with Steps in Crisis Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning constructs/Processes</th>
<th>Steps in Crisis Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Unlearning</td>
<td>1. Signal detection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Knowledge acquisition</td>
<td>2. Preparation of crisis management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Knowledge utilization</td>
<td>4. Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Reflection</td>
<td>5. Recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Organizational memory</td>
<td>6. Redesign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Change</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Wang’s conceptual model promotes a learning loop wherein during each step of the crisis management process an evaluation occurs across organizational units and the information is used to promote the unlearning of past behaviors and the creation and implementation of new behaviors.

While public relations practitioners interface with multiple units of the organization during a crisis event in determining the key message and strategy for crisis management, Wang suggests that simultaneous evaluation should occur at the design, implementation and evaluation of the crisis management plan by all units of the organization to promote reflection, learning and organizational change.

Chemical Manufacturers and Emergency Planning

Cherouras (2007) provides an excellent discussion regarding the history of right-to-know legislation and the current restrictions on the publics’ access to information due to the Critical Infrastructure Information Act of 2002. For the purposes of this discussion, The Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act of 1986 was designed to ensure communities were aware of potential chemical hazards in their communities and the development of emergency response plans and the local and state levels. Additionally, the legislation created State
Emergency Response Commissions, Emergency Planning Districts and Local Emergency Planning Committees.

A component of the chemical industry initiative Responsible Care® is the Community Awareness and Emergency Response (CAER) code, which requires chemical companies to create an on-site response plan. Annually, a majority of chemical manufacturing sites create and practice some form of emergency response simulation response effort designed to test the workforces’ response abilities and involve emergency responders, such as fire companies, health care providers, and police. These test-runs prove beneficial as shortcomings are identified and addressed before a catastrophic immediate crisis occurs. However, few companies rehearse how to manage communicating with external publics, for example, the media, key stakeholders and stakeholders during crisis. Grunig (1992) explains that “publics arise on their own and choose the organization for attention” (p. 128) as we can deduce, a crisis creates publics for the organization which are typically diffused linkages (Grunig & Hunt (1984) as presented in Rawlins (2006).

Likewise, in preparation for a crisis event, select management and public relations employees may attend half/full-day media training sessions where the focus is on how to manage the media. Unfortunately, “…[C]risis management means more than media relations, and media relations is only a fraction of what public relations managers should be doing” (Hagan, 2008, p. 413). While the organization attempts to prepare its employees to be prepared to manage crisis response events, due to the multidisciplinary nature of a crisis response effort, opportunities to rehearse how the units of an organization interface and what shortcomings arise when the emergency plan is implemented should be provided. Sylvester (2006) suggests that the learning derived from application of emergency plans is superior to table-top drills.

**Method**

This study sought to identify how a specialty chemical manufacturing company prepared its manufacturing sites for crisis response. Specifically, the following research questions were identified:

1. **R1:** Is the crisis response drill table-top or scaled-up?
2. **R2:** Are the participants in the drill multidisciplinary or from one unit in the organization?
3. **R3:** Does learning occur during any phase of the drill?
4. **R4:** What is learned from emergency response drills?

The researcher was asked to serve as a journalist during a series of drills for an organization that will be described later. As such, this case study used the participant observation method to observe an emergency response effort. Additionally, depth interviews with select members of the response effort were conducted.

**XYZ Corporation**

The chemical company discussed in this paper will be called the XYZ Corporation, which creates products used in construction, consumer electronics, pharmaceutical, agricultural, automotive transport, packaging, industrial and other areas of this market. A relatively new player to the chemical industry, this enterprise of 3,000 employees has boldly acquired key industry players, reduced production costs while increasing sales by 10% annually and held its occupational injury/illness rate at 0.88 injuries per 200,000 hours worked; a stellar record for this industry. According to XYZ’s Annual Report, the company advocates and rewards innovation,
holding over 1,400 patents in the United States and abroad and serves 3,200 customers in its research and development units or plants located on almost every continent.

XYZ Corporation’s leadership is considered “obsessed” with safety (personal communications with employees, 7/15/05; 11/7/07) and has invested considerable financial resources and personnel to promote safe work practices. Safety initiatives supported by the C.E.O. are communicated via the Environmental, Health and Safety (EHS) hierarchy and are to be followed without exception. EHS is cutting edge; mandating plant managers and their employees pursue International Safety Organization (ISO) certifications and attain timely compliance with Responsible Care’s® vision of “no accidents, injuries or harm to the environment” (www.AmericanChemistry.com). The company is a pioneer in the establishment and maintenance of community advisory councils (CAC).

Simulated Emergency Response Drill Protocol

In December of 2004, XYZ’s Environmental Health Safety (EHS) Vice President determined that all (6) domestic manufacturing sites must participate in a simulated emergency response effort requiring communication with external stakeholders. Manufacturing sites in Georgia, Arkansas, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Texas (2) participated in the drills. It was determined that the scale-up drills would be conducted every three years at all sites.

The company has designed a crisis response plan to guide the management of a crisis. XYZ’s corporate managers are available for consultation via telephone during the drill and the public relations coordinator interfaces with site responders to craft messages for distribution to the media and public. Corporate EHS is notified immediately when a crisis occurs; contingent upon the severity of the mishap, one or a joint Incident Command Chief is positioned and the focus shifts to the identification and containment of the release or management of the crisis. Representatives from Human Resources, Engineering, Environmental, or Health and Safety typically are the individual/s identified to communicate with the media and other publics at the sites. At all six sites, there was no on-site public relations representative, but all information for distribution was coordinated with representatives from corporate public relations.

The simulated drills occurred in July and November of 2007 and March of 2008. All drills followed the same procedure. One person from the company, the “mole” worked with the corporate EHS director to create a likely incident for the plant. Representatives from key publics were identified as call-ins, walk-ins, etc. and role cards depicting the caller’s focus, personality, and level of persistence were provided to each participant. A videographer accompanied the trained journalist to prepare the spokesperson for interacting with the media. During each exercise, community members or employees from other sites played members of the press, government agencies, and concerned family members. After the drill, all participants met and debriefed about the experience, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the response effort while a scribe recorded the conversation. Specific action items were identified for each unit of the organization and dialogue between members of each unit focused on how to improve the individual unit’s performance and streamline the effort so that all units’ response efforts were timely and efficient.

Results

The first research question focused on determining if emergency response plans are rehearsed as table-top drills or scaled-up to include a more realistic situation during a crisis event and thus providing a more realistic opportunity for the organization to learn and make effective
change. Due to costs, manpower and resources, the XYZ Corporation has committed to creating and executing scaled-up drills every three years. While most of the information shared with the community regarding response actions is disseminated by local emergency management spokespersons, it was determined that a company spokesperson-EMA spokesperson team seemed to prevail. Upon reflection of the experience, they realized that a coordinated and unified message for distribution to the public should be designed.

The second research question focused on the composition of the participants in the drill. The results of this case study support that the participants in the drill were multidisciplinary. In fact, the planning team made a strong effort to identify members of the community who would be likely to call-in or attempt to come to the plant to express their concerns, learn about the impact of the release or seek guidance. The team also included representatives from the local government, schools, senior homes, government agencies, and hospitals in their response efforts. The addition of role players’ queries and frantic calls enhanced the validity of the experience and prompted immediate reflection of the experience, detection of shortcomings, suggestions for more effective ways to manage the situation and action items to address the situation.

The third research question asked if learning occurs during any phase of the drill. XYZ Corporation positioned specific employees (observers) at each location in the crisis response effort to observe the behaviors, processes and conversations of those involved in the effort. After the drill, all those involved in the crisis response simulated drill met to discuss the experience. The corporate director of environmental, health and safety facilitated the debriefing by first asking the unit to describe the experience and then identify what worked and what didn’t work. The observers then confirmed or presented a different perspective on what occurred during the event. With the advice and consultation of those present, a commitment to design a plan to address any shortcomings or the actual remedy was identified.

The debriefings demonstrated knowledge acquisition, knowledge diffusion and were comparable to what educators would call “learning communities” or business would identify as “problem-solving teams” and as such created the response to the fourth research question: What is learned from emergency response drills? The specific recommendations were derived after reflection and evaluation from each unit in the organization. It was obvious that learning occurred during and after the crisis event. The information follows.

Corporate Communications
- Universal Response templates don’t work at all sites due to diversity of audiences.
- Protocol to manage a crisis is a first step, but individuals to support the effort must be available on short notice.
- Information sharing must be immediate.
- Legal Department input must be immediate.
- Media spokesperson isn’t trained to deal with press over prolonged time frame.
- Team media response effort is better for all involved.
- Diverse distribution channels must be explored.
- Social media is a force to reckon with. No distribution plan for blogs, websites or MySpace outlets.
- Site Spokespersons need enhanced media training.

Environmental Health and Safety
- Crisis communication necessitates more skilled and reliable spokespersons.
b. Local emergency planning committee members and site responders work toward joint media presentation.
c. Cellular telephone policy is critical.
d. Call-out system for neighbors.
e. Need more knowledgeable telephone responders when dealing with community.
f. Need to understand location of different neighborhoods with respect to releases.
g. Need more effective coordination of communication between incident command and media spokesperson.

Plant Responders
a. Simple tools, such as detailed area maps are critical.
b. Media spokesperson needs to be able to discuss the broad response effort with the community.
c. Media spokesperson needs to be able to discuss Incident Command structure and protocol with the community.
d. Media spokesperson needs support: another media spokesperson or an environmental expert to aid with managing media.
e. Plant neighbors need to be updated at regular intervals.
f. Communication with corporate must be more effective: too long to get approval to release information to the media.
g. Employees can serve as media “tipsters”. How can this be managed?
h. Community residents visiting plant to see what’s going on during release. Dangerous.
i. Journalists lack appropriate training to ask pertinent questions.
j. Materials to share with the media.

From the public relations perspective, the flow of information during this process was the most difficult to control due to the myriad units involved in the response effort and the ability for each unit to provide swift responses:

b. Responders arrive: joint incident command formed.
c. Incident command shares information with media spokesperson.
d. Media spokesperson contacts corporate for guidance on creation of media messages.
e. Corporate communications shares statement with corporate legal.
f. Media want information. Plant spokesperson can’t provide until cleared.
g. Media get frustrated. Community needs information.
h. How can a call-back system be installed and used in the case of emergency?
i. Should posting be on WEB about critical pieces of information?

Conclusion
There was complete agreement that the scale-up of the drills to include all the internal and external players in a crisis response effort created a more viable experience and prompted awareness of numerous shortcomings that necessitate immediate action by individual units in the organization as well as the entire organization. These drills prompted immediate change in XYZ’s culture. While the company had always focused on safety, external communication appeared to be more reactive than proactive in crisis situations. The corporate communications department is working to develop appropriate training for plant spokespersons and the
facilitation of more effective interaction with other units to expedite implementation of the crisis response plan. As a result of the multidisciplinary debriefing, each unit was better able to understand how the flow of information impacts the other units’ ability to respond in a timely manner and what the information is used for in the overall crisis response effort. Members of emergency management indicated the experience of having to respond to an aggressive reporter on camera altered how they will prepare for their next on-camera appearance. They realized that any statements addressed to the public need to be contextualized: offering available information about how the crisis started and investigation of the short-term and long-term impact to the community and environment. Thus, the unlearning of behaviors and the initiation of creating a new organizational memory that instigates change was uncovered.

**Best Practices for Organization Learning during Crisis Management**

1. Scaled-up simulated drills provide opportunities to identify strengths and weaknesses in emergency response plans.
2. During the drills, observers should be positioned at every response area to record information flow, group dynamics and reporting techniques.
3. Debriefing should include internal and external participants of the response effort to discuss shortcomings and devise plans to manage the shortcomings.
4. Company spokespersons should be videotaped interacting with members of the media and a critique of the message and performance used to create refined media response strategy.

While the Best Practices list will undoubtedly be refined and enhanced over time, it should be noted that the XYZ Corporation demonstrated the key components of learning and an effective crisis management plan. Wang’s conceptual model promotes a learning loop wherein during each step of the crisis management process an evaluation occurs across organizational units and the information is used to promote the unlearning of past behaviors and the creation and implementation of new behaviors. Based on the results of the actions taken at six manufacturing sites during a simulated scaled-up crisis response effort presented in this case study, XYZ Corporation’s actions coincide with the model. However, the real test of the model won’t be performed until the next scaled-up drill occurs during which time the researcher will be able to determine if the reflection of past experiences promoted unlearning of behaviors that ignited the reconstitution of the organizational culture and ultimately a relearning of a new way to manage crisis. The implementation of the action items identified during this drill will be evidence of change and thus, integrated learning.

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Recruiting Mom and Dad: Integrated Messages to Mobilize Parents as an Active Public to Support Youth Enlistment Decisions

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Abstract

Since 1953 the United States Air Force (USAF) has used its aerial demonstration squadron, the Thunderbirds, to support USAF recruiting and retention programs. As an Air Force public relations tool, the Thunderbird’s performance combines the powerful images and sounds of an airshow routine with mass mediated and interpersonal messages designed to influence American youth to enlist in the USAF. One of the primary variables that determines enlistment propensity is the normative support that youth receive from their parents. Recent research shows that parents’ attitudes are significantly related to their children’s social pressure to either join or not join the military, and parental beliefs about their child’s ability to succeed in the military are strongly related to the child’s self-efficacy beliefs. Airshow messages are an excellent way to reach both parents and their children. The paper proposes qualitative research that examines how integrated airshow messages may affect parental knowledge, attitudes, and potential behavior regarding support for their children’s interest in a military career. The situational theory of publics is used to connect parent’s problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement to their propensity to recommend a military career or to support an enlistment decision by their child. The proposed research will expand the public relations body of knowledge by connecting the situational theory to behavior theory and by providing insight into how a public is mobilized to provide normative support for a career decision.

Since 1953, the United States Air Force (USAF) has used its aerial demonstration squadron, the Thunderbirds, to exhibit the professional qualities of the men and women who accomplish the Air Force mission. The number one objective of the squadron is to support Air Force recruiting and retention programs (USAF Thunderbird Fact Sheet, 2007, para. 2). As an Air Force public relations tool, the Thunderbird’s performance combines the powerful images and sounds of an airshow routine with mass mediated and interpersonal messages designed to influence American youth to enlist in the Air Force. The term “youth”, as used in this paper, will include the adolescent years of the ages 10-17 and the emerging adult years of the ages 18-24 (Arnett, 2000). The paper will focus primarily on recruiting messages centered around airshow performances because the lack of current scholarship in this area, as well as the tradition and acclaim surrounding Thunderbird airshow demonstrations.

According to behavior theory, propensity, or intention to perform a behavior (such as joining the Air Force), is a strong indicator of actually performing the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). One of the primary variables that determines propensity is one’s perceived normative support from important influencers (Ajzen, 1991). Normative support is defined as the sum of one’s perceptions of what various important influencers think about a behavior and one’s actual inclination to act on those perceptions. For youth contemplating career decisions, parental support plays a key role. Recent research shows that parents’ attitudes are significantly related to their children’s social pressure to either join or not join the military, and parental beliefs about
their child’s ability to succeed in the military are strongly related to the child’s beliefs about his or her own competence (Gibson, Griepentrog, & Marsh, 2007). Recruiting messages should then be targeted to not only the youth in question, but to their parents as well. In light of ever-changing youth values and parental influence, as well as distinct forces that shape today’s youth, how effective are Thunderbird airshow messages in generating the normative support of key parental influencers in a youth’s propensity to join the Air Force? What role, if any, does the airshow have in mobilizing parents as an aware and active public relative to their child’s service in the military? A complete look at military recruiting efforts, behavior theory, situational theory, and Thunderbird public relations strategies is required to understand the crucial role of forming parental normative support and future Thunderbird recruiting messages.

The following sections will recommend an integrated approach to Air Force recruiting communication strategies, one that utilizes consistent messages across marketing, paid advertising, and public relations (media relations, community relations, publicity events, etc.) channels (Harris, 1998). This integrated communication program should be centrally managed from an office that has awareness of all recruiting communication avenues, including airshows. The program should also be strategically managed, meaning it is grounded in solid theory, guided by research, and evaluated with respect to concrete objectives and long-term goals (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). Such an integrated, strategically managed program will allow consistent, tailored recruiting messages to reach target publics in the most effective manner.

**The History of Military Recruiting**

Since the end of the Cold War and the elimination of the draft in 1973, the military services have relied exclusively on attracting an all-volunteer force to maintain required personnel strength levels. There are many factors that make military recruiting one of the most challenging human resources staffing operations conducted by any large organization. In addition to the sheer size of the recruiting effort, applicants must meet many standards not required by most civilian job alternatives. To successfully enter the military, a recruit must “demonstrate the physical and mental capabilities to master complex military systems and operations as well as meet high moral standards, age limits, and citizenship requirements” (Sackett & Mavor, 2003, p. 219). In addition, they must be willing to place high priorities on teamwork, dedication, and readiness to face life-threatening situations.

The effectiveness of military recruiting efforts has fluctuated over time, with periods of strength and weakness that appear to reflect the military’s status in society as well as its viability as an occupation when compared to that of other available alternatives. In 1979, just six years after the end of the draft, recruiting had already reached its first and most severe crisis (Asch et al., 2002). The lack of quality recruits and the meager retention rates threatened the existence of the volunteer concept. The government reacted in 1980 by greatly expanding enlistment and reenlistment bonuses, as well as developing a variety of educational benefit programs. By 1986, the military was also spending nearly $120 million dollars per year on advertising to help the recruiting effort (Dertouzos & Garber, 2003).

Levels of recruiting spending fell off sharply in the early 1990s as the military sought to draw down personnel requirements and reduce defense costs, while at the same time remaining active in ongoing operations in Southwest Asia. As recruiting levels declined again in the late 1990s, the military increased its advertising budget back to $120 million. This time, however, recruiting numbers largely failed to climb. The Army and Navy fell short of their recruiting goals in 1998, and the Army and Air Force fell short in 1999 (Asch, Du, & Shonlau, 2004). Since that
time, military advertising budgets have soared to nearly $200 million annually, yet each service has struggled to meet its required annual recruiting numbers (Dertouzos & Garber, 2006). It is clear from continually rising advertising budgets, yet decreasing interest of America’s youth in military enlistment, that there are more complex, underlying factors affecting youth propensity to enlist. Research of these underlying factors is crucial to the development of any future public relations communication strategies directed at youth or parental influencers.

Research: The Road to Theory

As the individual services continue to struggle to meet recruiting demands in the 21st century, many questions arise as to the ineffectiveness of current Department of Defense (DOD) recruiting strategies. The DOD remains the largest employer in the United States and requires approximately 200,000 new enlisted men and women each year to meet its recruiting requirements (Sackett & Mavor, 2003). The DOD has funded a large amount of research on how the military can use its public relations and advertising dollars to affect its recruiting audience’s knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding military enlistment (Asch, Can, & Schonlau, 2004; Asch et al., 2002; Dertouzos & Garber, 2003; Sackett & Mavor, 2003, 2004).

As early as 1994, the DOD commissioned the RAND Corporation to study then-present and future recruiting trends and their implications (Asch & Orvis, 1994). The early RAND research findings were in some ways visionary, yet in others ways did not fully explore adequate solutions for existing recruiting problems. The researchers found that the supply of high quality youth indicating a propensity to enlist (those indicating in survey research they “definitely would” or “probably would” join the military) remained consistent with results from earlier years. More importantly, however, the study revealed that enlistment propensity levels were significantly related to actual enlistment behavior. The research also found evidence of a consistent future supply of recruits based on competing econometric factors.

In light of these findings, the study identified two possible reasons for recruiting difficulties. The first was a lack of recruiting and advertising resources to effectively attract interested youth. The recommendation that followed was to increase budget spending on each, an increase that happened with little effect in the late 1990s. The second, though largely ignored, reason identified in the study suggested a potential paradigm shift in attitudes about a military career resulting from the Cold War and other changes in the military structure. These changes “could affect the enlistment-related advice given to youth by key influencers—such as parents—and youth’s own perceptions in ways that would diminish both propensity and enlistments” (Asch & Orvis, 1994, p. xii). This finding suggests that instead of simply increasing advertising and recruiting budgets, a more strategic change to public relations and advertising content is needed; message content targeted to change the attitudes of youth and their parents. Instead of exploring this avenue, however, the researchers maintained that “while additional research on attitudes would be helpful, we do not consider this exploration probable” (p. xii).

The primary data source used for most research prior to the year 2000, including the study cited above, was a national computer-assisted telephone interview of American youth called the Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS). The survey, conducted by the DOD, began in 1975 and continued until 1999. It included as many as 10,000 interviews of youth between the ages of 16 and 24 years old (Sackett & Mavor, 2003). The information gleaned from YATS interviews included youth propensity to enlist, military advertising awareness, reported attitudes of important youth influencers toward enlistment, and various demographic characteristics. Early waves of YATS data proved that among respondents who gave unaided mention (no previous
exposure to questions about a military career) of intention to join the military, fully 37 percent followed through with the behavior (Asch & Orvis, 1994). In this respect, the YATS data yielded useful information about the connection of enlistment intention and actual behavior, as well as youth perceptions of normative support from parents and other important youth referents.

There were, however, many limitations to the overall validity and reliability of the YATS data. It was only a semiannual survey until 1980, at which time it incorporated female respondents and converted to an annual timeframe. The annual longitudinal trend study administered different questions to different subsamples of youth at different times, making it difficult to truly measure changes in attitudes and propensity over time. In addition, the study did not cover an adequate range of questions on attitudes and values that influence career decisions, variables that are now crucial for valid and reliable measurement of the concepts of current behavior theory (Sackett & Mavor, 2004).

In 1999, the DOD formed the Committee on the Youth Population and Military Recruitment to gain further insight on the changing attitudes and values of American youth and to conceptualize potential recruiting strategies designed to increase their propensity to enlist (Sackett & Mavor, 2003). In their research, the Committee, and many other social scientists, took advantage of a more reliable, multi-cohort, panel survey conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. The survey, known as Monitoring The Future (MTF), began in 1975 and continues today. In it, approximately 50,000 eighth, tenth, and twelfth grade students from 420 public and private secondary schools are asked questions about their attitudes, values, behaviors, and future aspirations. Follow-up questionnaires are delivered to smaller sub-samples of graduates annually until the age of 35. The survey design allows effective measure of developmental changes related to aging, consistent differences among cohorts, and changes linked to social transitions, such as moving from secondary education to the workforce, youth to young adulthood, leaving parental influence, etc. (Monitoring The Future, 2007).

The MTF survey results yielded many interesting, yet troubling, answers about youth propensity to enlist. Bachman, Segal, Freedman-Doan, and O’Malley (1998) found that of those male high school seniors who said they would “definitely enlist” in the military, 70 percent actually did so within six years of graduation. Of those male seniors who indicated they would “probably enlist,” 29 percent eventually did. Among females in the same categories, the percentages were somewhat lower, totaling 40 percent and 8 percent, respectively, within six years of graduation (Segal, Bachman, Freedman-Doan, & O’Malley, 1999). Although high school seniors are more likely than younger cohorts to have solidified plans for after graduation, there is a clear correlation between youth intention to enlist in the military and the actual behavior of doing so. This correlation, which will be discussed at length with regard to behavior theory, is a major reason why Air Force recruiting messages must be aimed at moving youth, with the support of their parents, into the “probably will enlist” or “definitely will enlist” category.

Although a strong relationship exists between high school senior enlistment propensity and behavior, the knowledge, attitudes, and support required to form such an intention is an iterative process, one that is shaped over many years. It is not exactly clear when career intentions are formed, but parental support for youth vocational aspirations has been shown to play a significant role in that choice (Bryant, Zvonkovic, & Reynolds, 2006; Osoro, Amundson, & Borgen, 2000). An analysis of youth cohort attitudes toward a career in the military between eighth and twelfth grades suggests that, with respect to public relations recruiting efforts, earlier is better than later. In an analysis of MTF data between 1991 and 1997, Segal et al. (1999) found
significant changes in students’ opinions of the military as a career. There was not much variance in those that indicated they “definitely would” enter the military after high school. This response was given by about 5 percent of the sample each year and was fairly consistent by grade and by year. In contrast, those who said they “probably will” or “probably won’t” enter the military decreased each year, indicating that as students get older, they form more solid opinions about future career options. Moreover, those that move out of the “probably” category tended to move into the “definitely won’t” category, with the greatest increase in this category occurring between tenth and twelfth grades. These trends lead the researchers to conclude that students “who are definite in their feelings about military service as early as eighth grade are unlikely to change during their high school years. However, those who are less certain . . .tend over time to resolve their indecision in a negative direction” (p. 412). Air Force recruitment messages need to reach youth early in life to aid them in forming positive initial attitudes regarding military service. Airshows, attended by youth and parents alike, are excellent vehicles for relaying these messages in a vivid and memorable way.

The DOD realized that a new, theoretically grounded, integrated approach to marketing and recruiting was needed to reverse the trend of declining youth propensity to enlist in the military. To effectively apply such an approach, however, the DOD had to have a solid understanding of their target audience. The Committee on the Youth Population and Military Recruitment recommended a new, systematic program for the environmental scanning of America’s youth to determine the fundamental values and beliefs in their life and how those values and beliefs may change over time. The information gleaned from this research would be used as the basis for forming new public relations and integrated marketing strategies.

The military began the new environmental scanning program in 2001 by commissioning the Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) division of the DOD. This division conducts biannual, random digit dialed phone interviews of young adults between the ages of 16 and 21. In their latest survey, JAMRS contacted a nationally representative sample of 3,877 youth (Marsh, Bergman, Sheedy, & Boehmer, 2006). Because of the random sampling techniques and large sample sizes, JAMRS data can be generalized to the general population of American youth at a greater than 95 percent level.

In the last five years, JAMRS’ data set has yielded crucial information on trends in the American youth population, as well as important data that may be applied in a strategic integrated marketing campaign (Marsh et al., 2006). Researchers found a gradual decrease in young men’s propensity to enlist until 2001. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, there was a marked increase of enlistment intention as a wave of patriotism and desire to “do one’s duty” washed over the country. Since 2003, however, the propensity to enlist began to fall again, and the latest data from 2006 showed a decline that was unprecedented in magnitude. Young women’s propensity to enlist has remained relatively steady since 1984, yet female military aspirations also showed a notable decline in 2006. This decline in enlistment propensity for the population continues despite a steady increase in the aggregate number of youths in the target age demographic.

Other socio-economic factors in the population help contribute to this phenomenon. Researchers found that a record number of youths report they plan on seeking some form of higher education after high school. While this does not necessarily preclude an individual from joining the military after college, it does reduce their propensity to do so (Marsh et al., 2006). Youth indicate that higher salaries are important factors in choosing a career, and college graduates earned, on average, more than $20,000 more than non-graduates in 2004. Combined
with a strong domestic economy, lower unemployment rates, and rising weekly earnings, higher education is reducing the likelihood that youth will enlist. A final important contributor to the reduction of propensity numbers among youth is the decrease in America’s veteran population. After the Cold War it was estimated that over 40 percent of fathers of 18 year-olds had served in the armed forces, compared to only 20 percent in 2006 (Marsh et al., 2006). There are fewer parents today who have military backgrounds, and parents may therefore be less likely to urge their children to pursue a career in the military. As a discussion of behavior theory will illuminate, the normative support of parents is a key factor in determining youth career aspirations.

**Behavior Theory and Shaping Normative Support**

The term “propensity to enlist” has been used in various forms throughout the history of research on youth career intentions. YATS, MTF, and JAMRS surveys all used the concept to effectively predict enlistment behavior. What was lacking, however, was a thorough theoretical discussion to connect propensity to behavior, and to explicate a valid range of variables that make up the concept. Along with formulating a systematic method of environmental scanning, the Committee on the Youth Population and Military Recruitment drew on an extensive review of behavioral psychology literature to offer up the theoretical basis for future recruiting message strategies. Use of behavior theory allows the managers of an integrated marketing campaign to logically segment important publics and tailor specific messages with objectives to influence critical variables that determine behavior propensity.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) were the first researchers to lay out a coherent connection between behavior intention and actual behavior performance. Their research, later named the theory of reasoned action, can be characterized by four major propositions (Hornik, 1991). First, a given behavior is indeed a reflection of one’s intention to perform that behavior. Second, behavioral intentions are composed of personal attitudes about performing the behavior and the perceived subjective norms, or social support, that one feels about performing the behavior. The third proposition states that one’s attitudes are composed of certain salient, underlying beliefs about an object or event (such as joining the military or recommending to someone else that they do so). These beliefs are a function of one’s perception of advantages or disadvantages of the behavior in question, as well as the evaluation of the expected outcomes of the behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The final proposition states that perceived social norms are a sum of one’s perception of what various important others (such as parents and friends) think about a behavior and one’s actual inclination to act on those perceptions. The strength of Fishbein and Ajzen’s theoretical approach to behavior modification lies in the ways in which strategic communication messages can be crafted to shape the different variables. As Fishbein, Middlestadt, and Hitchcock (1991) state, “The more one knows about the precise underlying factors influencing the decision to perform (or not to perform) a given behavior, the greater the probability that one can develop successful interventions to modify that behavior” (p. 243). Messages targeted at shaping normative support for adolescents joining the military suggests that parents are an important public in any strategic, comprehensive marketing campaign.

Many studies, primarily in the health behavior modification arena, have illuminated the significant connection between intention and behavior suggested by Fishbein and Ajzen (Hornik, 1991; Wasserheit, Aral, Holmes, & Hitchcock, 1991). Over time, each researcher borrowed from other theories to modify the variables contributing to behavior intention. Fishbein (2000) draws on the theory of reasoned action, the health belief model, and social learning theory to form his
integrated behavior model. Ajzen (1991) formed his theory of planned behavior after reviewing research on the volitional control of an individual to perform a behavior. While review of the literature that contributes to each researcher’s updated model is outside the scope of this paper, a summary statement is that each added the concept of self-efficacy, or perceived behavioral control, as a variable to behavior intention. Bandura (1994) maintains that behavior is shaped by a mix of perceived internal capabilities that interact with specific external forces. As applied to the theory of planned behavior, these perceived internal capabilities refer to “people’s perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior of interest” (Ajzen, 1991, p. 183).

As discussed earlier, various longitudinal studies of American youth have suggested that one’s intention to enlist in the military is a significant indicator of actually joining the military. The theory of planned behavior, as well as other behavior models, shows that behavior intention is composed of three variables: attitudes about the behavior, subjective norms about support for the behavior, and perceived behavioral control of successfully performing the behavior. Recent research linked the theory of planned behavior to predict youth intentions to join the military (Emanuel et al., 2004) and adult influencer intentions to recommend military service (Fors, Marsh, Emanuel, Marsh, & Boehmer, 2004). One study of particular significance found that “parent attitudes are significantly related to the social pressure to enlist or not enlist experienced by youth and parent beliefs regarding the child’s ability to succeed in the military are strongly related to children’s beliefs about their own competence” (Gibson, Griepentrog, & Marsh, 2007, pp. 539). It is clear from this evidence that attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy contribute to propensity to enlist and that parental views on their children’s efficacy, as well as their attitudes about military service, affect a child’s subjective norm. Behavior theory explicates these linkages well. What is not known, however, is how strategic recruiting messages, such as those presented to youth and their parents during an airshow performance, affect parental intention to recommend military service to their child (or at the very least to not discourage the behavior).

**Parental Normative Support in the Adolescent and Emerging Adult Years**

Parents play an important psychological role in the formation of their child’s attitudes and aspirations regarding vocational choice. In contrast to what was called the “generation gap” of the 1960s, research shows that parents are the primary source of information and normative support for their child’s career decisions and that parent-child attitudes regarding future life plans are strikingly similar (Otto, 2000). In fact, the plethora of individual choices made available to youth in modern society can accentuate the role that parents play in adolescent life decisions well into a child’s mid-twenties (Shanahan, 2000). Youth born after 1980, known as the millennial generation, have been characterized by the powerful influence, wanted or not, that their parents play in every facet of life, including their educational and vocational choices (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Murray, 1997). These youth are now in the heart of the Air Force recruiting age demographic.

As stated previously, the earlier a child’s enlistment intention is formed, the better the chance that the intention will be strengthened over time as the child nears the behavior decision point. Crucial to this decision is that parental normative support begins in the early adolescent years and continues until the child actually makes a career decision. Arnett (2000) argued that the formative years of a child’s life are divided into two distinct demographic and psychographic time periods. The adolescent years, between the ages of 10 and 17, are characterized by strong parental influence in most every phase of life. Children typically still live with their parent(s) and are dependent on them for most aspects of their livelihood. Any discussion of future career plans
will most likely be influenced by parental attitudes and support for such a choice. As a child grows older, however, he or she enters what Arnett terms “emerging adulthood,” an age period between 18 and 25 years old. In this time, many different life choices remain possible, “when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life’s possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course” (p. 469). Even as emerging adults strive for a sense of independence and attempt to take responsibility for their own actions, they maintain relationships with their parents that depend on commitment and trust. Myers and Glover (2007) identified parent-child advice, or social support, as a significant variable in the maintenance of that relationship in the emerging adult years. Parental normative support appears to be significant throughout the span of a child’s life, from adolescence through emerging adulthood.

As a child grows, there are many subtle, yet important, parent-child interactions that affect a child’s vocational development. These interactions take place over time, in the complicated context of the family unit (Bryant, Zvonkovic, & Reynolds, 2006). One variable in this context is the level to which a parent is a key source for knowledge, beliefs, and values about work. Studies show that children often have inaccurate perceptions about their parent’s attitudes toward their job and that they perceive their parents to be more negative about work, in general, than is actually the case (Galinsky, 2000). The accessibility of parents (including physical availability, approachability, and communication skills) to speak with their children about career decisions is important as well. Parents who can easily communicate with their children on most issues are better able to pass on important advice to them about occupations (Young, Paseluikho, & Valach, 1997). Through these interpersonal conversations, children are able to internalize social values that affect their future vocationally related choices (Bryant et al.). Research also shows that parents’ self-efficacy beliefs about their ability to influence their children’s scholastic and vocational development has an effect on their child’s academic and occupational self-efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorellik, 2001).

There is recent empirical evidence that shows the strength of the tie between parent and child attitudes about future career plans, as well as how much parental normative support for a child outweighs that of all other important referents in the child’s life. Otto (2000) found that 81 percent of high school juniors in his sample said they had the same plans about their future as did their parents. When asked how closely their ideas about career plans matched those of their parents, 46 percent said their ideas were mostly similar and 36 percent said they were very similar. Children spoke most often with their mothers about career plans, yet many spoke with their fathers as well. In fact, mothers and fathers outranked friends, teachers, and other important influencers as people whom children sought out for career advice.

Even as parents and children seem to agree about future career plans, there may be critical misperceptions between them about a career in the military. In a study of 2,731 youth-parent dyads, Legree et al. (2000) found low correlations between youth perceptions of their parents’ attitudes toward the military and parents’ actual attitudes toward the military. Youth generally perceived their parents to hold much more negative views of military service than parents actually did. Legree et al. found four major implications from their research. First, many youth do not have parents with enough knowledge of the military to correctly inform them of the advantages and disadvantages of a military career. Data from the latest DOD Youth Poll confirms that the number of American parents with military service history fell 50 percent since the end of the Cold War (Marsh et al., 2006), indicating that without strategic messages aimed at increasing parents’ knowledge of military careers, this problem will only get worse. Second,
parents are largely unaware of how they can influence their children’s plans through casual conversations. Parents need to be direct and clear when speaking to their children about possible career choices. Third, youth perceptions of their parents’ attitudes about the military affect their propensity to enlist, “thus parental attitudes toward the military may provide unobtrusive information bearing on the enlistment propensity of youth” (Legree et al., p. 48). Finally, parents’ own reports of positive attitudes about military service are associated with their child’s eventual enlistment.

It is critical that parents, as an important source of support for enlistment, be made aware of the advantages and disadvantages of their child’s service in the military. An increase in parental awareness may also foster associated positive attitudes about a military career and activate them to speak to their children about the possibility of military service. An active parental public will exhibit normative support for the military, a key variable for the propensity to enlist in the theory of planned behavior. According to the situational theory of publics, there are distinct variables that affect how parents mobilize as an active public that is willing to seek out information on military careers and subsequently share that information with their children (Grunig, 1997).

**Parental Support and the Situational Theory of Publics**

Parental recommendation for youth enlistment in the military has gradually declined over the last few years. The most recent DOD research revealed that only 10 percent of parents indicated they would recommend military service to their child, while 96 percent said they would recommend continued education instead. Parental support for a child’s decision to enlist, however, has remained relatively constant. Parents who say they would either strongly support or somewhat support their child’s decision to join the military hovers at 57 percent (Marsh et al., 2006). The theory of planned behavior states that normative support from important others is a key variable in forming behavior intention. As studies have shown, parents are the most likely people with whom a child will discuss future career plans. Integrated message strategies targeted toward parents should aim to increase the percentage of parents who would recommend or support a military career by their child. The situational theory of publics is a useful way to analyze how parents, as an important stakeholder in the military’s most vital resource, can be mobilized to recommend and support military service. The theory is utilized most often in public relations as a way to manage relationships between an organization and its publics, but it also serves as an effective tool to examine how the military may facilitate parent-child communication and support for a military career.

The situational theory of publics states that there are three independent variables that describe the perceptions that people have on a specific situation (such as a parent’s willingness to recommend or support military service). Those three variables are problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement (Grunig, 1997). Problem recognition involves the extent to which people recognize a problem is facing them. Once a problem is recognized, one measure of the level of recognition is the extent to which an individual stops to think about what must be done about it. Constraint recognition is the extent to which people perceive they can do anything about the problem (much like the concept of self-efficacy). Some people may feel their behavior is limited by forces beyond their control, such as physical or psychological barriers. Finally, level of involvement is the extent to which people connect themselves with the problem. It is “a measure of how personally and emotionally relevant a problem can be for an individual” (Aldoory & Van Dyke, 2006, p. 347). These three variables influence the ways in
which people seek out and process information. Grunig puts these dependent variables into two categories, information processing and information seeking. Information processing describes the way in which people passively hear and process information. This is most likely to occur if problem recognition and level of involvement are low. Information seeking, on the other hand, involves the conscious scanning of the environment for messages about a specific issue or topic. Information seeking typically happens when problem recognition is high, constraint recognition is low, and level of involvement is high. Individuals who communicate actively “develop more organized cognitions, are more likely to have attitudes about a situation and more often engage in a behavior to do something about the situation” (Grunig, 1997, p. 10). In this way, attitudes and behaviors can be changed via a properly managed communication strategy.

Integrated messages to affect parent’s attitudes and communication behavior about military service should be aimed at increasing their problem recognition and level of involvement, and reducing their constraint recognition. Werder (2006) outlines specific message strategies that may be used to manipulate these independent variables. The informative strategy is used to convey unbiased, factual information. Military recruiting messages of this type can be used to present basic facts about military service and to highlight the various options available to a person in the military. This strategy will increase knowledge and may serve to increase problem recognition by forcing a parent to contend with their child’s impending career decisions. Constraint recognition may also be lowered as a parent realizes there are viable career alternatives in the military. If a parent recognizes advantages of a military career relative to other alternatives, he or she may be more willing to discuss that option with his or her child.

The facilitative strategy is accomplished by providing resources to individuals that allow them to carry out an action they may have already been predisposed to do. Recruiting messages of this type lower constraint recognition and increase level of involvement. They may provide a forum for parents to discuss military career options with their child or ways in which their child may contact a recruiter. These messages will be most effective on parents who already have positive attitudes about military service.

The final message strategy that may be used to affect parents is the persuasive strategy. This strategy would use appeals to parents’ values and emotions through a selective, potentially biased presentation of information. Recruiting messages of this type should appeal to parents’ sense of patriotism and highlight all the advantages their child would gain by joining the military. These messages may influence attitude and behavior by manipulating problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement. Any strategic recruiting communications plan must contain elements of all three message strategies to affect parental communication behaviors with their children. Parents are crucial stakeholders in the success or failure of military recruiting; therefore, messages crafted for airshow audiences should contain elements designed to move them to an active, information processing public.

**Integrated Approach to Recruiting**

The pathway to successfully recruiting a youth in today’s mass media market is beset with many alternative choices. Competition for America’s best and brightest is intense. Youth are faced with a wide array of job opportunities, and the ways in which they are exposed to those choices has expanded to levels that can overload an individual’s cognitive capability to process it all. To maximize the capability to rise above the noise level, military recruiting messages must be produced in a consistent manner across all available message channels. The corporate world has adopted the concept of integrated marketing communications “to ensure that all messages
about a product or service to which a customer is exposed are coordinated and controlled” (Harris, 1998, p. 7). All messages are strategically managed across marketing, advertising, and public relations avenues to produce a synergistic effect that efficiently and effectively reaches target publics.

In the recruiting sense, the Air Force is selling itself to young “consumers” as a brand, and just as any profit-seeking corporation, it should strategically manage its marketing functions through research, sound planning and implementation, and evaluation. Integrated marketing communications will allow such management to take place. Kliatchko (2005) defined integrated marketing communications as “the concept and processes of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centered, and results-driven brand communication programs over time” (p. 23). As the Air Force develops new recruiting messages, it is critical that those messages be coordinated and managed at a level that allows consistency across marketing, advertising, and public relations channels. Messages must be targeted at specific publics, through a wide array of channels, to produce, over time, a change in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of those publics. The airshow is an excellent way to reach both youth and parent publics. Through publicity, media and community relations, public information, and direct marketing, the Thunderbird performance can reinforce extant Air Force advertising. The integration of consistent message strategies potentially yields greater processing effects, leading to changed attitudes about the Air Force and an increase in enlistment intention (McGrath, 2005).

**The Thunderbirds as an Integrated Marketing Tool**

The Air Force Thunderbirds aerial demonstration team is able to combine all the integrated marketing communication functions mentioned above through its performances at airshows around the country. Recruiting is at the very heart of the Thunderbird mission, and each year they perform for millions of Americans, many of whom are the target publics of youth and their parents (Thunderbird Support Manual, 2007). For some, the airshow may be the only exposure to Air Force information and recruiting messages they will ever have. Thus, it is imperative that airshow messages be aligned to produce the knowledge, attitude, and behavior effects on parents to increase normative support for their children’s enlistment propensity.

Public affairs efforts for a Thunderbird performance start months prior to the airshow. Publicity, media relations, paid advertising, and recruiting liaison functions are set in motion such that the overall message strategy is in place before the squadron arrives. Once the airshow event begins, the squadron is involved in many other public relations activities, including visits to schools, hospitals, and youth organizations. The squadron often entertains children from the Make-A-Wish Foundation and ensures that they see a performance for free. In addition, there is a media day at each airshow, as well as media incentive flights in Thunderbird jets. All messages prior to the actual performance focus on publicity and media relations. They attempt to foster positive attitudes about the team and the Air Force, as well as generate attendance for the airshow (E. Kreft, personal communication, October 12, 2007).

The Thunderbird performance combines a mixture of mass mediated and interpersonal messages. During the show a narrator explains the maneuvers in detail and provides the audience with information about the team and the Air Force. Before and after the show, maintenance personnel, pilots, and public affairs officers interact with audience members at an interpersonal level, answering questions and signing autographs. The combination of mass mediated and interpersonal messages during the show provides a unique communication mix with implications for parental normative support and their child’s intention to enlist.
Vaughan and Rogers (2000) constructed a staged model of communication effects that highlights the interaction of mass mediated and interpersonal communication. The model borrows significantly from Roger’s diffusion of innovations theory that states mass media channels are more effective in the early stages of diffusion to increase knowledge of an innovation (or idea), but interpersonal channels become more important in the later stages as an individual decides whether or not to adopt the suggested behavior (Rogers, 2003). The staged model assumes an initial exposure to a mass mediated message (such as a narrated airshow message). From this point an individual moves from a precontemplation stage to a contemplation stage. Here the message is recognized, understood, and perceived as relevant. The individual also may undergo parasocial interaction, or a perceived relationship with a media character, which in this case may be a member of the Thunderbird squadron or Air Force recruiter. This interaction is heightened if an individual is able to perceive the character as real or is able to talk to the character. As the message is evaluated for relative advantages, societal norms, and parasocial interaction, an individual moves to the preparation stage. Here changes in attitude and self-efficacy occur, and intentions to perform a given behavior form. Next, various interpersonal exchanges with important others sends the individual to the validation and action stages where behavior changes actually occur. Clearly the model helps explain communication processes that affect both parents and youth during an airshow and may contribute to an understanding of how properly crafted messages can influence the propensity to enlist.

**Research Questions and Proposed Method of Study**

In recent years every branch of the armed services has struggled to reach recruiting goals. Research shows that today’s youth are losing their propensity to enlist in the military. While there are many socio-economic reasons that may keep young adults from joining the military, lack of support from key influencers is one of the largest factors. The theory of planned behavior states that normative support, particularly from one’s parents, is a key variable in the formation of behavior intention, which is strongly correlated with actual enlistment. Crafting integrated, strategic messages aimed at mobilizing parents as an active public, willing to recommend or support military service, should be a major goal of any comprehensive recruiting campaign. The airshow performance of the United States Air Force Thunderbirds is an excellent venue for reaching both parents and children with mass mediated and interpersonal messages about joining the Air Force.

Based on the theoretical and empirical discussions outlined above, this paper proposes qualitative research methods to analyze the impact of Thunderbird airshow messages on parents. Specific research questions to be studied are as follows:

**RQ1:** In what ways might Thunderbird airshow messages impact parent’s knowledge and attitudes toward military service in general?

**RQ2:** In what ways do Thunderbird airshow messages impact parent’s attitudes, normative support, and self-efficacy perceptions of their child serving in the Air Force?

**RQ3:** How might Thunderbird airshow messages impact parent’s intention to recommend military enlistment or increase support of their child’s decision to enlist?

**RQ4:** How might interpersonal communication with a member of the Thunderbird team, in addition to mass mediated messages, affect any of the variables that form intention to recommend or support military service?

The primary research method will be a series of focus groups consisting of parents, both mothers and fathers, of youth between the ages of 13 and 18. The groups will be shown images
and messages from a Thunderbird performance and then asked a series of open-ended questions to generate a discussion on topics relevant to each of the research questions above. After a comprehensive analysis of the results, the researcher hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge about recruiting messages, mobilizing active publics, and the factors that form behavior intention.

References


“A New Paradigm: Media Cost Weighting”
An Addendum to:
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ABSTRACT
Over the past two decades, Advertising Value Equivalency has been correctly denounced as a measurement technique. However, recent studies yield evidence that the data itself may improve correlations between media coverage and business outcomes significantly over other popular quantitative methods. This paper provides four case studies exploring this concept; calls for a new name for this valuable data, “Media Cost Weighting;” and provides a completely new paradigm for its proper use.

INTRODUCTION
The media analysis practice of Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE) has a long history in the public relations industry, and has come under severe criticism in the past decade. AVE is essentially the practice of assigning a “value” to a news story by equating it to advertising costs, with the implication that the news story is somehow “equivalent” to an advertisement in terms of probable audience impact.

In 2003, the IPR Commission on PR Measurement & Evaluation published a white paper, “Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE)”11 by Bruce Jeffries-Fox, citing some of the benefits of AVE, but mainly recommending against it. This paper and other Commission documents12 discourage the use of AVE in favor of other forms of media analysis such as Clip Counts and Audience Impressions for Quantitative scoring, and Tone, Message, Prominence, Dominance, Accuracy, etc., for Qualitative.

Furthermore, the Commission has categorized PR measurement methodologies into “Outputs, Outtakes and Outcomes”13, with media analysis falling into the first bucket only. Thus,

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11 By Bruce Jeffries-Fox, this white paper is available at www.instituteforpr.org.
13 According to The Dictionary of PR Measurement and Research by Dr. Don Stacks: Outputs – m. what is generated as a result of a PR program or campaign that impacts on a target audience or public to act or behave in some way – this is deemed important to the researcher (also known as a “judgmental sample”); the final stage of a communication product, production, or process resulting in the production and dissemination of a communication product (brochure, media release, Web site, speech, etc.); s. the number of communication products or services resulting from a communication production process; the number distributed and/or the number reaching a targeted audience; s. the dependent variable in research.
the old practice of wracking up a big AVE dollar score and claiming it as a true campaign “outcome” has appropriately been branded “PR witchcraft.”

Despite all the bad press associated with AVE, about half of all who measure their PR results still utilized it as of 2003. Clearly, there is something about this practice that has been resistant to eradication.

The writers of this addendum to the Jeffries-Fox paper agree with all the problems cited with AVE as it has been historically practiced. However, the question to be explored now is whether recent evidence warrants a fresh look at the metric itself (advertising cost data) as opposed to its historic use (“equivalency” between news and advertising in terms of impact).

In the past five years, extensive research executed by a major media analysis firm on more than 10 million clips has yielded hard evidence that the advertising cost data used to calculate AVE indeed has value. As we will demonstrate in four case studies, advertising costs seem to clarify the relationship, and improve correlations between, media coverage and business outcomes. These findings have been compelling enough to result in the following quote by Bruce Jeffries-Fox himself in Ragan’s Media Relations Report:

“[The PR Industry] may have thrown the baby out with the bath water” when it jettisoned AVE as a measurement method.

The research presented in this paper is an adjunct to that which was published in two recent Institute for Public Relations Commission on PR Measurement & Evaluation white papers, “Exploring the Link between Media Coverage and Business Outcomes” and “Exploring the Link between Share of Media Coverage and Business Outcomes,” by Angela Jeffrey, Dr. David Michaelson and Dr. Don Stacks. Those papers offered a number of case studies as evidence that a relationship exists between these variables, and that the relationship is clearest when viewed through the filter of competitive media analysis. In those papers, the highest

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**Outtakes** – m. measurement of what audiences have understood and/or heeded and/or responded to a communication product’s call to seek further information from PR messages prior to measuring an outcome; audience reaction to the receipt of a communication product, recall and retention of the message embedded in the product, and whether the audience heeded or responded to a call for information or action within the message; s. the dependent variable in research.

**Outcomes** – m. quantifiable changes in awareness, knowledge, attitude, opinion and behavior levels that occur as a result of a public relations program or campaign; in effect, consequence, or impact of a set or program of communication activities or products, and may be either short-term (immediate) or long term; s. the dependent variable in research.

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14 Ragan’s Media Relations Report, October 1, 2001 – “Ad Value Equivalency comes out of the shadows, but is it still considered PR witchcraft?”


16 PRtrak/SDI actually pioneered this research in the late nineties. It continues today under the auspices of VMS, which purchased the PRtrak division of SDI in 2005.

17 Ragan’s Media Relations Report, October 1, 2001 – “Ad Value Equivalency comes out of the shadows, but is it still considered PR witchcraft?”

18 18 Published by the Institute for Public Relations Commission on Public Relations Measurement and Evaluation, 2006; www.instituteforpr.org.
correlations were seen when advertising cost data was used rather than clip counts or audience impressions.

This evidence now begs the question: if we’re getting better results with advertising cost data, should we indeed separate the baby from the bathwater and set new parameters for its proper use?

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

The purposes in this paper are threefold:

1. Present new research that demonstrates the increased clarity of correlations between media coverage and business outcomes when advertising cost data is factored in;
2. Establish a new term for this data – Media Cost Weighting or the Media Cost Index – to distance it from Advertising Value Equivalency and its history of misuse;
3. Demonstrate a new paradigm for the proper use of Media Cost Weighting for optimal media analysis.

REVIEW OF PAST FINDINGS

In “Exploring the Link between Volume of Media Coverage and Business Outcomes”19, Jeffrey, Michaelson and Stacks looked at whether or not media coverage makes any real difference to business results, and if so, what role volume plays. In three case studies, they demonstrated a strong link between the two whether looking at volume alone, tonality-refined volume and message-refined volume:

- **Volume Alone** – A straightforward, neutral, non-competitive campaign comprised of 47,000 clips that stressed the importance of mammograms drove patients to doctors’ offices for medical procedures at a Pearson Product Moment Coefficient20 correlation of \( r = .89 \). Mammogram procedures increased as the volume of press went up, and decreased as it went down.

- **Tonality-Refined Volume** – A damning news release that claimed cough medicines were ineffective caused sales to drop at unprecedented rates, and to rebound when the bad news eased up. Thus, negative coverage volume appears to correlate inversely to desired outcomes, while positive news correlates directly.

- **Message-Refined Volume** – A study from Porter Novelli21 illustrated how neutral-to-positive media coverage that simply mentions a brand, but does not deliver meaningful or accurate messages about that brand, had only modest impact (\( r = .51 \)), whereas coverage

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20 \( (r=X) \) - The Pearson Product Moment Coefficient is a measure of association that describes the direction and strength of a linear relationship between two variables; it is usually measured at the interval or ratio data level. Definition is from “The Dictionary for Public Relations Measurement and Research,” by Dr. Don Stacks of the University of Miami, available through the Institute for Public Relations, www.instituteforpr.org. Pearson Correlations were preferred by the authors of these studies, since the qualitative data in social science research is inherently less precise.
21 Study was entitled PRoof© - Porter Novelli Key Message Assessment & Optimization” for Watson Pharma, Inc. on OXYTROL, with VMS.
that included at least one key message that resounded with the target audience saw correlations soar to $r=.97$.

While these cases fall short of offering proof of cause between media coverage and business results, they do offer a preponderance of evidence that a relationship exists.

Working from the foundation that volume matters, and particularly tonality- and message-qualified volume, the next logical step was to consider the more real-world aspect of competitive media coverage, or relative volume among key players. In the second paper, “Exploring the Link between SHARE of Media Coverage and Business Outcomes,” the authors looked at Share of Discussion (SoD) and its impact on the effectiveness of public relations campaigns. Share of Discussion is defined as “The quantity and quality of an organization’s non-paid media compared with that of its competitors.”

The cases below compare quality-refined competitive client media coverage with business outcomes. The studies all involved earned media placed by PR professionals as well as over-the-transom news; major campaigns with large numbers of clips; national or regional campaigns as opposed to local and media coverage that preceded business results. The studies also controlled for paid media and other marketing variables.

- **Comparing Correlations With and Without Share of Discussion** – a major media campaign for a regional hospital yielded very high Pearson correlations ($r=-.97$) when SoD scores were compared with Customer Preference Survey scores. But, they were much lower ($r=.51$) when the hospital’s coverage in isolation was compared with survey scores.

- **Share of Discussion in Practice: Pharmaceuticals** – A hormone-replacement therapy brand was suffering enormous sales losses despite all marketing variables remaining stable and a tripling of publicity. In actuality, the product’s SoD had dropped precipitously due to the entry of herbal supplements, which multiplied the entire product category by five. Share of Discussion precedes sales by 11 weeks for this product, at a correlation of $r=.84$, which has been consistent enough for sales forecasting.

- **Share of Discussion in Practice: Business-to-Business** - A manufacturer of business-to-business computer software and analytics found that its Share of Discussion tied directly into its sales-closing ratio for the sales force by about one calendar quarter at a correlation of $r=.98$.

- **Share of Discussion in Practice: Packaged Goods** – A major cookie and cracker manufacturer had no idea why its sales forecast was missed by 9.5% until SoD scores was input into its very sophisticated market mix model. Negative editorial discussion about trans-fatty acids had clearly contributed to the downturn, so SoD is now a permanent part of its sales forecasting model.

22 “Public Relations Effectiveness” is defined as “the degree to which the outcome of a public relations program is consonant with the overall objectives of the program as judged by some measure of causation in “The Dictionary for Public Relations Measurement and Research.”

23 “The Dictionary for Public Relations Measurement and Research.”
These cases support the hypothesis that competitive share of quality-refined media coverage (Share of Discussion) has a strong link to business outcomes; and, in most cases, this link is stronger than what was seen in non-competitive comparisons.

NEXT STEPS AND QUESTION TO BE EXPLORED

In the papers cited above, the authors wrote that while various combinations of media scoring techniques were used within the case studies presented, they had found correlations strongest when advertising cost data was factored in. The second paper concluded with a study in the Appendix entitled, “Comparing Media Value, Audience Impressions & Article Counts with Outcomes.”

This paper will now look more deeply into this question: Which quality-refined quantitative scoring technique offers the clearest correlations to business outcomes between Clip Counts, Audience Impressions and Media Cost Weighting?

DEFINITIONS OF MEDIA COVERAGE VOLUME METRICS

To better understand the comparisons that follow, let’s first review the main techniques for scoring clips:

Clip Counting – This is the most common and most basic way to measure media coverage volume. Articles are simply collected, sorted by subject or by date, and counted regardless of the size or quality of the story itself. Because Clip Counts offer no qualitative information, they can be severely misleading as a measure of success. According to a 2003 PR News survey, “Attitudes toward Public Relations Measurement & Evaluation,” a full 84% of respondents cited clip counts as their main method of measuring.

Audience Impressions – This is the second most commonly used method today, and consists of collecting print circulation figures, broadcast gross impressions and Internet “daily average visits,” and totaling them up as an estimate of audience reached. Various permutations exist, such as multiplying circulation figures by estimated pass-along rates. The research presented below will show that using audience impressions to gauge effectiveness is more accurate than story counts when correlating to outcomes; however, impressions can also mislead, since the size/duration of the story, the client’s presence therein, and the quality of the placement itself, is not considered. In the survey mentioned above, 51% of respondents claimed using this method.

AVE or Media Value – This is the third most commonly used method, and refers to multiplying the space or time occupied by a story by advertising costs and using the resulting score as a campaign outcome. While we agree there is no ‘equivalency’ between the impact a story might have versus that of an ad, the research presented in this paper will show that the information embedded in market-driven advertising costs do improve correlations between media coverage and business outcomes significantly over Clip Counts and Audience Impressions. However, while this method does capture the size/duration of a story, and is a good measure of client presence within, it lacks other qualitative factors such as tone, message appropriateness, etc., so is not an adequate measure alone. The actual term, “Media Value,” was coined by PRtrak in 1990 as an attempt to distance it from AVE, but the word “value” is still problematic. AVE or Media Value was cited as used by 45% of respondents in the PR News survey.

**Media Cost Weighting** – This is the new term we are introducing for the use of the advertising cost data formerly used for AVE. A full definition, and new paradigm for the data’s proper use, is included at the end of this paper.

**Qualified-Volume Measures** – More progressive and accurate measures of media coverage volume include counting and comparing only those articles that have been “qualified” by factors such as:

- Tonality
- Prominence
- Target audience reached
- Contains key messages
- Contains accurate messages
- Contains messages placed within proper context
- Size or duration
- Dominance, and so on …

While qualified-volume scores will always be lower in absolute value than non-qualified, they usually correlate much better to business outcomes than raw counts when quantitative factors are added in. In and of themselves, however, they can be too soft and subjective, and tend not to correlate to outcomes well at all.

**Media Analysis Indices** – In an attempt to marry the best quantitative measures (Clip Counts, Impressions or Media Values) with the best qualitative measures (Tone, Prominence, Message, etc.), more and more analysis firms are offering single-metric indices such as the *VMS Media Prominence Index™*, the *Delahaye Impact Score* and *Net Effect*, and the *Carma Favorability Rating System*. While no metric is perfect, Media Indices do go a long way toward quantifying coverage volume in qualitative terms that are meaningful, and certainly toward equalizing it for competitive analysis.

**METHODOLOGY**

The four case studies that follow compare Tonality-Refined Clip Counts, Audience Impressions and what we will now call **Media Cost Weighting**, scores against business outcomes such as sales and survey scores.

Each study was executed through an advanced linguistics, artificial intelligence tool with human-like text analysis capabilities, and double-checked by senior human analysts. Print, broadcast and Internet articles were imported into the artificial-intelligence system from LexisNexis, VMS and/or other electronic sources. Study results were then correlated to business outcomes both directly and through Share of Discussion. Pearson Product Moment Coefficient (r) 25 correlations were pulled for each set of metrics to see which correlated the closest. Details include:

25 The Pearson Product Moment Coefficient is a measure of association that describes the direction and strength of a linear relationship between two variables; it is usually measured at the interval or ratio data level. Definition is from “The Dictionary for Public Relations Measurement and Research” by Dr. Don Stacks of the University of Miami, available through the Institute for Public Relations at
1. **Scoring/Counting** – each clip was first analyzed by **Tone** on a nine-point scale ranging from highly favorable to highly unfavorable, and then bucketed as Tonality-Weighted Clip Counts, Audience Impressions or Media Cost scores.

2. **Clip Portions for Media Cost-Weighted Scores** – Media Costs can’t be figured without measuring the size/length of the relevant mention, so these studies assigned *only the portions of each clip that were actually ‘owned’ by each client organization for credit.* By “owned,” we mean the portions of each story that were obviously generated by, or focused on, a particular company. If a story contains several competitors, credit is split among them according to the space or time they occupy. If a company has a small passing mention, it is credited with only a few column inches or a paragraph, depending upon how the story laid out.

3. **Audience and Cost Data Utilized** - The audience and cost data used in these studies is from the VMS PRtrak database, which is updated quarterly, and is comprised of:
   
   a. **Television and Radio:**
      
      i. **Audience Impressions** – Gross Impressions from Nielsen and Arbitron – Average Quarter Hour for Adults 18+, Monday-Friday, Saturday and Sunday. TV data is configured by half-hour increment and Radio by official Daypart. See Appendix A for sample cost/impressions tables for a local-market TV and Radio station.

      ii. **Media Costs** - from SQAD Inc., the definitive media-cost forecasting Bible of the advertising world. SQAD collects $7 billion-worth of actual media buys from agencies throughout the country, and establishes “true value benchmarks” for each time period, each quarter, and projects them forward. Media buyers subscribe SQAD and utilize the cost benchmarks for negotiations. Thus, the SQAD data provides more precision in media valuation than the PR industry has ever had before. For more information, visit: www.sqad.com.

   b. **Internet:**
      
      i. **Daily Average Visits** – from comScore MediaMetrix, with a panel of more than two million people whose mouse-moves are tracked. Daily Average Visits compare directly with broadcast Gross Impressions, since both include first-time and returning visits during the defined time-periods.

      ii. **Media Costs** – from SQAD Inc. As with broadcast, SQAD obtains actual Internet media buys from participating agencies nationwide, and establishes banner-cost benchmarks against which negotiations begin.
Costs are provided in 26 site categories such as Automotive, Finance, Community, etc. Working closely with SQAD and comScore MediaMetrix, VMS introduced “Media Values” for the top 30,000 Internet sites in 2002 as an outgrowth of SQAD’s work. See the exact algorithm in Appendix B. This algorithm was presented in 2002 to a gathering of about 35 top PR agency, research and measurement leaders in New York, and made available free of charge to all in an effort to standardize Media Cost Weighting in this new media category.

c. Newspaper and Magazines:

   i. Circulation: Magazine and Newspaper circulation figures are provided by SRDS, American Newspaper Representatives and BurrellesLuce. No readership pass-along rates or multipliers have been used.

   ii. Media Costs: Unfortunately, SQAD has not yet turned its attention to establishing negotiated rates for print, so “Open” black-and-white and color advertising costs are utilized.

CASE STUDIES

Study One: Parental Preference for Five Northeastern Colleges (reprinted from “Exploring the Link between SHARE of Media Coverage and Business Outcomes,” by Jeffrey, Stacks and Michaelson)

In September 2003, 3,700 articles were analyzed by a major media research firm for five northeast colleges, calculating Share of Discussion for each. Share of Discussion was calculated in three different ways, using Story Counts, Audience Impressions and Media Values. These scores were then correlated to results of a parental preference survey for these five colleges.

In all cases, Share of Discussion was based on Tonality-qualified Story Counts, Audience Impressions and Media Values. Negative scores were subtracted from positive-plus-neutral to obtain Net Positive.

For example, if college A had a Net Positive score of 370 stories out of the 3,700 total stories, it had a Share of Discussion based on story counts of 10%.

Similarly, if total Impressions were 185 million, and college A had net positive Impressions of 18,500,000, it would have a Share of Discussion based on impressions of 10%.

Similar calculations were done for media values, though only the portion of each story that was truly “owned” by each college was counted for credit. All impressions and media values were calculated using a database comprised of open-rates for print, and negotiated rates for broadcast and Internet.27

26 PRtrak, which is now owned by VMS

27 VMS database, which is comprised of audited data from Arbitron, Nielsen, SRDS, SQAD, comScore Media Metrix, BurrellesLuce, PRtrak and American Newspaper Representatives.
The results in the chart above clearly showed that media coverage correlated highly with parental preference. The higher the Share of Discussion, the higher the preference. However, there were clear differences between the metrics:

- Share of Discussion based on Media Values (dark blue bars) provided the best correlation: $r=.99$
- Share of Discussion based on Impressions (red bars) was next best: $r=.88$
- Share of Discussion based on Story Counts (light blue bars) was least effective: $r=.79$

In this study, correlations based on Share of Discussion using Media Values are 12.4% clearer than when they are based on Impressions, and 25.6% clearer than when based on Story Counts.
Study Two: SoD and Sales Leads for Industrial Power Conditioners

Using the same process described in the case study above, several thousand articles were analyzed in three different ways for an industrial manufacturer and four of its competitors. Share of Discussion was calculated for six quarters using Tonality-Refined Story Counts, Audience Impressions and Media Cost Weighting. These scores were then correlated to sales leads with a three-quarter lag between editorial discussion and leads. This three-quarter lag matches the sales cycle of this product category. The chart below shows that the strongest correlations, which were between Tonality-Refined Media Cost Weighting and Sales at a Pearson $r=.92$. In contrast, Tonality-Weighted Impressions at $r=.63$, and Story Counts with a low $r=.56$.

Chart B: Share of Discussion with Media Cost Weighting and Sales

Thus, in this example, Media Cost Weighting improves correlations to leads by 64% over Story Counts and 47% over Impressions.

Chart B: Pearson Correlations for SoD Story Counts, Impressions and MCW
Study Three: Top-of-Mind Survey Scores and SoD for Wisconsin Hospital

Share of Discussion results were compared with “Top of Mind” survey scores from a major Wisconsin hospital’s ongoing market study. Editorial from the most recent two quarters preceding each survey period was compared for ten competing hospitals, and analyzed in the three ways described above. The chart below shows the strongest correlations, which were again between Tonality-Refined Media Cost Weighting and Top of Mind scores at an r=.659. Tonality-Weighted Story Counts had a very low r=.299 while Impressions was only slightly better at r=.36. This study vividly illustrates that the relationship between editorial discussion and Top of Mind scores would have been obscured were it not for the precision offered with MCW.

Chart A: Share of Discussion with Media Cost Weighting and Survey Scores

This time, Tonality-Refined Media Cost Weighting improves correlations to results by 120% over Story Counts and 83% over Impressions.

Chart B: Pearson Correlations for SoD Story Counts, Impressions and MCW
Study Four: SoD and Sales for Business-to-Business Software

Looking at one more business-to-business case, SoD scores were compared for a software manufacturer and five of its competitors over three calendar quarters. The methodology used was exactly the same as discussed in the cases above, with results being compared against sales with a two-quarter lag. As per the chart below, the clearest correlations were again between Tonality-Refined Media Cost Weighting and results at r=.80. Tonality-Weighted Story Counts had a lower r=.57 while Impressions was only slightly better at r=.64.

Chart A: Share of Discussion with Media Cost Weighting and Sales

So, in this example, Tonality-Refined Media Cost Weighting improves correlations to results by 40% over Story Counts and 25% over Impressions.

Chart B: Pearson Correlations for SoD Story Counts, Impressions and MCW
INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

The four cases above lend some support for the hypothesis that Quality-Refined Media Costs provide clearer correlations between media coverage and business outcomes than Quality-Refined Clip Counts or Audience Impressions.

In fact, the improvements are a bit startling, as Tonality-Refined Media Cost Weighting improved correlations in the case studies above by:

- Between 12.4% and 120% over Tonality-Refined Clip Counts
- Between 25.6 and 83% over Tonality-Refined Audience Impressions

Also of significance:

- Audience Impressions only improved correlations over Clip Counts by between 12% and 25% in any of the studies.

But why?

Nielsen Media Research, The Arbitron Company, the TV Bureau of Advertising, the Radio Advertising Bureau, Magazine Publishers of America, SQAD Inc. and the Institute for Public Relations have provided some possible explanations. It appears that correlations are improved because the following information is imbedded within the price of media time and space:

1. **Size of Audience** – to some extent, the greater the size of audience, the higher the price; i.e. a daily newspaper versus a weekly.
2. **Credibility of Source** – to some extent, the more believable the source, the higher the price; i.e. Forbes or Fortune versus a tabloid.\(^{28}\)
3. **Ability to Deliver an Outcome** – to some extent, the ability of a given media source to deliver a desired outcome or response; i.e. WFAN-AM in NYC which has among the highest spot costs in the nation – not because it has the largest audience, but because it has a very wealthy male audience.
4. **Prominence of News Coverage** – to some extent, the likely influencing power of news coverage - since both audience size and credibility of source are involved.\(^{29}\)
5. **Objective, Market-Driven Data** – the fact that media costs are driven by media availability and market demand, they serve as objective starting points for media analysis as opposed to being subjective, artificial scores made up by analysis companies.
6. **Size/Length of Company Presence** – finally, the fact that Media Weighting Scores can’t be figured without factoring in size/length of client presence means that by nature, it is a more rigorous method than either Clip Counts or Audience Impressions.

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\(^{28}\) Bruce Jeffries-Fox expounds on this on page one of his paper, “Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE):” “How much a publication charges for advertising is a reflection of its circulation and its reputation versus its peers. In Canada, for example, the Globe & Mail and the National Post have identical circulations, but the Globe & Mail can charge considerably more for ad space because it is the more credible publication. “

\(^{29}\) Also from the paper cited above, page 4.
So, a great deal of market intelligence goes into the prices that are set by media outlets for their space and time, and therefore contribute to more accurate media analysis, and consequently to better correlations with outcomes. Additional research must now be done to find the optimal mix of qualitative factors that should be added to Media Cost Weighting to ascertain the best possible Media Index.

**A NEW NAME AND PARADIGM SHIFT**

As stated in the introduction, media cost data may be a very good metric with a very bad name and a history of misuse as an “equivalency” between advertising and editorial in terms of business impact. The public relations industry has also refused to fully let go of “AVE,” suggesting practitioners know there is value in the data, but have no idea how to utilize it well.

These authors thus propose the IPR Commission for PR Measurement & Evaluation set a new name for this database, *Media Cost Weighting (MCW)*, which would permanently replace the term Advertising Value Equivalency, AVE and Media Value.

But more important than a name change is a paradigm shift in how the data is used. To illustrate this shift, let’s review the key issues cited in the Bruce Jeffries-Fox paper regarding current use of AVE, and how Media Cost Weighting would be different.

**Conceptual Issues:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Ad Value Equivalency</th>
<th>Media Cost Weighting (MCW)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Name</td>
<td>AVE infers a direct comparison to advertising in terms of impact. Problem is, “There is no scientific evidence to demonstrate that a six-column inch ad has the same impact as a six-inch story in the same publication.”³⁰</td>
<td>Media Cost Weighting makes no inference to the data being a direct comparison between news and advertising. MCW would strictly be taught as a comparative index that can be used with or without dollar signs. Comparisons can be made over time, against PR objectives or against competitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outputs, Outgrowths, Outcomes</td>
<td>The absolute AVE dollar number has been incorrectly been used as an Outcome measure of success.</td>
<td>The absolute number is meaningless, and can only be used as a comparative Output score, or to link Outputs with Outcomes as discussed in this paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Credibility Crisis and Multipliers – the assertion that</td>
<td>Many studies over the past decades show the decline of overall media credibility, and that</td>
<td>Not an issue, since it is not a direct comparison in terms of impact.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

news is always more believable than advertising.

credibility varies by topic, so there is no 1:1 comparison. Also, the practice of multiplying AVE by an arbitrary "credibility" factor, and then referred to as a “PR Value” has no foundation. A new study by Drs. David Michaelson and Don Stacks, “What Research Says: Advertising vs. PR Effectiveness,” \(^{31}\) show that news is NOT always more credible.

Divergence of messages in news vs. homogenous messages in ads.

Assumes that a story = an ad regardless great differences in messaging and frequency of exposure.

Not an issue, since it is not a direct comparison in terms of impact.

Absence of publicity is sometimes the goal.

AVEs can only value what actually appears in the media, and therefore are useless to measure absence of coverage.

While there are better ways to estimate the success of such objectives, it is nonetheless possible to research other situations similar to one's own, but where negative publicity indeed occurred. Then, one can estimate the MCW of that coverage, and utilize it as some indication of what might have been avoided.

Logistical Issues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Ad Value Equivalency</th>
<th>Media Cost Weighting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ad Rates don’t exist for everything – like front pages of newspapers</td>
<td>Back-up procedures are used for estimating when actual rates aren’t available, which can undermine or water-down the basic concept when utilizing AVE results as outcomes.</td>
<td>Estimates work well since they are applied across the board for relative comparisons over time, against objective or against competitors. Rates can be obtained for similar outlets, and extrapolated over. Rates do exist for inside covers of major publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Historically, AVE calculations have treated positive, neutral and</td>
<td>The work above cites the importance of factoring-in Tone, and advises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{31}\) Available at www.instituteforpr.org.
negative stories equally, ignoring tone altogether.

subtracting Negative scores from Positive + Neutral as a standard practice. Again, however, the absolute number is not important, since MCW is a comparative metric only.

| Story Portion | There is no standard for how much of a story should be included in a calculation for AVE; should it be the entire article? Should it be just the portion of the story that is about us? | The work above provides recommendations for parsing out and counting only the portions of each story that applies to each competitor. This IS very important in MCW since it this precision improves correlations between outputs and outcomes. NOTE: Photographs, visuals, headlines and other irregularities can be measured the same way as text and factored right in. |

**IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER DISCUSSION**

This paper has presented a preponderance of evidence for the validity of using media costs in media analysis. It has called for a new name and a paradigm shift for the use of this data in the PR industry since it offers superior precision to clip counts and audience impressions, and clarifies correlations to outcomes. We thus recommend the IPR Commission on PR Measurement & Evaluation:

- Test the findings above in additional case studies to see if they hold true;
- Suggest the name change and paradigm shift to major industry groups as a step in the right direction;
- Add the following definition to the Dictionary for Public Relations Measurement & Research:

  **Media Cost Weighting** is the practice of assigning the cost of media time or space occupied by a story (or portion of a story that applies to a given organization) as an objective market proxy number for comparative analysis against historical performance, against objectives, or against competitors. The absolute number itself has no meaning or value beyond that of any index used for comparisons of any kind. Proper use includes the subtraction of all negative coverage; assigning costs to only the space or time occupied by an organization; using audited, negotiated media costs to the extent possible; and refraining from claiming MCW scores as outcomes of public relations campaigns. A score derived from Media
Cost Weighting could be referred to as a Media Cost Index, especially when utilized without dollar signs.

- Encourage industry media evaluation, research and analysis firms to adopt this new method as a replacement for old Advertising Value Equivalency scoring, and as a replacement for, or addition to, Clip Counts and Audience Impressions for quantitative scoring … especially if correlations to outtakes or outcomes is to be undertaken. The difference may be as significant as seeing, or not seeing, a relationship between outputs, outtakes and/or outcomes.

It is the hope of these authors that the research and insights shared in this paper help put to rest the Ad Value Equivalency wars, and lead PR practitioners toward clearer correlations of their hard work to real business results.

APPENDIX A

Sample LOCAL TELEVISION Data Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday - Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COST</td>
<td>IMPR</td>
<td>COST</td>
</tr>
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<td>5AM - 6AM</td>
<td>$164.45</td>
<td>33,200</td>
<td>$91.50</td>
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<td>6AM - 7AM</td>
<td>$178.44</td>
<td>36,100</td>
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<td>7AM - 8AM</td>
<td>$213.37</td>
<td>43,200</td>
<td>$286.37</td>
</tr>
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<td>8AM - 9AM</td>
<td>$187.08</td>
<td>37,900</td>
<td>$323.11</td>
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<td>9AM - 10AM</td>
<td>$290.09</td>
<td>52,900</td>
<td>$221.78</td>
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<td>10AM - 11AM</td>
<td>$465.44</td>
<td>84,900</td>
<td>$57.34</td>
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<td>11AM - 12PM</td>
<td>$618.86</td>
<td>112,900</td>
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<td>12PM - 1PM</td>
<td>$462.57</td>
<td>84,400</td>
<td>$279.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1PM - 2PM</td>
<td>$279.51</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>$299.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2PM - 3PM</td>
<td>$354.90</td>
<td>64,700</td>
<td>$234.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3PM - 4PM</td>
<td>$559.15</td>
<td>88,700</td>
<td>$356.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>4PM - 5PM</td>
<td>$849.61</td>
<td>134,800</td>
<td>$421.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5PM - 6PM</td>
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<td>11PM - 12AM</td>
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<td>1AM - 2AM</td>
<td>$55.39</td>
<td>7,700</td>
<td>$63.56</td>
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<td>2AM - 5AM</td>
<td>$34.75</td>
<td>4,300</td>
<td>$39.44</td>
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## Sample LOCAL RADIO STATION Data Table

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<th></th>
<th>Sunday</th>
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<td>COST</td>
<td>IMPR</td>
<td>COST</td>
<td>IMPR</td>
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<tr>
<td>5AM - 6AM</td>
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<td>$11.38</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>$9.22</td>
<td>1,400</td>
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<td>6AM - 10AM</td>
<td>$172.98</td>
<td>31,900</td>
<td>$69.19</td>
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<td>$51.89</td>
<td>8,600</td>
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<tr>
<td>10AM - 3PM</td>
<td>$143.94</td>
<td>32,900</td>
<td>$104.68</td>
<td>24,800</td>
<td>$78.51</td>
<td>19,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>3PM - 7PM</td>
<td>$173.12</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>$103.87</td>
<td>18,900</td>
<td>$86.56</td>
<td>14,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7PM - 12AM</td>
<td>$35.06</td>
<td>7,500</td>
<td>$52.60</td>
<td>10,600</td>
<td>$35.06</td>
<td>6,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12AM - 5AM</td>
<td>$18.75</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>$39.44</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>$21.55</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B
Measuring Media Relations Outputs for Internet Publications

If you think guidelines to measure print and broadcast media can give you a headache, trying to measure articles on the Internet is akin to getting a frontal lobotomy. How does one determine the number of people who may have seen a story on the Web, and what possible media value could it have? It’s an issue that should be at the top of mind for communications executives, especially if you consider how much faster the Internet has grown compared with the historic growth of radio and TV, for example. To get a better handle on Web measurement, PRtrak/SDI recently worked with top executives in the advertising research, media buying and Web measurement industries to develop some methodologies and guidelines that would lay a cornerstone for Internet media measurement for the PR world. These methods are now being used by a number of PR vendors and hundreds of practitioners nationwide, and include the following:

Internet Audience Estimates:

Internet audience estimates are easy to inflate, just by misunderstanding the various definitions alone.

Hits: many users cite “Hit” counts as evidence of how many times their story was accessed. But “Hits” is the most inflated number of all, since it delivers the total of all graphic elements accessed within an entire site each day.

Impressions: this number is also inflated, since it delivers the total of all pages viewed on a site per day.

Visits: since a story usually appears on a single page, the best number to use is Daily Average Visits, which shows the average number of times the site itself is accessed each day. Thus, at the most, this would be how many people could actually have seen your story. Essentially, Daily Average Visits for the Internet is the same as Gross Impressions are for broadcast stations—“eyeballs.”

Home Versus Non-Home Page Visits:
Keep in mind that “Visit” numbers tend to be available for Home Pages, which is not where most of us get story placements. So, if you wish to measure more precisely, research done by SDI and comScore MediaMetrix has shown that the likelihood of a prospect to go from a home page to a secondary (or deeper) sub-page depends upon the type of site. For example, at the low end, only 8% of visitors to a “community” site go on to a sub-page, whereas at the high end, 28% do so to a financial site.

Internet Media Values:
The metric to request is the 468 x 60 banner rate for a site. A reliable source for Internet advertising rates is:

SQAD Inc., which is the definitive standard in media-cost forecasting for the broadcast and Internet industries. SQAD obtains the real invoices paid by major ad agencies, and supplements that information with polling and then determines the “Average Banner CPM” paid by media buyers.

Using a straight banner rate for the value of a story is completely inaccurate. SDI found that what was missing in these calculations was the amount of space covered by a story, in the same way column inches are used to calculate print value. The algorithm that yields the most realistic rates—when compared to print space costs—is to use 1 banner rate for each 50 words in an article.

Adding It All Up:
Here is a summary of the steps, along with an example:

Obtain Daily Average Visits for the site
(Example: 20,000 visits)

Obtain the 468 x 60 Banner CPM
(Example: $25)

Divide Daily Average Visits by 1,000
(Example above: 20,000 divided by 1,000 = 20)

Multiply the CPM by the result above to get the full Banner Cost
(Example above: $25 x 20 = $500)

Divide the Word Count of your story by 50
(Example: a 200-word story divided by 50 = 4)

Multiply the result above by the Banner Cost for story Media Value
(4 x $500 = $2,000 Media Value)

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713.956.1516, angie@prtrak.com
Do Corporate Public Relations and Citizenship Contribute to Community-Building?
Enhancing Trust as a Resource of Social Capital

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bjin@jou.ufl.edu

Abstract
In today’s civic society, trust toward members, organizations, and communities plays a crucial role in creating and maintaining norms and values for community-building. Notably, trust is an essential foundation of the society and is facilitated by diverse communication channels. This study argues that if corporations, acting as active citizens and sources of communication messages and channels to facilitate trust, pursue sustainable development for the community beyond business profits, community members tend to perceive that the corporations will result in trust toward the community. Thus, the study aimed to examine whether corporations’ sincere public relations activities and citizenship for community-building can enhance trust as a resource of social capital and further heighten positive attitude toward the corporations. By using a between-subject experiment (N = 128), this study asked 65 undergraduates to read one fictitious news story describing one company’s sincere community-building online campaign to inspire acts of kindness and consideration as humanistic value. However, 63 undergraduates read a fictitious news story describing the company’s same community-building campaign with a self-interested intent. Results showed that there was a significant difference between the two group’s perceptions of trust toward the community, but no significant difference between the groups’ attitudes toward the company was found. These findings imply that although corporations need to make profits, they should also create the business value that is harmonious with community-building. Corporations should identify themselves with a responsible and trustful model of a citizen in society, so that their sound public relations activities and citizenship will construct the social bridge for creating mutual benefits and norms between corporations and community members.

Today’s civil society is very often confronted with various social problems, which community members, such as local companies, need to share and resolve together with other fellow members. The members express mutual interests in their common life and form bonds with specific others. This interaction in a community can occur by virtue of communication process. In particular, trust as either a communication message or channel may become such a lubricant to create, maintain, or restore our community. Given that American community has become increasingly disintegrated and disconnected in terms of social networks and trust as bases of social capital (Putnam, 1995, 2000), it is imperative to explore diverse avenues for the revival of the community and the restoration of a sense of community.

This study argues that public relations and corporate citizenship can make a contribution to community-building by enhancing trust among community members. As a facilitator of public good will and a community-builder, corporations’ sound public relations activity and citizenship can help community members to be involved more in and put a high level of trust in their community. In other words, trustworthiness, relational norms, and reciprocity among community members will be more likely to increase if corporations, acting as citizens in contemporary
society, pursue sustainable development for community beyond business profits. To address this thesis, the study examined whether corporations’ sincere commitment to humanistic and community values increases trust among community members. Moreover, it tested whether such a commitment can positively affect attitudes toward the corporations.

**Review of Literature**

**Social capital and public relations**

The notion of social capital was first invoked in Hanifan’s articles on rural school community centers in the early twentieth century (Smith, 2007). However, the renewed attention to social capital is traced to Bourdieu (1983), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000). In particular, since Putnam popularized the concept of social capital, it has been widely used in the social sciences (Castle, 2002).

According to the three thinkers, social capital refers to “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Also, it is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to a possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1983, p. 249). In its functional perspective, social capital is “not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Coleman, 1994, p. 302). Thus, social capital occupies a critical role as a socially cohesive agent in helping individuals more effectively accomplish their shared objective at the community or societal level. It is the group or organization members’ capabilities to collaborate for common purposes (Fukuyama, 1995). Furthermore, it endows the community or society with economic property and sustainable development on the grounds of the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of social interactions (Goddard, 2005b). Notably, social capital comprises two resources, social networks and trust.

The social networks as the basis of social capital refer to connectedness and relationships with other societal members, while trust as another basis is conceptualized as positive attitudes toward society and its members. Given that social ties and interactions can help to enhance the productivity of individuals and groups (Fleming, Thorson, & Peng, 2005), the social networks are a critical catalyst to build a community. Trust also becomes a foundation and a lubricant to build up a healthy community and civil society because the high levels of societal trust can facilitate better cooperation and communication among societal members (Botan & Taylor, 2005). Ultimately, the resources bring about such an outcome as social participation (Brehm & Rhan, 1997; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

The notion of social capital may be conceptually consistent with public relations (Ihlen, 2005) because both in the best situations facilitate interactions, reciprocity, and relational norms among members in groups, organizations, community, or society. Kennan and Hazleton (2006) argued that internal public relationships of an organization can be cultivated and maintained by social capital’s structural, relational, and communicative dimensions. In other words, the structural system of social network connections helps to generate relational outcomes among members in a given organization, particularly when the members put trust in each other and communicate and share information effectively. The understanding of internal public relationships of an organization can be expanded into that of relationships among members at a community or societal level as well. Given that the community or societal members also need to
cooperate and build relationships, their social connections and trust are critical components for building a healthy community and society.

Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) maintain that public relations should perform a critical role for community-building. As a community-builder, public relations provides a foundation to promote and maintain a sense of community among organizations and their publics and stakeholders through a range of ways. That is, the sense of community can be facilitated by communicating social ties, norms, institutions, and reciprocity through the functions of public relations. Consequently, the productivity and civic participation of individuals and groups will be enhanced in the community.

To sustain the sense of community and develop communities, social capital’s two resources, social networks and trust, are helpful (Putnam, 2000). In particular, social networks, shared norms, and values for community-building can be increased by the presence of trust among community members. If these members place trust in society, its members, organizations, or groups, the higher level of social interactions, norms, and cohesion will be produced. Critically, trust is an essential foundation of civil society that comprises diverse communities (Fukuyama, 1995), while it is understood through communication channels (Botan & Taylor, 2005). If corporations as an organization can be the sources of communication messages and channels to enhance trust as a basis of social capital, the corporations’ participations for community-building will be able to trigger individuals’ sense of community. Furthermore, once corporations are aware of their rights and responsibilities as a responsible member and citizen in community, corporate citizenship will help to foster social trust and its positive environment.

**Corporate citizenship and social capital**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has garnered attention from public relations researcher due to similar functions and connections (Clark, 2000). CSR activities and programs offer the publics and stakeholders of corporations opportunities to observe the civic behavior of corporations (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). CSR programs, by contributing to sustainable development of local community and society, also create economic benefits and business values for the companies. By participating in CSR activities, furthermore, corporations are persuaded to identify themselves with “citizens” with rights and responsibilities in society (Tracey, Phillips, & Haugh, 2005). This function of business can be consistent with that of public relations, which generates public goodwill through business-community partnerships.

Corporate citizenship is clearly shown in the “strategies and operating practices a company develops in operationalizing its relationships with and impacts on stakeholders and the natural environment” (Waddock, 2004, p. 9). In a contemporary civil society, this corporate citizenship is considered as a social bridge connecting corporations with communities in order to strengthen community relations (Goddard, 2005a). By acknowledging the social, cultural, environmental, and economic responsibilities and duties, corporations should build relationships and values with publics and create a sense of community, as well as committing to information transparency and ethical behavior. For community-building, good corporate citizenship includes producing social norms and interactions through mutual relationships between corporations and its publics (e.g., local government, community members, educational institutions, and the like).

Notably, corporate citizenship may create social capital, so that civic participation will be expected to initiate a healthy community, where social, cultural, political, and economic prosperity and harmony are proliferated. Once corporations as a community citizen conduct community outreach programs for the prosperity of the community, then community members
may be involved in the programs while they trust each other and form social ties. Social capital is also needed in the process of CSR and establishing social standards (Hiss, 2006). Goddard (2005b) argues that the level of social participation and positive perceptions of public and private sectors can be enhanced by corporate activities that promote the community. For example, the BHP Billiton Zamzama gas project in Pakistan provided government, civic organizations, and local community with a local educational system. These CSR program and support were able to facilitate social cohesion and harmony to produce both corporate and community growth.

Corporations’ commitment to and involvement in community, as citizens in civil society, may form the higher level of trust as a basis of social capital among community-based stakeholders. When community members perceive corporations’ genuine concern and efforts for creating a sense of community including humanistic values, the members will be more likely to believe that such concern and efforts can increase trust among them and in their community. Furthermore, their perception of the genuine concern and efforts will shape positive attitudes toward the corporations as good citizens. Thus, the following hypotheses are posed:

H1: Corporations’ sincere commitment to community-building will heighten community members’ trust toward their community and society.

H2: Corporations’ sincere commitment to community-building will shape community members’ positive attitudes toward the corporations.

Methods

Participants

One hundred and twenty eight undergraduate students at a Southeastern public university volunteered to participate in this study. Undergraduate students represent one community group in a college town, which affects a company’s public relations activity by setting agendas through the Internet. Participants were recruited from advertising and public relations courses and received extra credit in exchange for their voluntary participation. Of the 128 respondents ($N = 128$), the majority were female (84.4%), senior (68.0%), and White (79.7%). The respondents’ ages ranged from 19 to 31, with the mean age being 21.05 years ($SD = 1.24$).

Design

This study employed the between-subject experiment method, so the 128 participants were randomly assigned to two groups (sincere vs. self-interesting commitment). Two news stories describing an actual hotel conglomerate’s campaign were adopted and modified from a real news story. The hotel’s name was also changed. One story described the intent of the hotel’s sincere community-building campaign to inspire acts of kindness and consideration as humanistic value and the other described the same company’s campaign with a self-interesting intent.

Procedure

The two groups were asked to read different news stories: the first group read the short article that described the company’s sincere community-building campaign and the second one read the article that described the company’s campaign with a self-interesting intent. After reading the intent news stories, the two groups were asked to respond to a questionnaire, designed to measure the level of the company’s motive (sincerity vs. self-interest) behind the
campaign. The groups were also asked to rate trust toward their community. Also, participants were asked to respond with their attitude toward the company.

**Key variables**

Trust toward their community, a dependent variable, was measured with five items using a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) point Likert scale: “The hotel’s campaign will help people in their communities to try to” 1) be caring to each other, 2) be generous to each other, 3) trust their communities, 4) brighten their communities, and 5) care about their communities. Reliability for this scale was high ($\alpha = .83$). The mean score for the five-item scale was 4.18, $SD = .96$.

Attitude toward the company, a dependent variable, was gauged with four items, using a seven-point semantic differential scale; unfavorable/favorable, interested/altruistic, bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Reliability for this scale was also high ($\alpha = .94$). The mean score for the six item scale was 4.13, $SD = .96$.

**Results**

**Manipulation check**

The corporations’ intent of commitment to community of two news stories was tested to ensure that the manipulation of the intent type was in the expected direction. This was assessed with two questions reflecting that the hotel’s campaign is “a socially responsible activity created to care about people” or “a genuine concern for publics as a socially responsible activity,” using a seven-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). After this, an independent samples $t$-test confirmed that the intent of commitment between the two groups was significantly different (Sincere $M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.30$; Self-interesting $M = 3.92$ $SD = 1.15$) ($t[126] = 5.51$, $p < .001$).

**Evidence for Hypotheses**

Two one-way ANOVA tests were performed to examine two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that corporations’ sincere commitment to community-building will enhance community members’ trust toward their community. Results show that participants who read the company’s community-building campaign with the sincere intent had a higher score of trust ($M = 4.49$, $SD = .96$) than participants who read the second article that described the company’s campaign with a self-interesting intent ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .85$; $F[1, 110] = 11.47$). A post hoc test reveals that the mean difference between sincere and self-interesting group is significant ($p < .001$). In other words, those who perceive corporations’ campaign for community-building with the sincere intent tend to trust toward their community than those who perceive the self-interesting intent. Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that corporations’ sincere commitment to community-building will shape community members’ positive attitudes toward the corporations. Results present that there were no significant differences among the two groups ($F[1, 111] = .547$, $p > .461$). This indicates that irrespective of their sincere or self-interesting intent, corporations’ campaign for community-building does not tend to affect people’s attitudes toward corporations. Thus, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

**Discussion**
This study addressed that corporations’ sound public relations activities and citizenship for community building can enhance trust as a resource of social capital among community members. Importantly, the study revealed that the trust can be positively affected by corporations’ genuine and sincere concern for community. Given that corporations’ sound citizenship for and commitment to community can generate a high level of trust, the study provides public relations and CSR scholarship with critical implications.

As noted earlier, Kruckeberg and Starck (1988) asserted that the essential role of public relations is to promote and maintain a sense of community, which should be facilitated by a range of avenues. For this, contemporary public relations needs to communicate and create such a value as trust. In civil society, trust also needs to be incorporated into the sense of community because trust plays a role as both communication message and channel, which help societal members to better cooperate and build relationships. The members’ trust toward society and others strengthens social ties, norms, and reciprocity, so that their active participation in community will be anticipated. In particular, given that American community has become increasingly disconnected in terms of civic participations such as voting, donating, and volunteering (Putnam, 1995, 2000), the restoration of the sense of community is urgently needed.

Although corporations aim to make more profits, they should also strive to create their business value, which can be harmonious with value for community-building. By doing so, corporations can identify themselves with good citizens in society and further enjoy business-community partnership. Goddard (2005a) noted that this good corporate citizenship functions as a social bridge between corporations and communities. If companies can become a role model of citizen in communities, they will be more likely to pave the way for creating mutual benefits for corporations and its publics.

Interestingly, this study found that community members’ attitudes toward corporations are not affected by the corporations’ public relations campaign for community regardless of the corporations’ sincere or self-interesting intent. This finding implies that even if a company attempts to initiate public relations programs for community-building with its intent of making profits (e.g., marketing gimmick), such public relations activities can still offer a foundation for creating a healthy community. That is, community members may not care about the intent of the activities, but rather they may focus more on ultimate outcomes such as enhancing trust.

Despite its vital theoretical and practical implications, this study has its limitations. First, this small convenience sampling, which included college students, cannot generalize the results to a larger population. A randomly chosen, large sampling should include diversity in age and ethnicity because our communities and society consist of more various publics. Next, another limitation of the study did not include control variables. For example, the type of community (urban vs. rural) may affect individuals’ trust toward their community. Therefore, future research should examine whether there is any different perception of trust among urban and rural community members when corporations try to enhance a sense of community in the two types. Finally, the study did not attempt to investigate the effect of corporations’ sound public relations and citizenship on social networks as another basis of social capital. For this reason, further research needs to do this.

References


Factors Affecting E-mail Rumor Belief and Activity:  
The Effects of Type of Rumor and Organization-Public Relationships  
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Abstract  
A 2 (rumor type: dread vs. wish) × 2 (OPR: good vs. bad) between-subject design experiment was conducted to examine the effects of rumor type and OPR on rumor belief and activities. The result showed the significant main effects of rumor type and the interaction effects of rumor type by OPR on rumor beliefs and activity intentions.  

Introduction  
Before the era of telecommunication, rumors spread mainly via word-of-mouth. Due to the development of communication technology, especially the Internet, people can spread rumors without the limitation of time and space. As a result of abundant information flowing out on the Internet, nowadays rumors circulate everywhere.  

From the perspective of public relations, rumors are generally considered harmful or potentially harmful, but are extremely difficult to control, especially on the Internet (Kimmel, 2004). A previous study showed that harmful rumors reach public relations professionals almost once per week on average (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000). These harmful rumors can damage organizations’ reputations or lead them to financial disaster (e.g., the loss of sales; DiFonzo, Bordia, & Rosnow, 1994). For organizations, rumors are like sparks that could possibly ignite and become a large fire. In other words, rumors can be considered as potential activators of crises for the organizations. Given the potentially harmful effect of rumors, public relations practitioners should try to manage rumors before they become real crises (Basso, 1997).  

Some rumors related to an organization conjure people’s anxiety by depicting dreadful consequences or events; others invoke false hope by referring to wishful results. According to the different emotional consequences from each type of rumor, people may react differently. However, no matter what kind of emotion is induced, a rumor can potentially result in conflict between an organization and its public. A dread rumor may induce anger toward the organization, and a wish rumor may cause disappointment about the organization when it turns out to be false. Moreover, those reactions may appear differently in accordance with the relationship quality between the organization and its public. A well-managed relationship with the organization would facilitate resolution when there is a conflict with the public (Huang, 2001a). Studies in crisis communication have found that relationship history has an influence on an organization’s reputation and on people’s behavior intentions (e.g., purchase) in crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Therefore, it is significant to examine the effect of relationship in the process of rumors, which are potential crises.
Accordingly, this study attempts to examine the effects of type of rumor (wish vs. dread rumors) and organization-public relationship (good vs. bad relationship) on people’s rumor belief and rumor activity intentions (e.g., rumor transmission, rumor verification). A 2 (type of rumor: wish vs. dread rumor) × 2 (OPR: good vs. bad) between-subject design experiment was conducted at a large Midwestern university.

The results of the study will help public relations managers to understand factors that affect people’s processing of rumors. Furthermore, this study will add a good body of knowledge for developing effective strategies to combat harmful rumors.

**Literature Review**

*Rumors and E-mail Rumors*

Rumor can be generally defined as “a story or statement in general circulation without confirmation or certainty as to fact,” or an “unconfirmed proposition” (Kimmel, 2004, p. 21). The sociological view of rumor suggests it arises from external threats or a new event that cannot be understood within the context of “established assumptions” (Rosnow, 1974). Thus, a lack of certainty is one of the critical elements of rumor. Also, rumor has been understood as everyday conversation transferred by word-of-mouth (Wilson, 1994). This notion is consistent with Kimmel’s definition (2004) that rumor has a characteristic of “circulation.” Thus, all rumors have rumor publics in which they are active and circulated (Allport & Postman 1947).

**Although not all rumors are harmful, many can cause negative results. For example, rumors can negatively affect an organization in diverse aspects such as damage to the organization’s reputation, reduction in productivity and sales, etc. In other words, rumors can affect not only a company’s credibility, but also its financial status (DiFonzo et al., 1994).**

Similar or even much worse harmful effects can be expected from rumors disseminated on the Internet. The impact and spreading speed of rumors has become larger than ever because of the advancement of telecommunications, especially the Internet. E-mail is one of the primary tools for Internet interactions (Fearn-Banks, 2002). Stromer-Galley (2000) argued that the World-Wide-Web coupled with e-mail caused people to find and disseminate information more easily than ever. Moreover, e-mail messages are delivered directly to users’ own accounts, and can be easily forwarded to multiple receivers.

The current study defines e-mail rumors as an unverified proposition of belief, which bears topical relevance for persons actively involved in its disseminations via e-mail by adapting Rosnow and Kimmel’s (2000) definition.

**General Rumor Process**

DiFonzo et al. (1994) proposed three stages of rumor activities: generation, evaluation, and dissemination. They explained that when people perceive that the information is not sufficient although they have interests in the situation, most rumors will be processed through all stages.

Uncertainty and anxiety are key factors of rumor generation, followed by the evaluation stage, when people evaluate a rumor’s authenticity, and lastly, rumors are disseminated (DiFonzo et al., 1994). In the first stages of rumor activity, also known as parturition (Rosnow, 1974), or dependency and inclusion phases (Bordia & Rosnow, 1998; Wheelan, 1994), the
situation approached by the rumor is not clearly defined, and people are expecting directions and more information before believing or disbelieving the rumor. Moreover, some studies found belief as a good predictor of rumor activities when the message includes consequences or threats, or when it refers to a new event that is not clear or comprehensible for the receivers (DiFonzo et al., 1994; Koenig, 1985; Rosnow 1974; 1988). In other words, people are more prone to transmit a rumor when they believe the rumor is true than when they believe it is false. People typically do not want to do things that will embarrass them, and they tend to be reluctant to spread an anxiety-inducing rumor that may later be proven to be false (Rosnow, 1988).

E-mail Rumor Activities

Although e-mail has a high potential as a powerful medium of rumor transmission, few studies have been conducted to examine intentional or behavioral processes of e-mail rumor transmission. However, scholarly research on viral marketing via email can provide a good body of knowledge regarding e-mail rumor transmissions because rumors and viral marketing messages are similar in the aspects that they circulate (Kimmel, 2004) and diffuse via word-of-mouth (Wilson, 1994).

Phelps et al. (2004) examined consumer responses to transmitted emails in the context of word-of-mouth advertising. They found people’s motivations and behaviors related to e-mail transmission, and proposed a typical pass-along e-mail episode model. A focus group interview showed that receiving a forwarded e-mail may direct people to find out further information from other sources, such as experts or related websites. The results also implicated that transmitted e-mails may lead people to discuss the e-mail message with others via other channels, such as face-to-face or telephone conversations (Phelps et al., 2004).

Type of Rumor: Dread Rumors vs. Wish Rumors

Rumors can be categorized as dread and wish rumors according to the degree of anxiety that a rumor invokes (Rosnow, Esposito, & Gibney, 1988). Dread rumors refer undesirable or fearful consequences so that conjures people’s anxiety, whereas wish rumors contain desirable or hopeful consequences (Allport & Postman, 1947).

Rosnow (1991) found that rumors inducing more anxiety, or dread rumors, are more likely to be transmitted. Thus, the type of rumor, causing more or less anxiety to the perceivers, might influence the process of belief and transmission. For instance, findings in impression formation literature have shown that negative information is weighted more heavily than positive information, and that people pay more attention to negative than to positive information (Pratto & John, 1991). More recently, Smith and Petty (1996) have found that negative framing of the messages makes people think more about the message, and might lead to a more effortful processing or message elaboration. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis to examine the main effects of type of rumor on rumor activity intentions (i.e., rumor transmission via e-mail, rumor transmission to other places on the Internet, rumor transmission in person, and rumor verification).
H1: The rumor activity intentions on dread e-mail rumors are stronger than the rumor activity intentions on wish e-mail rumors.

From those findings, it can be expected that people may show different strength of belief in accordance with the type of rumor (i.e., dread or wish rumor). According to previous studies (DiFonzo et al., 1994; Koenig, 1985; Rosnow 1974; 1988) belief plays a role as a predictor of rumor activities. Therefore, exploring the relationship between the type of rumor and rumor belief may provide public relations managers with valuable insights to predict their key public’s rumor activities. Hence, we proposed the following research question and hypothesis:

RQ1: Will there be a difference in belief between dread e-mail rumors and wish e-mail rumors?

The Role of Organization-Public Relationship in Rumor Processing

The term, “relationship,” is commonly positioned as a core concept in public relations. As Ledingham and Bruning (1998) pointed out, the existing relationship influences how publics interpret current events or interactions in the relationship with the organization. In rumor processing, people define the authenticity of a rumor based on available cognitions related to the rumor issues (DiFonzo et al., 1994). People’s perception of the relationship with the organization is one of the available cognitions related to the issue.

Several scholars have developed scales to measure the quality of the relationship between an organization and its publics (e.g., Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001b). In general, the basic organization-public relationship (OPR) is formed with four dimensions: trust, control mutuality, relationship satisfaction, and relationship commitment (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Trust is “a willingness to risk oneself because the relational partner is perceived as benevolent and honest” (Canary & Cupach, 1988, p.308). Control mutuality can be defined as “the degree to which parties agree on who has rightful power to influence one another” (Grunig & Hon, 1999). Relationship satisfaction refers to the degree of satisfaction of organization and its publics get from their relationship (Huang, 2001b). Relationship satisfaction includes affective cognition (Huang, 2001b), and can be measured by thought, feelings or behaviors in relationships (Ferguson, 1984). Relationship commitment is the extent to which one party believes and feels that the relationship is worth the effort to maintain and promote (Hon & Grunig, 1999). There are two aspects of the commitment: 1) affective commitment: a public’s emotional or affective feeling toward an organization, and 2) continuous commitment: an intention to continue certain actions (Meyer & Allen 1984).

Previous studies have found the organization-public relationship to be a significant factor influencing people’s perception of an organization in conflicts or crises (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001b; Ki & Hon, 2007). Coombs and Holladay (2001), for example, found that people in unfavorable relationships perceived the organization to have more crisis responsibility and a worse reputation than people in favorable relationships. Huang (2001a) found that the OPR mediates between public relations strategies and conflict resolution. That is, a favorable relationship between organization and public facilitates conflict resolution between those two parties. Among the OPR’s dimensions, Huang (1999) found that trust, along with control mutuality, is a major variable in mediating the effectiveness of public relations when resolving conflicts.
The present study viewed rumor as potential crises or conflicts, and attempted to examine the effect of organization-public relationship (OPR) on rumor belief and rumor activity intentions. Based on the above discussion, we proposed the following research questions.

RQ2: Will there be a difference in rumor activity intentions between people with good OPR and people with bad OPR?

RQ3: Will there be a difference in belief in e-mail rumors between people with good OPR and people with bad OPR?

Previous studies have found a deflective power of a favorable relationship in crises. For instance, people with a positive view of an organization will ignore information that contradicts the favorable reputation (Balzer & Sulsky, 1992; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). An unfavorable relationship would intensify the negative perception of an organization in crises (Coombs, 1999). Applying the concept in rumor processing, people with good OPR may process dread rumors and wish rumors differently from people with bad OPR. Hence, the following research question was proposed to investigate the interaction effect of the type of rumor by OPR.

RQ4: Will there be a significant interaction effect of type of rumor by OPR on rumor activity intentions?

RQ5: Will there be a significant interaction effect of type of rumor by OPR on belief in rumors?

Method

Design and Stimuli Materials

A 2 (type of rumor: wish vs. dread rumor) × 2 (OPR: good vs. bad) between-subjects experiment was conducted to test the effects of rumor type and OPR on rumor belief and rumor activity intentions. Organization-public relationship was manipulated as public with good vs. bad OPR with the organization. A large Midwestern university and its students were chosen as the tested organization and public. Students at the university were asked to assess their OPR with the university. Later, the students were divided into two groups by the mean split of the OPR.

Type of rumor was manipulated as wish and dread e-mail rumors about the organization (i.e., the university). The topic of the rumor was regarding the parking fee on campus. The content of the wish rumor was “the decrease in parking fee on campus;” the content of the dread rumor was “the increase in parking fee on campus” (see stimuli in Appendix 1). The messages were presented in a general plain-text e-mail format, and the length of the rumors was controlled.

Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the two rumor conditions: wish rumor (N = 52), dread rumor (N = 57). Personal relevance to the topic was controlled as a covariate since personal relevance was found to influence people’s processing of rumors (see Bordia, et al. 2005).

Participants

A total of 109 undergraduate and graduate students (50 males, 59 females) at a large Midwestern university participated in the experiment. The mean age of participants was 22. Caucasian (60%), Asian (24%), African American (12%), Hispanic (3%), and Native American (1%) made up the sample.

Measures

OPR was measured using a 16-item scale adapted from Huang’s (2001b) OPRA scale. The dimension of trust, control mutuality, relationship satisfaction, and relationship commitment
were measured. Here are some examples of measured items for each dimension: 1) trust: “The university is honest with me;” 2) control mutuality: “In most cases, both the university and I, as a student, have equal influence in the decision-making process;” 3) relationship satisfaction: “In general, I am satisfied with my relationship with the university;” 4) relationship commitment: “I hope to have a long-lasting relationship with the university.” Each participant rated his or her answers on a 7-point scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Belief in rumors was measured using five items adopted from Bordia, et al. (2005). Participants were asked to rate the e-mail as “credible-not credible,” “believable-not believable,” “truthful-not truthful,” “reliable-unreliable,” and “convincing-not convincing” on a 7-point scale.

Rumor activity intentions measured in this study were: 1) transmitting the rumor via e-mail, 2) transmitting the rumor to other places on the Internet, 3) transmitting the rumor in person, and 4) verifying the rumor. Transmitting the rumor via e-mail was measured by asking two questions: “Will you forward the e-mail to your friends?” and “Will you add your comments and forward the e-mail to your friends?” Transmitting the rumor to other places on the Internet was measured by asking two questions: “Will you post the e-mail on a blog?” and “Will you discuss the e-mail in chat rooms?” Transmitting the rumor in person was measured by asking two questions: “Will you tell your friends the message in person?” and “Will you discuss the e-mail in person?” Last, verifying the rumor was measured by asking: “Will you verify the message by asking the university’s parking department directly?” Each participant rated rumor activity intentions by using a 7-point scale anchored by 1 = definitely not to 7 = definitely. These rumor activity items were developed by referring previous studies (e.g. DiFonzo et al., 1994; Phelps et al., 2004; Rosnow, 1988)

Personal relevance to the topic was measured by a six-item measure (Zaichkowsky 1985; Bordia, et al. 2005). Participants were asked to rate the e-mail as “important,” “concerning,” “relevant,” “meaningful,” “a matter,” and “significant” on 7-point bipolar scales.

Procedure

Each participant received booklets including a cover letter, the scale of OPR, a wish or dread rumor, and a questionnaire. The participants were randomly allocated to two rumor conditions (i.e., wish or dread rumors). First, participants were asked to assess the relationships between them and the university. Then, they were told that they just received an e-mail from a student in the university. After reading the e-mail, they were asked to answer questions measuring rumor belief, rumor activity intentions, etc. Last, demographic questions were asked.

Results

Reliability

The results of reliability analysis showed a Cronbach’s alpha of .93 for the OPR scale. For the OPR’s dimensions, the results showed a Cronbach’s alpha of .80 for trust, .57 for control mutuality, .80 for relationship satisfaction, and .87 for relationship commitment. The Cronbach’s alphas for transmitting the rumor via e-mail, transmitting the rumor to other places on the Internet, and transmitting the rumor in person were .91, .76, and .85 respectively. The Cronbach’s alpha was .86 for belief in rumors, and .95 for personal relevance to the topic.

Data Analysis

The participants were first divided into two groups by the mean split of OPR (M = 4.65, SD = 1.01): good OPR (N = 58), bad OPR (N = 51). To test whether the effects of the dimensions of OPR (e.g., trust, etc.) on dependent measures (e.g., rumor belief), the participants
were also divided into two groups by the mean split of the dimensions of OPR: trust ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.17$), control mutuality ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .94$), relationship satisfaction ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.14$), and relationship commitment ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.38$). The numbers of the sample in each condition, and the descriptive statistics of the measures in this study are shown in Table 1. Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used to test the main and interaction effects of type of rumor on rumor processing outcomes. Personal relevance to the rumor topic was controlled as a covariate.

Table 1-1. *Descriptive statistics of dependent measures by experimental conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Type of rumor</th>
<th>OPR</th>
<th>Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wish (n = 52)</td>
<td>Dread (n = 57)</td>
<td>Good (n = 58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in Rumors</td>
<td>2.77 (1.46)</td>
<td>3.72 (1.29)</td>
<td>3.25 (1.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of Transmitting the Rumor via E-mail</td>
<td>2.51 (1.98)</td>
<td>2.64 (1.64)</td>
<td>2.63 (1.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of Transmitting the Rumor to Other Places on the Internet</td>
<td>1.79 (1.49)</td>
<td>2.01 (1.36)</td>
<td>1.75 (1.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of Transmitting the Rumor in Person</td>
<td>3.51 (1.99)</td>
<td>4.31 (1.61)</td>
<td>4.03 (1.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of Verifying the Rumor</td>
<td>3.51 (2.23)</td>
<td>4.09 (1.95)</td>
<td>3.65 (2.19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1-2. Descriptive statistics of dependent measures by experimental conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Control Mutuality High (n = 59)</th>
<th>Control Mutuality Low (n = 50)</th>
<th>Relationship Satisfaction High (n = 60)</th>
<th>Relationship Satisfaction Low (n = 49)</th>
<th>Relationship Commitment High (n = 62)</th>
<th>Relationship Commitment Low (n = 47)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in Rumors</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.45 (1.38)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.05 (1.51)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.21 (1.43)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.33 (1.48)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.22 (1.45)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.34 (1.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of Transmitting the</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 2.62 (1.75)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 2.53 (1.87)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 2.50 (1.70)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 2.67 (1.92)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 2.77 (1.79)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 2.33 (1.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumor via E-mail</td>
<td>Intention of Transmitting the</td>
<td>Intention of Transmitting the</td>
<td>Intention of Transmitting the</td>
<td>Intention of Transmitting the</td>
<td>Intention of Transmitting the</td>
<td>Intention of Transmitting the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumor to Other Places on the</td>
<td>Rumor in Person</td>
<td>Rumor to Other Places on the</td>
<td>Rumor in Person</td>
<td>Rumor in Person</td>
<td>Rumor in Person</td>
<td>Rumor in Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.98 (1.90)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 4.04 (1.89)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.80 (1.79)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.87 (1.72)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.98 (1.93)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.87 (1.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention of Verifying the</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.83 (2.17)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.68 (2.15)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.98 (2.05)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.77 (2.16)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.87 (2.03)</td>
<td>Mean (SD) = 3.87 (2.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumor</td>
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The Effects of Type of Rumor on Belief in Rumors and Rumor Activity Intentions

In H1, we proposed that rumor activity intentions on dread e-mail rumors are stronger than intentions on wish e-mail rumors. As predicted, the results of MANCOVA showed a significant main effect of type of rumor on the intention of rumor transmission in person, $F(1, 107) = 4.41, p < .05$. Participants intended to transmit dread rumors ($M = 4.26, SE = .23$) in person more than wish rumors ($M = 3.56, SE = .24$).

However, the results of MANCOVA show no significant main effect of type of rumor on other rumor activity intentions: transmitting the rumor via e-mail, $F(1, 107) = .0001, p = n.s.$; transmitting the rumor to other places on the Internet, $F(1, 107) = .26, p = n.s.$; and verifying the rumor, $F(1, 107) = 1.43, p = n.s.$.

RQ1 was proposed to examine the main effect of rumor types on people’s belief in rumors. The results of MANCOVA showed a significant main effect of type of rumor on belief
in e-mail rumors, \( F(1, 107) = 11.83, p < .01 \). Participants believed in dread rumors (\( M = 3.66, \ SE = .17 \)) more than wish rumors (\( M = 2.82, \ SE = .18 \)).

The Effects of OPR on Belief in Rumors and Rumor Activity Intentions

RQ2 was proposed to test the main effect of OPR on rumor activity intentions. The results of MANCOVA showed no significant main effect of OPR on rumor activity intentions: transmitting the rumor via e-mail, \( F(1, 107) = .0002, p = \text{n.s.} \), transmitting the rumor to other places on the Internet, \( F(1, 107) = 1.85, p = \text{n.s.} \), transmitting the rumor in person, \( F(1, 107) = .24, p = \text{n.s.} \), and verifying the rumor, \( F(1, 107) = .89, p = \text{n.s.} \).

Through further analysis of each dimension of OPR, the results showed a significant main effect of relationship satisfaction on transmitting the rumor to other places on the Internet, \( F(1, 107) = 4.50, p < .05 \). Participants with low relationship satisfaction (\( M = 2.21, \ SE = .20 \)) showed a stronger intention of transmitting the rumor to other places on the Internet than did those with high relationship satisfaction (\( M = 1.65, \ SE = .18 \)). However, there was no significant main effect of relationship satisfaction on other rumor activity intentions: transmitting via e-mail, \( F(1, 107) = .19, p = \text{n.s.} \), transmitting in person, \( F(1, 107) = .95, p = \text{n.s.} \), and verifying the rumor, \( F(1, 107) = .78, p = \text{n.s.} \).

Additionally, no significant main effect of the other OPR’s dimensions was found on rumor activity intentions: 1) transmitting the rumor via e-mail: trust, \( F(1, 107) = .13, p = \text{n.s.} \), control mutuality, \( F(1, 107) = .006, p = \text{n.s.} \), and relationship commitment: \( F(1, 107) = 1.37, p = \text{n.s.} \); 2) transmitting the rumor to other places on the Internet: trust, \( F(1, 107) = .55, p = \text{n.s.} \), control mutuality, \( F(1, 107) = .46, p = \text{n.s.} \), and relationship commitment: \( F(1, 107) = .60, p = \text{n.s.} \); 3) transmitting the rumor in person: trust, \( F(1, 107) = 1.91, p = \text{n.s.} \), control mutuality, \( F(1, 107) = .03, p = \text{n.s.} \), and relationship commitment: \( F(1, 107) = .11, p = \text{n.s.} \); and 4) verifying the rumor: trust, \( F(1, 107) = .25, p = \text{n.s.} \), control mutuality, \( F(1, 107) = .001, p = \text{n.s.} \), and relationship commitment: \( F(1, 107) = .07, p = \text{n.s.} \).

In RQ3, we tested the effect of OPR on belief in e-mail rumors, but found no significant main effect of OPR on belief in e-mail rumors, \( F(1, 107) = .08, p = \text{n.s.} \). The results also showed no significant main effect of the OPR’s dimensions on belief in e-mail rumors: trust, \( F(1, 107) = .31, p = \text{n.s.} \), control mutuality, \( F(1, 107) = 2.34, p = \text{n.s.} \), relationship satisfaction: \( F(1, 107) = .04, p = \text{n.s.} \), and relationship commitment: \( F(1, 107) = .05, p = \text{n.s.} \).

The Interaction Effects of Type of Rumor by OPR on Dependent Measures

RQ4 was proposed to examine the interaction effect of rumor type by OPR on rumor activity intentions. The results of MANCOVA showed a marginally significant interaction effect of type of rumor by OPR on the intention of verifying rumors, \( F(1, 107) = 3.52, p = .06 \). As Figure 1 shows, people with good OPR had a stronger intention of verifying dread rumors than did people with bad OPR; whereas people with bad OPR had a stronger intention of verifying wish rumors than did people with good OPR. The effect of rumor type on the intention of verifying rumors was particularly strong with people in the condition of good OPR. However, no significant main effect of OPR was found on other rumor activity intentions: transmitting the rumor via e-mail, \( F(1, 107) = .74, p = \text{n.s.} \), transmitting the rumor to other places on the Internet, \( F(1, 107) = .12, p = \text{n.s.} \), transmitting the rumor in person, \( F(1, 107) = .29, p = \text{n.s.} \).

We further tested the interaction effects of type of rumor by OPR’s dimensions on rumor activity intentions. Similarly, the results showed significant interaction effects of type of rumor by three dimensions of OPR on the intention of verifying the rumor: trust, \( F(1, 107) = 9.41, p \)
< .01, control mutuality, \( F(1, 107) = 4.73, p < .05 \), and relationship satisfaction, \( F(1, 107) = 6.93, p < .05 \). But no significant interaction effect of type of rumor by relationship commitment on the intention of verifying the rumor was found, \( F(1, 107) = 3.18, p = \text{n.s} \). As shown in Figure 2, 3 and 4, the results showed similar interaction effects of type of rumor by trust/control mutuality/relationship satisfaction on the intention of verifying the rumor. People with high trust/control mutuality/relationship satisfaction had a stronger intention of verifying dread rumors than did people with low trust/control mutuality/relationship satisfaction; whereas people with low trust/control mutuality/relationship satisfaction had a stronger intention of verifying wish rumors than did people with high trust/control mutuality/relationship satisfaction. The effect of rumor type on the intention of verifying rumors was particularly strong with people having high trust/control mutuality/relationship satisfaction with the organization.

*Figure 1: The interaction effect of type of rumor by OPR on the intention of verifying the rumor*

*Figure 2: The interaction effect of type of rumor by trust on the intention of verifying the rumor*
Figure 3: The interaction effect of type of rumor by control mutuality on the intention of verifying the rumor

Figure 4: The interaction effect of type of rumor by relationship satisfaction on the intention of verifying the rumor
There was a marginally significant interaction effect of type of rumor by relationship satisfaction on transmitting rumors via e-mail, $F(1, 107) = 3.53, p = .06$. As Figure 5 shows, people with high relationship satisfaction had a stronger intention of transmitting dread rumors via e-mail than did people with low relationship satisfaction; whereas people with low relationship satisfaction had a stronger intention of transmitting wish rumors via e-mail than did people with high relationship satisfaction.

Figure 5: The interaction effect of type of rumor by relationship satisfaction on the intention of transmitting the rumor via e-mail

The results showed a marginally significant interaction effect of type of rumor by relationship commitment on transmitting rumors in person, $F(1, 107) = 3.52, p = .06$. As shown in Figure 6, people with high relationship commitment had a stronger intention of transmitting dread rumors in person than did people with low relationship commitment; whereas people with low relationship commitment had a stronger intention of transmitting wish rumors in person than did people with high relationship commitment. The effect of type of rumor on the intention of
transmitting e-mail rumors in person was particularly strong with people having high commitment with the organization.

Figure 6: The interaction effect of type of rumor by relationship commitment on the intention of transmitting the rumor in person

![Graph showing interaction effect](image)

No other significant interaction effect was found: 1) transmitting the rumor via e-mail: trust, $F(1, 107) = .15, p = n.s.$, control mutuality, $F(1, 107) = .83, p = n.s.$, and relationship commitment: $F(1, 107) = 1.38, p = n.s.$; 2) transmitting the rumor to other places on the Internet: trust, $F(1, 107) = .24, p = n.s.$, control mutuality, $F(1, 107) = .10, p = n.s.$, relationship satisfaction, $F(1, 107) = 1.07, p = n.s.$, and relationship commitment: $F(1, 107) = .48, p = n.s.$; 3) transmitting the rumor in person: trust, $F(1, 107) = .69, p = n.s.$, control mutuality, $F(1, 107) = .02, p = n.s.$, and relationship satisfaction: $F(1, 107) = .11, p = n.s.$.

In RQ5, we tested the interaction effect of rumor type by OPR on rumor belief, but the results showed no significant interaction effect of type of rumor by OPR on belief in e-mail rumors, $F(1, 107) = .30, p = n.s.$ Also, there was no significant interaction effect of OPR’s dimensions on rumor belief: trust, $F(1, 107) = .07, p = n.s.$, control mutuality, $F(1, 107) = .84, p = n.s.$, relationship satisfaction: $F(1, 107) = .00005, p = n.s.$, and relationship commitment: $F(1, 107) = .15, p = n.s.$.

**Discussion**

Although rumor theory has been extensively studied (e.g., Allport & Postman, 1947; Bordia & Rosnow, 1998; Difonzo & Bordia, 2000; Difonzo, Bordia, and Rosnow, 1994), the findings of this research open a new arena for the analysis of rumor activity within the Internet environment with the approach from a public relations perspective. The results attained have relevant implications for both theoretical understanding and practical management of rumors. The results suggest that rumor processing depends not only on the type of rumor (i.e., dread vs. wish rumor), but also on some contextual characteristics of the relationships between an organization and its publics, whom rumors may benefit or harm. The main conclusion, as detailed below, is that the role of public relations is crucial for the treatment of rumors, which although they cannot be predicted, can be strategically managed by providing the key publics with appropriate information at an appropriate moment.
First, the results of this study indicate that rumor type (i.e., dread vs. wish rumor) did affect people’s belief in rumors and rumor activity intentions. People believe dread rumors more than wish rumors. As previous studies have found, people tend to pay more attention and develop more effortful message elaboration when the message portrays negative information (Pratto & John, 1991; Smith & Petty, 1996). The nature of negative information is directly related to the levels of anxiety, which dread rumors invoke when no other information is available (Rosnow et al., 1988). Consequently, people might perceive a dread rumor as true because of the anxiety.

Consistently, the results show that some rumor activity intentions are also affected by the type of rumor. Specifically, we found that the intention of transmitting the rumor in person is higher when people receive a dread rumor than when they receive a wish rumor. These findings also support previous studies (e.g., Rosnow, 1991) showing that dread rumors cause more anxiety to the perceivers, and lead people to transmit them more easily than rumors which are not considered having negative or threatening consequences.

For public relations practitioners, these findings of the main effect of rumor type on rumor belief and intention of rumor transmission suggest that the management of rumors, especially dread rumors, has to 1) be as fast as possible, and 2) provide the publics with information that may reduce the anxiety and uncertainty produced by the rumor and, thus, their intention of rumor transmission.

Second, when analyzing the effects of the organization-public relationship, the study found that the OPR did not affect the belief and rumor activity intentions when it is used as one measure integrating the four dimensions proposed (i.e., trust, control mutuality, relationship satisfaction, and relationship commitment). However, when the dimensions were observed separately, we were able to observe some evocative results. Specifically, this study found evidence that when people had low relationship satisfaction, they tended to transmit the rumor to other places on the Internet more than people with high relationship satisfaction. Applying this finding to the management of rumor in organizations, again, it calls for the intervention of public relations, directing appropriate information to the publics with lower levels of relationship satisfaction (e.g. activists) since they might be more likely to spread the rumor.

The third main finding of this research regarding the interactions of rumor type by OPR on belief and rumor activity intentions showed that OPR works as a whole measure, and with its dimensions analyzed separately. On one hand, the evidence showed that people with good OPR - as a whole - have a stronger intention of verifying dread rumors. Accordingly, people with bad OPR show a stronger intention of verifying wish rumors. This is consistent with previous studies (Bordia & Rosnow, 1998; Difonzo et. al., 1994; Rosnow, 1974; Wheelan, 1994) that allocate different stages of the rumor, and state that during the first phases of its activity (e.g., evaluation, parturition, or dependency) people are expecting direction and looking for more information and to authenticate the rumor, before believing or disbelieving it. These findings are also consistent with previous studies of e-mail communication (Phelps et al., 2004), which find that receiving a forwarded email may direct people to find out further information from other sources.

For public relations practitioners, these findings suggest that they must prioritize in providing appropriate information to the publics with whom they already have a good relationship (e.g. loyal customers), because they will be seeking for more information trying to authenticate the rumor they received. Analogously, when the organization wants to spread a wish rumor, they must prioritize information for publics with whom they still do not have a good relationship (e.g., non-costumers.) This is also consistent with some studies of denials (Bordia &
which state the value of providing information during the stages of rumor when people tend to look for additional information before reacting to the rumor received.

The analysis of the interaction of the type of rumor by separate dimensions of OPR on rumor activity intentions shows mixed results. Consistent with the results attained with the OPR as a whole measure, the intention of verifying the rumor is higher when receiving a dread rumor for people with higher trust, control mutuality, and relationship satisfaction. In other words, better relationships lead to more seeking of information when a threatening rumor is received. Only relationship commitment did not follow the same pattern.

However, the findings show the opposite direction with the intention of transmitting the rumor via email and in person with relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment. Here, people with a better relationship with the organization showed stronger intentions of transmitting the email. This finding might be due to some emotional reaction leading people with more satisfying and committed relationships with the organization to feel more offended or betrayed when they receive information that is against what they expected, thus causing more anxiety and, therefore, more intention of rumor transmission instead of verification of the information.

Finally, this study is a starting point for studying the different manners in which people react to a rumor portrayed online, depending on the nature of its content (i.e., dread or wish rumor) and the relationship that the receiver has with the organization that the rumor affects. However, further studies must continue testing these findings, not only using a more realistic environment (a real rumor, a real electronic communication, etc.), but validating the OPR, which was a conflictive measure in this study. In addition, more research should be done to approach different types of organizations and working with different time periods to observe the rumor in different stages of its activity. For now, we are opening a door to enlighten organizations on the manner of managing the apparently inoffensive spark of rumors and prevent them from becoming uncontrollable fires.

Reference


Appendix 1: Stimulus Material

**The Wish Rumor**

Date: April 15, 2006

To: XXXX@xxx.edu

From: XXXXXX@xxx.edu

Subject: Fwd: The university to lower parking fees next semester!

Hey, I got this e-mail from a friend of mine. Tell everyone you know.

-----Original Message-----

I read an article in the State News. It said the university will cut the parking fees in half next semester! Not only for parking permits, but metered and public parking, too. Instead of paying up to $1.50 per hour at meters, we would pay 75 cents per hour.

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**The Dread Rumor**

Date: April 15, 2006

To: XXXX@xxx.edu
From: XXXXX@xxx.edu

Subject: Fwd: Campus parking fee will be increased next semester!

Hey, I got this e-mail from a friend of mine. Tell everyone you know.

-----Original Message-----

I read an article in the State News. It said the university will jack up the parking fees by half next semester! Not only for parking permits, but metered and public parking, too. Instead of paying up to $1.50 per hour at meters, we would pay $2.25 per hour.
Restoring Reputation beyond a Racial Crisis: The Effects of CSR and Crisis Response on Organizational Responsibility, Reputation, and Word-of-Mouth Intention
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Abstract
This study investigates how CSR practices and crisis-responses affect stakeholders’ attributions of organizational responsibility, reputation and positive word-of-mouth intention. The significant findings include 1) direct effects of both CSR history and crisis-response on organizational reputation, 2) interaction between CSR history and crisis-response on organizational responsibility, and 3) mediation of organizational reputation.

Workplace demographics are becoming more heterogeneous, providing public relations practitioners with new challenges. Organizations can ill afford the financial burdens caused by charges of racism. Of even greater consequence, issues of race can cause significant damage to organizations’ reputations among critical stakeholders (Baker, 2001). Even though many organizations face problems and concerns involving racial issues, the racial crisis has not been given much attention by public relations researchers.

As Baker (2001) stressed, sound reputations are required to protect an organization against existing and potential confrontations with racial incidents. Many organizations invest their resources to build reputation through implementing diversity initiatives under the umbrella of corporate social responsibilities (hereafter called “CSR”) programs. However, little is known about how CSR practices actually help an organization in crisis situations.

To address this gap, the researcher proposes the cognitive processing of crisis communication in order to provide a more refined understanding of crisis situations, especially crises resulting from race issues. The researcher identified the variables in the existing literature that are considered to be involved in a crisis dynamic and connected these relationships in a causal model. In particular, the study investigates how prior CSR practices and different crisis-responses affect stakeholders’ attributions of organizational responsibility, reputation and positive word-of-mouth communication intention. The researcher expects that public relations professionals will find the results of this study useful for selecting effective crisis-responses as well as understanding the viable role of public relations in crisis management.

Literature Review
Definitions of Organizational Crisis
Mitroff and Pearson (1993) defined an organizational crisis as an incident or event that poses a threat to the organization’s reputation and viability. They included the personal, societal, and technical factors of crisis, and stated that a crisis could break down the basic assumptions that the society holds: values, beliefs and social structures. In terms of a relational perspective, Marra (1992) pointed out stress, instability, and undermined relationships with stakeholders as characteristics of a crisis. Even though most definitions of a crisis focus on its financial impact, in fact, a crisis is a threat to the relationships between an organization and its stakeholders.
**Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)**

Coombs and Holladay (2002) developed a model of situational crisis communication theory (hereafter called “SCCT”) in order to conceptualize how stakeholders interpret a crisis. SCCT assumes that an organization’s reputation is a valued resource that is threatened by crises. Therefore, the central focus of SCCT is to manage organizational reputation during a crisis, to assess the crisis situation, and to select a crisis-response that fits the crisis situation (Barton, 2001; Fombrun, 1996). SCCT evolved from a number of studies including symbolic and relational management approaches that examine how a crisis shapes the selection of a crisis response and how crisis-response strategies affect organizational reputation (e.g., Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Coombs, 1999a; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2001; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Fediuk, 1999).

**Crisis-Response Strategy**

Crisis communication represents the actual responses an organization uses to address a crisis (Coombs, 1999b, p. 121). Crisis communication is designed to minimize damage to the reputation of an organization (Fearn-Banks, 1996) and to reestablish institutional legitimacy (Hearit, 1994). Crisis communication research has gone through two stages, from identifying or analyzing (or both) crisis-response strategies in crisis cases (e.g., Allen & Caillouet, 1994, Benoit, 1995) to examining or identifying (or both) crisis situations for the selection of appropriate crisis-response strategies (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2001, 2002). A variety of researchers have examined how organizations respond to crises (e.g., Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Hearit, 1994, 1995; Hobbs, 1995). Coombs (1999b) developed a model of crisis-response strategy by grouping various strategies into seven categories and placing them on a defensive-accommodative continuum. The responses on the defensive end of this continuum seek to protect an organization, whereas the responses on the accommodative end seek to address the victim’s concerns. Arranged from defensive to accommodative, the seven categories are as follows: **attack the accuser, denial, excuse, justification, ingratiation, corrective action, full apology and mortification** (Coombs, 1998).

Instead of testing a wide array of crisis responses, this study tests those that are applicable to a racial crisis. As such, four crisis-response variables were chosen based on previous case studies (e.g., Brinson & Benoit, 1999; Williams & Olaniran, 2002) and an empirical study (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000) examining a racial crisis: 1) **attack the accuser**, aggressively denying the claims of a crisis and insisting on punishing the accuser; 2) **shifting blame**, arguing that another party actually performed the offensive act; 3) **corrective action**, repairing crisis damage, preventing a repeat of the crisis, or both; 4) **mortification**, taking responsibility for the crisis.

**Crisis Responsibility Perceived by Stakeholders: Attribution Theory**

Crisis responsibility is defined as the degree to which a stakeholder blames the organization for the crisis event (Coombs, 1998). Attribution theory serves as a guide for linking crisis situations to crisis-response strategies (Coombs, 1995, 1998, 1999a, 1999b).

Attribution theory assumes that people make judgments about the causes of events. When an event is negative, unexpected, or important, people tend to engage in causal attribution processing (Weiner, 1986). Therefore, stakeholders will make causal attributions of organizational crises because crises are often negative, unexpected, and attention drawing (Winter & Steger, 1998).
People commonly think along three causal dimensions when making attributions (Coombs, 2004): 1) **stability** reflects whether the cause of the event happens frequently (stable) or infrequently (unstable); 2) **external control** indicates whether the event’s cause was controllable or uncontrollable by some other persons; and 3) **personal control** reflects whether the event’s cause was controllable or uncontrollable by the actor. **Locus**, a part of the third causal dimension, reflects the extent to which an event’s cause was located in the actor or in the situation. Based on these three attribution dimensions, a person is held more responsible for an event when it is perceived as stable and when the person has high personal control and/or is under low external control. Likewise, similar patterns should hold true for attributions of crisis responsibility.

To choose an appropriate crisis-response, crisis managers need to assess the level of crisis responsibility. The crisis manager begins by identifying the crisis type, which is conceptualized as the frame that stakeholders use to interpret the event (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Identifying the crisis type enables an initial assessment of the amount of crisis responsibility that stakeholders will attribute to a crisis situation. In this study, the researcher focuses on a racial crisis.

**Crisis Type: A Racial Crisis**

Mitroff (1998) and other crisis management experts recommend clustering crisis types that can be managed in similar ways (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993). Crisis types vary by how much crisis responsibility stakeholders ascribe to an organization. Coombs (1995) applied Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory to develop a 2 X 2 (internal-external and intentional-unintentional) matrix that categorizes crises into four types: 1) accident – unintentional and internal; 2) transgression – intentional and internal; 3) faux pas – unintentional and external; and 4) terrorism – intentional and external. Coombs and Holladay (2002) refined the crisis categorization by classifying various crisis types into three clusters, the victim cluster, the accidental cluster, and intentional cluster.

Coombs and Holladay (2001) affirmed that violating discrimination laws is an intentional crisis, one that produces strong attributions of crisis responsibility and represents a severe reputational threat. Past research has found that transgression crises, such as Texaco’s legal violation, create strong perceptions of personal control, which reflect controllability by the actor (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Coombs and Schmidt (2000) evaluated the personal control score in the racial crisis context, and their result was consistent with past evaluations of organizational transgressions, indicating that respondents did view the Texaco crisis as a transgression crisis.

Crisis involving racial issues present a unique set of circumstances. A racial crisis brings public and media attention and organizational responses are demanded and critiqued with a skeptical eye and ear. Because the element of race typically increases the volatility of the situation, how well an organization responds to racial crises is closely linked to its willingness to accept the existence of a racial problem and respond accordingly (Baker, 2001).

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32 In late 1996, reports broke of secret tape recording that revealed racist language used by top executives and plans to destroy evidence related to a racial discrimination lawsuit pending against Texaco. The tape reportedly contained many racial epithets being used by three Texaco executives along with their plans to destroy evidence.
Racial crises tend to fall into three major categories: actions, words, and symbols (Baker, 2001). Baker (2001) suggested that racial incidents resulting from actions or behaviors should be met with calculated responses. Instead of offering a quick response to a single accusation, vigilant decision-making by the crisis management team is necessary (Hirokawa & Rost, 1992).

According to Baker (2001), a racial crisis based on words will be most effectively handled through the strategy of apology. The organization can offer no justification for the words so it is best to apologize and quickly move away from the culprit (Baker, 2001). Therefore, the researcher propose the following hypothesis about the effect of crisis-response on perceived crisis responsibility:

H1: Participants will report greater attribution of crisis responsibility toward the company for using a more defensive crisis-response than an apologetic response.

In addition, organizational reputation is posited to be a function of an organization’s crisis-response. It has been evidenced in interpersonal contexts that responses denoting an acceptance of responsibility have positive effects on impression, whereas denial of responsibility can elicit anger (Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991). Several studies in organizational contexts also pointed to similar positive effects of acceptance of responsibility on image and favorability (e.g., Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Griffin, Babin, & Attaway, 1991).

H2: Participants will report more negative perceptions of organizational reputation when the company uses a more defensive crisis-response than an apologetic response.

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Organization’s Relational Performance**

While the primary social responsibility of a company is economic (Carroll, 1979; Wood, 1991), it also has the responsibility to follow the legal and ethical standards considered appropriate by society. Thus, the corporate citizenship involves the “extent to which business assume the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities imposed on them by their various stakeholders” (Maignan & Ferrell, 2001, p.459). While CSR practices can be extended to include community support, diversity, employee support, the environment, non-U.S. operations, and product manufacturing (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), for this study, the researcher focuses on CSR actions related to diversity issues.

There is evidence of a positive relationship between CSR practices and corporate image (David, Kline, & Dai, 2005). According to the Cone/Roper Cause Related Trends Report (Cone, inc., 1999), over 80% of respondents reported that they have more positive images of companies who support causes they care about. Kim (2007) also noted that the degree to which a person believes he/she has a communal relationship with an organization is a critical indicator of the social responsibility of an organization. Thus, CSR history, whether an organization has addressed CSR issues and implemented initiatives to support those causes, is a significant part of performance history of an organization.

Crisis research has always considered performance history to be an important element when evaluating a crisis situation (e.g., Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Coombs (1998) divided performance history into crisis history (whether the crisis was isolated or part of a pattern) and past relationships by good works. Performance history has proven to modify perceptions of crisis responsibility for some crisis types (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2001, 2002). As performance history worsens, publics attribute greater crisis responsibility to the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Coombs and Holladay (2001) suggested two possible explanatory frames: the halo effect and attribution theory.
First, the deflective power of a good performance history can be explained by the halo effect. The halo effect states that previous reputation affects the acceptance and interpretation of new information (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Once a positive view of a person or organization is established, people ignore information that contradicts the favorable reputation (Balzer & Sulsky, 1992; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Performance history could be a reflection of an organization’s reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Additionally, performance history could be a form of stability, one of the predictors of causal attributions, and it may serve to reduce the negative consequences generated by a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). When there is a good performance history, stakeholders see a crisis as one misstep for an organization. However, the crisis becomes just another example of bad behavior for an organization if there is a bad performance history. Applying to a racial crisis context, a bad CSR history might intensify the judgment of crisis responsibility and further damage organizational reputation.

H3: A bad CSR history will lead to more negative perceptions of crisis responsibility.
H4: A bad CSR history will lead to more negative perceptions of organizational reputation.

Organizational Reputation
An organization’s reputation, “a collective assessment of a company’s ability to provide valued outcomes to a representative group or stakeholders,” (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000, p. 243) is a valuable resource that should be protected from the threats posed by a crisis (Barton, 2001). According to the attributes of organizational reputation that Bromley (1993) and Yang (2007a) extracted, it is difficult to make and keep up a good reputation or to repair a damaged one – a good reputation is easily lost or damaged. With regard to such fragile nature of organizational reputation, public relations practitioners are responsible for the maintenance of an organization’s reputation during a crisis. According to the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), the crisis responsibility-organizational reputation relationship is at the center of the dynamic. Referencing Weiner’s (1996) findings - in the interpersonal context - that judgment of responsibility precedes other reactions, Coombs and Holladay (2002) found that a moderate correlation existed between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation in all three crisis clusters: the victim, the accidental, and intentional clusters.

H5: The more responsible the participants hold the organization to be for the crisis, the worse they will rate its organizational reputation.

Stakeholders’ Positive Word-of-Mouth Intention After a Crisis
Word-of-mouth (hereafter called “WOM”) is an “informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived noncommercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization, or a service” (Harrison-Walker, 2001, p. 63). Based on this definition, Brown, Barry, Dacin, and Gunst (2005) noted positive WOM as “making others aware that one does business with a company or store, making positive recommendations to others about a company, extolling a company’s quality orientation, and so on” (p. 125). According to the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988), behavioral intentions, “the intentions to perform a particular behavior, a plan to put behavior into effect” (Perloff, 2003, p.92), are the immediate antecedent of actual behavior.

Based on the premise that people consider personal sources of information to be more reliable than any other sources (Murray, 1991), WOM communication plays a key role in shaping and influencing publics’ attitudes and behaviors (Day, 1971; Herr, Kardes, & Kim,
1991; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Murray, 1991; Price & Feick, 1984). For instance, compared to advertising, WOM is nine times more effective in making people change from unfavorable or neutral attitudes to favorable ones (Day, 1971).

Even though the direct relationship between reputation and positive WOM intentions has yet to be empirically tested, supportive behavioral intention has been believed to be a function of organizational reputation; the more favorable the organizational reputation, the more likely a person is to report supportive behavior. Past research has found such relationships (e.g., Coombs, 1998, 1999a). Lee (2005) found that participants’ degree of trust in the organization has a significant direct effect on consumption intention. The path between organizational reputation and supportive intention yielded the strongest effect among all paths in the study (Lee, 2005). In addition, Coombs and Schmidt (2000) confirmed that such relationships are consistent in a racial crisis.

H6: A better organizational reputation would lead to more positive WOM intention. Hypotheses are visualized in Figure 1 as a path model.

Method

Overview of the Experiment

A 2 (CSR history: Good vs. Bad) X 4 (Crisis-response strategy: Attack the accuser, Shifting blame, Corrective action, and Mortification) between-subjects design was employed. Mock newspaper reports of eight different racial discrimination incident scenarios were created with different combinations of CSR history and crisis-response strategies.

Participants

Participants were 207 students at a large private university in the United States. All students participated in this study voluntarily, but some of the students received extra credit for completing the questionnaire. Selecting college students, especially those whose majors are in communications related fields, was appropriate because the research design of this study required participants to read several news articles and to engage in evaluative and analytic processes which communications students have experience with.

Procedure

Participants who agreed to participate in this study were asked to sign up for the experiment by writing their email addresses. Each participant received an email invitation, which was linked to a randomly assigned experimental condition on the Web. The order of the experiment materials was: cover page, consent form, demographic information questions, first stimulus, first copy of survey instrument, second stimulus, and second copy of survey instrument. Experimental administration required approximately 10 minutes.

Stimulus Material and Instrumentation

A racial crisis case. Denny’s restaurant’s racial discrimination incident in 1997 was chosen as a sample for writing the crisis case for this study. In the incident, six Asian-American university students claimed that they were denied service at one of the chain’s restaurants, shoved out by two security guards, and then beaten up by a mob of white customers as the Denny’s guards stood by. The core elements of the stimulus news story were derived from the real news reports about the incident. However, the scenario used a fictional name to prevent
prejudice about the company. The crisis case was written in newswire style, and headlines were included to summarize the situation.

**Corporate Social Responsibility.** Two fictitious CSR history paragraphs were written: Good and bad. CSR history is manipulated as to whether the company has implemented initiatives to foster diversity in terms of enhancement of relationships with stakeholders. For example, the good CSR history scenario includes indications that the company has clearly and vigorously enforced policies against discrimination in the workplace. Also, the good CSR history company has wider antidiscrimination goals, such as expanding economic access for minority firms and increasing the positive impact its investments can have in the minority community.

**Crisis-response strategy.** As previously mentioned, the organizational crisis-response variables were chosen based on previous studies evaluating racial crises (e.g., Brinson & Benoit, 1999; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Williams & Olaniran, 2002). Mortification includes actions such as the chairman issuing an apology and taking responsibility for the incident. Corrective action involves a promise of disciplinary actions and expanding diversity learning at the company. Shifting blame separates the company and its policies from the “bad” employees by noting that the discriminatory behaviors are not representative of the company. Attack the accuser refuses responsibility for the incident and blames the students who claim that they were discriminated against by the company.

**Crisis responsibility.** Crisis responsibility was measured with 5-item scale: three items adopted from Griffin, Babin and Darden’s (1992) work on responsibility and blame, and two items from Cho and Gower (2006).

**Organizational reputation.** The Reputation Quotient (Fombrun, 1996; Winkleman, 1999) was used to measure organizational reputation on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). Among the six underlying dimensions of reputation, only the three dimensions that are relevant to this study were used: emotional appeal, workplace environment, and social responsibility.

**Stakeholders’ positive word-of-mouth intention.** This study used one dimension (3 items) adopted from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996) to measure positive WOM intentions on a 7-point likelihood scale (1=not at all likely, and 7= extremely likely).

**Reliability of Measurement Instruments**

Cronbach’s alpha was calculated to examine the reliability of each index of both independent and dependent variables. The reliability of positive WOM intention was the highest ($\alpha = .95$) among all other indexes, followed by organizational reputation ($\alpha = .92$), crisis responsibility ($\alpha = .86$), and CSR history ($\alpha = .84$). Thus, all the measures that constituted each of indexes were high enough to be used as reliable measures of each theoretical construct.

**Results**

Of the 207 participants, 66.2 % ($n = 137$) were women and 33.8 % ($n = 70$) were men. The respondents ranged in age from 19 to 59 years ($M = 24, SD = 5.1$). Each scenario had at least 22 respondents, which exceeds the minimum of 15 per condition required for analysis of variance (ANOVA) analyses (Morgan & Griego, 1998).

**Manipulation Checks**

**Corporate social responsibility history.** As previously mentioned, CSR history is considered to be a part of performance history, specifically a relational history. Participants were
asked to answer five questions adopted from communal relationship items (Hon & J. Grunig, 1999) after exposed to a CSR history paragraph. As presented in Table 1, participants assigned to the good CSR history condition rated a mean of 4.75 (SD = .94) on a 7-point scale, while counterparts in an bad CSR condition rated a mean of 3.01 (SD=.92), $F(1, 206) = 179.09, p < .001$.

**Crisis-response strategy.** Referencing the manipulation check items that Coombs and Schmidt (2000) designed, six items were used to test if respondents recognized the defining characteristic of the crisis-response strategy being used in a particular scenario. Overall, participants did perceive each scenario as intended. The four one-way ANOVAs revealed significant differences for each of the four scenarios all significant at $p < .001$: attack the accuser, $F(3, 207) = 57.63$; shifting blame, $F(3, 207) = 61.65$; corrective action, $F(3, 207) = 50.38$; mortification, $F(3, 206) = 93.46$ for “accepted responsibility,” $F(3, 206) = 53.10$ for “apologized.” For each item, the post hoc analysis identified each scenario as having the highest mean score and as being significantly larger than the means of the other scenarios.

In addition, participants rated the degrees of the company’s acceptance of responsibility on a 7-point semantic differential scale ranging from 1 (denial) to 7 (apology). Using a one-way ANOVA, a significant difference was found among the scenarios, $F(3, 207)=107.91, p < .001$. Participants perceived attack the accuser as the most defensive and mortification as the most apologetic response, as intended. (See Table 2)

**Tests of Hypotheses 1 to 4: Effects of Manipulated Variables**

A series of one-way ANOVAs and a post hoc analysis were performed to examine H1 to H4. It was predicted that a more defensive response and a bad CSR history would result in a higher degree of crisis responsibility and lower organizational reputation. The results revealed a significant difference among the response strategies on organizational reputation, $F(3, 201) = 4.52, p = .004$. Due to the equality of variance, the Dunnette C post hoc test was performed. Respondents rated higher organizational reputation for the mortification condition ($M = 2.85, SD = .96$) than other conditions such as attack the accuser ($M = 2.19, SD = .83$) and shifting blame ($M = 2.38, SD = .96$), but not significantly higher than the condition of corrective action ($M = 2.46, SD = 1.04$).

In addition, participants in the condition of good CSR history ($M = 2.76, SD = .92$) had a higher organizational reputation score than those in the bad CSR history ($M = 2.17, SD = .92$), $F(1, 201) = 21.12, p < .001$. However, no significant difference was found for crisis responsibility. Thus, H2 and H4 were supported, while H1 and H3 were not supported. (See Table 3 and 4)

**Interaction between Crisis-Response and CSR History**

The interaction effect between manipulated variables was analyzed using a 2 x 4 MANOVA. While the results revealed no significant main effects for either CSR history or crisis-response strategy, the interaction effect was found significant at .047.

Crisis-response strategies were looked at distinctively to examine which strategy was most likely to be influenced by CSR history. To this end, the data was split by crisis-response, and a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed for each crisis-response condition separately. The corrective action condition identified a significant effect of CSR history on crisis responsibility, $F(1, 47) = 6.51, p = .01, \eta^2 = .12, power = .71$. The result discovered that the bad CSR group ($M=5.33$) was perceived as having significantly greater
attributions of crisis responsibility than the good CSR group ($M=4.65$) when they were exposed to corrective action. There was no significant difference for other crisis-response strategies.

Tests of Hypotheses 5 and 6: Structural Equation Modeling

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to empirically test theoretically derived paths in the proposed model. The researcher followed a two-step process of latent path modeling. In the measurement phase, an initial confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted by imposing all factors in the proposed model to covary. The data-model indexes at the measurement phase indicate the measurement model is a valid model: \( CFI = .93, RMSEA = .092 \). Even though the chi-square value (281.38, \( df = 101, p < .001 \)) suggests that the measurement model does not adequately fit the data, the chi-square value is often problematic because it is sensitive to sample size (Bentler, 1990; Bollen, 1989). Thus, the researcher considers the measurement model of this study a reasonable explanation of the covariances in the data set. In terms of a data-model fit in the structural model, this study found the proposed model can be retained as a valid model. The proposed structural equation model yielded the following data-model fits: \( \text{Chi-Square}/df = 2.99, CFI = .901 \) and \( RMSEA = .097 \). The results are illustrated in Figure 2.

Direct Effects

Four significant direct effects were found in the proposed model. As for organizational reputation, crisis responsibility was a significant predictor \((H5, \beta = -.43, b = -.37, \text{S.E.} = .06, p < .001)\). Organizational reputation was a significant predictor of positive WOM intention \((H6, \beta = .75, b = .81, \text{S.E.} = .08, p < .001)\). Table 6 presents the results of direct effects in the proposed path model.

Mediation Effect of Organizational Reputation

In the proposed model, organizational reputation mediates the effects of the two independent variables (i.e., CSR history and crisis-response) and another mediator (i.e., crisis responsibility) on positive WOM intention. Organizational reputation positively mediated the effect of CSR history on positive WOM intention (Sobel \( z \) statistic = 4.54, \( p < .001 \)). And the final \( \beta \) coefficient of the effect of CSR history on positive WOM intention was .03, suggesting that this mediation effect was very strong. In addition, organizational reputation significantly mediated the effects of both crisis-response and crisis responsibility on positive WOM intention. Sobel \( z \) statistics were significant at the .001 level: \( z = 3.72 \) for crisis-response; \( z = -5.27 \) for crisis responsibility. (See Table 7)

Discussion

Both CSR history and crisis-response significantly affected organizational reputation, reinforcing the conventional wisdom that those elements play an important role in judgment formation following a crisis. The causal path between crisis-response and organizational reputation demonstrates the importance of crisis-response strategy in the retention of a favorable organizational reputation (Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Lee, 2005).

The significant effect of CSR history on organizational reputation reinforces the results of previous crisis studies based on relational approach (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Lyon & Cameron, 2004). The relational approach suggests the value of the “halo effect,” which refers to the influence of previous reputation on the acceptance and interpretation of new information.
Coombs & Holladay, 2001). The results of this study supported such propositions, and a company that has proven to be a shining star of social responsibility was afforded the benefit of the doubt in a time of crisis.

Based on the significant interaction between CSR history and crisis-response on crisis responsibility, this study is against viewing crisis-responses in a vacuum devoid of information about prior organization history. Crisis managers should factor performance history into their evaluation of the crisis situation and subsequent selection of a crisis response strategy. Because a good performance history becomes a bank account of goodwill in a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2001), stakeholders might discount the negative implications of the crisis (Coombs, 1999). Crisis managers should encourage and invest in CSR actions as a cost-effective strategy to minimize damage during crises. In the model of crisis public relations (Marra, 1992), the pre-crisis stakeholder relationship is an integral part of successful crisis management. Still, the interplay between performance history and crisis-response is tentative and requires further investigation.

One of the most important findings of this study was the significant mediation effect of organizational reputation. Even though crisis-response and CSR history do not alter a stakeholder’s WOM intention directly, if an organization’s reputation is damaged, then the WOM intention will be affected. In this study, the path between organizational reputation and positive WOM intention yielded the strongest magnitude of effect among all the paths in the proposed model. This indicates that an organization’s reputation is a valuable resource that should be protected from the threats posed by a crisis (Barton, 2001).

Neither the direct effects of crisis-response nor CSR history on crisis responsibility were corroborated. Based on the results of the current study and Coombs and Schmitz’s (2000) study, one possibility could be that crisis-response is not the direct “triggering” stimulus to a participant’s judgment of organizational responsibility, especially for the racial crisis category.

The results of this study have practical implications for dealing with a racially oriented crisis. No real difference between any of four strategies (i.e., attack the accuser, shifting blame, corrective action and mortification) on crisis responsibility was corroborated, whereas significant differences were found for a set of two social-oriented outcomes (i.e., organizational reputation and positive WOM intention). This indicates an organization can get the same benefit from using any of four strategies in terms of stakeholders’ attributions of organizational responsibility. Yet, those four responses could generate significantly different results for protecting organizational reputation and retaining a positive WOM intention.

A company in crisis usually cannot avoid the issue of possible conflict between public relations and legal viewpoints. Even though mortification is often recommended for dealing with transgressions in public relations practice, lawyers do not prefer this strategy because it places the organization in legal jeopardy (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1995). However, as Marra (1998) stated, “organizations that allow attorneys, personnel or financial specialists to determine communication policy during a crisis may survive later battles in a court of law, but often fail miserably in the court of public opinion.” (p. 8) This study provides empirical evidences that a defensive response might have a detrimental effect on the organization’s reputation. According to the results of this study, it is possible that a damaged reputation can detriment stakeholders’ positive WOM intention, which could have an incremental effect on other stakeholders.
Despite such implications, this study suffers from limitations common to any experimental study because a purposeful choice was made to limit the present study to CSR history and crisis-response and the effects of such on perceptions of an organization in a crisis. Also, considering that the essence of an organization-public relationship is in its interactive cultivation over time (Yang, 2007b), research based on fictitious stories might have limited theoretical and empirical implications. However, previous studies note that people tend to learn about organizations through media and have their perceptions of organizations shaped by the news coverage (e.g., Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Deephouse, 2000). Even though the direct effects of exogenous variables on crisis responsibility were not supported, still, crisis responsibility was an important factor in the path model. Further studies could examine other factors that might influence attributions of responsibility.

Reference


### Table 1
**Manipulation Check and Reliability for Corporate Social Responsibility**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Corporate Social Responsibility</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communal Relationship</td>
<td>(5 items)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td></td>
<td>179.09***</td>
<td>1, 206</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.***p < .001.

### Table 2
**Manipulation Check for Crisis-Response Strategy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Crisis-Response Scenarios</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blame for allegation</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>57.63***</td>
<td>3, 207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few bad employees</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>61.65***</td>
<td>3, 207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made changes</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>50.39***</td>
<td>3, 207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apologized</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>53.10***</td>
<td>3, 206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>93.46***</td>
<td>3, 206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial or apology?</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>107.91***</td>
<td>3, 207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Measures are based on a 7-point scale, with 4 indicating neutrality of evaluations.***p < .001.

### Table 3
**Crisis Responsibility and Organizational Reputation by Crisis-Response**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Crisis-Response Scenarios</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR* (5 items)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>3, 206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORb (9 items)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>4.52**</td>
<td>3, 201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *aCR = Crisis responsibility. *bOR = Organizational reputation. The dependent measures show the average of items on a 7-point scale, with higher values indicating higher perceived crisis responsibility and more favorable organizational reputation.***p < .01.
Table 4

Crisis Responsibility and Organizational Reputation by Corporate Social Responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corporate Social Responsibility</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRa (5 items)</td>
<td>4.83 1.08</td>
<td>5.04 1.17</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1,206</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORb (9 items)</td>
<td>2.76 .92</td>
<td>2.17 .92</td>
<td>21.12***</td>
<td>1,201</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. aCR = Crisis responsibility. bOR = Organizational reputation. The dependent measures show the average of items on a 7-point scale, with higher values indicating higher perceived crisis responsibility and more favorable organizational reputation. ***p < .001.

Table 5

The Effects of CSR History and Crisis-response on Crisis Responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>η²</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR History</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.07 (ns)</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis-response strategy</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.25 (ns)</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR x CRS</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.70*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R squared = .05 (Adj. R squared=.02). * p < .05; CSR=Corporate social responsibility, CRS=Crisis-response strategy. The dependent measure of crisis responsibility shows the average of five items on a 7-point scale, with higher values indicating higher attribution of responsibility.

Table 6

Direct Effects of the Proposed Model (N = 207)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent factor</th>
<th>Dependent factor</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>z</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRS</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>H1</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRS</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>H2</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>H3</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-1.22</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>H4</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>H5</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-6.20</td>
<td>-.43</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR</td>
<td>WOMI</td>
<td>H6</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>10.89</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CRS = Crisis-response strategy; CSR = Corporate social responsibility; OR = Organizational reputation; WOMI = Positive word-of-mouth intention; CR = Crisis responsibility. ***p < .001.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediation Steps</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>Z</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CSR → OR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>OR → WOMI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CSR → OR → WOMI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>CSR → WOMI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CRS → OR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>OR → WOMI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CRS → OR → WOMI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>CRS → WOMI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CR → OR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.43</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>OR → WOMI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CR → OR  → WOMI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>CR → WOMI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Following Baron and Kenny Steps, Sobel z scores were used for statistical decisions. 

\[
z-value = \frac{a \cdot b}{\sqrt{b^2 \cdot S_a^2 + a^2 \cdot S_b^2}},\]

where \(a\) = unstandardized regression coefficient for the association between independent variable and mediator, \(b\) = raw coefficient for the association between the mediator and the dependent variable, \(S_a\) = standard error of \(a\), and \(S_b\) = standard error of \(b\).
Figure 1. A theoretical model with hypothesis notation.

Figure 2. Results of path model for cognitive processing of crisis communication. 
Note. Paths of \( p \) value stronger than .01 are in bold arrow; covariances between exogenous variables, indicators for latent variables and errors for the indicators are excluded from the figure; CFI= Comparative fit index; RMSEA= Root mean square error of approximation.

Goodness-of-Fit Indices (\( N =207 \))
\[
df = 97, \chi^2 = 290.88^{***}, \\
\chi^2/df = 2.99, \text{CFI} = .901, \\
\text{RMSEA} = .097
\]
Are Your Corporate Crisis Responses Effective? : 
The Effects of Crisis Types and Corporate Responses on The Public’s Perceptions of Organizational Responsibility for Crisis
Jeesun Kim, Hyo Jung Kim, & Glen T. Cameron
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Introduction
Any corporation is likely to face crises regardless of its strengths or weaknesses. Considering increasing uncertainty and rising social, economic, and biological risks, crisis management has become a “booming industry” (Burnett, 1998). A crisis is defined as a situation that causes negative or undesirable outcomes for an organization (Coombs, 1999). According to survey results conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2006, approximately half of 104 U.S.-based multinational companies responded that they faced a major crisis over the last three years (Trinidad, 2006).

Timothy Coombs, a professor whose expertise is in crisis communications, criticized the way that Taco Bell handled the crisis regarding a recent E. coli scare (Maier, 2006). A 2006 E. coli outbreak linked to Taco Bell restaurants created a major crisis management challenge such as potential fallout for their sales and brand image. Taco Bell’s crisis first appeared in the public eye as the cover story under the headline “Taco Hell” in the New York Daily News. The New York Daily News reported that more than two-dozen people in New York and New Jersey became sick after eating at Taco Bell (Hein, 2006). According to Coombs, Taco Bell was not actively involved in explaining its response to the E. coli problem, pointing out that no announcement was made regarding the problem on the company’s Web site when the news was released (Maier, 2006). In contemporary business, social responsibility and corporate citizenship are highly valued. However, Taco Bell was not prompt enough to deliver their strategic messages regarding the food-borne illness crisis in order to keep their customers informed and safe. Less than three months after the E. coli outbreak at Taco Bell, Yum Brands, a parent company of Taco Bell, KFC, and Pizza Hut, faced another crisis after a video showing a dozen large rats scampering across the floor at one of its Taco Bell-KFC restaurants in New York spread across the Internet (Ward, 2007). Damage was done even though Yum Brands apologized to their customers and tried to reassure the customers, saying that they had been working around the clock to resolve this accident (Rivera, 2007).

It is a very complicated situation for an organization to decide how to respond to a crisis, particularly, as in Taco Bell’s case, when the crisis was something that the organization could not control. If an organization purposely conducted an action that led to a crisis (e.g., internal corruption), there is no doubt that the organization should admit its responsibility for the crisis. However, an organization struck with a crisis that is not necessarily associated with an organization’s intended course of action may need to utilize different crisis response strategies than the ones used for the crisis deliberately caused by an organization’s misconduct. An important question arises as to how an organization should create and develop its responding messages to different types of crises for the optimal communication responses and, ultimately, for protecting the organization’s reputation.
The purpose of this study is to explore how an organization’s responding message to a certain kind of crisis influences the audience's perceptions of organizational responsibility for the crisis. Particularly, it is expected that people’s perceptions of organizational responsibility for the crisis would vary depending on the crisis type and on an organization’s crisis response.

Previous research on crisis management has examined the effects of crisis types along with moderator variables such as crisis response types: no response, matched response, and mismatched response (Coombs & Holladay, 1996), history of crisis (Coombs, 2004), and human interest frame (Cho & Gower, 2006) in order to measure the public’s perceptions of organizational responsibility. Although, Coombs and Holladay (1996) examined crisis response types using a distance strategy (i.e., The organization claims there was no intention of doing harm—an excuse.) and a rectification strategy (i.e., A form of mortification where the organization offers some form of compensation to the victims.), little attention has been paid to an organization’s emphasis on its organizational positioning strategies that can be employed as crisis response strategies.

The current study attempts to apply the two types of corporate associations: corporate ability and corporate social responsibility (Brown & Dacin, 1997) to crisis situations. Corporate ability associations focus on the company’s expertise in products and services while corporate social responsibility associations involve the company’s commitment to social responsibility and ethics (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Brown and Dacin (1997) suggested that different types of corporate associations (i.e., corporate ability (CA) vs. corporate social responsibility (CSR)) influenced consumers’ perceptions of corporate messages. It is expected that exploring the effects of crisis types and the use of corporate associations on the public’s perceptions of organizational responsibility would generate practical implications in terms of designing messages for media coverage in certain crisis situations.

Even though an array of research on crisis communication has been conducted, the effects of crisis types and corporate associations on the public’s perceptions of organizational responsibility for the crisis have not been empirically tested. When a corporate crisis occurs, the public make sense of the crisis based on not only the objective fact of the crisis, but also on the aspects of reassurance emphasized by the company in the media or news releases. The public would evaluate an organization’s response to crises differently in terms of crisis types and types of corporate associations (CA and CSR). Therefore, the present study attempts to advance previous crisis communication research by exploring the impact of crisis types and types of corporate associations on the public’s perceptions of organizational responsibility for the crisis.

**Literature Review**

**Crisis communications**

Although there has been no consensus definition of a crisis, a large number of definitions have been offered by scholars. According to Fink (1986), a crisis has the potential to escalate in intensity that leads to higher degrees of outside scrutiny from media and government, to damage normal business operations, and to influence the image and bottom line of a company. Lerbinger (1997) regarded a crisis as “an event that brings, or has the potential for bringing, an organization into disrepute and imperils its future profitability, growth, and possibly its very survival” (p. 4).

Other definitions have particularly focused on the concepts of disruption (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992), negative potential consequences (Fearn-Banks, 1996; Guth, 1995), and threats (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Ulmer, 2001) for an organization. For instance, Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) defined a crisis as “a disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens
its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core” (p. 12). Emphasizing a crisis’ negative potential upshot, Fearn-Banks (1996) perceived a crisis as “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name” (p. 1). Pearson and Clair (1998) viewed a crisis as “a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly” (p. 60). From a corporate strategy perspective, Burnett (1998) argued that crisis management should be viewed as strategic action designed to avoid or mitigate undesirable developments and to bring about a desirable resolution of the problems. This study applies Burnett’s (1998) strategic approach to managing crises.

A line of crisis communication research has examined how organizations should communicate and behave after a crisis occurs as crisis response strategies (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Coombs, 1998; Hobbs, 1995; Ice, 1991). Specifically, crisis communication researchers have focused on the ways to communicate in order to protect the organization’s reputation during a crisis (Barton, 1993; Benoit, 1995; DeVries and Fitzpatrick, 2006; Hearit, 1996, 2001). Based on a rhetorical criticism perspective, Benoit’s (1995) image restoration theory is largely grounded in case studies, which describe both the image restoration discourse and audience reactions to that discourse. According to Barton (1993), a crisis “is a major, unpredictable event that has potentially negative results. The event and its aftermath may significantly damage an organization and its employees, products, services, financial condition, and reputation” (p. 2). This study takes Barton’s (1993) definition of a crisis focusing on negative outcomes that might influence reputation because this study centers on the public’s perceptions of organizational responsibility for a crisis, which might involve reputation.

Coombs and Holladay (1996) investigated the match between crisis types and crisis response strategies based on attribution theory. Although attribution theory originated in the interpersonal context (Weiner, 1986), it is a useful framework for explaining the premise that “people make judgments about the cause of events, and people commonly use three causal dimensions when making attributions: stability, external control, and personal control/locus” (Coombs & Holladay, 2004, p. 97). Stability is used to assess if the cause of an incident happens frequently (stable) or infrequently (unstable). External control shows whether or not the cause of an incident is controllable. Both personal control and locus are related to intentionality of an act (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; McAuley, Duncan, & Russell, 1992; Russell, 1982). Coombs and Holladay (1996) argued that people make attributions about responsibility to the organization depending on these three causal dimensions of attribution.

Employing two orthogonal dimensions of external control (internal or external) and intentionality (intentional or unintentional), Coombs and Holladay (1996) formulated a crisis typology based on attribution theory, which categorized into accidents (unintentional and internal), transgressions (intentional and internal), faux pas (unintentional and external), and terrorism (intentional and external). Internal refers to a crisis caused by something the organization itself did while external means a crisis brought on by some agents outside the organization. Intentional means some actor committed the crisis act purposefully, and unintentional, on the other hand, refers to the crisis event that was not committed purposefully. In this study, only two crisis types, accident and a transgression, will be employed because they are happening more frequently than the faux pas or terrorism types, particularly under the control of the organization. In addition, previous research (e.g., Cho & Gower, 2006; Coombs & Holladay, 1996) has often used these two crisis types in an experimental design.
Coombs and Holladay (1996) emphasized that choosing a crisis response strategy should fit the crisis situation. For example, compared to terrorism, which is intentional, accidents are unintentional so crisis managers facing accidents should stress the attribution of unintentionality in order to minimize organizational responsibility for the crisis. In the case of transgressions, which are intentional, remedial strategies are recommended as a way to repair organizational legitimacy, which is built by conforming to the social rules and expectations formed by stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Their findings show that matched responses (crisis response strategies recommended by the approach) were found to be associated with more positive organizational images than either the no response or a mismatched response.

Cho and Gower (2006) explored the effects of a human interest frame and the types of crises (accident vs. transgression) in news coverage of a corporate crisis on people’s responses to the crisis in an experimental setting. Their results showed that the more intentional event (employee injuries) led to more attribution of organizational blame and responsibility than the unintentional event (car accident). Also, the emotional response influenced by the human interest frame was found to be a significant predictor of blame and responsibility in a transgression crisis. Their findings imply that, for people exposed to a company’s intentional act, emotions can lead to blaming of the company for the crisis. Therefore, the following hypothesis is predicted: 

**H1**: Participants in a transgression crisis condition will attribute more responsibility to the organization than those in an accident crisis condition.

However, their findings did not consider how the public’s attribution of responsibility regarding crisis is influenced by a company’s ways of construction to reassure the public in addition to the crisis type.

As an attempt to understand how the public interprets a crisis, Coombs and Holladay (2002) developed a model of situational crisis communication theory. Attention to reputational concerns in crisis response strategies has been also addressed in a model of situational crisis communication theory. According to the model, as attributions of organizational control increase, the public’s judgment of crisis responsibility also intensifies. Also, the model predicted that attribution of greater amounts of crisis responsibility would produce more negative crisis reputation. Thus, the current study considers the public’s attribution of organizational responsibility for the crisis as a potential sign of the organization being vulnerable in having negative consequences for their reputation.

Coombs (1998) defined crisis responsibility as the degree to which a stakeholder group blames the organization for the crisis. Attribution of responsibility is often made when there is (1) an identifiable source of an action (i.e., an action of a particular organization), (2) a belief that the source should have been able to control or predict the outcome, (3) the impression that the source’s actions are not justified by the situation, or (4) the belief that the source operated under conditions of free choice (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Weiner, 1995). Following the line of research on the linkage between organizational crisis responses and the public’s perceptions of crisis responsibility (e.g., Coombs, 1995, 1999; Cho & Gower, 2006), the current study further develops the linkage by adopting new aspects of a product-centered organization’s ability or expertise, and social responsibility-focused approach into organizational crisis responses. Particularly, this study attempts to apply a corporate ability message and a corporate social responsibility message as organizational positioning strategies for crisis responses.

**Corporate associations: Corporate ability (CA) and corporate social responsibility (CSR)**

Previous studies argued that consumers’ cognitive associations for a company (i.e., corporate associations) can be both a strategic asset (Dowling, 1993; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988)
and a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Aaker, 1996; Ghemawat, 1986; Hall, 1993). The term corporate associations is defined as “a generic label for all the information about a company that a person holds” and might involve “perceptions, inferences, and beliefs about a company; a person’s knowledge of his or her prior behaviors with respect to the company; information about the company’s prior actions; moods and emotions experienced by the person with respect to the company; and overall and specific evaluations of the company and its perceived attributes” (Brown & Dacin, 1997, p. 69).

According to Brown and Dacin (1997), there are two types of corporate associations: corporate ability (CA) and corporate social responsibility (CSR), which are distinctly different in affecting consumers’ cognitive association for a company. Corporate ability associations are associated with “the company’s expertise in producing and delivering its outputs” while corporate social responsibility associations involve “the organization’s status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations” (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Therefore, corporate ability messages are placed on product-relevant dimensions, such as quality and service orientation, whereas corporate social responsibility messages are positioned on less-product-relevant dimensions, such as social responsibility and ethical orientation (Biehal & Sheinin, 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

David, Kline, and Dai (2005) conceptualized corporate identity that consists of two dimensions: corporate expertise and corporate social responsibility. According to them, corporate expertise is defined as “the ability of an organization to detect, assess, and satisfy consumers’ needs, wants, and desires by being the leader in a product or service category” (p. 293). Thus, the concept of corporate expertise is highly related with corporate ability associations that Brown and Dacin (1997) identified. Corporate social responsibility, on the other hand, is defined as “a citizenship function with moral, ethical, and social obligations that provide the scaffolding for mutually beneficial exchanges between an organization and its publics” (p. 293). Since corporate social responsibility focuses on an organization’s commitment to avoiding harm and enhancing society’s well-being (e.g., David, Kline, & Dai, 2005; J. E. Grunig, 2000, Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001), corporate messages emphasizing corporate social responsibility activities may play a significant role in coping with a crisis.

A line of research on CSR activities addressed the effects of CSR actions on consumer reactions. For example, previous studies showed the direct or indirect linkage between CSR activities and purchase intentions (e.g., Murray & Vogel, 1997; Smith & Stodghill, 1994). Brown and Dacin (1997) found that CSR activities influenced consumers’ overall evaluation of the company, which in turn led to their preference for new products. Particularly, Brown and Dacin (1997) found that a reputation derived from company’s abilities may have larger effects on both specific product attribute perceptions and the overall corporate evaluation than a reputation based on social responsibility. Biehal and Sheinin (2007) found that corporate ability messages were more diagnostic than CSR messages, producing higher product beliefs and more positive product attitude. They stated that CSR messages may play a role as “an affective ‘boost’ without altering product beliefs” (Biehal & Sheinin, 2007, p. 21).

Crises that organizations experience are often involved with their product, public, or employees. However, Coombs and Holladay (1996) did not consider types of crisis response messages related to an organization’s product-related quality and service, or ethical orientation and social responsibility. Therefore, this study attempts to extend previous crisis research by exploring how highlighting an organization’s product quality or ethical standards in certain
organization’s crisis situation influences the public’s perceptions of the organizational responsibility.

For instance, Taco Bell failed to address its expertise in producing and delivering product as a response to the E. coli outbreak even though it could have emphasized its food quality assurance in its news release on its corporate Web site. President of Taco Bell Greg Creed said that “… Nothing is more important to us than the health and safety of our customers and employees. We are obviously very concerned about the well-being of all those who have been affected by this incident and will continue to work closely with health authorities to get to the root cause of the issue,” in the news release of its first response to the E. coli incident after six days (Taco Bell, 2006). Since the E. coli crisis was an accident, Taco Bell could have advocated their ongoing commitment to assuring their food quality.

Considering that the public make attributions about the cause of a crisis, the more the public attribute responsibility for the crisis to the organization, the greater risk an organization’s reputation will be damaged (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Crisis response strategies can lessen the reputational damage by moderating the public’s perceptions and feelings toward an organization through the strategic use of corporate associations. Transgressions are clearly perceived, by the public, as intentional because the organization is assumed to have greater control over a transgression. As Biehal and Sheinin (2007) pointed out, CSR messages that can influence the public’s affective status in a positive fashion lessen the blaming of the organization for the crisis. Coombs and Holladay (1996)’s findings suggest that organizations that might be perceived as being unable to prevent a crisis have a less negative image than an organization perceived to have control over a crisis. Therefore, an organization in an accident crisis situation, which is largely associated with an organization’s products or equipments (Coombs, 2004), might alleviate the public’s attribution of responsibility for the crisis to the organization by emphasizing the organization’s expertise in producing and delivering its outputs from a CA approach.

Previous research on corporate associations has been examined in the marketing context. In particular, two types of corporate associations (corporate ability and corporate social responsibility) have been mostly applied to consumer product responses. Therefore, the strategic application of corporate associations (CA or CSR) to the domain of crisis management would provide new insights into both corporate associations and crisis communication research. Given the effects of CA vs. CSR associations on consumers’ company evaluations (Brown & Dacin, 1997), we assume that different types of crisis responses using CA vs. CSR associations will influence consumers’ perceptions of the crisis messages and, in turn, their attributions of crisis responsibility. Therefore, we propose:

**H2**: The types of crisis responses (CA vs. CSR associations) will influence consumers’ attributions of corporate crisis responsibility.

There is no study that addressed an interaction between crisis types and crisis responses using corporate associations (i.e., CA and CSR), and a further exploration of the interaction of these variables will contribute to the development of crisis communication research taking a CA vs. CSR approach. Thus the following question is suggested:

**RQ1**: Is there an interaction between crisis types and response types in consumers’ attribution of corporate crisis responsibility?

**Method**

**Participants**
One hundred sixty two students from three undergraduate journalism courses at a large Midwestern university were recruited to participate in this study. Participants were compensated through extra credit. There will be approximately 40 participants in each condition.

**Design and independent variables**

This study involves a 2 (crisis type: accident vs. transgression) x 2 (response type: CA vs. CSR) x 2 (crisis issue: food poisoning vs. laptop battery explosion) mixed design experiment. Crisis type and response type were adopted as between-participants factors. Two crisis types used in this design, an accident and a transgression, were results of internal factors rather than external factors. Intentionality makes a difference between an accident and a transgression. Accidents are unintentional whereas transgressions are intentional.

Two types of corporate associations, corporate ability (CA) and corporate social responsibility (CSR), were used as crisis response types. Corporate ability was manipulated as a company’s responding message to a crisis that emphasizes the company’s expertise in producing and delivering its products. Corporate social responsibility was manipulated as a company’s responding message to a crisis that focuses on its ethical standards and social responsibility activities. Crisis type and response type were crossed to create four crisis news stories (accident and CA, accident and CSR, transgression and CA, and transgression and CSR). Crisis issue type was a within-participants factor and referred to the two different crisis issues, which are food poisoning and laptop battery explosion crises that participants read irrespective of condition.

**Stimuli**

All stories were written in a news style having headlines. All stories were similar in length, writing style, and number of quotations included except for paragraphs that include messages exclusive to each condition. Two stories for an accident crisis involved technical error recalls. One accident story related with technical error recalls involved a computer manufacturer’s decision to recall its batteries after receiving reports of injury of customers from laptop battery fires linked to a high temperature condition. Another accident story related with technical error recalls dealt with a salad bar chain’s shutdown of its restaurant after receiving reports that several consumers were diagnosed with heat-related food poisoning.

Two stories for a transgression crisis involved organizational misdeed. One transgression story involved allegations of a computer manufacturer’s intended flaw on manufacturing its batteries that caused minor burns to its consumers. Another transgression story involved allegations of a salad bar chain’s use of expired food items that caused several people to suffer from vomiting, diarrhea, and nausea.

Crisis response types, CA and CSR messages, were presented as a corporate apology in press releases. In the same way for both the accident stories and the transgression stories, the CA message manipulation focused on the company’s expertise in the industry and on the previous records in product quality. The CSR message manipulation dealt with the company’s commitment to ethical management as well as community development and supporting important charities.

**Manipulation check**

Taken Lee (2005)’s manipulation checks, crisis types were measured with two 7-point items. Participants were asked to indicate the following: To what degree they thought the organization could prevent the incident (1 = “not at all preventable by the organization” and 7 =
“absolutely preventable”) and to what degree they thought the organization had control over the incident (1 = “not at all controllable by the organization” to 7 = “totally controllable by the organization”). In order to check the manipulation for corporate associations, participants were asked to indicate whether the company’s responding messages to a crisis in the story they received emphasized the company’s expertise in the industry and product/service quality, or company’s social responsibility and ethical standards (1 = “not at all” and 7 = “very much”).

**Dependent variable**

*Perceptions of organizational responsibility for the crisis.* This measure was taken from Lee (2005)’s measure. On a 7-point bipolar scale, participants were asked to indicate (1) how much responsibility the organization should bear: 1 (not at all responsible) to 7 (totally responsible), and (2) to what degree they thought the organization should be blamed: 1 (not at all to be blamed) to 7 (absolutely to be blamed). These two items were averaged to compute an index of the perceptions of organizational responsibility for the crisis. The reliability of these two items were measured using Chronbach’s alpha (food poisoning crisis story: α = .89 and laptop battery explosion story: α = .82).

**Procedure**

This study was based on an online experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four different message conditions in a form of URL, created by applying a 2 (crisis type: accident vs. transgression) x 2 (response type: CA vs. CSR) x 2 (crisis issue: food poisoning vs. laptop battery explosion) mixed design. Each participant received an email that included informed consent form to notify them of their rights as a research participant, and stimuli with questions. Manipulated messages were presented in two random orders with participants randomly assigned to view one of the two orders. Therefore, each participant in each of the four conditions was exposed to two different messages by repeating the process of reading them and answering the related questions twice. Immediately after reading the articles, the participants were expected to complete the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire, a series of demographic questions were also presented. Demographic measures (e.g., age, gender, race, and education) as well as questions for manipulation checks were included at the end of the questionnaire.

**Results**

**Manipulation checks**

The validity of IV manipulations was tested by independent t-tests. For crisis type, two manipulation check items were averaged to a single score. The result of t-tests showed that participants in the transgression condition (M = 5.83) perceived higher controllability than those in the accident condition (M = 5.09; t(160) = -5.04, p < .001 ). For response type, participants in the CA condition (M = 5.74) perceived the response emphasizing company’s expertise more than those in the CSR condition (M = 5.23; t(160) = 2.70, p < .01). On the other hand, participants in the CSR condition (M = 5.65) perceived the response emphasizing company’s ethics more than those in the CA condition (M = 5.27; t(160) = -1.92, p < .05).

**Hypotheses tests**
After the manipulations of independent variables were checked, a series of ANOVA tests were conducted to test the hypotheses and research questions. The final results of these tests are discussed below.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that those in the transgression crisis condition will attribute more responsibility to the organization than those in the accident crisis condition. The main effect of accident vs. transgression on responsibility attribution was significant for both crisis issues (food poisoning and laptop battery explosion). For the food poisoning crisis, \( F(1, 160) = 5.03, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .03 \). Participants in the transgression condition (\( M = 6.26, S.D. = 1.04 \)) attributed more responsibility for the crisis to the company than did participants in the accident condition (\( M = 5.90, S.D. = .97 \)). For the laptop battery explosion, \( F(1, 160) = 13.4, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .08 \). Participants in the transgression condition (\( M = 6.26, S.D. = 1.02 \)) attributed more responsibility for the crisis to the company than did participants in the accident condition (\( M = 5.70, S.D. = .91 \)).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the types of crisis responses (CA vs. CSR associations) will influence consumers’ attributions of corporate crisis responsibility. The main effect of crisis response on responsibility attribution was significant for the laptop battery explosion crisis only. \( F(1, 160) = 4.90, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .03 \). Participants in the CSR condition (\( M = 6.15, S.D. = .86 \)) attributed more responsibility for the crisis to the company than did participants in the CA condition (\( M = 5.81, S.D. = 1.10 \)). That is, for the laptop battery explosion crisis, the corporate response emphasizing the company’s CSR association was less effective in reducing consumers’ responsibility attribution than the response emphasizing its CA association. In other words, the company which responded to the crisis emphasizing its expertise/capability was less blamed for the given crisis than the company which emphasized its CSR efforts. For the food poisoning crisis, there was no main effect of response types, however.
As for Research Question 1, significant interaction effects between the crisis types and responses were found in the food poisoning crisis \( F(1,162) = 5.33, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .03 \). In the accident condition, participants attributed more responsibility to the CSR-focused company \( (M = 6.06, S.D. = 1.00) \) than did participants to the CA-focused company \( (M = 5.76, S.D. = .92) \). That is, the CA-focused response was more effective than the CSR-focused response in the accidental crisis of food poisoning. On the other hand, in the transgression condition, participants attributed more responsibility to the CA-focused company \( (M = 6.46, S.D. = .69) \) than did participants to the CSR-focused company \( (M = 6.05, S.D. = 1.28) \). That is, the CSR-focused response was more effective than the CA-focused response in the transgressional crisis of food poisoning (see Figure 1).

Meanwhile, for the laptop battery explosions, there was no significant interaction between the crisis types and responses (see Figure 2).

As for Research Question 1, significant interaction effects between the crisis types and responses were found in the food poisoning crisis \( F(1,162) = 5.33, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .03 \). In the accident condition, participants attributed more responsibility to the CSR-focused company \( (M = 6.06, S.D. = 1.00) \) than did participants to the CA-focused company \( (M = 5.76, S.D. = .92) \). That is, the CA-focused response was more effective than the CSR-focused response in the accidental crisis of food poisoning. On the other hand, in the transgression condition, participants attributed more responsibility to the CA-focused company \( (M = 6.46, S.D. = .69) \) than did participants to the CSR-focused company \( (M = 6.05, S.D. = 1.28) \). That is, the CSR-focused response was more effective than the CA-focused response in the transgressional crisis of food poisoning (see Figure 1).

Meanwhile, for the laptop battery explosions, there was no significant interaction between the crisis types and responses (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. An interaction between crisis type and response for perceptions of organizational responsibility for the food poisoning crisis (1 = not at all responsible/not at all to be blamed, 7 = totally responsible/absolutely to be blamed).

Figure 2. An interaction between crisis type and response for perceptions of organizational responsibility for the laptop battery explosion crisis (1 = not at all responsible/not at all to be blamed, 7 = totally responsible/absolutely to be blamed).
Discussion

Implications

We made an attempt to examine how crisis types, as differentiated by an accident and a transgression, influence consumers’ responsibility attribution of the crisis to the company, as a function of cognitive association as CA or CSR. The findings of our study showed some main effects of crisis type (accident vs. transgression) and response type (CA vs. CSR), as well as interaction effects. Interestingly, however, such effects functioned differently depending on crisis issues (food poisoning vs. laptop battery explosion).

For the laptop battery explosion crisis, there was a main effect of crisis responses, but no interaction effect was found. That is, CA-focused responses were effective regardless of whether crisis was accidental or transgressional in the laptop battery explosion crisis. In the case of the food poisoning crisis, on the other hand, an interaction between crisis types and crisis responses was found. That is, CA-focused responses were more effective than CSR-focused responses in the accidental crisis, while CSR-focused responses were more effective than CA-focused responses in the transgressional crisis.

One of the most interesting findings in this study was the main effect of CA-focused responses over CSR-focused responses in reducing consumers’ perceptions of organizational responsibility in laptop computer crisis. Although many CSR studies have stressed the important role of CSR activities in enhancing consumers’ attitudes toward an organization and purchase
intention, our findings suggest that CSR approaches should be carefully considered; the CSR messages may not be as effective as expected in certain crisis situations. That is, CSR-focused strategies would work through a dynamic mechanism in an interaction with various situational factors. This finding is associated with Bae and Cameron’s (2006) research findings that the effectiveness of CSR messages was not effective in improving consumers’ perceptions of a company with bad prior reputation. While Bae and Cameron (2006) showed the link between CSR messages and prior reputation, this study examined limited effects of CSR messages, particularly in the context of crisis communication. The effects of CSR messages were contingent upon other crisis factors such as crisis types and crisis issues. It is noteworthy that CSR messages, often based on an organization’s relationship with a community, are not necessarily perceived in a favorable manner in a crisis situation.

We assumed that CSR-centered apologies are related to taking an accommodative stance as explained in the contingency theory of public relations developed by Cameron and colleagues (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997; Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999; Cameron, Wilcox, Reber, & Shin, 2008). Our findings are in line with the contingency theory in a sense that there are limited effects of an accommodative approach. Therefore, CSR messages as organizational positioning strategies in crisis situations need to be strategically employed with a consideration of various factors involved in crisis.

The study results suggest that public relations practitioners should strive to shape public perception of the organization as having little control over the crisis when consumers’ crisis responsibility perceptions are not necessarily clear. A distinction between an accident and a transgression might not be clear-cut from a consumer’s point of view. Given that perceptions of organizational responsibility for the crisis are oftentimes changed by the way consumers interpret the degree of organization’s controllability over the crisis, it is critical to develop crisis response strategies to increase consumers’ belief in an organization’s little control over the crisis.

The findings of this study also suggest that public relations practitioners should consider crisis types and crisis issues when implementing a crisis plan. For example, in order to deal with crises related to products that have relatively high product attributes and high product involvement such as computers, it would be more effective to highlight the company’s expertise in the industry and product/service quality than a the company’s CSR efforts. However, if an organization involves society’s well-being, CSR messages that focus on ethical management and community development may be a better option for crisis response strategies, particularly when the crisis is perceived as transgressional by consumers.

In sum, this study made a contribution to the body of crisis communication research by adopting corporate associations (CA vs. CSR) as a form of organizational positioning strategies in crisis situations. Although corporate associations have been found effective in forming consumers’ perceptions of organizations in the context of marketing, such effects have not been explored in crisis communication. We believe that corporate associations should be considered as important constructs as corporate crisis response strategies from a crisis management perspective.

Future research

Although this study extended the current literature in crisis communication by adopting CA and CSR associations from the field of marketing, more research should be conducted to further understand the relationships among crisis types, responses, and crisis issues with possible mediating variables such as credibility, relevance, and suspicion. Also, research on the connections between responsibility attribution and attitudinal/behavioral measures should be
examined. Future research needs to study more various organizational stances on the continuum from advocacy to accommodation as the contingency theory. It would be useful to find out what combinations among CA, CSR, crisis types, and crisis issues would make an organization’s crisis response most effective. For example, it would be interesting to examine how CA and CSR function under organization’s denial of responsibility of the crisis.

In conclusion, this study made a first attempt to further develop crisis communication research by applying CA and CSR association to the context of corporate crisis situations. We hope that our findings will strengthen and enrich public relations practitioners’ efforts to make their crisis strategies work as well as will provide new valuable insights for ongoing research in the field of crisis communication.

References


PR in the News: How a Sample of Network Newscasts Framed Public Relations
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Abstract
Content analysis was conducted on a random sample of news stories using PR-related terms on ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news broadcasts from 1997 to 2005. A Lexis-Nexis keyword search resulted in 530 transcripts using common references to public relations. Of the 530 stories resulting from the search, 36% were randomly selected for coding. Out of the list of 12 referencing terms, the most common was “public relations.” Overall, the terms were used properly more often than improperly, but the most common type of reference was a cliché. Terms were used negatively more often than positively or neutrally. Politics/government stories had the most negative framing of PR.

Public relations practitioners want their clients discussed positively in the news. When a product or event is discussed by journalists, that third-party endorsement lends credibility to the information and to some extent the organization or product (Callison, 2001; Lamons, 2002; Murphy, 2001). For some, a positive mention on the network news is the epitome of a successful placement. It is important to know what happens, though, when network news anchors and reporters throw around phrases like “public relations battle,” “PR nightmare,” or “PR war,” and say that a company’s positive actions amount to “just public relations.” Through content analysis, this study seeks to systematically examine the use of the term “public relations” and related terms on network evening news broadcasts from 1997 to 2005.

Literature Review
Five earlier studies directly relate to the current research focus: the examination of the use of the term “public relations” and/or related euphemisms by the news media. Previous researchers focused on print, broadcast, or both. Related articles have examined the portrayal of public relations practitioners and other communications professionals in fictional television programming, films, or novels, while others have investigated the perceptions of public relations practitioners by journalists and the public at large. Considering the recent research revealing the negative public opinion held against public relations and its practitioners (Callison, 2001; Callison, 2004; Callison & Zillmann, 2002; Jo, 2003; Sallot, 2002;), how the media present the PR industry and its professionals is of key importance and may help explain the poor perception. An investigation of media portrayal and its influence on audience attitude and opinion necessarily is grounded in research conducted in priming and framing.

Theoretical Basis: Priming & Framing
Priming is often studied in relation to politics with the basic idea being that viewers are prepared, or primed, to think about certain topics (Dillard & Pfau, 2002; Pan & Kosicki, 1997; Sears, 1993). Generally, studies focus on the top news stories of the day and how their presentation in the media prompts people to mentally process the information. While political issues are often investigated in priming studies (see Druckman, 2004; Mendelsohn, 1996; Miller...
& Krosnick, 1997), there is no reason to believe the influences of coverage are limited to the political arena. Desire for certain products, changes in attitude toward healthcare, and encouragement or discouragement of racial prejudice have all been discussed when it comes to priming abilities of the media (Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996; Yi, 1993; Zhao, Sayeed, & Capella, 2006).

Sears (1993) states that viewing television news coverage of certain issues primes “the individual’s attitudes toward that issue, making them more accessible and more influential” (p. 138). Iyengar and Kinder (1987) tested the priming hypothesis and concluded “that television news powerfully influences which problems viewers regard as the nation’s most serious” (p. 4). One sequential experiment showed news content to three groups: one observed news about shortcomings in defense preparedness; a second group watched news focused on economic problems; and a third group viewed news about pollution. Participants answered a questionnaire prior to the six days of news viewing and another questionnaire following exposure. Both questionnaires asked respondents about the most important problems facing the nation and the president’s performance. Results revealed that when primed on defense (or inflation or pollution), subjects judged the president by his performance in relation to the nation’s defense (or economy or environment).

Mendelsohn (1996) stated that since Iyengar and Kinder’s introduction of the idea of priming into the world of political science, many other studies have confirmed their findings. The media “can provoke opinion or behavior change not because individuals alter their beliefs or evaluations of objects, but because they alter the relative weight they give to various considerations that make up the ultimate evaluation” (Mendelsohn, 1996, p. 113). Mendelsohn examined an election in Canada and found that voter sophistication does not thwart priming and concluded that involvement in political conversations does prime issues.

According to Iyengar and Simon (1993), framing, like priming, is related to agenda-setting. Framing involves the presentation of information by the media, but it appears to have more levels of complexity than priming. Bateson (1972) first offered the illustration of a picture frame. Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem (1991) further explained that the frame determines what is included, what is excluded, and it gives a tone to the issue. Tankard et al. (1991) stated that frames include the topic, its presentation, and both cognitive and affective attributes. Goffman (1974) described frames as more of a schematic set-up in the brain that allowed people to organize new information through symbols and stereotypes.

Iyengar and Simon (1993) specified two types of frames: episodic (specific occurrences) and thematic (general topics). Ghanem (1997) stated that framing, as opposed to priming, involves the media trying to tell citizens how to think about a topic. Chyi and McCombs (2004) discussed how journalists often change the frame to keep a continuing story interesting. They suggested “thinking of frames as attributes of an object” (p. 24). Subsequently, it becomes increasingly important to investigate not only what topics the news media choose to air but also the manner in which the media present the topics.

Portrayals of Public Relations Practitioners by the Media

Much research has been performed on the depiction of various occupations in the media. Specifically, prime-time television has been a popular analysis area for occupation portrayals (see DeFleur, 1964; Gerbner, 1966; Gersh, 1991; Good, 1986; Mahon, 1994; Signorielli, 1993; Spaulding & Beasley, 2003; Stone & Lee, 1990; Tavcar, 1993). Focusing on news media portrayal of public relations, Keenan (1996) performed a census of the terms “public relations”
and “PR” mentioned in network news broadcasts from 1980 to 1995 using the Vanderbilt archive of television news abstracts. The most commonly mentioned benefactors of public relations were politicians or foreign governments, and the most popular story themes included war (either literal or metaphorical) or disaster (including disaster clichés). The presentation of practitioners was generally in the role of press agent. Keenan found an increase in the mention of the public relations terms over that 16-year period. Keenan also coded the stories as positive, negative, or neutral in tone. While his results showed a majority of these 79 news stories used a neutral tone when discussing public relations, negative stories outnumbered positive ones.

Jo (2003) also examined both print and broadcast news and the use of the term public relations from October 1998 to October 2001. Jo coded the type of organization mentioned (business, government, non-profit, citizen group, or politician/celebrity), the news story type (straight, feature, opinion column, or editorial), the purpose of PR portrayed (persuasion, advocacy, public information, cause-related, image-reputation, or relationship management), and the treatment of public relations within the story (positive, negative, or neutral). He found that public relations most commonly had a negative connotation when used in business or government-based stories, as opposed to the positive portrayal public relations received in stories about non-profit organizations. Additionally, Jo found that stories mentioning public relations generally referred to publicity campaigns, image-making efforts, persuasion, or marketing.

Bishop’s (1988) examination of public relations mentions in the media entailed a study of one month’s editions of three different newspapers. His sample included more than 16,000 articles, but only three were found to use “PR,” and none were found using the terms public relations or public information. On the other hand, 121 articles used the term “publicity.”

In other research, Tankard and Sumpter (1993) performed a content analysis of articles using the term “spin doctor” from 1982 to 1992. The researchers wanted “to look at how the spin doctors, who are attempting to set the news frames for other issues, are themselves framed by the mass media” (1993, n.p.). They recorded the frequency of use, the source using the term, and the tone – whether the term was used disparagingly or not. The number of times “spin doctor” was used increased over time ending with 1,553 in the final year of their study. Their results show the term was more often used by reporters (85%) than interview subjects. The term was used pejoratively in 46% of the mentions. Interestingly, this pejorative use decreased over time, from 70% in 1989 to 25% in 1992. According to Tankard and Sumpter (1993), “Rather than pointing the finger at media manipulation, as the term did when it was first used, the effect has become one of trivializing media manipulation” (n.p.). The authors concluded that journalists have come to accept spin doctors and no longer always use the term as a subtle jab.

Spicer (1993) used convenience sampling to collect stories, cartoons, and editorials that used the terms “public relations” or “PR” in the print media. He analyzed 84 items, 88.9% of which were from newspapers. He performed inductive thematic analysis allowing themes to emerge as his study progressed. Spicer’s ultimate categories of how “public relations and PR are given subjective meaning in the print media” were titled: distraction, disaster, challenge, hype, merely, war, and schmooze Spicer determined that “clearly there is not simply one meaning, either positive or negative, attributable to the terms” (p. 58). In his analysis, 83% of the sample used the terms in a negative or unfavorable way. According to Spicer, “Reporters, editors, headline writers, and cartoonists subjectively embed and reinforce negative connotations about public relations through their use of the terms public relations and PR” (p. 58).

Henderson (1998) followed the lead of Bishop and Spicer in her focus on the use of the terms “public relations” and “PR” by print media. She analyzed 100 articles published from
January 1995 to December 1996. Henderson created “a taxonomy of the connotative meanings of the term ‘public relations’ as used in the popular print media” (p. 48). She placed each story in one of eight categories: “public relations used correctly,” “public relations as a corrupter of the channels of communication,” “public relations as a corrupter of democracy,” “public relations as sleight of hand,” “public relations and winners and losers,” “public relations as disaster,” “public relations misused as synonym,” and “miscellaneous” (p. 48-50). She found that “public relations” was used accurately only 5% of the time. Her conclusion was that “apparently only a minority of the people who are writing for the mass media understand the phrase and the profession, at least well enough to use them correctly” (p. 51). Her findings include a low positive rating for the use of the term public relations (7.4 %). According to Henderson, “consistent with surveys of journalists, the implication is that they have a negative impression of the profession” (p. 53).

The study of the portrayal of the field of public relations and its practitioners in the media has spanned almost two decades, but much is left to uncover. The studies of Bishop (1988), Henderson (1998), Jo (2003), Keenan (1996), and Spicer (1993) offer baseline examinations of the presentation of public relations and its practitioners in the news. These portrayals of public relations in the media may be affecting how viewers perceive PR practitioners and the industry, in general. Building upon the foundational research efforts by scholars, research is still needed that employs scientific, random sampling of stories in the news that use the terms “public relations” and “PR,” among others. Besides the non-probability samples conducted by earlier researchers, several of the previous studies are weakened by their use of abstracts or summaries rather than complete transcripts. The current study seeks to fill this gap.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The main purpose of this study is to determine how “PR” and other public relations euphemisms are used by the network news media. Several hypotheses and research questions guide the study.

It is likely that there are differences between the handling of public relations terms by different networks and their personnel. Specifically the authors wondered whether anchor people, reporters, or interview subjects are more likely to use PR-related terms and in what context the terms are used. Perhaps some members of the media are using PR terms more accurately and framing the industry more positively than others. The researchers also wondered how often public relations is simply thrown in as an unrelated cliché. Finally, the authors wanted to search for patterns of usage by certain networks, anchors, and reporters.

**RQ1:** How are public relations terms used on the network evening news (1997-2005) based on story topic, manner of use, and speakers using the terms?

Based on Henderson (1998), the researchers expect to see an inaccurate use of terminology, thus it is postulated that:

**H1:** Public relations terms will be used inaccurately more than they will be used accurately.

Based on Henderson (1998), Keenan (1996), Spicer (1993), and Tankard and Sumpter (1993), the researchers expect to see a large number of stories that negatively frame public relations.

**H2:** Public relations terms will be used negatively more often than they will be used positively.
While the researchers expect the terms to be used negatively, the authors are interested to know which story topics have more negative framing of public relations. Therefore, the question is asked:

RQ2: What types of stories are more likely to use public relations terms in a negative sense?

Method

Content analysis was employed to analyze the use of 12 public relations-related terms on the network evening news broadcasts from ABC, CBS, and NBC aired between January 1997 and December 2005. The search for the transcripts was conducted via Lexis-Nexis, a content analysis tool applauded for its ease of access and thoroughness (Tankard, Hendrickson, & Lee, 1994). A keyword search resulted in 530 stories using the following terms: community relations, corporate communications, corporate marketing, flack, media relations, public affairs, public information, public relations, PR, publicist, press agent, and spin doctor. The keywords were chosen based upon their acceptance as common references for public relations (Wilcox & Cameron, 2006). Of the 530 stories resulting from the search, 193 (36%) were randomly selected for coding.

The authors coded each story that included one of the 12 terms. The authors noted basic facts about the story including the day of the week, the month, date, and year, the story’s title, the length of the story (number of words), and the network. Also recorded were the names of the anchor and reporter associated with each story, the main focus of every story, the organization supposedly using public relations, whether public relations was central to the story, the overall impression on the PR industry, the type of PR reference, each term’s valence (positive, negative, or neutral), and whether it was a proper use of the term.

Operational Definitions

A term was deemed properly used if it followed the explanation of public relations given by Cutlip, Center, and Broom (as cited in Wilcox & Cameron, 2006): “public relations is the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 5). If the term did not follow this definition, it was determined to be an improper use. Often, improper uses of terms involved clichés such as “PR nightmare.”

With regard to the valence of the individual PR-related terms, the researchers coded each term as positive, negative, or neutral. The definitions for those levels were pulled from Jo’s (2003) study:

A positive meaning displays the positive role of public relations, suggesting the accurate meaning of public relations and a beneficial outcome to an organization. A negative meaning involves a dilemma of image, or failure of reputation management toward the organization. In this case, public relations was portrayed in a derogatory manner. A neutral meaning denoted a general adjectival use of public relations as in the phrases public relations strategy and public relations campaign. (italics added, p. 402-403)

Using Hosti’s (1969) method, intercoder reliability was tested on a random selection of 30% of the stories. Intercoder reliability was found to be 83%. The remainder of the stories were divided randomly and coded separately by the researchers.

Results
Term Usage Research Question

In an initial investigation of the data, analyses revealed 530 stories that used public relations-related terms between 1997 and 2005 on ABC, CBS, and NBC network evening news. RQ1 asked about differences between the use of the terms based on topic, manner of use, and the speaker using those terms. In the current sample of approximately one third (193) of the total number of news stories, public relations-related terms were found 226 times. The term used most often was public relations (59.3%). The second most common term, PR, was used less than half as often (27.4%). The other terms used within this sample were community relations (0.4%), corporate communications (0.4%), public affairs (6.2%), public information (1.3%), publicist (2.7%), and spin doctor (2.2%). The terms corporate marketing, flack, media relations, and press agent were also searched on Lexis-Nexis, but they were not found in this sample of stories.

Story topic. In investigations of topics of stories in which public relations terms are used, the most common story topic involved politics/government (34.1%). The second most common story type was war/military (18.1%). Other types of stories included a focus on business (14.6%), celebrity/entertainment (10.2%), trial/crime (9.3%), non-profit organization/event (4.4%), health (2.7%), teasers to open the news (1.3%), and sports (0.4%). Eleven stories did not fit one of the categories (4.9%).

Manner of use. The type of PR reference within the story tended to fall into the cliché category most often (45.1%), followed by descriptions of actual PR efforts (31.9%). The terms were also used as job titles (13.7%), business names (0.9%), and “other” (8.4%). The other category included the mention of someone’s job description and general references to a business or firm.

Speakers using terms. Out of 16 anchors involved in stories using PR terms during this time period, the anchors most commonly connected with the stories were Tom Brokaw of NBC (20.8%), Peter Jennings of ABC (23.5%), and Dan Rather of CBS (23.9%). Ninety-one reporters were involved in these 193 stories. The most commonly associated reporters included: Andrea Mitchell (4.4%), John Roberts (4.4%), Sharyl Attkisson (3.5%), Bill Whitaker (2.7%), Bob Faw (2.2%), George Lewis (2.2%), and Jackie Judd (2.2%). The frequency of term usage by networks showed CBS as the leader with 35% of the mentions, followed closely by ABC with 34.5%, and NBC with 30.5%.

Of those who actually used the term in the news story, reporters were the most common (60.2%). Besides reporters, those using public relations terms included anchors (18.1%) and interview subjects (11.9%). Reporters also sometimes quoted other sources as using PR-related terms (1.3%). There were also times when a public relations term was not spoken but was visible on the screen as someone’s title (7.5%). The frequency of use of public relations terms by the top three anchors showed Jennings saying the terms more (6.6%) than Rather (3.1%) and Brokaw (4.0%).

Significant differences were found using crosstabs analysis based on the individuals using the term and the type of stories ($\chi^2 (4, N = 225) = 10.61, p < .05$). When comparing reporters’ use of public relations terms and the story topics they covered, the data suggest that reporters use public relations-related terms more in war or government-related stories (59.9%) than in business (9.5%), entertainment (8.8%), trial/crime (9.5%), or other topics (12.4%). This is likely due to the world events occurring during the final five years of this study, including 9/11, the war in Afghanistan, and the beginning of the war in Iraq. There was a jump from one war story using a PR term in 2000 to seven in 2001, which continued to a peak of 10 in 2003 with U.S. troops on the ground in Iraq.
In business stories, other sources, including anchor people and interview subjects, tended to use public relations euphemisms more than reporters (59.4%). An equal number of reporters (12) and other sources (12) used public relations-related terms in entertainment stories.

*Proper Use Hypothesis*

Overall, the public relations terms were used properly (58.4%) more often than improperly (41.6%). This contradicts H1, which proposed that public relations terms would be used inaccurately more than they would be accurately; however, investigation of the top two most commonly occurring terms revealed a difference in usage. According to crosstabs data analysis, the most common PR-related terms used in these stories were not used in the same manner ($\chi^2 (1, N = 196) = 4.37, p < .05$). A review of the data suggests that the term “PR” is used properly on the evening network news 64.5% of the time; however, the term “public relations” is used properly only 48.5%.

The accuracy of term usage by networks was examined as well. According to crosstabs data analysis, there was no difference in the treatment of the terms by network in a proper versus improper manner ($\chi^2 (2, N = 226) = 4.38, p > .05$).

*Valence of Terms Hypothesis*

With regard to the stories’ portrayal of the overall industry of public relations, the majority of stories were neutral (64.2%). Thirty percent were negative and approximately five percent were positive in their portrayal of the industry in general. While it was not the majority, these results still suggest that the public relations industry as a whole receives a serious amount of negative coverage in the nightly broadcast news.

The valence of the use of each term was also rated as positive, negative, or neutral. The most common valence rating was negative (48.7%), followed by neutral (46.9%), and lastly, by positive (4.4%). There were so few positive stories that to perform statistical analysis on the valence of the most common terms used (PR and public relations), positive and neutral were combined into a “non-harmful” category. According to crosstabs analysis, there was no difference in the treatment of the top terms (PR and public relations) with regard to the individual terms’ valence as harmful or non-harmful ($\chi^2 (1, N = 196) = .42, p > .05$). The same combination of positive and neutral into a non-harmful category was also required to compare the valence of the overall story and the most common terms used. According to crosstabs data analysis, there was also no difference in the use of “PR” and “public relations” and the overall impression on the public relations industry ($\chi^2 (1, N = 195) = 1.43, p > .05$).

An examination of the valence of public relations terms based on the network airing each story shows a significant difference according to crosstabs analysis ($\chi^2 (2, N = 226) = 8.68, p < .05$). Further investigation of the data suggests that ABC had the biggest share of non-harmful (positive/neutral) framing (39.7%) compared to NBC (34.5%) and CBS (25.9%). While ABC's and NBC's use of PR-related terms were more often non-harmful (59% and 58%, respectively), CBS's stories were more often potentially harmful (62%). According to crosstabs analysis, there were no differences between the network and the overall impression on the PR industry ($\chi^2 (2, N = 225) = 2.82, p > .05$).

The top three anchors were also examined for their connection with PR-related terms in a harmful (negative) or non-harmful (positive and neutral combined) manner. This included their actual use of the terms and their interactions with reporters or other sources using the terms. Based on frequency, the results seemed to point toward Dan Rather as a more negative framer of
public relations. Unlike the other two anchors, a majority of the stories he was involved with framed PR terms negatively (61.1%); however, crosstabs failed to show that the difference was significant ($\chi^2 (2, N = 154) = 5.21, p = .07$). Therefore, there were no significant differences found based on the top three anchors (Brokaw, Jennings, and Rather) when investigating the valence of the individual terms. There were also no significant differences based on these anchors’ involvement with the proper use of the terms ($\chi^2 (2, N = 154) = 4.31, p > .05$) or their overall impression on the industry ($\chi^2 (2, N = 154) = .53, p > .05$).

**Story Topic and Valence Research Question**

With regard to the focus of the story, crosstabs analysis reveals a difference in the valence of the public relations-related terms based on the story topic ($\chi^2 (5, N = 226) = 11.90, p < .05$). The data suggests that celebrity/entertainment stories tended to frame public relations terms more positively or neutrally (70.8%) than negatively, while trial/crime stories and stories about politics/government were more negative (71.4% and 54.5%, respectively) than positive/neutral. The most common focus for non-harmful (positive/neutral) stories was politics/government (30.2%). Additionally, the most common focus for harmful (negative) stories was also politics/government (38.2%). This data answers RQ2, which asked what story topics would be more likely to use PR-related terms in a negative manner.

**Discussion**

Numerous references using PR euphemisms were found on network evening newscasts between 1997 and 2005. The most common term found in this sample was “public relations,” followed by “PR.” The reason these are so commonly found may be tied directly to the frequent use of them within trite sayings like “public relations disaster,” “public relations war,” or “public relations nightmare.” The number of clichés is disheartening. To have more than 45% of the PR references come in the form of a platitude is likely to send a message that the industry itself is stale.

Other terms used in the news reports in this sample included community relations, corporate communications, public affairs, public information, publicist, and spin doctor. The terms flack, corporate marketing, media relations, and press agent were not used in these stories. It was encouraging not to see the disparaging term flack used in any descriptions of public relations efforts.

Politics/government was the most common focus of news stories using PR-related terms, followed by war/military. The prevalent number of stories in these categories is likely connected to world events. With regard to the news teams using these terms, 17 anchors and 91 reporters were involved in the 193 stories in this sample. Reporters were the most likely speakers to use a PR-related term. The PR references found in this study tended to be clichés. Surprisingly, actual PR efforts were also described in a number of stories. Other terms were shown on the screen as a source’s job title or place of work or mentioned as someone’s job was described.

The four main significant findings from this study involve the proper/improper use of the top two terms (PR and public relations); who said the term and the focus of the story; the network airing the term and whether its use was deemed harmful or not harmful; and, finally, the valence compared with the story topic.

Significant differences were found for the proper versus improper usage of the two most common terms, PR and public relations. This finding offered some support for H1. The term
“PR” was more likely to be used accurately than inaccurately, while “public relations” was more likely to be used inaccurately, perhaps because of more clichés using the latter term.

Significant differences were apparent based on who used the term and the type of story involved. Reporters tended to use PR-related terms more in war or government-related stories than any of the other topics. The large number of war-related stories is likely because of the events of the last five years of this study (2001-2005). For business stories, the speaker using a PR-related term was more likely to be the anchor or an outside source. The “other” category also included PR terms on the screen, so perhaps there were more public relations practitioners asked to serve as experts in interviews about business topics.

With regard to the valence of each term’s use by the three major networks, CBS had significantly more negatively framed terms than ABC or NBC. Perhaps a network’s use of PR-related terms is connected to the leadership of the anchor. It would be interesting to test for any changes in the valence of these terms since the recent turnover of anchor people at each network.

Significant differences were found for the valence of the terms based on the topic of the stories. Trial/crime stories were more likely to use PR-related terms negatively, and celebrity/entertainment stories were more likely to use the terms positively. This seems logical in that most trial/crime stories would be negative in their focus anyway. These results helped answer RQ2, which asked what story topics were more likely to use public relations terms negatively.

Overall, more stories presented PR-related terms negatively than positively or neutrally. Therefore, H2 was supported. This fits in with the findings of previous studies in that public relations is generally portrayed negatively. This negative framing of public relations is likely to have an impact on how viewers of the news think of the PR profession. While the terms were deemed negative more often than positive or neutral, when examining the stories’ overall portrayal of the PR industry, more stories were found to be neutral. This may be the case because public relations was not generally the central focus of the news stories.

There was no difference between the valence of “PR” and “public relations.” Most likely this is because they are both used in an equally negative manner. There was also no difference between these two terms and their overall impression on the industry. Again, it appears that the negative use of both terms equally frames the industry in a negative light.

**Conclusion**

This study adds to the literature on the treatment of public relations by the news media. It will benefit academe by offering an updated, systematic, longitudinal examination of the use of public relations-related terms on the network evening news. It builds upon previous research by expanding the list of terms studied. It also confirms previous findings about the prodigious use of PR-related terms, which are most often framed in a negative manner.

This research offers an overall impression of the presentation of public relations on the network evening news including a more specific breakdown of who is using the terms, which terms are used most often, what story topics are covered, whether they are used properly/improperly or positively/negatively, and how this reflects on the PR industry as a whole. There were very few positively framed stories; however, the fact that non-harmful (positive-neutral) stories outnumbered the potentially harmful (negative) stories was surprising and encouraging. Also, it appears that the negative framing of individual terms may not have as much of an effect on the impression of the industry overall, which is also good news.
The reason “PR” is more often used accurately than inaccurately while the opposite is true for “public relations” remains a mystery. Perhaps there are more clichés spelling out “public relations” than those using “PR.” This seems to be the case with the repetition of the hackneyed descriptions of public relations battles, disasters, and nightmares.

The investigation of the expanded list of terms offers a baseline of frequencies that should be useful for future studies. Future researchers could update these numbers every 10 years to compare the use of these 12 terms over time. To discover how the negatively framed terms and rampant clichés impact viewers, experiments could also be conducted to test for any actual media effects from watching news stories that mention public relations.

References


Defining Social Responsibility in Sport:  
Sports Practitioners’ Perception of Their Role in Social Responsibility  
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I would like to thank the Arthur W. Page Center at Penn State University for their support of this project. Through their support, research such as this can be conducted in areas that often have restricted access. Their commitment to ethical concerns allows researchers to open the door of conversation and candidly discuss social responsibility and how to integrate it into our daily activities.

Abstract
Society places increasing demands for organizations to act in a socially responsible manner, but what does that mean for the practicing sports public relations practitioner? This analysis examined sports organizations at every level and found that sports practitioners define social responsibility as professionalism, and use it as a guide in all aspects of their job. The analysis also reflects the tenuous balance between organizational and societal interests and illustrates that sports practitioners manage this balance by two divergent approaches to social responsibility, an intrinsic motivational approach and an extrinsic motivational approach. Finally, this analysis suggests the emergence of an internal social responsibility in sport that seeks to teach athletes the merit of social responsibility through the development of character and leadership skills.

Stan Lee, the developer of such comic book heroes as Spider-Man, the Hulk, the Fantastic Four, and Ghost Rider once penned the phrase “with great power there must also come great responsibility” (McLaughlin, 2007). Used as the leading quote in the 2002 Spider-Man movie, this phrase reflects the enduring value of social responsibility in society. As an organization’s or an individual’s influence grows, the need for ethics or social responsibility becomes greater (Fitzpatrick, 2006; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995). These entities become role models. Nowhere is this status more prevalent than in sports. Athletes are regarded as role models, our modern day super heroes, and their actions, even their words, are mimicked on and off the athletic playing field (Lule, 2001). Such a status brings an associated responsibility to society; a responsibility that sports practitioners must often communicate and manage (Bivins, 2006).

The public relations profession has made strides in managing this responsibility through the development of professional ethical standards and conceptual ethical models. For example, the Excellent Study’s definition of symmetrical communication provides a defining framework for ethical practice in public relations (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). However, public relations practitioners and students alike often find this explanation idealistic and incongruent
with real-world practice. The dichotomy between how it should work and how it does work separates academia and professional practice. Practitioners and academics alike are left walking on quicksand, knowing that each idealistic step may bury them deeper into the complexities of ethics. The purpose of this analysis is to define how public relations practitioners in sport define their role in fostering social responsibility.

**Literature Review**

Ask 100 people if social responsibility is important, and you will receive a unified yes. Ask those same 100 people what social responsibility is, and you will probably get 100 different responses, hence the problem. While today’s society expects organizations and its professionals to be socially responsible, they are less clear on what social responsibility is. This literature review will first examine the literature to establish a baseline understanding of social responsibility and then consider the implications for public relations practitioners.

This literature review will describe two basic practices of social responsibility: an organization’s response to its environment and an organization’s dialogue with its environment. In an organization’s response to its environment, the organization remains primary and responds to the environment through actions that are deemed necessary and advantageous for the organization. Three basic approaches to social responsibility illustrate this conceptualization: public policy, stakeholder capitalism, and enlightened self interest. The public policy approach identifies a need in society and determines if an organization should respond to that need (Pearson, 1992). This approach places organizations in a passive role, responding to needs only as they become known. The second approach, stakeholder capitalism, represents a reactive organizational response to social responsibility. Stakeholder capitalism is the philosophy that a prosperous business owes something back to the community because the community supports the business and has helped it succeed financially (Badaracco, 1998). Companies internalize this philosophy as their “responsibility to give back”. Interestingly, organizations in this approach are often reacting to an internal expectation as well as an environmental expectation. This self-imposed response leads organizations to develop and increase action in the environment through “good deed” activities (Esrock & Leichty, 1998).

The third approach, enlightened self interest, supports organizational action in the external environment, but, an organization considers such activities in terms of organizational self benefit. It prioritizes organizational needs and wants above those of its external environment, allowing an organization to be “represented as in the public interest, even if their ultimate motivation is the financial benefit of the company” (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001, p. 197). Enlightened self interest operates under the philosophy that organizations should perform socially responsible activities that primarily benefit the organization through publicity, promotion, and financial gain. This approach aligns with the invisible hand concept in economics. The invisible hand suggests that when organizations pursue their own interests, they will naturally benefit individuals and society (Martinson, 1994). Organizations following enlightened self interest perform positive socially responsible activities as they seek to improve their financial and public relations position in the environment. Because of public relations interests, individuals and society often receive substantial benefit, but the ultimate motive remains organizational self benefit. If an activity would benefit society but not the organization, organizations that follow enlightened self interest would typically not perform the activity. As a result, societal needs that could be satisfied by the organization are not due to a self-centered motivation.
The danger of the three approaches is their negligence in how organizational action or inaction affect society. The failure is not inherently in an organization’s self interest, but using the organization’s self interest as a baseline for what is considered socially responsible (Martinson, 1994). Organizations must take care that their first priority is not their only priority. As such, a practitioner cannot engage in organizational action without also considering the implication of that action to others. In essence, a reward cannot be the only consideration. “The ethical practitioner must be concerned that no injustice is done to others. To be concerned about the welfare of others means that one must again by definition, be concerned about more than the organization/client’s self-interest” (Martinson, 1994, p. 104). In order to determine the implication of organizational action, organizations must engage in dialogue with society. This level of engagement represents the second practice of social responsibility, organizational dialogue. Organizational dialogue is best illustrated in the leader component of Reeves and Ferguson-DeThorne’s (1980) model of social responsibility and in the consultation method of Heath & Ryan’s (1989) model of social responsibility setting.

Reeves and Ferguson-DeThorne’s (1980) model of social responsibility describes the different approaches to social responsibility as a continuum with three points of practice along the scale: profit, citizen, and leader. The profit and citizen points illustrate the practice of an organization’s response to the environment, and the leader point illustrates the practice of an organization’s dialogue with the environment. The profit point represents organizations that seek to maximize organizational profit through socially responsible endeavors. This point resembles the enlightened self-interest approach to social responsibility. Here, organizations support action in the external environment, but all activity is evaluated through the lens of organizational self benefit. These organizations may represent themselves as if the public’s interest is top priority, but the ultimate motivation is the financial benefit of the company (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001). The profit organization operates under the philosophy that socially responsible activities should primarily benefit the organization and consistently prioritizes its needs over those of the external environment. The second point on the continuum is the citizen point. The citizen organization is concerned with its external environment and undertakes activities to assist various groups. It follows the public policy approach of social responsibility, that as needs and issues become known, the organization develops a response, and often publicizes these “good deed” activities to the external environment (Esrock & Leichty, 1998). A cursory examination might suggest the citizen point as an appropriate response to societal needs. Yet, it places organizations in a passive role, reacting to environmental needs only as they become known. Bucholz (1985) rejected this approach to social responsibility, saying that this approach ultimately dodges the issues of social responsibility. Organizations become passive reactors to environmental issues.

The final point on the social responsibility continuum is the leader point. The leader organization is deeply involved in solving social problems and identifying “quality of life” goals in the environment (Reeves & Ferguson-DeThorne, 1980, p. 42). It illustrates a movement along the continuum from a passive reactor to an active participant in social responsibility. The leader organization actively identifies needs in the external environment and determines what changes need to be made both internally and externally in order to effectively address societal needs (Pearson, 1989b). This point differs from the profit and citizen points primarily because of its emphasis on dialogue. The profit and citizen points represent a type of reaction to the environment. These organizations receive information, evaluate information, and then determine if and to what degree they will act. The leader organization, however, does more than simply
react to the environment; it responds. It dialogues with its publics to identify issues, develop goals, and solve problems.

A second model describes the two practices of social responsibility (Heath & Ryan, 1989). In a review of Fortune 500 web pages, Heath & Ryan (1989) identified three methods to setting an organization’s social responsibility: moral rectitude, image building, and public consultation. Moral rectitude and image building follow the practice of an organization’s response to the environment, and public consultation follows the practice of an organization’s dialogue with the environment. Moral rectitude identifies and implements one morally correct solution to a problem. This method illustrates an organization’s passive response to the environment. The organization chooses to respond to issues in the environment as they become known. It does not actively investigate social issues and typically relies on a self-motivated interest to guide its socially responsible activities. As a result, this method is considered inadequate because it doesn’t recognize the often-conflicting interests between the organization and its environment. Similar to the argument against enlightened self interest, organizational benefits are not always equally benefiting to the community. Moral rectitude does not consider this potential inequality in the organizational decision making process. The second method is image building, and it involves the publicizing of organizational good deeds. Much like enlightened self interest, image building relies on traditional publicity and promotion to gain a positive organizational image. However, these activities are typically organizationally-oriented. The activities are carefully selected to reflect a management-developed image of the organization. Activities that do not fit with this image are either not performed or, if performed, they are not publicized.

The final method, the consultation method, involves systematic monitoring and identification of the interests of various publics. It requires a dialogue with an organization’s publics and suggests a joint responsibility between an organization and its environment. The consultation method is considered idealistic, much like the leader approach. Yet, these more idealistic approaches to social responsibility remove the organization as priority and engage in socially responsible activities with society. The practice of an organization’s response to the environment illustrates social responsibility as something an organization gives to society, but the practice of an organization’s dialogue with the environment, as seen in the leader approach and consultation method, illustrates social responsibility as something an organization engages with society to perform. This second practice suggests that organizations move beyond organizational interests and genuinely seek to build relationships with its publics. In fact, today’s society expects it. “Society now expects businesses to improve the quality of life in ways that go beyond serving narrowly defined, enlightened self interest” (Baskin & Aronoff, 1992, p. 434). Interestingly, Reeves and Ferguson-DeThorne (1980) found that among the three points on their social responsibility continuum, the citizen organization projected the most favorable image of social responsibility to its environment while the leader point was seen as an idealistic view of social responsibility. The researchers determined organizations that publicize their contributions of time and money to the environment, regardless of motive, are perceived as more socially responsible. Yet, the idealism of the leader point reflects the idealism of symmetrical public relations. Both establish an important model for organizations to follow. These findings, then, underscore the need for a closer examination of social responsibility and public relations.

The Intersection of Social Responsibility and Public Relations

Grunig (1989) introduced the four models of public relations in an effort to explain the presupposition of public relations. He said the dominant presupposition of public relations was to
manipulate the behavior of publics for the benefit of the manipulated publics and the organization. He argued that this dominant presupposition should be replaced with a symmetrical supposition to guide the development and practice of public relations (Grunig, 1992, 2001). His four models include: press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical. The press agentry/publicity model seeks media attention, often through propaganda techniques. The public information model follows basic journalistic practice in disseminating information, but the information is selective and does not include negative information. The press agentry/publicity and the public information models are described as one-way communication models that are less effective than their two-way communication counterparts.

The two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models of public relations are more sophisticated in their use of research and two-way communication methods. The two-way asymmetrical model identifies messages most likely to produce the support of publics without having to change the behavior of the organization. It is based on persuasive techniques in order to attain a desired attitude or action from a public. The two-way symmetrical model seeks mutual benefits between an organization and its publics in order to bring about changes in the attitudes and actions of both. Researchers have identified the two-way symmetrical model as the most effective and most ethical model for practitioners to follow (Grunig, 1992, 2000; 2001; Pearson, 1989a; Prabu, 2004; Roper, 2005; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995).

Public relations practitioners have been identified as the initiators and managers of dialogue. Pearson (1989b) said that the goal for practitioners is to manage communication based on the ideal of dialogue, and by doing so, manage the moral dimension of the corporate conduct. While research contends that the symmetrical model is the most ethical, Grunig (1992) found that most organizations follow the two lower models of public relations, press agentry/publicity and public information. This finding is consistent with sports organizations as well. Neupauer (2001) found that most sports information practitioners practice the two lower public relations models through media relations. Sports practitioners use news releases, news conferences, media guides, and a host of other tactics to distribute selective pieces of information about their team, coaches, and players. These information subsidies are provided to sports media at a subsidized cost, making it more likely that media will acquire this preferred information. Universities commonly use this tactic by providing only certain players for interviews at a news conference and by scripting the media’s line of questioning. Grunig (1989) describes these lower public relations models as propagandistic and manipulative. He notes that the use of information subsidies results in an indirect manipulation of publics. They “influence the actions of others by controlling their access to and use of information relevant to those actions (Gandy, 1982, p. 61). Is it possible then for practitioners who historically follow the two lower models of public relations to practice social responsibility in their daily professional actions?

To answer this question, one must first address the juxtaposition that practitioners frequently occupy, the dual role of mediator and advocate. The ethical quandary is not which model is more ethical, but if professionals can practice ethical persuasion. This balance reflects the tension evident in the two main practices of social responsibility, an organizational philosophy of self-interest and a relational philosophy of organizational dialogue.

Balancing the Tension: The Dual Role of Mediator and Advocate

The difficulty of social responsibility is not its inherent importance, but its practice. Even when considered from a dialogue approach, social responsibility is commonly situated between two public relations loyalties, loyalty to the organization and loyalty to the environment or
society. Pearson (1989a) identified this tension as one that seemingly defies resolution. Research has sought to clarify and reconcile this balance between a practitioner’s conflicting loyalties and its impact on social responsibility. For example, Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) identify three main duties in public relations: duty to self, duty to the employer, and duty to society. Duty to self is defined by a personal value system. This personal system determines what a professional will or will not do and exemplifies the ideals of professionalism in social responsibility (Prabu, Kline & Yang, 2005; Wright, 1979). It guides personal actions and, by so doing, guides organizational action. A public relations practitioner’s second duty, duty to the employer, is an obligation to the organization the professional agrees to represent. This duty is enacted by the response and actions of an organization in an effort to favorably position the organization in the environment. Much like the self interest approach, duty to the employer considers all actions through the lens of the organization’s best interest. The central question for the practitioner is how will this activity benefit the organization? Seib & Fitzpatrick (1995) identify a practitioner’s final duty as a duty to society. Duty to society is an obligation to practice symmetrical public relations with their external publics. This duty is consistent with the dialogue approach in social responsibility and seeks to work with the environment through an exchange of needs and action in order to build relationships. This duty is believed to be more important than a duty to self and a duty to the employer (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995).

Sullivan (1965) rejected zealous advocacy for an organization and identified three ethical values for public relations practitioners to follow: technical values, partisan values, and mutual values. Technical values are morally neutral, while partisan values are concepts of commitment, trust, loyalty, and obedience toward one’s organization. Although Sullivan (1965) identified the necessity of partisan values, he warned that many practitioners rely on organizational values at the expense of other viewpoints. As a result, partisan values often fall prey to the self interest approach to social responsibility. Sullivan’s (1965) third value, mutual values, balances the one-sided weakness of partisan values. Mutual values are “higher values” and “they take into account the viewpoints, interests, and rights of others” (Parson, 1993, p. 57). These values reflect the dialogue approach to social responsibility.

While the identification of practitioner duties and values are helpful, their practical application is not as clearly defined. Organizations may submit to a duty to the employer and follow partisan values in some cases, but seek mutual values in a duty to society in other cases. Parsons (1993) models this seeming inconsistency by suggestion four competing public loyalties for a public relations practitioner that overlaps in their application. The four public loyalties are: self, employer, profession, and society. These publics are similar to the duties of self, organization, and society (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995). First, the individual practitioner must clarify his/her own values and how far s/he is willing to uphold those values. The second public loyalty is the organization that provides employment. “Acceptance of a position with an organization implies the acceptance of the organization’s philosophy and a contract to carry out the functions for which the practitioner is willing to accept payment” (Parsons, 1993, p. 52). This organizational loyalty aligns with Sullivan’s (1965) partisan values and suggests that if taken to an extreme, this loyalty may have negative consequences due to a self interest orientation in social responsibility. The third loyalty is a duty to the public relations profession. As a profession, practitioners have a responsibility to one another to act responsibly. Parsons (1993) suggests that this loyalty is higher than a loyalty to an organization. The fourth loyalty is a responsibility to society and is considered the most important for a practitioner (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995; Sullivan, 1965) Responsibility to society also includes an element of accountability to society for
irresponsible action. An organization’s social responsibility is often reflected in its ethical standards (Wright, 1979). In a study of corporations, Heath & Ryan (1989) found that most corporations have either written or unwritten codes of behavior that are updated regularly in order to guide social behavior. These codes of behavior indicate if an organization and its employees follow a loyalty to the organization, self, profession, or society. The overlapping loyalty sections often conflict with one another, and the practitioner has to discern the level of conflict and priority given to each. The overarching loyalty to society suggests that all other loyalties are subservient to a loyalty to society (Parsons, 1993). All the social responsibility models considered here place a duty, a value, or a loyalty to society as the highest priority. Yet, despite these models, practitioners identify the organization as their first professional duty (Bovet, 1993). Is social responsibility possible for practitioners who identify their first duty to the organization? The literature remains unclear; however, today’s environment requires an answer.

Today’s social climate demands organizations to increase their known socially responsible behavior. “Never before in history has the field of public relations been as affected by the social climate in which it operates because never before has the social climate demanded so much of the individual practitioner” (Parsons, 1993, p. 50). Under this pressure, many organizations have responded by hiring publicists to publicize the “good deeds” of the organization. This organizational response has allowed practitioners to retain the organization as the primary duty while appearing to respond to societal pressure. Yet, “good deeds” do not change organizational priorities. The culture remains invested inward with only secondary interests for those outside the organization (Heath & Ryan, 1989). To navigate the varying loyalty inconsistencies, practitioners follow the lower public relations models and selectively provide information to external publics in order to remain consistent with its “good deeds” image and to positively impact profit margins. This stance contradicts the symmetrical ideals of public relations and the dialogue approach of social responsibility (Grunig, 1992, 2000; 2001; Pearson, 1989a, 1989b; Roper, 2005; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995; Woodward, 2000). However, other researchers have suggested that the organization can remain a priority for practitioners if this priority is monitored closely (Edgett, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 2006; Fitzpatrick & Gautheir, 2001). The theory of professional responsibility is one such idea. It focuses on relationships between an organization and its publics, rather than on an organization’s obligation to serve society. (Fitzpatrick & Gautheir, 2001). It seeks to balance the conflicting loyalties of public relations practitioners by focusing on relationships with individuals. The term social conscious or loyalty to society is replaced with the term public conscious in order to reflect a practitioner’s focus to “serve society by balancing clients’ and employers’ interests with the interests of those directly associated with their clients' decisions and actions” (Fitzpatrick & Gautheir, 2001, p. 206). The theory is based on three principles. First, there must be a comparison of benefits and harms where harms are avoided or at least minimized, and benefits are maximized for all involved individuals. Second, persons should be treated with respect and dignity. And third, benefits and burdens of an action or policy should be distributed as fairly as possible. Through these principles, the theory of professional responsibility seeks to replace “social” with the term “public,” indicating a shift from society to the individual.

Despite a conflict in loyalties and divided interests, dialogue has been reiterated as the central component in social responsibility. Dialogue in social responsibility balances conflicting loyalties through relationships, which public relations seeks to build and maintain. The intersection of public relations and social responsibility then moves responsible action beyond
organizational “good deeds” and toward an interaction with individuals. In turn, social responsibility moves public relations beyond advocacy and toward a dialogue with individuals. Together, they seek to build symmetrical relationships between the organization and its public. Social responsibility, then, is an integral part of public relations because of the inherency of relationships in both (Bowen, 2004; Clark, 2000; Heath & Ryan, 1991; Tilley, 2005). Public relations is also instrumental in effectively communicating socially responsible initiatives to society.

**Communicating Social Responsibility**

Communicating an organization’s social responsibility helps create a positive image of the organization as a contributing member of society. Yet, Manheim and Pratt (1986) found that many organizations have failed to communicate their actions. “Vast resources are being devoted to socially responsible corporate behaviors, but the public either does not know about them or does not appreciate them” (Manheim & Pratt, 1986, p. 10). For example, many researchers have argued for organizational actions to be highly visible in order to improve or sustain the image of an organization, and that this visibility does improve a public’s perception of the organization (Heath & Ryan, 1989; Manheim & Pratt, 1986; Reeves & Ferguson-DeThorne, 1980). Should practitioners who practice organizational dialogue communicate the socially responsible activities of their organization, and if so, is transparency a concern? Manheim & Pratt (1986) suggests the affirmative and identify three communicating publics: the media, the public, and the makers of public policy. The media are the first point of entry in communicating social responsibility. This communication involves disseminating press releases and organizing news conferences regularly. The media are vital in reaching the public as they often influence the public agenda, which in turn may influence the policy agenda (Manheim & Pratt, 1986). The makers of public policy are identified as the ultimate target for socially responsible communication because they impact the marketplace in which the organization operates.

The self interest approach has typically communicated socially responsible activities to the media in order to make the public aware and foster a perception of social responsibility, but does a relational approach foster this same perception? David, Kline, and Dai (2005) identified three socially responsible practices and sought to determine which of the three would predict the greatest perception of social responsibility. The three identified values were discretionary practice, moral/ethical practice, and relational practice. Discretionary practices included social causes supported by organizations, causes such as the arts, education, children’s issues, and public health. Moral/ethical practices included treating employees fairly, competing fairly with competitors, responding to environmental concerns, and being truthful in a crisis. The relational practice encouraged listening to publics and building long-term relationships with them. Of the three practices, the relationship practice was found to be fundamental to an organization’s ability to be considered effective in the business environment. Discretionary practice or “good works” was found to be least important of the three practices. However, within the relationship of an organization and its public, discretionary practice was a significant predictor of social responsibility. (David, Kline & Dai, 2005). This finding indicates that while relationships are at the core of social responsibility, communication about an organization’s socially responsible activities serve to positively impact the relationship. The researchers suggest that these findings are encouraging to communicators who primarily practice the lower models of public relations, the press agentry/publicity and public information models. Based on their findings, promotion
and publicity have a positive impact on a corporation’s identity as being socially responsible when monitored by a relationship perspective (David, Kline & Dai, 2005).

The dichotomy in social responsibility mirrors the tension in public relations between self-interest publicity/promotion and symmetrical dialogue. To facilitate an examination of this balance, it is important to discern how practitioners perceive and manage social responsibility. This analysis provides a foundational examination of social responsibility in sports public relations by considering the following research questions.

RQ1: How do public relations practitioners define their role in fostering social responsibility?
RQ2: Do practitioners perceive message formation and dissemination part of an ethical social responsibility process?
RQ3: If so, how do they manage this process?

Methodology

Sports and its public relations practitioners provide a viable platform to examine social responsibility due to sports’ increasing ramifications in society as an agent of entertainment and influence. Sports public relations practitioners were identified based on their full-time status as a public relations/sports information practitioner of a sport organization and based on their availability. Study practitioners were located in the United States and are members of an organized sport governing body at either the college/university or professional level. The governing bodies include the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), National Basketball Association (NBA), Major League Baseball (MLB), National Football League (NFL), and National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR). Fifty-two full-time sports practitioners within the sampling frame were contacted, and 12 participated in the in-depth interview process. In-depth interviews were conducted to the point of redundancy, and each interview was transcribed, resulting in 41,084 words suitable for analysis. Transcripts were initially analyzed using grounded theory in order to identify terms in the text that characterized broad textual themes. Computer-assisted textual analysis was then used to quantitatively determine the themes apparent in the text. Computer-assisted textual analysis followed three main steps: the identification of frame terms, a hierarchical cluster analysis, and the determination of the dominant themes in text. The usage of computer-assisted textual analysis allows terms to emerge from text rather than imposing researcher terms on the text (Andsager, 2000; Miller, Andsager & Riechert, 1998).

Frame terms are terms in the text that together define textual themes. These terms are identified based on their magnitude and cultural resonance in the text (Miller 1997; Miller, et. al., 1998). Magnitude is a term’s frequency in the text, and was identified by developing a word count of words with substantial meaning. Non-meaningful words such as “the,” “a,” and “of” were not included in the list of frame terms. The grounded theory method assisted in the identification of culturally resonant terms in the text. Culturally resonant terms are terms that may not have a high frequency count in the text, but have substantial meaning. Using grounded theory, culturally resonant terms were chosen that characterized the themes that emerged from grounded theory. Previous computer-assisted textual analysis studies have used a similar identification method, choosing terms based on frequency, lack of ambiguity, and meaningfulness in context (Andsager, 2000; Miller, 1997; Miller, et. al., 1998). Together, magnitude and cultural resonance were used to identify 160 terms to be submitted to a hierarchical cluster analysis.
The second step in the textual analysis is a hierarchical cluster analysis using a computer-assisted textual analysis program. The identified frame terms were submitted to Ward’s method of hierarchical cluster analysis. This method obtains small-shaped clusters that are useful for identifying textual themes. A dendrogram was then created to provide a visual representation of the themes. Dendrograms generated through cluster analysis provide the researcher with an interpretable visualization of whether, and the degree to which, objects of interest relate in similarity and dissimilarity to one another. According to computer-assisted textual analysis research, the clusters in the dendrograms represent the themes present in analyzed text (Andsager, 2000; Miller, et. al., 1998). Each cluster of terms was given an identifier based on the theme apparent in the terms that comprise this cluster. Because the Ward’s method identifies several themes in a single body of text, the dominance of each cluster is calculated to determine which theme is the most dominant in the text.

The final step in the textual analysis is calculating the dominance of each theme in the text by calculating the standardized mean occurrence of each cluster (Andsager, 2000; Miller & Riechert, 2001). The standardized mean occurrence is the sum of the mean frequency of occurrence of each term in a single cluster. The higher the standardized mean score in each cluster, the higher the probability that the terms in the cluster or theme dominated the text. In this manner, the textual analysis is able to determine the prominence of each theme in text.

Findings

Three themes emerged from the sports practitioner interviews: professionalism, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation. Professionalism emerged as the strongest theme, with a 1.0001 standard mean occurrence, and included two categories, standards set by organizations and individuals, and accountability. The second theme, Intrinsic Motivation, emerged in two separate clusters, each with a 1.000 standard mean occurrence. The third theme, Extrinsic Motivation, emerged in a single cluster and with a slightly lower standard mean occurrence (.9994). The emergence of these three themes in the practitioner interviews provides the data to answer the following research questions.

RQ1: How do public relations practitioners define their role in fostering social responsibility?

The dominant theme Professionalism characterized how these practitioners perceived their role in social responsibility. They defined professionalism as “maintaining a certain set of personal and quality standards. Not only standards that your employer might have, but also some that your own conscience might have.” The professionalism theme emerged as two linked clusters, indicating two distinct categories of professionalism, organizational and individual standards, and accountability.

Sports practitioners identified organizational standards as important guidelines in the social responsibility process. These organizational guidelines included standards developed internally by the organization and externally by regulatory bodies. Internal organizational standards were identified as an organizational philosophy or code of behavior. Sometimes this philosophy was formally written, such as an athletic philosophy, and other times it was an informal characteristic of the organizational culture. Whether formal or informal, internal organizational standards were considered more successful when they were management-driven and management-modeled. For example, one practitioner recounted how the local high school had developed black mold in the school building, and lacked another place to conduct school. They were going to have to close school until the black mold could be removed, which would have put the school well into the summer months. The organization’s management opened the
sports corporate suites as classroom space so the students could complete the school year. “Nobody even questioned it; nobody even thought about if it was going to cost extra money, or anything like that,” said the practitioner. “It was just the right thing to do, so we did it.” Professionalism was also guided by organizational standards developed externally by regulatory bodies, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Practitioners noted the additional strain these types of regulations add to sports information duties.

Sports public relations practitioners also identified an accompanying set of individual standards that guided professionalism. The idea of individual standards emerged quantitatively with the term character emerging as part of the Professionalism theme (.0118). It was also evident in the statements of the practitioners. For example, one practitioner explained that his personal character was his ultimate guideline in being socially responsible. He defined social responsibility as ethics and said, “In terms of ethics, you’re obligated to always be truthful. I say that not just because of a personal code, but also keeping yourself out of trouble. That’s first and foremost.” Another practitioner agreed, saying that social responsibility is “doing the right thing even when no one is looking.”

The Professionalism theme incorporated the second category of accountability as either an obligation or as an opportunity for both organizations and individuals. Many practitioners shared that the level of organizational accountability was tied to the level of organizational prominence. One practitioner said, “They may all go to work at the homeless shelter; they may all volunteer at Habitat for Humanity, but if the people from the local delicatessen go to Habitat and start building or go to the homeless shelter and start service, their help is much appreciated, but nobody really knows who they are. They’re just people who came to help out. But you get (our organization’s) football and basketball players, and it just has a lot more impact.” While social responsibility was considered by many practitioners to be an obligation, it was also seen as an opportunity. In fact, most practitioners did not see obligation as a negative aspect, but one that brought opportunity. For example, one practitioner noted that his high profile organization increased the opportunities for social responsibility. “Everyone has an opportunity and maybe a responsibility to improve whatever community that you’re living in. A high profile organization has the opportunity to have much more of a positive impact on community and society in the area,” he said. Thus, practitioners viewed accountability as both an obligation that brought opportunity to the organization. They also identified an individual accountability in sports.

The term model emerged in the Professionalism theme, and a textual analysis of this term’s use revealed that the term model was used in the phrase role model. Sports practitioners connected the idea of role model to an individual accountability in professionalism, primarily for its athletes. “These athletes are extremely gifted,” said one sports practitioner. “They have an opportunity to influence other people, particularly younger people who hold these athletes as role models. They can have a tremendously positive impact.” As with social responsibility, the status of role model is not a choice for most athletes, but a requirement. “I think most athletes know they are held as role models. I’ve heard a couple of athletes say on occasion ‘I don’t care what you think. I’m not a role model. I don’t want to be a role model.’ But because of celebrity, if you will, there is a responsibility,” one practitioner said. Many practitioners said their job in the accountability process is to prepare young athletes to be appropriate role models. “One of my duties is helping them (athletes) to realize what an impact and influence they do have and what role that they’re going to have for the rest of their career, and that they need to take it seriously. That is probably one of my most important roles,” one sports practitioner said.
Sports practitioners said that in sport, a team’s wins and losses often dictate the public’s perception of an organization. When a team is successful, the organization must be doing everything right, but when the team struggles, all aspects of the organization are cast into doubt. One practitioner said that this sport principle holds true with social responsibility as well. “A really hard thing for us to deal with is that our community’s perception of the team in general is very closely tied to team performance. When you’re winning, everybody loves us; when you’re losing, everybody wants us to head out of town. Trying to convince the community of the other things that we do that are wonderful and beneficial to them is a big challenge.”

*RQ 2: Do practitioners perceive message formation and dissemination as part of an ethical social responsibility process?*

Sports practitioners agreed that all words and actions should be guided by a professionalism that encompasses accuracy and truth. The terms *accuracy* (.0235) and *truth* (.0118) clustered together in the hierarchical cluster analysis and were the first terms to emerge in the Professionalism theme. “I think you have a responsibility to report accurately, to be fair to all of the student athletes, coaches, and teams,” said one practitioner. The term *balance* (.0588) emerged in the Professionalism theme as the second strongest term in the cluster. Practitioners struggled with balancing the needs of external publics, such as the media, with the needs of the organization. The majority of practitioners said that the first loyalty was to their employer. The term *organization* emerged as the strongest term in the Extrinsic Motivation theme (.0992). “The first priority would be the university,” said one practitioner. Another practitioner discussed the tension between an employee obligation and the level of message transparency. “I think you are obligated to be truthful, but you’re also obligated to keep the interests of your employer in mind,” he said.

The relationship between sports practitioners and the news media was the main job duty in message formation and dissemination noted by practitioners. The term *media* was the most frequent frame term (112) mentioned by sports practitioners. One practitioner described a practitioner’s role with the media as an “information funnel.” Interviewed practitioners approached this tension between their organization and external publics as a balance of needs. “It’s like you have two different teams tugging in different directions. It’s our job to try to find them (the organization and the media) some common ground and agree on a circumstance that’s workable for both parties,” said one practitioner. Thus, practitioners agreed that message formation and dissemination often embody the delicate balance of priorities inherent in social responsibility.

*RQ 3: If so, how do practitioners manage the social responsibility process?*

Sports practitioners identified two areas of motivation that guided their social responsibility process, an intrinsic motivation and an extrinsic motivation. Many of these sports organizations had activities that they had developed to address specific community issues, such as helping children’s charities, assisting special community groups, and developing mentor programs. Yet, it was how practitioners approached these activities that differed.

In the Intrinsic Motivation theme (1.000), *community* was the most dominant word (.4626) with the word *building* (.1224) clustering with it. The terms *habitat* and *humanity* emerged together in the second Intrinsic Motivation cluster, illustrating sports organizations work with Habitat for Humanity. Intrinsically motivated practitioners identify activities as their primary management function. They describe community service as the experience that brings the greatest organizational and personal change. For example, one sports practitioner said, “On a personal level for me, anything that I can do to help make things just a little bit better for kids or
for anybody who’s in need, I’m just very interested in that. I want to be able to help.” These practitioners said that public recognition was not the main goal in the social responsibility process. For example, one practitioner explained that her organization often lets the smaller nonprofit centers that receive their help get the publicity. “A strategy we’ve tried is for nonprofits that we align with to write the news release. We give them information, but then the media pitch and everything comes from them on their letterhead so that it doesn't sound as self-serving. This is how we’re accomplishing a goal together to prevent child abuse in our community. It seems to be a win-win,” she said. In fact, many sports practitioners believe that a pure motive is key to managing the social responsibility process. “I don’t believe anybody has a social responsibility to do anything specific, because you’re doing it for the wrong reason,” said one practitioner. “You choose something because you want to do it. It doesn’t matter what as long as you believe in the cause and want to be a part of that.”

Sports practitioners identified a second motivation that guided the social responsibility process, an extrinsic motivation. The Extrinsic Motivation theme (.9994) was slightly less pervasive than the Intrinsic Motivation theme in the data, and focused primarily on the idea of publicity. The strongest terms in the Extrinsic Motivation theme were organization (.0992) and negative (.0794), with a strong emphasis on publicity (.0317) and promotion (.0317). The term negative suggests that practitioners seek to overcome negative issues through positive publicity and promotion. A textual analysis supported this finding with extrinsically motivated practitioners identifying positive publicity as their primary management function in social responsibility. “We’re charged with generating positive publicity for our athletic program, student athletes, coaches, and teams,” one practitioner said. Several practitioners described how they used community service activities as opportunities to generate positive publicity for the organization. “What we’re trying to do is make sure whenever we’re doing those things, we have internally a photographer and videographer who can get pictures for our publications, put them on our website and send them to the media,” said one practitioner.

Although publicity and promotion emerged in the Extrinsic Motivation theme, practitioners who exemplified a more intrinsic motivational approach also used publicity. These practitioners were quick to note, however, that socially responsible activities were not used to simply garner publicity. Rather, practitioners noted a delicate balance in managing social responsibility and managing organizational publicity. Despite the motivational differences, both the extrinsic and intrinsic motivational approach share a commonality in their management process, the importance of relationships. The term relationship (.0714) in the Extrinsic Motivation theme was stronger than the combined strength of publicity and promotion (.0634). The idea of relationships was expressed in the Intrinsic Motivation theme with the term talking. Talking (.3026) emerged as the second most dominant word in the Intrinsic Motivation theme. A textual analysis supported this commonality as all of the interviewed sports practitioners identified relationships as the ultimate reward of all their job duties. One practitioner said that the most important aspect of the job is “the relationships you build.”

Discussion

Sports public relations practitioners defined social responsibility as maintaining a certain set of professional and quality standards that originates from an employer and from an individual’s conscious. This definition reflects practitioners’ emphasis on job responsibilities and performance, emerging in the analysis as professionalism. Based on these practitioners, professionalism lies at the very core of social responsibility and is based on the values of
accuracy, honesty, and trustworthiness. However, these practitioners revealed two divergent approaches: an extrinsic motivational approach and an intrinsic motivational approach.

The first approach, the extrinsic motivational approach, is analogous to both the enlightened self interest and the profit and client points on the social responsibility continuum in that extrinsically motivated organizations are often reactive to their environment and develop actions primarily to benefit the organization (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001; Reeves & Ferguson-DeThorne, 1980). Practitioners assume an advocate position and use publicity and promotional tactics to position their organization in the most desirable light. This finding concurs with the sport communication literature that found sports information practitioners typically perform the lower models of public relations (Neupauer, 2001). These organizations react to the external environment rather than having a clear philosophy to guide socially responsible activities. With the omission of clear principles, these practitioners describe themselves as publicity agents, even in social responsibility, who seize on socially responsible activities as “publicity opportunities”. The ultimate goal of positive publicity reduces the probability of organizational dialogue with the external environment, leaving sports practitioners to practice reactive social responsibility. Despite the dominant focus on publicity, the idea of relationships in this approach was evident. These practitioners said that relationships were a central concern in their job duties. Yet, the practitioners’ explanation of their job duties and their perception of social responsibility did not reflect this relationship priority.

The second approach, the intrinsic motivational approach, reflects the idea of an organizational dialogue between the organization and its environment. These practitioners actively engage with the environment to identify issues and develop appropriate activities (Esrock & Leichty, 1998). Sports practitioners are no longer reactive agents, but shapers of socially responsible activities. This intrinsic motivational approach exemplifies the theory of professional responsibility. With its core focus on relationships, this approach develops relationships between the organization and society, fostering a mediator role for public relations practitioners (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001). As mediators, practitioners are able to practice what Grunig (1989) considers the ethical practice of public relations. However, practitioners in the intrinsic motivational approach follow their extrinsic counterparts and practice publicity and promotion. They describe media relations as their primary job duty, a strategy often placed in the lower models of public relations (Grunig, 1989). Practitioners in the intrinsic motivational approach also operate primarily as mediators for their organizations, by establishing and maintaining two-way communication, rather than the extrinsic approach of advocates. Further, all communication is developed from a symmetrical standpoint. With the emphasis on dialogue and relationships, organizations in the intrinsic motivational approach do not engage in socially responsible activities for publicity reasons. Rather, these activities are part of strategic objectives that are ultimately tied to the organization’s mission (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001).

Responsibility to Society and the Organization

The social responsibility literature recognizes the precarious balance of priorities that public relations practitioners face. Sport is no different. All sports practitioners in this analysis admit the difficulty in being responsible to both the organization and to society. The extrinsic motivational approach typically prioritizes the organization over society and identifies its primary duty as maintaining a positive organizational image. Of notable interest, however, practitioners in the intrinsic motivational approach also describe their daily operations in the same manner. Is it possible then for practitioners who operate in the lower models of public
relations to effectively practice social responsibility? Yes. Both approaches engage in socially responsible activities. Even the extrinsic motivational approach, despite its tight organizational focus, develops effective socially responsible activities. Why? Organizations with improper motives can and do perform good activities (Martinson, 1994). These activities, however, are reactive to the environment rather than strategically planned, causing an inconsistency in their effectiveness. The intrinsic motivational approach consistently reflects effective socially responsible activities because activities seek to build relationships with individuals in society. Practitioners of the intrinsic motivational approach operate as facilitators of dialogue, and although their job duties remain highly technical, all job activities are filtered through a relationship perspective. This analysis, then, indicates that the lower models of public relations can be effective and ethical if guided by a relationship-based social responsibility (Grunig, 1989; Murphy, 1989). The following model illustrates the practice of social responsibility in sports.

The Root System of Social Responsibility

This analysis has identified how sports public relations practitioners define and approach social responsibility in their daily activities. It has also considered the observable practice of social responsibility. To clarify its practice, this analysis suggests a root structure that describes how the two identified approaches operate in sport. The root structure of social responsibility encompasses four levels that build on one another from an inner core to the top superficial layers. The layers from top to core include: the communication layer, the engagement layer, the organizational culture layer, and the individual conscious core. The two top layers represent a superficial practice of social responsibility. Moving down through the layers, social responsibility extends from a superficial publicity-based practice to a relationship-based practice. Organizations with deep roots have stronger, more established, and more effective socially responsible programs than organizations with superficial root systems.

The first layer in the root structure is the communication layer. At the most superficial level, this layer disseminates information about socially responsible activities in order to gain positive publicity and promotion for the organization. Both the extrinsic and intrinsic motivational approaches have firm roots in this layer, and both will engage in “good deed” social responsibility. However, organizations with deeper root systems, such as those in the intrinsic motivational approach, typically avoid self-promotional tactics. The second layer, the engagement layer, seeks to engage society at varying points. While still at the superficial level, this layer represents a transition where organizations can begin to develop a deeper root structure. To do so, the engagement layer incorporates two different stages of engagement. The first stage is a response to the environment. Organizations at this stage are aware and responsive to society, but typically in a reactive manner. As issues arise, organizations determine a response based on self-interest. This stage has a strong tie to the communication layer. Most organizations typically communicate the activities of this response stage. If the root structure proceeds no deeper than this point, organizational response is typically directed by the amount of positive publicity an organization can receive. The second stage in the engagement layer is a dialogue with society. This stage exhibits deeper roots than the first stage, and includes organizations that seek to develop a relationship at the individual level. These organizations seek to balance the needs and wants of both the organization and society by engaging in a dialogue with individuals. Activity and communication in the upper layers are guided by the relationship between the organization and individuals in society. Typically, the intrinsically motivated organization will have a stronger root structure in the dialogue stage, and the extrinsically motivated organization is more prone to
the reactive publicity found in the response stage. Organizations may move between the two stages. Both approaches, however, use the engagement layer to develop information at the communication layer.

While the communication and engagement layers remain at the superficial level of social responsibility, the third layer, the organization culture layer, represents the beginning of a developed social responsibility root structure of an organization. The organizational culture layer indicates an organization that has guidelines for social responsibility and a culture that fosters such activity. Extrinsicly motivated organizations are not found at this level; rather, the intrinsically motivated organization is rooted in this layer. All socially responsible activity and communication from the superficial layers should be congruent with this organization culture layer. Organizations will still struggle in maintaining this tenuous balance of priorities, and at times, may revert to the superficial layers; however, these organizations typically do not engage in an activity that is incongruent with the culture layer. The core of the root system is the individual conscious. Sports practitioners defined this layer as professionalism and a core component of social responsibility. Individual conscious is often manifest through a person’s integrity and character. Organizations with strong social responsibility programs have roots that wrap around this core and drive every preceding layer. For practitioners in the intrinsic motivational approach, individual conscious is often congruent with the organization’s culture. Its influence extends to the superficial layers as well, dictating how an organization should engage and communicate socially responsible actions. Interestingly, sports practitioners in the extrinsic motivational approach also identified the importance of an individual conscious to social responsibility. However, these individual standards remained separate from organizational activity. Perhaps this is due to the absence of a strong organizational culture that the individual conscious could embrace. Although present in all social responsibility approaches, the individual conscious remains separate from social responsible activities and communication in the extrinsic motivational approach. The individual conscious may be present in some practitioners, but it remains disconnected from the roots above. Because the engagement through dialogue layer and the organization culture layer are not used, these layers block any impact the individual conscious core may have on the superficial layers. As a result, the individual core may be present in the extrinsic motivational approach, but this core is ineffective. Figure 1 depicts the root system of the intrinsic motivational approach, and Figure 2 depicts the root system of the extrinsic motivational approach.

**Sports Success and Social Responsibility**

A sports team lives and dies by its win-loss record. Its success or lack of on the playing field infiltrates every aspect of the sports organization. When a team is winning, the perception of all aspects of the organization is positive. The same, however, is true when the team is performing poorly on the playing field. This analysis indicates that team performance also impacts the perception of an organization’s social responsibility. When a team is winning, the social responsibility perception is positive. The reverse is also true. Sports practitioners who operated at the superficial layers identified team performance as a variable that hampered social responsibility efforts. However, organizations that had developed roots in the engagement with dialogue layer indicated less of an impact.

Success is also a double-edged sword. With success comes the accompanying societal expectation of an athletic hero (Lule, 2001). Practitioners admit that asking an 18- to 20-year-old athlete to be a role model is often difficult. In this analysis, organizations that performed
predominately in the superficial layers of social responsibility struggled the most with this societal expectation. When the goal is positive publicity, visibility with young “heroes” introduces a lot of unknowns into sports public relations. As a result, many sports organizations have fallen based on the action of an athletic hero. However, organizations that exemplified a deeper root structure seemed better equipped for the pressures of success. In these organizations, young athletes are taught what social responsibility entails, primarily because social responsibility is part of the organizational culture. These organizations are by no means exempt from the rigors of the fallen hero; yet, they seem better equipped to manage the storm.

**Limitations & Future Direction**

Like all research studies, this analysis has some limitations. This analysis is based on computer-assisted textual assessment, which relies heavily on word frequency to identify resonant themes in text. This research limitation was balanced by a qualitative analysis through deep coding; however, frequency-based data remains a study limitation. The analysis also utilized in-depth interviews from selective sports public relations practitioners. While this method is ideal for deep levels of analysis, it does not allow generalizable results. As a result, this analysis is limited to the experiences of the practitioners interviewed and cannot be generalized to all sports public relations practitioners. Future research on a larger sample of sports practitioners is necessary to validate the social responsibility definition articulated here and the approach sports practitioners follow.

**Conclusion**

Social responsibility is an important concern for public relations practitioners and their organizations. Society places increasing demands for organizations to act in a socially responsible manner, but what does that mean for the practicing sports public relations practitioner? For these practitioners, it means a commitment to professionalism and a delicate balance between organizational and societal interests. This analysis reveals that sport practitioners manage this balance through either an intrinsic motivational approach or an extrinsic motivational approach. The intrinsic motivational approach displays a well-developed philosophy of social responsibility that guides all communication and action. The extrinsic motivational approach exhibits a more shallow understanding of social responsibility, and uses socially responsible activities to garner favorable publicity for the organization. Relationships are a primary concern for both approaches to social responsibility, but a symmetrical relationship is more developed in the intrinsic motivational approach. These practitioners seem better able to survive the rigors of sports performance and the demands of sport heroism than the extrinsically motivated practitioner.

**References**


Figure 1: The Root System of Social Responsibility: Intrinsic Motivational Approach
Figure 2: The Root System of Social Responsibility: Extrinsic Motivational Approach
An Exploratory Study of Media Transparency
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Abstract
The goal of this research was to investigate the phenomenon of media transparency in the Urals Federal District of Russia and to explore whether direct and indirect payments and influences exist in the region. The research also examined influences on current media relations in the region and media relations tactics that are common among journalists and public relations practitioners of the region. The findings of the study indicated that direct and indirect payments and influences exist in the media of the Urals Federal District and are often formalized through information service contracts.

Globalization forces many organizations around the world to integrate into the global economy. The public relations industry is not an exception. According to Sriramesh and Verčič (2007), the public relations industry has globalized, and the global distribution of public relations networks is a demonstration of industry globalization. Taylor (2001) argued that as organizations enter the global market, public relations practitioners “need to adjust to see, listen, and speak to international publics” (p. 629). Unfortunately, this recommendation is hard to follow as public relations scholarship has not yet accumulated a comprehensive collection of literature on global public relations that is based on empirical data (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2007). This research is an attempt to extend the knowledge about global public relations by researching unexplored geographic areas such as the Urals District of Russia. The following section introduces the problem, overview of the problem and justification, practical implications, and theoretical contributions of the current work.

Problem Overview and Justification
Many scholars agree that global public relations has not been studied enough in many parts of the world and there is little empirical evidence on the nature of public relations practices (Jo & Kim, 2004; Molleda & Ferguson, 2004; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003). Most studies on global public relations have been primarily concerned with the descriptive analysis of public relations practices in different countries (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003). While such analysis is important for understanding global public relations, Sriramesh and Verčič, among others, argued for traditional empirical studies of public relations in different countries. Jo and Kim (2004) also challenged international and global public relations researchers to determine the status of the public relations profession in their respective countries.

The status of the public relations profession in Russia has been studied inconsistently. Only a few studies have explored public relations practices in Russia (Tsetsura, 2004). Some of them examined the presence of Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) models of public relations in Russia (Rogozina, 2007); others analyzed an overall development of public relations as a field (Goregin & Nikolaev, 1996; Guth, 2000; Tsetsura, 2003). Most of the data for these studies was collected in two principal cities, Moscow and Saint Petersburg (Rogozina, 2007; Tsetsura, 2005a).
Rogozina argued that the examination of the nature of public relations activities in other regions of the Russian Federation may yield additional knowledge about public relations in Russia. In addition, she called to utilize different approaches in studying Russian public relations, such as the global public relations framework by Sriramesh and Verčič (2003). The current study was a response to these challenges. Its goal was to examine the status of public relations practices in one region of the Russian Federation, the Urals Federal District. The terms Urals Federal District of Russia and the Urals region are used interchangeably in this study and refer to the same geographic area.

Jo and Kim (2004) argued that in many countries public relations is perceived only as media relations. This is true for Russia as well, since media relations is one of the most dominant public relations practices in Russia (Tsetsura, 2003). This study mainly concentrated on media relations as a basic component of public relations. The concept of media relations involves targeting the gatekeepers of the media with the goal of communicating about an organization or a product by public relations practitioners (Hendrix & Hayes, 2007). Therefore, the focus of this study was the investigation of media relations practices that are common among journalists and public relations practitioners of the Urals Region. As a way to understand common media relations practices and cooperation between journalists and public relations practitioners this study used the phenomenon of media transparency (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), a theory of information subsidy (Gandy, 1982; Zoch & Molleda, 2006), and media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Taylor, 2004). To provide context for understanding current media relations practices in Russia and Urals Federal District, this study presents a historical overview of the development of journalism and media relations in Russia and Urals Federal District.

Three major assumptions drive this research and provide a foundation for its justification. First, the global framework for public relations (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003) is considered a useful and comprehensive tool for studying and understanding public relations practices worldwide (Rogozina, 2007). Sriramesh and Verčič developed a global framework for public relations that identified five contextual variables influencing the practice of public relations regardless of location: political system, level of activism, economics, media system, and culture. These factors help to understand how public relations is practiced in different parts of the world. The framework implies that countries with similar political and media systems, levels of activism, economics, and culture will practice public relations in a similar way. In this study, the framework was used to provide a historical, political and media context for the development of public relations in Russia and its Urals Federal District.

This framework can also be used to explain differences in practice within one country (Tsetsura, 2003). Consequently, the second assumption of the study is that there are differences in the practice of public relations and media relations in different countries and various regions of these countries, as in the case of Russia. This is why the study focuses on exploring public relations in a region other than the Moscow and Saint Petersburg region, which was a geopolitical area covered by previous researchers (Guth, 2000; Rogozina, 2007; Tsetsura, 2003, 2005a).

Tsetsura (2003) argued that public relations practices can vary not only from country to country but also from region to region within one country. A geopolitical approach to public relations thus assumes that five main factors, political and media systems, level of activism, economics, and culture, will influence practices in different parts of one country. Tsetsura (2003) used Russia as an example of a country where the political system, level of activism, economics, media system, and culture of a region can influence the public relations practices of that region.
The Russian Federation is divided into seven federal districts. In its turn, each federal district is divided into several regions or “federal subjects” (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Urals Federal District [CCI], 2007). The former Soviet “economic districts” system was the prototype for the federal districts system, where the incorporation of the regions into districts was based on the similarity of economies of different regions. Therefore, in Russia, it is only logical to examine public relations practices, and media relations in particular, not only at the level of the country as a whole, but also at the level of its regions.

As was previously mentioned, until now, most of the data about Russian public relations have been collected in Moscow and Saint Petersburg (Tsetsura, 2004). However, rapid developments of public relations practices in other parts of Russia in the last decade call for studying public relations in regions other than the Moscow and Saint Petersburg regions as defined by Tsetsura (Tsetsura, 2003). This research focused on exploring practices of media relations in just one part of Russia, the Urals Federal District. It is one of the largest geographical regions in Russia which also has one of the highest levels of economic development (CCI, 2007). It includes six other administrative regions with a total population of over 12 million people. The Urals Federal District produces 16% of the country’s GDP, and contributes about 42% of all taxes to Russia’s federal budget (CCI, 2007). In addition, the Urals Federal District is active in the political arena. It is also home to the first Russian president, Boris Yeltsin (Uralfo, 2007). An estimated 200 newspapers, 15 television stations, and 18 radio stations are officially registered as mass media outlets in the Urals District (PR-life, 2007). The Russian Association of Public Relations has a regional chapter in the Urals, and an established Regional Award for Achievements in Public Relations called “White Wing,” which is given every year for best practices. All these elements make the Urals Federal District of Russia an important and interesting region for research in the area of public relations.

The third assumption of the study is that media transparency is one of the main components to understanding media relations all over the world. Therefore, the phenomenon of media transparency should also be examined in order to better understand media relations practices in any country or region. Traditionally, media transparency is understood as a process to diminish the incidents of unethical and illegal practices in the relationships between public relations professionals and the media (IPRA, 2001). However, with the growing pool of the research on the topic (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003; Kruckeberg, Ovaitt, & Tsetsura, 2005; Tsetsura, 2005a, 2005b, Tsetsura & Grynko, 2007), the phenomenon of media transparency has become commonly used as a description of any form of payment for news coverage. In Russia, this phenomenon was initially called zakazukha, a Russian slang word for paid publicity (Holmes, 2001). Different studies employed different descriptions of the phenomenon of media transparency. It is also known as cash for news coverage (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), media bribery (Tsetsura, 2005b), and simply payments for news coverage. This study understands the concept of media transparency phenomenon as any payment for news coverage.

In the first study of media transparency, the International Index of Bribery for News Coverage (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), Russia was ranked sixteenth out of 66 countries. The higher ranking countries were considered less likely to experience the phenomenon. However, no primary empirical evidence to support or reject this ranking has been gathered so far concerning Russia and many other countries. This study reduced this research gap by collecting first-hand data and examining the existence and forms of media transparency in the Urals Federal District of Russia.
To further contextualize media transparency phenomenon and media relations practices, this study applied the concept of information subsidy (Gandy, 1982; Zoch & Molleda, 2006) as a basis for understanding the relationship between journalists and public relations practitioners. In order to further explore media relations practices in the Urals region, this study also utilized media richness theory as suggested by Taylor (2004).

Statement of Purpose

The primary goal of the study was to explore phenomenon of media transparency in the region. The secondary goal was to examine existing forms of media relations practices that are common among Ural journalists and public relations practitioners, and identify factors that influence current media relations in the region. In addition, this study aimed to collect first-hand data on the phenomenon of media transparency. It could help to explore types of media transparency that exist in the various regions of Russia, specifically in the Urals Federal District. The study also explored how historical, political, and media developments have influenced and shaped contemporary media relations practices.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical development of the field of global public relations. As public relations practices globalize, the need for empirical research grows. By using first-hand empirical data, this study advances the understanding of public relations practices in Russia and its regions; it helps to describe how public relations in general and media relations in particular work in different parts of the world and within the borders of one country. The study presents a theoretical contribution to the understanding of public relations evolution in countries where the history, political, and media environments are similar to those of Russia. The study also contributes to the understanding of the media transparency phenomenon and provides primary evidence of existence of formalized and non-formalized types of media transparency phenomenon in Russia.

Further, this research advances the knowledge about public relations development in Russia by providing a detailed account how journalistic theory and practice in Russia, and specifically in the Urals Federal District, has influenced the evolution of public relations. In addition, the data that were collected for the study can be used for future inquiries about the nature of public relations and can allow comparisons between media relations practices in different regions of Russia, and between Russia and other countries.

Practical Applications

This study offers several practical applications for its results. First, the results of the study provide practitioners with a real and applicable model of media relations practices in Russia, instead of anecdotal evidences from personal experiences. Second, the results provide an opportunity for practitioners to identify and choose appropriate media relations tactics and strategies that would work in Russian public relations practice, specifically in the Urals District of Russia. The results of this study also can help public relations practitioners, both in Russia and outside of Russia, to handle media relations in the Urals Federal District. In addition, the results can be meaningful for members of the business community in Russia and the United States, who actively invest money and other resources in the region’s economy. The Urals Federal District is an industrial region of Russia that attracts many investors from all over the world, who need to work within the local market and communicate with the local public. Those investors and their
public relations representatives would be interested in the analysis of the media relations practices offered in this study in order to launch effective public relations campaigns.

**Literature Review**

This chapter discusses the main concepts of the current research. First, it provides a brief overview of the Sriramesh and Verčič (2003) global public relations framework. The historical context for the development of public relations in Russia follows. Third, it examines the concept of media relations along with the media transparency phenomenon (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), the media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984) and the information subsidy theory (Gandy, 1982) as the frameworks in which to understand media relations. The discussion of the gaps in literature summarizes the chapter.

**Theoretical Framework for Global Public Relations Research and Practice**

A theoretical framework for global public relations consists of five contextual variables: political system, level of activism, economics, media system, and culture. According to Sriramesh and Verčič (2003), these variables are closely interrelated and determine the practice of public relations in different countries. Although all of the described variables are important determinants of the public relations practice in different countries, this study specifically looked at only two elements of the global framework for public relations: political environment and media environment. The study focused on exploring these elements in details as they might have preconditioned the development of media relations in all regions of Russia (Koltsova, 2006).

As Sriramesh and White (1992) argued, the political system and political environment have substantial effects on public relations practices. Taylor (2004) studied public relations in several countries of Eastern Europe and observed that, although these countries have their own distinctive cultures, they do share the common political, social, and economic past of communism. She argued that this indeed influences the development of public relations in the whole region. Braun (2007) also argued that the shared political history of the former communist states affected the practice of public relations all over the Eastern Europe.

On the other side, one cannot overemphasize the crucial relationship between public relations and the media (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003). The development of media freedoms remains a key to democratic development in most countries of the former Soviet Bloc. In Russia, perestroika and the principles of the freedom of speech gave a push for the development of the media system and public relations (Cassara, Gross, Kruckeberg, Palmer, & Tsetsura, 2004). As in many other countries of the world, media plays a focal part in Russian public relations. Particularly with the recent political changes, media relations has come to overshadow what was previously the most popular area of public relations in Russia, political communication. Today media relations is actively developing in many parts of Russia (Tsetsura, 2003). The following section describes the evolution of journalism as a historical context for public relations and media relations in Russia and the Urals Federal District.

**Journalism in Russia as a Historical Context for Public Relations**

Journalism in Russia has a long history and set traditions (McReynolds, 1991). It is important to see how journalism has been developing during the last three centuries in order to understand the current public relations and media relations situation in Russia.

During the last two decades, Russian journalism has undergone several serious changes as a result of economic and political development (Rogozina, 2007). The new Russian media
system and journalism became the environment in which public relations was born, and which determined the development of public relations in Russia. According to Tsetsura (2003), the origins of public relations in Russia can be found in journalism as the very first public relations practitioners were journalists. In addition, Russian public relations theory is drawn from journalism (Tsetsura, 2004). This is why it is important to discuss the evolution of Russian journalism as it strongly parallels the development of public relations.

According to Cassara et al. (2004), there are three major periods into which the history of Russian journalism can be divided: the pre-Soviet period which encompasses the early development of journalism in Russia from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries; the Soviet period covers 1917-1985, which includes the Soviet contribution to the development of journalism and the beginning of the perestroika period; and the Gorbachev and post-Soviet period 1985-2000, during which there was free speech without regulation, rules, or restrictions. Recently, a new period was identified as the Putin Era, which covers the development of journalism from 2000 until the present time.

The pre-Soviet period of Russian journalism. The pre-Soviet period of Russian journalism can be traced to the beginning of the 18th century when the Russian Academy of Sciences was created by the directive of Peter the Great (Lazarevich, 1974). The Academy of Sciences became and remained the center for all state publishing activities for many years after the first official newspaper in Russia, “Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomost” [Saint Petersburg Gazette], was transferred under the control of the Academy in 1703 (Lazarevich, 1974). The foundation of the Academy of Sciences began a tradition of housing printing presses in educational institutions, which meant that they were controlled and subsidized by the government (McReynolds, 1991). Throughout the history of Russian journalism government traditionally tried to control media and impose censorship on it.

Since the publication of the first newspaper, Russian journalism has been persistently striving to survive. During the last decades of the 18th century, more than 150 journals and newspapers were founded, but many existed only for a short period of time. The next step in the development of Russian journalism occurred in the 1860s with the emergence of the mass circulation media and the first commercial newspaper Moskovkie vedomost, which gave start to the development of the mass circulation press and advertising in imperial Russia (McReynolds, 1991).

The pre-Soviet period of journalism in the Urals District. The history of Urals journalism started during the same period of time as Russian journalism. The Urals District traditionally has been an industrial region given that it has vast natural resources (CCI, 2007). However, the development of journalism in the Urals District was not steady until the beginning of the 20th century when the Russian revolutionists recognized the importance of media and utilized mass circulation newspapers to propagate their ideas (Encyclopedia of Russian Periodic Press, 2007). During the first Russian Revolution (1905-1907) more than 20 new newspapers were established in the Urals District.

The Soviet period of Russian journalism. The Soviet period of Russian journalism began with the Russian revolution of 1917 and was characterized by one major paradox of the Soviet political system: it was a combination of an extreme control and censorship over the media and a little attention to the actual perception of the media by the wider public, in other words, public opinion (Koltsova, 2006). Public relations practices, however, build on public opinion (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003). According to Sriramesh and Verčič, public relations tends to be one-way or has propagandistic elements in societies that do not value public opinion. McNair
confirmed that during the Soviet era, mass media were treated as means of mass information and propaganda and were widely used to report and propagate socialist ideals. Propaganda was considered the most significant task for Soviet journalists in order to facilitate the upbringing of the decent citizens of the Soviet society (Koltsova, 2006). At the same time, the ideologist of the communist regime, Vladimir Lenin, had ascribed an active role to the media, and argued for its glasnost, id est openness (McNair). Initially, the idea of Soviet journalism was built on the dedication to objectivity, openness, and concern for the public. However, these noble intentions were not met in practice (McNair, 1991).

After the Bolsheviks came to power, the bourgeois or commercial press organized an anticommunist campaign. Using the newly acquired freedom of press, they disparaged the Bolsheviks (McNair, 1991). During this time, the communist regime began to openly express aggressive hostility toward freedom of the press. A state monopoly on advertising was installed with the aim of depriving the commercial press of its main source of income. The idea was that the “truly” free press can be established only without capitalistic principles of work (Dementiev, 1966).

After the Bolsheviks strengthened their power, restrictions on freedom of the press were weakened. Private publishing houses and non-Bolshevik newspapers were reestablished (Zhirkov, 2001). When Stalin came to power, journalistic principles were further destroyed, and the whole media structure became a servant of the Soviet bureaucratic system. Stalin established the cult of personality and journalists were intimidated by the overwhelming political pressure to write only about the achievements of the USSR. Principles of objectivity and openness were forgotten for more than twenty years, until Stalin’s death in 1953 (Kuznetsov, 2006).

Stalin’s successor Nikita Khrushchev denounced the cult of personality, and implemented a relative liberalization of the press. In 1956, the Union of Journalists was created in order to stimulate the development of the profession and encourage journalists to be more confident and politically autonomous (Bogdanov & Vyazemsky, 1971). However, this period, widely known as “The Thaw,” did not last long, and in 1964 Brezhnev re-established the cult of personality and imposed censorship on the press once again. Brezhnev’s administration was characterized by pervasive subservience, as any media professional who wished to achieve his or her career goals or ambitions had to respect Brezhnev and praise him (Kuznetsov, 2006).

The official rehabilitation of the principles of objectivity and openness after a “half a century of virtual silence” (McNair, 1991, p. 2) took place when Gorbachev delivered his speech to party workers during the conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1984 (Onikov, 1988). Shortly after his election as the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Gorbachev initiated the Glasnost campaign. The new information policy promised freedom of the spoken and printed word, pluralism of opinions, and open exchange of ideas and interests among others (Zhirkov, 2001). The decree on press was finally denounced. It led to the restoration of criticism of the government in the media and opened discussions of hot political and economic issues. The public interest in perestroika (economic reforms in the Soviet Union) and glasnost (freedom of speech) created an increased demand for newspapers and magazines, and by 1988 demand had far surpassed supply (McNair, 1991). In addition, economic reforms led to a free market economy and opened doors to the development of all market-related activities, such as advertising, marketing, and public relations (Tsetsura, 2004).

According to Goregin and Nikolaev (1996), the first people to work in the field of Russian public relations in the era of perestroika and glasnost were the journalists. The first task for the journalists in public relations was to satisfy the mass media's interest in their
organizations; therefore, they adopted a Western tradition of openness to the public (Goregin & Nikolaev, 1996). Newly minted public relations practitioners knew the nature of the media from the inside due to their own experience, so they were able to turn media interest to the advantage of their organizations (Goregin & Nikolaev).

The Soviet period of journalism in the Urals District. The development of Ural journalism paralleled the overall development of Russian-Soviet journalism. Yet, the local school of journalism differed from the one in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. In the Urals District, the Department of Journalism at the Ural State University was created at the peak of the Soviet power in 1936. Its purpose was to teach specifically Soviet, Communist principles of journalism, including propaganda for building socialism (Malakheev, 2006). On the other hand, journalism schools in Moscow and Saint Petersburg were established before the Bolshevik revolution and thus were aimed to enlighten the public. Nevertheless, the department of journalism at the Ural State University has been considered to be one of the oldest and the best journalism departments in Russia outside of the Moscow/St. Petersburg geopolitical region.

According to Malakheev (2006), Ural journalism carried out a supportive task for the initiatives of the Soviet government. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Urals District was building industrial giants for the USSR, such as Uralmash and Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel works, and journalists were expected to praise the significance of these constructions. In 1970s and 1980s, journalists were granted special authority to softly criticize imperfections in the economic system such as dead time on production lines (Malakheev, 2006). All these publications were approved by the party, and the critique was never about the party itself, as censorship did not allow for this (McNair, 1991).

In the era of perestroika and glasnost, the Urals District was at the center of the events. One of the main figures of the political changes, Boris Yeltsin, was a Ural native and had a lot of supporters there. Yeltsin’s connections helped give an early start to the development of public relations in the Urals District, particularly the popular area of political consultancy. As in much of Russia, the first public relations practitioners in the Urals District were journalists who worked for information agencies or newspapers (Goregin & Nikolaev, 1996).

The post-Soviet period of Russian journalism. A new era of Russian journalism was inaugurated by the first USSR Law on Press and other mass media, adopted in 1990. This law prohibited censorship and allowed individuals to establish private media outlets. Lenin’s decree on press guided censorship in the Soviet media for over 70 years, and this was the first time in the history of Russian state when censorship was forbidden (Koltsova, 2006). In 1991, the parliament of the newly independent Russian Federation adopted another Law on Mass Media, and from that moment the media was no longer under official government control (Koltsova, 2006).

At the end of 1980s and in the beginning of 1990s, the members of state-owned Russian media found themselves in a compromising situation. On one hand, they were still funded by the state; on the other hand, the system of state control over media was no longer functioning (Zassourky, 2004). Many journalists described this period as an era of absolute freedom of speech and euphoria (Koltsova, 2006). The media was thriving and developing. The volume of the newspaper and magazine circulations rose dramatically. In 1991, the popular weekly publication Argumenti i Facti (Arguments and Facts) reached its absolute record of 33 million copies (Koltsova). The tremendous increase of new media created the need for cooperation between journalists and public relations practitioners. However, since the journalistic workforce could no longer match the demand for news content in publications, the need also arose for
information subsidies from public relations practitioners (McElreath, Chen, Azarova, & Shadrova, 2001).

According to Zassoursky (2004), the year of 1993 was the end of this euphoria and the beginning of the era of economic dependency of the media. The harsh economic reforms and growing inflation made most of the media unprofitable. Circulation dropped significantly. For instance, the circulation of the aforementioned Argumenti i Facti decreased to five million copies. During this period, the economic conditions under which journalists in Russia worked affected their ethics. Some researchers claimed that harsh economic conditions forced journalists to sacrifice their professional integrity by accepting bribes for producing news stories (Cassara et al., 2004). It was an economically unstable period for all industries in the newly created country. However, the media system encountered the greatest challenge of how to survive in the market economy (Cassara et al.).

Surprisingly, economic hardship did not decrease the number of mass media outlets. The number grew continuously in 1990s (Koltsova, 2006). In many cases, instead of going bankrupt, media management preferred to provide propaganda weapons by selling news space to various political organizations and corporations (Goregin & Nikolaev, 1996). At the same time, business and political groups started to appreciate media attention and became interested in finding ways to influence media. One of the logical choices was media ownership. By 1995-96, media outlets were redistributed and concentrated in the hands of major business groups and corporations in Russia (Koltsova, 2006). These so-called cross-institutional groups included political, industrial and financial institutions (Koltsova, 2006).

These cross-institutional groups regarded mass media mainly as a propaganda resource. This tradition carried over from the Soviet times when the media were simply considered as the means of mass information and propaganda (Zassoursky, 2004). Hagstrom (2000) argued that new ownership of the media substituted state control over the media. Often, the head of a cross-institutional group dictated to his or her media outlet what issues to cover. Consequently, the affiliation of the media with different cross-institutional groups was reflected in media content as hostile groups published discrediting materials in their subsidiary media about each other (Koltsova, 2006). This period was known as the period of informational wars, or kompromat wars.

Kompromat wars became a routine part of the political consultancy and gave birth to several infamous concepts, such as “black PR” and zakazukha (Tsetsura, 2004). In addition, kompromat wars created a need for these practices, which secured the informational supply and contributed to the prosperity of the media organizations. Scholars argued that without zakazukha and “black PR,” some smaller media outlets would not have survived this period (Koltsova, 2006; Zassourky, 2004).

Corporate ownership of the mass media and its concentration facilitated the commercialization of journalism and media. Pasti (2005) argued that journalists of the 1990s perceived journalism “rather as a public relations role for the benefit of influential groups and people in politics and business” (p. 89). She found that the new generation of Russian journalists of the 1990s represented a new market conception of journalism, whose main task was to please the client. Harro-Loit and Saks (2006) describing the similar phenomenon in Estonia, argued that journalists switched to business model of content production, and did not separate journalistic and commercial content. They argued that this commercialization of journalism led to the blurred borders between journalism and advertising. According to Goregin and Nikolaev (1996), similar
processes happened in Russia when advertising practitioners frequently considered the purchase of editorial space as just another type of advertising for their clients.

The post-Soviet period of journalism in the Urals District. Ural journalism in the post-Soviet period also struggled to survive. However, in comparison with Moscow and Saint Petersburg, the economic conditions of the media were worse in the Urals as there were fewer opportunities for the media to find corporate owners (Hagstrom, 2000). As Moseev (2006) reported, Ural journalism from the late 1980s to the early 1990s was separated from the audience’s interests. The majority of media content was still under heavy influence of the Soviet propagandistic traditions, where the achievements of the industrial and agricultural sectors were the main focus. Moreover, many journalists who now worked for these independent media were the same journalists who just a few years ago praised the Soviet lifestyle in that same media outlet (Zassoursky, 2004). In addition, many newspapers in the region preserved their Soviet titles, such as *Uralskiy rabochiy* [The Ural Worker], and *Znamya Truda* [The Flag of Labor].

Local enthusiasm for politics in the early 1990s changed the Ural media. Many new media were established, among them several private TV channels, business magazines, and newspapers. Most of them were also acquired by local and national cross-institutional groups and were used as a weapon for competing corporations and political parties (Koltsova, 2006). As a result, the very first public relations practices in the Urals Federal District primarily consisted of political consultancy and media relations.

Putin era of Russian journalism. The end of 1990s, when Putin’s power started to rise, was marked with the general concentration of the media under the ownership of corporations and governments of the deferent levels. The Glasnost Defense Foundation (GDF, 1998) reported a trend of re-nationalizing the media on the national and regional levels. According to Koltsova (2006), this was often achieved through the forced replacement of the private owner or by creating an environment in which private owners could not survive. Also during this time, the Russian government finalized and developed a comprehensive information policy, which was the part of the broader policy of the Putin’s policy to concentrate various resources in the hands of the government (Koltsova, 2006).

The Putin era is credited with the growth of the print media market, a search for a new audience for radio stations, and the appearance of new television channels. Also, Putin's first presidential term ended the era of “informational wars” (Borodina & Vorontsov, 2004). At the same time, in 2000, Putin proposed new restrictions on the media. For example, he brought all national news broadcasting under Kremlin control in order to effectively bar independent reporting on the country's most sensitive issues, in particular, the war in Chechnya (Cooper, 2006). Those who refused to conform were pressed and forced either to stop functioning or to change their information policy, as it was in the case of independent Russian television station *NTV* (Koltsova, 2006).

Another significant sign of this new era was the end of the prevalence of political consultancy. With the ratification of the new law in 2004 concerning the reforms in the Federal system of government, which prescribed that governors now be appointed by the president and not publicly elected, the need for huge political campaigns ran dry (Zassoursky, 2004). This led to reduction in the need for political consultancy, an area of public relations that once was the most popular in Russia (Tsetsura, 2003).

Putin era of journalism in the Urals District. The trend of media concentration under corporations and government was also common in the Ural media. Many successful media created media holdings that consisted of TV and radio companies, information agencies,
newspapers, and advertising agencies (Koltsova, 2006). As in many other parts of Russia, the actively developing industry of political consultancy in the Urals region started to decline during the Putin era as well. Media relations became the most popular practice of public relations in Russian provinces (Tsetsura, 2003).

In 1997, the Ural regional chapter of the Russian Association of Public Relations was created to promote the profession and public relations education (PR-life, 2007). At the same time, several universities in the Urals District started to offer a public relations major within the departments of journalism. As a result, according to Kovaleva (2006), the terms journalism, mass media, and public relations were used interchangeably in practice and theoretical work. She claimed that some graduates working in the Ural region were not capable of separating professional public relations practices from journalistic practices.

The review of journalism history from political and media perspectives provides a context for understanding the development of media relations in Russia and the Urals Federal District. It is clear that there are several major influences that shaped the nature of interactions between journalists and public relations practitioners. First, throughout its history, journalism in Russia was influenced by the government at different levels, from federal to local. Inevitably, this influence affected modern media relations in Russia, as public relations practitioners needed to cooperate with the media and took into account their interests in order to get publicity. Second, commercialization of the media made them eager to maximize their revenues through advertising. Thus, media often readily allowed advertisers to influence their editorial decisions through purchased content space, and often the line between journalism and advertising was blurred. Third, the media’s need for information subsidies created the opportunity for public relations practitioners to potentially influence editorial decisions by helping to create news content. Fourth, the existence of cross-institutional groups as the corporate owners of the media in Russia, influenced the ways media relations were practiced in Russia.

Thus, the previous research indicates that the described factors influence the media and media relations practices. Further, these factors are intrinsic to the Russian media in general. The research also demonstrates that the history of public relations in the Urals Federal District parallels the overall development of public relations and media relations in Russia. This may indicate that those factors may influence practices in the Urals Federal District as well. However, various regions of Russia have differences in their political and media structures (Tsetsura, 2003). For instance, municipal and federal government might have different influences on the media at the national and local levels. This may indicate that it is possible that some media influences may differ between the Urals Federal District and Russia as a whole, and it would be interesting to see how they differ. Thus, the first research question is:

RQ1: What factors influence current media and thus media relations in the Urals Federal District of Russia?

Public Relations and Media Relations in Russia

This section discusses public relations development in Russia, specifically media relations. It demonstrates that media relations has always been a predominant area of public relations in Russia and shows how media relations practices evolved. Then, it presents the current status of media relations in Russia.

Some argued that contemporary public relations and media relations as concepts were not present in Russia some twenty years ago (Tsetsura, 2003). Public relations was introduced after the collapse of the Soviet Union and for many years was considered to be “a marketing function
that was used in capitalist countries” (Tsetsura, 2004, p. 332). According to McElreath et al. (2001), the practices of public relations were comparable to those in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century when the press agency model was the predominant way of public relations practice.

Moreover, public relations in Russia was historically associated with propaganda and was considered by many as just another tool to manipulate public opinion (Tsetsura & Kruckeberg, 2004). This did not add credit to the practice, when the Russian government and foreign companies investing their money into the Russian economy were the first organizations to utilize the tools of public relations (Guth, 2000). According to Guth, the first Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, at the beginning of his term, hired Western public relations agencies to promote his foreign political trips and domestic programs (Goregin & Nikolaev, 1996).

Finally, as in most countries, public relations in Russia started with media relations (Tsetsura, 2004). Even in the booming field of political consultancy, most of the attention was paid to the practice of media relations (Goregin & Nikolaev, 1996). Russian business also understood public relations mainly as media relations. Russian companies wanted positive images of their goods and services to reach customers beyond advertising, which quickly became very expensive (Goregin & Nikolaev, 1996).

Tsetsura (2003) also reported that media relations was one of the most popular areas of public relations practice in Russia and its regions. According to Tsetsura (2003), the majority of the public relations practices in Russia are concentrated around generating information subsidies in a form of news releases and organizing events. Traditionally, public relations agencies outside of Moscow or Saint Petersburg offered media relations services (Tsetsura, 2003). In addition, many textbooks on public relations cover mainly the different tactics of media relations, such as news conferences, news releases, and media monitoring (Kondratiev, 2008; Chumikov & Bocharov, 2007).

If media relations is a prevailing practice of public relations in different parts of Russia, it should be a dominant area of practice in the Urals District of Russia as well. Anecdotal evidence and personal communication with professionals in the region supported this claim (N. Fadeeva, personal communication, September 3, 2007). Thus, it is necessary to examine the way media relations is practiced in the region. This study incorporates two approaches of examining media relations in the Urals District. First, the study examines the nature of media relations through the information subsidy theory (Gandy, 1982), and the notion of media transparency (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), and second, the study explores media relations tactics through the media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984). The following section presents media relations through the lens of media richness theory and information subsidy as well as media transparency.

**Media Relations and Media Richness**

Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984) states that there is a rank of media channels in terms of their richness. It starts with the face-to-face communication, which is considered to have the highest level of richness, goes down to telephone, electronic mail, personal written text (letters), formal written text (documents), and ends with the formal numeric text (financial statement), the lean channel that has the lowest level of richness (Schmitz & Fulk, 1991). According to Daft and Lengel (1984), rich media are characterized by high concentration of cues and an opportunity for feedback, and lean media are static and do not provide additional information for the interactants. For example, face-to-face communication is the richest medium because it provides the opportunity to check the accuracy of the cues of interpretation.
immediately (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Low richness media minimize the opportunity for interpretation; however, they can be very efficient with well-crafted messages (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

The notion of media richness is generally used for reducing ambiguity and equivocality in communication. Daft and Lengel (1984) argued that based on the situation the members of organizations would deliberately choose a proper communication media. In cases when an organization wants to avoid misinterpretation of the message, it would choose to use a richer medium. Although rich media helps to avoid ambiguity in communication, it is also considered more costly and inefficient for communication of the concise messages (Schmitz & Fulk, 1991).

Taylor and Doerfel (2003) and Taylor (2004) applied this theory to studying media relations in Croatia. Using the media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), Taylor (2004) classified the media relations tactics based on the level of interpersonal contact and interaction needed for information processing during the communication between journalists and public relations practitioners. According to her ranking of the media relations tactics, rich tactics included personal invitation of the journalists to the event and organizing news conferences. Moderately rich media relations tactics were identified as those that have a potential for interpersonal communication. Lean media relations tactics were identified as buying advertising, posting information on the web-site, and paying for a story. Although news releases are lean tactics as they are at the end of the media richness ranking (written text), Taylor (2004) considered this practices to be moderately rich because in Croatia there was a potential for interpersonal communication during personal delivery of the news release. Her research showed that Croatian public relations practitioners preferred to use rich channels when they communicated with the media to overcome a traditional low trust between media and society.

Taylor (2004) argued that public relations research and theory can only gain from utilizing media richness theory because “it can tell us about preferred communication channels in media – organization relationships” (p. 151). Therefore, this study utilized media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and Taylor’s (2004) classification of the media relations tactics in order to determine what practices are most often used by media professionals in the Urals Federal District of Russia. In addition, this study aimed to compare whether the difference exists between personal delivery of the news release and its mass distribution, and whether the media professionals in the Urals Federal District more often generate free publicity through organization of the news conferences or through cash for coverage. Thus, the study poses following question research question:

RQ2: What kinds of media relations tactics are employed by journalists and public relations practitioners in the Urals Federal District of Russia? How often do journalists and public relations practitioners in the Urals Federal District of Russia use rich, moderately rich, and lean media relations tactics?

Media Relations and Information Subsidy

In the past, media relations was often considered the main function of public relations (Zoch & Mollèda, 2006). Media relations consists essentially of obtaining publicity, or news coverage for the activities of the organizations, government entities or individuals (Hendrix & Hayes, 2007). However, media relations may also serve the media by providing them with information. This type of media-public relations relationship is explained by the information subsidy concept (Gandy, 1982).
Information that is generated by a public relations practitioner to publicize the organization, its products, or a specific point of view is called information subsidy (Gandy, 1982; Zoch & Molleda, 2006). According to Gandy, information subsidies are the efforts to decrease the cost of information in order to enhance its consumption. This trend has economic implications for both media and public relations professionals. Public relations practitioners spend resources to produce the packages of information subsidies, whereas media organizations basically receive these packages for free (Zoch & Molleda, 2006). Gandy (1982) argued that information subsidies corrupt the process of news gathering because bigger organizations have more resources to create such subsidies and provide background for the news stories. According to Gandy, small organizations with lack of resources cannot compete with large organizations, and as a result their point view would not appear in the news as often.

However other scholars (Taylor, 2000; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005) argued that the practice of information subsidy has enormous potential to help get important social issues on the public agenda. It allows for establishing positive, mutually beneficial relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners and explains how the two groups of media professionals need to interact in order to create news content. According to Taylor and Kent (2007), media organizations need information and public relations practitioners need a channel of communication to reach the targeted audience. Taylor and Kent argued that this is particularly true in those parts of the world where media relations is a relatively new notion, as in the case of Russia.

However, Taylor and Kent (2007) argued that information subsidies taken to extreme may damage the credibility of the news media, as well as the value of the news stories generated by public relations practitioners. In Russia, extreme forms of information subsidies have facilitated the emergence of the phenomenon, known as media transparency (sometimes called zakazukha), which became a major problem in Russian media relations practices (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). The next section discusses this phenomenon in detail.

**Media Transparency in Russian Media**

One of the most infamous practices of media relations is the phenomenon of media transparency. Media transparency is defined as an open and transparent exchange of information subsidies between media and public relations practitioners, based on the idea of newsworthiness of information and without any monetary or non-monetary influence. Media transparency is a main challenge of contemporary everyday media practices around the world as media outlets and media representatives constantly experience pressures from advertisers, information sources, publishers, and other influential groups (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). Often, media themselves put pressures on information sources to pay or provide non-monetary benefits for publications. Russia is no exception. The practice, sometimes known here as hidden advertising or, using slang words, zakazukha, or jinsa, that can be translated from Russian as pay-for-publicity (Cassara et al., 2004). It was first discussed in Russia in the middle of 1990s when one public relations agency conducted a “zakazukha” experiment (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). The agency sent a fake news release about an opening of a non-existent store to a dozen of leading newspapers in Moscow and asked the media to publish it. Several newspapers contacted the agency and said they would publish the news release if the agency pays money to the newspapers (the price was set anywhere between $50 and $500). When the agency paid some of the newspapers, the news release appeared as a story on main pages of the newspaper. Some newspapers did not even check the facts and published a fake story about a non-existing store.
This case study made headlines around the world and attracted the attention of the global media and public relations community to the problem of media transparency (Kruckeberg et al., 2005).

The practice of zakazukha was very common in the 1990s. Mater (2001) reported that The Saint Petersburg Times in 2001 carried out a survey showing that two-thirds of the local journalists in Saint Petersburg produced stories with hidden advertising. According to Startseva (2001), hidden advertising is a "multimillion-dollar industry involving nearly every publication in the country" (para 4). Startseva argued that selling paid editorial space or accepting money for not running the story was so widespread and routine in Russia that most publications had an "official price list" that they distributed discreetly to public relations firms. Startseva reported that in April of 2001, the second largest newspaper in Russia, Komsomolskaya Pravda alone pulled in an estimated half of a million dollars from zakazukha, followed by Izvestia, Trud, and Novaya Gazeta. She claimed these newspapers alone earn more than $25 million a year through zakazukha.

Despite the widespread practice of the phenomenon, media transparency remains on the periphery of research in Russia. Tsetsura (2005a) made the first attempt to study media transparency among Moscow public relations practitioners. She interviewed employees of the leading public relations agencies in Moscow and found that they perceived cash for news coverage as one of the main issues of contemporary Russian media relations. Although practitioners were not in agreement concerning whether media transparency is good or bad for media relations practices in Russia, the majority of participants said that media transparency is essential for successful development of Russian media relations. In addition, participants said that journalists, practitioners, and clients should all be responsible for media transparency.

However, cash for news coverage is just one side of the problem. Tsetsura (2005b) conducted a study on media transparency in Poland. She researched the phenomenon within two dimensions of the media transparency phenomenon, direct and indirect payments. Direct payments were defined as cash or other monetary payments for news coverage (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003). Indirect payments were defined as "as any type of non-monetary reward to a journalist, editor, or media outlet or the existence of a media policy which dictates, encourages indirect payments or influences the financial success and independence of the media outlet or its employees" (Tsetsura, 2005b, p. 15).

An indirect payment is a more complicated phenomenon because it can take any imaginable form. As a result of the study, Tsetsura (2005a) developed the following classification of the types of indirect payments and influences. They are 1) publication or production of materials in exchange for paid advertising, 2) written media rules of conduct that allow the receipt of samples, free gifts or attractively discounted items from third parties to media representatives, 3) conflict of interests when a journalists is employed with media and company, institution, government, or public relations agency, 4) pressure from the advertising departments of media on editors in regards to which news from which sources to cover, and 5) financial and psychological pressures from news sources, companies, and public relations agencies on the media to present information which comes from them.

In addition, previous studies on media transparency neglected the trend in Russian media to formalize direct and indirect payments and influences. Hagstrom (2000) reported that direct and indirect payments exist both at the individual level, but they also can be formalized "with a fixed distribution of the revenue within the media organization" (p. 217). He provided an example of a bureau in Moscow, an organized business, which sells commercials disguised as articles published in various newspapers. In addition, in personal communication with the
researcher some public relations practitioners in the Urals Federal District of Russia admitted that formalized forms of direct and indirect payments and influences exist in the region (personal communication with various practitioners, September 3, 2007). They referred to this type of media transparency phenomenon as an information service contract, and acknowledged that their companies encountered this practice.

In her study, Tsetsura (2005a), while researching the media transparency in Russia, focused primarily on direct payments, such as cash for news coverage. Thus, the indirect payments and the formalization of both direct and indirect payments and influences have not been researched in Russia so far. Also, in the past, the investigation of this phenomenon took place only in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, the two largest cities in Russia, which is logical as most of the national mass media outlets and public relations firms are located there. However, there is some anecdotal evidence that this practice is widespread and exists in other regions of Russia as well. In addition, study on media transparency in Poland (Tsetsura, 2005b) showed that local media were more prone to experience the phenomenon of media transparency than the national media. This study also aimed to compare if the difference in frequencies of occurrence exists between local and regional and national media of Russia, according to Urals media professionals. Since no systematic study has been conducted to examine media transparency in other geopolitical regions of Russia, this study diminishes the research gap by examining the phenomenon in the Urals Federal District. Thus, the third research question of the study is:

RQ3: What types of media transparency phenomenon exist in the Urals Federal District of Russia? Are these practices formalized?

Gaps in Literature

Jo and Kim (2004) argued that globalization has created a greater need for global public relations. Evidence from the literature indicates that global public relations has been inadequately studied in many parts of the world. In addition, little empirical research exists concerning the nature of media relations practices in different countries, including Russia (Jo & Kim, 2004; Molleda & Ferguson, 2004; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003). This current study is significant because it is the first attempt to understand the nature of public relations in a Russian geopolitical region outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg, where most studies have been previously conducted (Goregin & Nikolaev, 1996; Guth, 2000; Rogozina, 2007; Tsetsura, 2005a).

Although most of the data on Russian public relations have been collected in Moscow and Saint Petersburg (Tsetsura, 2004), the rapid development of public relations and media relations practices in other parts of Russia in the last decade, call for studying public relations in the regions outside Moscow and Saint Petersburg (Tsetsura, 2005a). The current research addresses this gap in the research literature by studying media relations in one of the biggest regions of Russia, the Urals Federal District.

Focus on media relations as a prevalent practice of public relations in Russia is another feature that makes this research significant. Most of the previous studies were concerned with the descriptive analysis of the practice (Guth, 2000), models of public relations in Russia (Rogozina, 2007), and the overall development of public relations in Russia (Tsetsura, 2003; Tsetsura, 2005a). This study aimed to explore this unmarked territory and minimize this research gap.

Finally, the International Index of Bribery for News Coverage (Kruckeberg & Tsetsura, 2003), which predicted the existence of the media transparency phenomenon in Russia, is based on the secondary data analysis. So far, no empirical data in Russia were gathered to confirm or reject it. In addition, the Index was concerned only with one part of the phenomenon, cash for
news coverage, and did not take into account other types of media transparency phenomenon, such as direct and indirect payments, and their formalization. This study reduces the research gap by collecting the first-hand data and examining all existing forms of media transparency in the Urals Federal District of Russia.

This study does not analyze the overall practice of media relations in Russia as a whole. Rather, it offers a snapshot of the media relations practices in one region of Russia to explore whether the geopolitical approach to studying public relations in any large country, but specifically in Russia, can contribute to understanding why practices can be different within one country. In summary, the goal of this study was to examine and identify existing forms of media relations practices that are common among journalists and public relations practitioners of the Urals Federal District.

Method

The following chapter provides an explanation for the chosen methodology and procedures for collecting and analyzing the data. First, it justifies survey as a tool for this research; then it discusses the process of data gathering, study population, and the sampling procedure. The operational definitions used in the study follow. Finally, the instrument design and data analysis are described.

Justification of the Method

This study was designed to explore media relations practices and the phenomenon of media transparency in the Urals Federal District of Russia. Given this goal, the study primarily employed a quantitative method of surveying, with elements of a qualitative open-ended question technique to collect and analyze the data.

There are several reasons why surveying was the most appropriate tool for this study. First, this method allows reaching a lot of respondents outside the United States (Roberts, 2007). Second, the method allows greater precision in reporting results (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Third, surveying allows to collect a large amount of data in a limited time to examine many variables (Roberts, 2007). According to Leonard (2003), this characteristic of the survey is particularly important for topics that have not been previously explored, as it permits a snapshot of the big picture. Therefore, for the purpose of this exploratory study the quantitative method was found to be the most appropriate. In addition, many previous exploratory studies have employed a survey tool as a method for collecting the data (Hong & Ki, 2007; Kitchen & Li, 2005; Stein, 2006).

However, according to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), most researchers acknowledged that quantitative and qualitative methods are equally important in understanding any phenomenon. Therefore, this study did not eliminate opportunities that qualitative research offers. Part of the data was gathered through open-ended questions and analyzed using qualitative techniques, such as thematic and illustrative analysis (Owen, 1984). Open-ended questions were included in the survey so that respondents could express their views and thoughts regarding media relations practices in the Urals region based on their own experiences. This type of questions was included for three main reasons. First, open-ended questions present an opportunity for respondents to generate their own answers and provide in-depth responses (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Second, it allows for answers that the researcher did not anticipate in the survey. Third, it gives the flexibility to follow up and to learn about the respondents feelings behind a particular answer (Wimmer & Dominick).
Data Gathering

To collect the data for the proposed research questions, an online survey was utilized. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), online distribution is able to provide access to a world-wide population, as well as to specialized and hidden populations. It also provides convenience, opportunity for immediate feedback, and tailored questions. In addition, an Internet survey can enhance the volunteer nature of participation (Roberts, 2007). Moreover, it allows for reduction of errors associated with manual data entry (Roberts, 2007). Finally, Internet surveys are less time consuming than mail surveys or telephone and personal interviews (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Given the distance between the researcher’s and the respondents’ locations, it was cost-effective and less time consuming to distribute the survey via Internet. In addition, journalists and public relations practitioners constantly work under deadlines, and an online survey is a more manageable time commitment for them because they can complete the survey at their convenience (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

After receiving approval from the University of Oklahoma IRB to conduct a study, the data were collected over a four-week period in spring 2008 using the online service, Survey Monkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com/). Survey questions were entered into a template provided by the online service that allowed several different question formats. After the online survey was ready, the researcher created a link to a web page where the survey was housed. This link was included in a letter of invitation to participate in the study. The researcher then emailed letters to all journalists and public relations practitioners in the chosen survey group. A copy of the letter of invitation is included as Appendix C.

The four-step distribution process, or follow-up correspondence, was used, and letters of invitation were sent to all potential participants once a week over the four-week period. The follow-up correspondence was conducted in accordance with Dilman’s (1978) recommendations, who argued that this method allows the researcher to maximize the response rate. During the first week, an email that included a description of the study, a proposal to participate, and an option to opt out of receiving the message was sent to the study participants. During the second and third weeks, participants received a kind reminder. In addition, during these weeks, snowball sampling was utilized as the researcher sent letters to other potential participants whom respondents referred in previous weeks. At the beginning of the last week, the researcher emailed potential respondents about the last opportunity to participate in the study. At the end of the forth week, a thank you note was sent to those who completed the survey.

Study Population

The study population was restricted to media professionals who work in the Urals Federal District of Russia. For the purpose of this study, media professionals were defined as journalists and public relations practitioners, including reporters, editors, and broadcasting hosts of the regional and local mass media outlets, and public relations practitioners employed by private and public organizations, government, and public relations agencies in the Urals Federal District of Russia. The study interchangeably refers to media professionals as journalists and public relations practitioners.

Sampling

The purpose of this study was to explore media relations practices and the phenomenon of media transparency in the Urals Federal District of Russia. Thus, a census of all available
journalists and public relations practitioners in the Urals District was desired. However, the researcher did not have sufficient knowledge about the actual size of the population being studied due to the unavailability of such information (N. Skvortsova, personal communication, February 29, 2008). Therefore, the participants for this study were selected using the combination of the two non-probability sampling techniques: purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

The defining characteristic of the non-probability sampling is that the sample is not a random selection, and it is conducted without knowledge of whether those included in the sample are representative of the overall population (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). Streubert and Carpenter (1995) pointed out that there is no need to randomly select individuals if manipulation and control are not the purpose of the research. Streubert and Carpenter’s standard is also true for this study as the current research is the first one of its kind and is exploratory in nature. According to Buddenbaum and Novak (2001), the goal of the purposive sample is to select participants who can be expected to provide useful information. In this study all subjects of the study population, such as journalists and public relations practitioners, could potentially contribute to the examination of media relations practices in the Urals region.

Due to unavailability of a single list of journalists and public relations practitioners, the researcher utilized purposive and snowball sampling using three sample frames: 1) a list of the members of professional organizations such as The Journalists Union of the Urals Federal District of Russia and The Urals Department of the Russian Public Relations Association, 2) representatives of the public relations departments of the Top 50 organizations of the region, based on the latest available ranking based on business reputation, as compiled by Expert magazine (2005), 3) a list of personal contacts of the researcher (the researcher has been working for two years as a public relations practitioner in the region and has developed extensive connections among media professionals, which were included in the sample).

The initial list of journalists was compiled with the researcher’s personal contacts of journalists (N = 114) and contacts provided by the Journalists Union (N = 384, see Table 1). Although the Journalists Union did not have a list with addresses of all members per se, an opportunity was offered to the researcher to distribute the survey through their mailing list of 384 mass media outlets that work in the Urals Federal District of Russia (D. Polyanin, personal communication, February 28, 2008).

Table 1 Sampling Procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media professionals</th>
<th>Purposive sample</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Snowball sampling</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>Personal contacts</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>Referrals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalists Union</td>
<td>384</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td></td>
<td>498</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations practitioners</td>
<td>Personal contacts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Referrals</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Relations Association</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Top 50 companies</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td></td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Potential recipients 597, Journalists Union’s list does not work, total 207

| Week 3-4 |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| **Journalists** | Personal contacts | 114 | Referrals
Online search | 150 | Subtotal 264 |
| **Public relations practitioners** | Personal contacts | 5 | Referrals
Public Relations Association | 38 | Subtotal 93 |
Top 50 companies | 50 | Total 9 (with 15 referrals) |

Potential recipients 357, undeliverable 168, total 189 + 15 referrals = 204

Note. During the third week of data gathering the mailing list for journalists provided by the Journalist Union was no longer functioning.

The initial list of public relations practitioners was compiled with the researcher’s personal contacts of public relations practitioners of the region (N = 5), members of the Ural branch of the Russian Public Relations Association (N = 38), and contacts in the public relations departments of the top 50 Ural companies as listed in Expert magazine (N = 50, for detailed information, please see Table 1).

Due to an unexplained complication, the mailing list provided by the Journalist Union stopped functioning during the third week of data gathering. This incident limited the sample of journalists to only 114 initial personal contacts of the researcher (see Table 1). Therefore, the researcher undertook an Internet search of the journalists’ contacts using the online database of mass media in the Urals District of Russia (PR-life, 2007). The search resulted in 150 additional journalists’ contacts, bringing the total for journalists to 264, and the total for both groups to 357 (see Table 1).

Response Rate

Out of 357 email invitations that were sent to journalists and public relations specialists of the Urals Federal District of Russia, 168 emails were returned as undeliverable, resulting in 189 usable email addresses: 52 for public relations professionals and 137 for journalists (see Table 1). The snowball sampling increased the sample size by 15 referrals bringing the total to 204: 62 public relations practitioners and 142 journalists.

Table 2 Response rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media professionals</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations practitioners</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20.09%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 204 journalists and public relations practitioners, a total of 41 responses were received, with the overall response rate of 20.09% (see Table 2). The response rate for public relations practitioners constituted 40.3% (25 out of 62). The response rate for journalists was much lower and constituted 11.2% (16 out of 142). Low response rates were anticipated as this research was first of its kind and exploratory in nature. Moreover, the response rate for journalists compares favorably with the previous studies on media transparency, where
Journalists showed significantly lower desire to participate (Tsetsura, 2007). Additionally, the president of the Ural Branch of the Journalists Union in personal communication with the researcher predicted that no more than 10% of journalists would agree to participate (D. Polyanin, personal communication, February 28, 2008).

Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions are used throughout this study:

Based on the previous research, factors that influence current media relations in the Urals region were identified as: 1) national government, 2) municipal government, 3) advertisers, 4) news sources such as public relations practitioners, 5) corporate owners or publishers, and 6) political affiliation or political party.

Media relations tactics were classified based on the level of interpersonal contact and interaction needed for information processing during the communication between journalists and public relations practitioners (Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986; Taylor, 2004). The following tactics were identified as rich, moderately rich, and lean tactics:

Rich tactics – those that involve high level of interpersonal communication: 1) personal invitation to the event over the phone, 2) organizing news conferences, 3) granting an exclusive interview with the company’s CEO, and 4) personal invitation during an informal meeting or lunch/dinner.

Moderately rich tactics – those that may and may not involve interpersonal communication depending on situation: 1) granting exclusive news information to the journalists (can be in a form of personal communication, email, or a written report), 2) personal delivery of news releases to the journalists (can be done by public relations practitioner or a courier), and 3) invitation to a corporate party (may involve personal communication with the public relations practitioner and may not).

Lean tactics – those that restrict interpersonal communication between journalists and public relations practitioners: 1) mass distribution of the news release via fax, email, or wire service, 2) granting free tickets to a show or concert (via courier service or mail), 3) presenting other gifts to journalists and editors (via mail or courier service), 4) presenting services or products of the company as gifts to journalists and editors (via mail or courier service), and 5) cash payments for media coverage or non-coverage (do not require interpersonal communication as the message is controlled and paid by public relations practitioners).

Direct payments were identified as cash or other monetary payments for news coverage based on the research by Kruckeberg and Tsetsura (2003).

Indirect payments and influences were classified based on the study by Tsetsura (2005b) as: 1) publication or production of materials in exchange for paid advertising, 2) written media rules of conduct that allow the receipt of samples, free gifts, or attractively discounted items from third parties to media representatives, 3) conflict of interests, when a journalist is employed with media and a company, institution, government, or public relations agency, 4) pressure from the advertising departments of media on editors in regards to which news from which sources to cover, and 5) financial and psychological pressure from news sources, companies, and public relations agencies on the media to present the information that they desire.

Formalized direct and indirect payments and influences were identified based on anecdotal evidence and Hagstrom’s (2000) observations that direct and indirect payments can be regulated by official agreements, and referred in this study to as information service contracts.
Survey Design

The survey for this study was based on the tool first designed by Tsetsura (2005) to collect data on global media practices and media transparency. The survey was previously used for collecting data in Russia (Tsetsura, 2005a), Poland (Tsetsura, 2005b), Ukraine (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2007), and China (Tsetsura, 2008). This study used an updated version of the survey instrument in order to correspond with the study’s goals and research questions. Further discussion describes the specific changes in the survey.

RQ1: What factors influence current media and thus media relations in the Urals Federal District of Russia?

In order to answer this research question eight items were added to the survey, including two open-ended questions (see Q1-Q8 in the Appendix A). This part of the survey asked participants to rate their level of agreement or disagreement to stimulus statements along a five-point Likert-like intensity scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 3 (disagree some and agree some) to 5 (strongly agree). For example, “I believe that any media outlet in the Urals is most influenced by the municipal government of the Urals Federal District.” Statement responses were coded so that the higher value indicated positive support for the concept.

RQ2: What kinds of media relations tactics are employed by journalists and public relations practitioners in the Urals Federal District of Russia? How often do journalists and public relations practitioners in the Urals Federal District of Russia use rich, moderately rich, and lean media relations tactics?

To explore media relations practices that are common among public relations practitioners and journalists in the Urals Federal District of Russia, two questions were included in the survey, one with 12 subquestions inquiring about the frequency of use of the 12 rich, moderately rich, and lean media relations tactics, and another question was open-ended (see Q22-Q23 in the Appendix A). Public relations practitioners were asked to identify tactics that they employ most often in order to attract journalists’ attention to the company’s products, events, services, or the company itself. In their turn, journalists were asked to identify practices that are employed by public relations practitioners in order to attract journalists’ attention. In this part of the survey respondents were asked to record the level of frequency of occurrence of a certain media relations tactic along a five-point semantic differential scale, from 1 (never) to 5 (always). According to Buddenbaum and Novak (2001), this technique helps reduce response bias by rating the phenomenon on a five-point scale bounded by words. Also, it helps the researcher to identify and remove from the study responses that were just circled instead of being actually rated. Statement responses were coded so that the higher value indicated more frequent use of a practice.

RQ3: What types of media transparency phenomenon exist in the Urals Federal District of Russia? Are these practices formalized?

To answer this research question, 12 questions were created and embodied in the survey, including two open-ended questions (see Q9-Q17 & Q19-Q21 in the Appendix A). The first nine questions were constructed to explore the phenomenon across two dimensions: different types of media and different types of direct and indirect payments and influences. The study identified 12 different types of media outlets that exist in the region: 1) national newspaper (with Ural pages), 2) regional and local daily newspaper, 3) regional and local weekly newspaper, 4) magazines, 5) the Ural branch of the national information agency, 6) regional and local information agencies, 7) wire networks, 8) national TV programming, 9) national radio programming, 10) local and regional TV programming, 11) local and regional radio programming, and 12) website.
In this part of the survey respondents also were asked to record the level of frequency of occurrence of direct and indirect payments and influences along a five-point semantic differential scale, from 1 (never) to 5 (always). For example, “News media have a written policy covering the receipt of samples, free gifts, or discounted materials from news sources.” Statement responses were coded so that the higher value indicated positive support for the concept, meaning that the media is less transparent. Therefore, two questions of the survey (see Q9 & Q10 in the Appendix A) were reverse coded for logic in data analysis.

In addition, all of the nine survey questions included a box for an open-ended response, for example: “Please provide clear, detailed, specific examples from your personal experience with specific media practices listed” (see Appendix A).

To answer the second part of the research question, an additional three questions were included in the survey, including one open-ended question (see Q19-Q21 A). One of these questions asked respondents to choose an answer from three different options yes (1), no (2), I do not know (3). Another question asked respondents to record the level of frequency of occurrence of the 11 services offered by Ural media and identified through anecdotal evidence along a five-point semantic differential scale, from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Statement responses were coded so that the higher value indicated more frequent use of a practice.

Demographic information about the participants was also sought, including gender, age, level of education and major, location, employer, working experience in journalism and public relations, and additional employment if any. Overall, the updated survey consisted of 50 questions and it included an additional 19 questions (see Q24-Q42 in the Appendix A) that were not in the scope of this study. These questions were carried over from the initial survey design to collect the data for other studies.

After the survey design was completed, the researcher translated it into Russian. In order to check the translation accuracy, the survey was then translated back into English by a doctoral student in the Political Science Department who is a native speaker of Russian. The researcher compared the back translation with the original version and corrected inconsistencies. The final, corrected Russian language version was used in the study.

Pretesting

In order to discover whether the survey was adequately designed and to refine questions, the instrument was pretested prior to its distribution. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), “self-administered questionnaires should be pretested with the type of respondents who will participate in the actual study” (p. 194). Therefore, the online survey was sent to four personal contacts of the researcher who are media professionals in the city of Moscow, two journalists and two public relations practitioners. These pretest participants were chosen intentionally, because they practice outside of the Urals Federal District and were not likely to be included accidentally in the sample through referrals. The pretest participants were initially contacted by email with the invitation to participate in the pretest. After all four of them agreed to participate, they received another email with instructions and a link to the survey. After respondents completed the questionnaire, they received another email inviting them to critique the questions and respond via email indicating which questions were hard to understand or answer. As a result of the pretest, several questions were rephrased and instructions to certain questions were changed.

Data Analysis
The survey results were analyzed using statistical software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 16.0). The collected data were processed and analyzed using primarily descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests. Open-ended questions were analyzed using the thematic and illustrative analysis.

To answer the research question one (RQ1), the data were analyzed using mainly descriptive statistics. The results section reports means and standard deviations. In addition, paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare the obtained means between variables: Federal Russian government and municipal government authorities. The test allowed to determine whether a statistically significant difference existed between this pair of variables.

To answer the research question two (RQ2), descriptive statistic was also used to report what types of media relations journalists and public relations practitioners practice in the Urals Federal District of Russia. Means and standard deviations are reported in the results section. In addition, paired-sample t-tests were used to detect a difference in means between mass distribution of the news releases and its personal delivery, as well as organization of the news conferences and cash payments.

To answer research question three (RQ3), the data were analyzed using descriptive statistic to report the frequency of occurrence of a certain practice in different types of media. The results section reports measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion (means and standard deviations).

Separate scales for frequency of occurrence of a certain practice for national and local and regional media were constructed according to each type of media transparency practices (see Q9-Q17 in the Appendix A). Scales for the national media included four items: 1) national press with Ural pages, 2) Ural branch of the national information agency, 3) national TV programming, and 4) national radio programming. Scales for local and regional media included five items: 1) local and regional daily newspaper, 2) local and regional weekly newspaper, 3) local and regional information agency, 4) local TV programming, and 5) local radio programming. The reliability of each scale presented in the Table 3.

Paired-sample t-tests were used to identify whether there were statistically significant differences between media transparency practices at the national and local and regional media levels for each of the types of media transparency, as perceived by media professionals.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability of Scales for Local and Regional Media and National Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of media transparency as listed in the survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12</td>
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<td>Q13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thematic and Illustrative Analysis

A qualitative analysis of the responses to open-ended questions was performed to identify major themes and topics. In addition, open-ended responses were analyzed to provide additional insight to the quantitative data and to illustrate media practices of the Urals region with specific examples. Most of the questions in the survey had an additional box for open-ended questions. Previous experience in the similar studies (Tsatsura, 2005b, Tsatsura, 2007) showed that respondents often provide extensive comments regarding certain issues. The collected data were analyzed using the thematic and illustrative analysis (Owen, 1984).

Responses to open-ended questions were downloaded in a separate file and translated from Russian into English by the researcher. English translation was then once again back translated into Russian by another graduate student, who is a native speaker of Russian. Two Russian versions of the data were compared to determine discrepancies, which were immediately adjusted.

After the back translation was performed, a thematic analysis was executed. Grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used as a foundation for the analysis. According to Strauss and Corbin, the analysis of the data should be preceded until the emerging themes do not change the created categories will exhaustive and mutually exclusive.

To make the technique more precise, the researcher used Owen’s (1984) prescriptions for data analysis. Owen argued that the criteria for isolating themes are recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence is when at least two parts of the speech carry the same meaning using different wording. Repetition means that the same words or phrases are used throughout the discourse reflecting the same meaning. Forcefulness refers to significant changes in intonation in oral speech or underlining and capitalizing words in written speech. Using these recommendations the salient themes were identified in responses.

The themes were created by first reading each comment and making reflexive notes. The responses then were divided into categories with answers that appeared to have similar meanings. After the initial sorting process, definitions in each category were examined to see whether a certain theme emerges. Sub-themes were identified when the responses in a category appear to form subcategories. Each theme was also examined to determine whether the theme is limited to responses from only public relations practitioners or journalists.

Illustrative analysis was used when the data obtained from the open-ended responses did not compile into a separate theme, but provided a unique example of a media relations practice. These illustrations were used to elucidate the reported statistics on the corresponding survey question.

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For the Sake of Our Children: 
Corporate Social Responsibility, Public Relations, and the Crisis of British Children's Television

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Abstract
This study examines activism, by both individuals and groups, on behalf of quality, indigenous children's programming in the U.K. British children's television is currently in the throes of an unprecedented major funding crisis, which has severe repercussions for the production of such programming. In addition, the withdrawal from production and broadcast of children's programs by ITV, the major national commercial channel, has exacerbated an already diminishing showcase for reflection on British life and culture, in all its diversity. Across Britain, individuals and local and national groups have called for a reevaluation of children's TV needs, the program output currently available to them, and that which is ideally suited to those needs. Ofcom, the national communications regulator, and the House of Commons have both weighed in on the issue. The former's nation-wide study, report, and consultation was at least, in part, a result of concerted efforts by individuals and NGOs across nations (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland), sectors (voluntary, industry, and academic), and economic and educational strata. The paper's central focus is the relationships, alliances, and other public relations strategies these NGO and other activists use. Their efforts pave the way for policy change in an area of immense social consequence for the cultural identity and engagement of children and youth in the U.K. and for the future of that society itself.

If children are the key to the future, then we must safeguard their welfare by providing audiovisual content that will nurture their minds and spirits and prepare them to take their places as responsible citizens in society. So argue non-governmental organization (NGO) activists and interested others throughout the U.K. They are responding to the current, acute crisis in British children's television, where production is largely revenue-driven and most broadcasters have backed away from their historic public service obligations. In general, activists’ expect broadcasters to fulfill these obligations, which Kovacs (2006, 2007) has associated with corporate social responsibility (CSR). As per the 1991 Broadcasting Act, companies bidding for a commercial broadcasting franchise had to demonstrate that their programs met a "quality threshold" (Parliament, 1990).

As the advertising revenue of ITV, the commercial network, has declined over the years, and as Childs (2008, of Save Kids' TV [SKTV]) noted, lighter-touch regulations have been the norm. Broadcasters have sought to pull back from public service obligations. Consequently, SKTV's position, said Childs, is that there needs to be a source of public funding for producing quality, indigenous, children's broadcasting across the U.K. Not all British broadcasters agree with this position, nor are they equally willing to finance such productions themselves. Although
Childs maintained that commercial broadcasters' obligations have been more specifically terms under which they are licensed to broadcast. The fact that provisions of the 2003 Broadcasting Act, as it concerns children, are voluntary, rather than obligatory, and therefore, Childs has not characterized them as CSR. Nevertheless, Kovacs (2006), in an exploration of frameworks and exemplars for CSR, posited that voluntary benchmarks are pushes from within an organization, rather than from outside it, and thus are at a higher level. As such, Kovacs would argue that broadcasters' compliance with norms for quality children's broadcasting constitutes CSR.

This paper documents the public relations efforts in the U.K. of a handful of individuals, various industry groups, grassroots activists, and broadcasting-centered groups to elicit policy changes and subsidies from broadcasters and ultimately, government, for ongoing, indigenous children's television production. It will identify the main policy issues, the players who bring them into the public sphere for debate, and those empowered to make change. It will explore the relationships built around shared goals of quality, indigenous British programming, including the alliances and tactics stakeholders use to draw attention to their agendas and achieve their goals.

**Problem**

The study tracked a public relations response to a crisis in British children's television, which, unlike toxic waste, natural disasters, pandemics, and terrorist attacks, would not rank on most people's top ten crises list. Few citizens, even parents, would prioritize kids' TV over life-threatening phenomena. Fewer would contemplate that a "short-term" dearth of appropriate programming might result in the long-term impact of foreign content and lack of indigenous, quality drama and other genres that reflect a multicultural British experience. Thus, the failure to perceive such a crisis poses a formidable barrier to an effective public relations campaign and transcends quantity, genres, placement, or audiences of children's programs. The broader concern is the issue's link to the fundamental value placed on public service broadcasting, its role in shaping future participants in civil society, and its provision of the skills needed to deal with a complex, evolving, and highly diverse country. The historic mandate of the BBC, as per its founder, Lord Reith, has been "to inform, to educate, and to entertain," (BBC, 1992). That public service ethos was never limited to the BBC (although the lion's share of the burden for sustaining children's broadcasting has fallen to it) but its implementation across all channels is now at risk.

**Recent background**

Less than one year ago, Britain's independent, commercial television company (ITV) announced it would stop producing and broadcasting kids' TV shows to preempt children's programming for more commercially viable adult shows. Not coincidentally, this news also piggybacked on a new regulation that prohibited advertisements of junk/snack foods during hours designated for kids' programming. A number of activist groups, including Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV-see below) and the European Alliance of Viewer and Listener organizations (EURALVA) had lobbied for food-centered restrictions in the U.K. and Brussels. The commercial broadcasters were already competing for a shrinking pool of advertising pounds and the new ban exacerbated an already difficult situation. Some saw ITV's move as justification for eliminating a less-profitable genre and a "way out" from its public service obligations.

Thus, these changes go beyond just revenues lost and programs slashed; they undercut broadcasting's role in serving the public interest and meeting the informational, educational, and entertainment needs of citizens (Crawford Commission, 1926) to keep them civically engaged, provide social cohesion, and sustain democracy. Its obligations to children should be to assist
them, as future citizens, in developing an ethos and perspectives that will have a positive impact on British society for generations to come. But the means to fulfill these obligations seem to have been pulled out from under the broadcasters. According to Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV), this situation has been exacerbated by the BBC's recent statement that it would cut 5% of its children's programming budget for six years. To activists, this is insult after injury, given ITV's decision, above.


Pressure groups and advocacy. British groups have a strong record of advocacy around broadcasting issues, going back to at least the Television Act itself. ITV's beginnings in 1956 were preceded by a vigorous industry campaign (Wilson, 1954) but the first broad-based activist push was led by Mary Whitehouse in the late '60s. Her following of church groups, outraged mothers, and concerned others rallied as National Listeners and Viewers Association (NVALA, later Mediawatch UK) a conservative watchdog for taste and dignity (Kovacs, 2004). Since then, activists of many persuasions have continued to push for policy and programming change.

The literature of advocacy suggests that effective rhetoric used in a public interest campaign contextualizes and frames that campaign's agenda and strongly contributes to its success (Wallach, Dorfman, Jernigan, & Themba; 1993, Toth & Heath, 1992). Such public interest campaigns frame the problem, whether AIDS, underage drinking, drug abuse, or other public health issues, as stemming from flawed social policies, rather than from individuals' behaviors.

*Setting the Stage for Broadcasting Activism*

Broadcasting has an incontrovertible influence, as a public good/interest, on public opinion and cultural norms. Public service broadcasting (PSB) advocates continue to use rhetoric appeals to the reader, viewer, or listener that identify potentially threatening program or policy changes—either to the moral fiber, civic participation, cultural integrity or other "sacred cow" of British citizens. Mary Whitehouse (National Viewers and Listeners Association, now Mediawatch UK) suggested the former; Jocelyn Hay (VLV) focused on the latter. Rhetoric used by children's television activists in their campaign will appear below.

Coalitions were another strategy historically employed by many British pressure groups. More often than not, these alliances of groups or individuals and groups were ad hoc and issue-based. Nevertheless, a few permanent coalitions existed. Notable among them was the Deaf Broadcasting Council, which represented deaf groups throughout the U.K. Public Voice (2008), a coalition of voluntary groups unrelated to broadcasting, Campaign for Quality Television, a producers' group, VLV, and other activists, rallied about the future of the BBC, the Royal Charter Review of the BBC, and the license fee that funds it. Kids TV alliances are cited below.

Activist NGOs were also adroit at navigating the political system. They employed celebrities, frequented party conferences and invited key politicians and civil servants to public media-centered forums, The "good and the great," in turn, provided a voice for the activists by means of questions posed in Parliament, motions, and other legislative maneuvers. This is what Mills (1998) referred to as a “virtuous circle.” These NGOs also cultivated relationships with key journalists of the broadsheet media pages. A comprehensive list of strategies/tactics is listed in Results, below. What follows is an overview of content, methods, and an historical retrospective.
Methods

This study builds on 12 years of research into British broadcasting activism. The initial focus was on six activist groups that sought greater accountability from broadcasters (Kovacs, 1998) and grew to encompass their regional and global influence, the future of public service broadcasting, access to digital services, cultural representation in England, Scotland, and the North, and similar issues. Heavy reliance by activist groups on relationship building and relationship management was one of the most significant findings in the early research (Kovacs, 1998). Public relations research has increasingly emphasized relationships (e.g., Ledingham and Bruning, 2000). Subsequent studies of British activism corroborated the value of relationship outcomes for NGOs’ agendas. The campaigns of VLV, a major participant in the children's television campaign, earned it visibility, credibility, and high marks for good relationships. Subsequent follow-up studies tracked the NGO literatures and characteristics that these British NGO activists had in common with others (Kovacs, 2006, Kovacs, 2007). They confirmed what Castells (1999) had suggested: When the nation-state fails to or is incapable of addressing certain issues, NGOs step in to fill the vacuum. Doh (2001) had observed that the rising power of NGOs in a triangle with business and government meant that they could not longer be brushed aside. This was clearly the case with broadcasting NGOs, which like all such organizations, sought to increase targets' corporate social responsibility (CSR). The research then expanded to rubrics and frameworks for CSR and what NGOs could learn from them. Recently, the focus broadened to cultural considerations in the U.K., where the nations’ (Scotland, Wales, and N. Ireland) and the English North’s traditions set them apart and warrant preservation and government subsidy.

Data gathering as regards the current focus on children's TV

This paper’s focus is drawn from in-depth interviews with broadcasting executives and advocates, first-hand accounts of campaigns, consultations, and tactics, articles from the broadsheet press, and other sources. Compiled over a six-month period, the data were provided, in large part, by the actors themselves. Among these NGOs are Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV), Save Kids’ TV, a host of industry and voluntary groups, and concerned individuals. In addition, the authors consulted online, including government, documents, coalition members' Web sites, campaign coordination meeting notes, emails circulated among campaign members, Ofcom's (the communications regulator) review of issues and survey data, and Parliamentary records. Although Ofcom's data collection transpired within a six-month period in 2007, its grounding was in public service performance norms originating with the BBC, above.

Results

The NGO activist groups cited above, together with prominent, concerned individuals, positioned this issue as a crisis of national proportion. Their goal: to preserve endangered, quality indigenous children’s television. They have sought to foster programs that bolster children's self-esteem, pride in diverse British cultures, and provide a foundation for good citizenship. The BBC, the world's most highly-regarded public broadcaster, may be pushing beyond its capacity in producing such programs. The authoritative 2007 report on U.K. children's television by Ofcom, the national communication regulator, describes the state of U.K. children's television, changes in the production marketplace, and if and how output meets the expectations of parents and children and the CSR obligations of broadcasters.

Reports by Ofcom, the Regulator, and Parliament and Responses to Them.
The Ofcom report disclosed that only 1% of 113,000 hours of children's television programs is British in origin. Although there is more children's television than ever available on the digital channels, the proportion of U.K.-generated programs continues to shrink. Of the 17% shown that is British in origin, much is reruns (Childs, 2008). Some in the advertising industry have blamed Ofcom for precipitating the children's television crisis but the fact remains that without funding provisions, new children's programs will be all but stymied. Ofcom refuted this charge, pointing to a reduced pool of investment in children's TV since 2002 and a relatively small impact of advertising revenues on that genre. The Ofcom report (2007) was followed with a seminar on the future of children's programming sponsored by and featuring panels of children's TV producers, broadcasting executives, activists, a media analyst, a journalist and a House of Lords member.

Reaction to the Ofcom Report. Author Philip Pullman commented that the crisis was "...the result of dogmatic insistence that the market knows best." "The problem can only be cured by telling the market who's boss," he said. "I hope the government will…safeguard…imaginative, witty, and beautiful television for children. Why should they have…anything less?"

Public relations has been instrumental in generating a nationwide dialogue about the future of U.K. children's television at a time when revenues for production are at an all-time low and where commercial broadcasters, dependent on advertising, have lost all incentive to produce what NGOs and many parent think children should be able to watch. Notably, in promoting children’s needs, activists have aimed well beyond the press blitz surrounding the Ofcom's report. The campaign says much about the ability of credible NGOs, coalitions, a well-coordinated series of forums, political lobbying, Web-based petitions to Whitehall, and other key players and tactics to catalyze a major government review and public consultation on this issue. In this case, it heralds an incontrovertible link between public affairs, public relations, CSR from broadcasters, and democratic processes that sustain civil society as reflected below.

House of Commons Select Committee Report. The involvement of Parliament in the debate attests to the significance of this policy issue in the national consciousness, although the average British citizen is far from fully engaged in the debate. The report (Nov. 6, 2007), which was submitted by the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) Select Committee, stems from members' reactions to oral and written testimony from NGO groups. It covered five key areas of public service content, of which children's television was but one. Its message was:

We believe that a mix of imported and UK-produced content is beneficial for UK children…we believe that U.K.-produced content plays an important role in maintaining children's cultural identity. We note the commitment to children's programming of the BBC, ITV, Five and some digital multichannels and we encourage these broadcasters to continue to contribute to the production of U.K. originated output…we believe that the financial pressure likely to face the main current commercial commissioners…interventions which will restrict advertising revenue…uncertainty about the level of UK produced children's content…We believe that it…is important that there remains a significant amount of UK-produced children's programming on commercial channels as well as the BBC… We therefore recommend that the Government and Ofcom…identify how much UK children's production…is necessary and…If …a shortfall is envisaged, we believe that children's programming should be eligible for assistance
Public service obligations of ITV and commercial broadcasters. Magnus Brooke (2007), head of public affairs at ITV, discussed the above concerns about commercial TV's children's output. He confirmed ITV’s dilemma in competing for shrinking advertising funds in a multichannel environment. ITV’s revenues had declined so much that it could no longer afford children’s programming on terrestrial channels, he said, but he hoped that children’s CITV channel would continue to expand. Nevertheless, as a commercial institution, ITV’s primary responsibility was to its shareholders, he maintained. Despite outside pressure, this seemed to be ITV’s bottom line.

Public Relations Strategies

Strategies used by groups and individuals on behalf of quality, indigenous children’s TV reflected those cited in the original study (Kovacs, 1998). They included rhetorical framing, as it related to media advocacy (Wallack, et al, 1993), lobbying, letter/petition writing, working, consultation, and written/oral public testimony. The most noticeable difference with the 1998 data was the extent of Internet/Web based activity, which was used for mobilization, exchanging ideas and documents, and correspondence among group members. Most activists used face-to-face or voice-to-voice-based communication. This reinforced the notion that in the U.K., the NGO agenda is still largely interpersonally advanced and its progress still heavily dependent on relationships and networking. The first step to success in this area is identifying key players.

Relationship building and strategic targeting of Government and civil servants

At a Jan. 31, 2008 meeting of SKTV and other group members and individuals, Tongue suggested three particular foci for targeting key individuals: 1) the Department of Media, Culture, and Sport (DCMS) Convergence Think Tank (a review of digital services and domestic programs); 2) the House of Lords; and 3) senior civil servants regarding the pending Review of Childhood. Activists' ancillary efforts might include, respectively, a SKTV paper to the review body, a SKTV message to Lords, and a note on the centrality and influence of television for kids.

Coalitions, their constituent members, and their strategies

A number of coalition members strengthened ties with the press and those empowered to make changes. They also organized conferences and forums to which politicians, civil servants, journalists, and other opinion makers were invited. Coalitions used all tactics at the disposal of individual groups. Hutt (2007) pointed out how, in May 2007, VLV was "creating a coalition of concerned individuals, opinion formers and representative organizations, to act as a catalyst for ideas and actions." Among the opinion formers was Lord David Puttnam, renowned producer. Save Kids' TV. This coalition of producer-and broadcasting-based pressure groups and notables, coordinated by Childs (2008), mentioned above and formerly a kids' TV producer and now a consultant, and chaired by Anna Home (2008), former head of BBC Children's Television, draws support from distinguished individuals like author Philip Pullman, author of His Dark Materials trilogy (Guardian, 2007), like-minded broadcasting groups like VLV, the International Broadcasting Trust (IBT), the U.K. Coalition for Cultural Diversity of Expression, those in other areas of the arts and literature (e.g., Society of Authors [SA]), the Writers' Guild of Great Britain) Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS), industry groups like Equity (Actors), The British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), Producers' Alliance for Cinema and Television (PACT), and Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU ), the Directors' and Producers' Rights Society (DPRS), The Association for Children's
Arts ("dedicated to the promotion, development and celebration of all the creative and performing arts for and with children…” [ACA, 200) and the Musicians’ Union (MU).

Save Kids TV Campaign Coordination, Outreach, and Activities by Supporters. Campaign coordination meeting notes document the plurality of voices involved in the campaign (see above), the careful attention paid to their suggestions, and the multiplicity of tactics suggested and used at any given time. These included lobbying the Parliamentary Performers and Writers All Party Group. At a recent annual lobby/social event, performing artists had "buttonholed politicians" In the previous Parliament there had been an Early Day Motion (EDM #1375)) on children's television (below).

VLV. A broad-based, all-issue membership-based group founded by Jocelyn Hay in 1983 to save BBC Radio 4, it rapidly expanded to television using a range of tactics in defense of public service broadcasting. In 1994, it created the VLV Forum for Children's Television to deal with the attendant issues. It holds conferences and lobbies broadcasters, government, and Ofcom regarding the vital role of children's programming in kids' lives. According to Hutt (2007), VLV deserves much of the credit for getting the Ofcom review in motion. VLV’s Hay (2008) herself added that the combination of overtures she made to key civil servants and the conference and other events VLV organized "put the issue on the public agenda" for Save Kids' TV to promote. Her main regret in this realm is that producers did not heed VLV’s warning about the dangers to children's programming earlier, when it would have been less difficult to remedy. Her concern underscores the need for proactive rather than reactive public relations and issue management.

Rhetorical framing of issues. Activists have feared that budget cuts will deprive U.K. children of the pluralistic, quality domestic productions at which the British have distinguished themselves. VLV (2007) framed its agenda as follows: “It is vitally important therefore that we not only alert all those with an interest in the welfare of children to the dangers that these cuts pose but also encourage them to engage in debate at this time.” Similar rhetoric was used Hay (2007b) at VLV's November Children’s Television Conference in London. "Our children are our future…We must persuade the politicians that a viable means must be found to provide programs that nurture them mentally, emotionally, and culturally," a position explicated in earlier remarks (2007a):

Our children need to be able to enjoy a wide range of programming which reflects their own rich heritage of language, literature, speech, history, and values. But traditional, high-quality UK-originated children's television as we have known it is under serious threat from changing economics of the digital era. With the right mix of culture, quality, and diversity, good television stimulates mental and social development, and plays a critical role in inspiring the children of tomorrow…

Tongue's (2007) letter to the Guardian, written with regard to the suspension of the kids’ program BBC Jam (which was a government-contracted delivery by the BBC of a digital broadband curriculum [Childs, 2008]), argued that "At a time when government education priorities focus heavily on disadvantaged young people, there has been a failure to defend an individual public space and resource that would give access to those, particularly on low incomes, to …curriculum support."

Lobbying. Hutt (2007) noted that, "As a result of its lobbying, VLV can claim much credit for Ofcom's decision to launch its current review of the state of children's television in the U.K.
VLV strategies heavily involved working with government ministers and civil servants to open the issue for debate in Parliament, government-based conferences, and in dialogue with Department of Media, Culture, and Sport (DCMS), responsible for broadcasting.

EDMs. Early day motions (EDMs) are formally submitted for debate (but rarely debated) in the House of Commons and meant to publicize the views of individual MPs, an event or campaign, and/or garner parliamentary support for an issue (An MP may add his or her signature to an EDM or submit amendments to an existing one [U.K. Parliament, 2008]). Below, #1375:

That this House recognises that children's television production provides significant public value; appreciates… high quality British television programmes… believes that plurality of provision …is essential in ensuring quality…supports the requirements in the Communications Act 2003 for broadcasters to show an appropriate range of home-grown children's programmes; and calls upon Ofcom to ensure that this obligation is met. (Gerrard, 2007)

Ultimately, said Childs (2008), this motion was tabled after pressure by professional lobbyists

Adjournment Debate. The debate, in Westminster Hall, was opened by MP Gerrard on December 4, 2007, initiated by the Performers’ Alliance Parliamentary Group, with support from by PACT. Across political parties, consensus on the need to protect children’s TV in the UK prevailed. Sutcliffe, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Culture Media and Sport, responding to the debate, acknowledged the presence of “respected industry figures" as indicative of the need to "take the issue seriously," even if it was delayed by its absorption into larger public service broadcasting concerns. (SKTV, 2007). This reinforced the public relations value of credible spokespersons.

Research. In addition to the initial offer to undertake comprehensive research on children's television, which eventually was conducted by Ofcom (Hay, 2008), the International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) had commissioned research into the extent (hours) of broader content on children's TV. Study results will be available in April 2008. IBT intends to approach MPs with the research results, which are likely to suggest U.S. market dominance.

Petitions. On its Web site, Save Kids' TV publicized a petition posted by the Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television (PACT) and encouraged visitors to sign it (linked to a government e-petition Web site). The brief text is explicit in its request: "We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to ensure that UK children have access to a wider range of high quality, UK-made public service kids' television programmes that reflect the rich diversity of UK culture." Submitted by Adam Minns of Pact, it already 3,873 signatures before its 2008 deadline. Only 500 signatures were displayed on the Web site, which stressed the following:

UK parents place a high value on the role that children's television plays in society…it is particularly important that public service broadcasting for kids reflects their own lives and cultures, and helps them learn more about the world around them. But new programming made in the UK accounts for just 1% of the total…kids TV on offer to UK audiences. The situation is rapidly getting worse: .. There are more kids channels than before… but they are unable to plug the gap left by the main channels…The BBC remains… parents do not want their children to have one perspective - the BBC's. We ask
the Government to act now to ensure… a rich variety of UK kids' shows with different voices and views.

Its destination was 10 Downing Street, the seat of the Labour Government headed by Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Save Kids' TV hoped to gather enough signatures to move the government towards policy change but the response was slow and relatively poor. The Mothers' Union was not interested in the issue. According to Childs (2008), the Women's Institute was "too cumbersome to respond in a timely manner." This is problematic inasmuch as parental support was key to winning politicians' backup for the initiative. Aside from seeking the support of parenting groups, activists focus more on press activity, celebrity support to generate press interest, and reaching young people themselves through outreach to schools and large organizations such as the Scouts. VLV engaged in all these activities but specifically sought to involve university students, given the group's aging membership and leadership (Hay, 2006)

*Letter Writing.* Viewers, including parents, were encouraged to write to the Member of Parliament (MP) to voice their concerns and/or complaints about the programming changes. PACT provided access to an automated system through which campaign supporters could find their local MP and send a pre-generated letter to an email address (Childs, 2008).

*Conferences and Forums.* Above, we mentioned the Ofcom seminar, which followed on the regulator's report (2007) and the VLV conference on children's TV. VLV also organized an event last May at the London Zoo on "The Role of the Media in Contemporary Childhood (Hutt, 2007). In addition, groups unaffiliated with the Save Kids' TV coalition hosted issue-related events. These included the Westminster Media Forum--which brings together activists, interest groups, and politicians (although, according to Childs (2008) few politicians actually attended the children's TV events) and a co-sponsored event by the Social Market Foundation and PACT.

*Testimony before Select Committee.* Last month, Hay (2008) gave evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee regarding media ownership and referred to children's TV. This is a recent example of oral and written testimony that comes before Select Committees of both Houses of Parliament, which then report of such testimonies and makes policy recommendations.

*European Connections and Comparative Policies*  
At a recent SKTV campaign committee meeting, Tongue (2007) suggested invoking to the Government the Television without Frontiers Directive, which dictates the percentage of member nations' programs that must be of European origin. Currently, the official quota for original, indigenous programs is 51%, although that figure may be qualified where not practicable. Perhaps, she felt, such a reminder might move the Government to enforce the statute.

*Policy Proposals to Ofcom.* At a recent meeting, Childs (2007) discussed SKTV's response to Ofcom's call for consultation following Ofcom's (2007) report proposal to Ofcom for a Funded Online Destination, which would be funded to commission new programs "but would also feature interactive and participatory enhancements." SKTV had raised money, through donations, to engage a digital communications consultancy company to pull together experts from among SKTV activists "to generate a completely new approach to children’s broadcasting" (Childs, 2008). Channel 4 had already been approached, with positive feedback, An IBT-BBC meeting, in the works, would raise this issue.

*Web Use.* On its Web site, SKTV created a compilation video of some of the best children's programs. It was a cooperative effort of these programs' producers and distributors.
The goal of the video was to show what would be lost if children’s TV would be permitted to deteriorate.

*Cultivating journalists and engaging them in advocacy.* This activist tactic is among the most important. Broadsheet media journalists set the agenda for public discourse on compelling issues, including kids’ TV. Thus, VLV goes to great lengths to invite them to their events. Raymond Snoddy (2007) and Maggie Brown are perhaps the most renowned journalists.

**Discussion**

Although the campaign for children's television is relatively recent and has been exacerbated by the recent loss of advertising revenues for commercial TV, the crisis itself has been brewing for far longer. Channel proliferation, and the fragmentation of broadcasting through cable, satellite, and now digital services, has overtaken terrestrial television and the race for audiences. The commoditization of childhood, from advertising to market-based synergies rooted in Harry Potter, Disney, and other commercially-exploitable product spin-offs, has left a culturally-stilted taste in the mouths of industry pundits, parents, activists, and observers alike. There is no magic bullet to ameliorate the effects of an exponential growth of available cheap, exported, largely-U.S.-based programming on British minds. Yet British NGOs do not see the situation as irreversible. They see their quest for a funding source and distributor for children’s production as both critical and within reach. The need for some source of funding to sustain culturally-specific, diverse, indigenous, British children’s programming is incontrovertible: Whether there will be a public service publisher, top slicing of the BBC’s revenues (an approach rejected by many), or some other solution, a vehicle for its preservation must be found. U.K. children’s television cannot survive without British financial and artistic support. British children’s values, perspectives, and future are profoundly bound up with their media. U.K. democracy cannot survive without engaged, informed, and inherently British children, the adults of tomorrow.

Public relations’ role has been to call attention to and rally resources toward the recognition and protection of the media/citizen connections. NGO activists have been the proactive link among relevant actors and empowered bodies in the children’s TV crisis. They should be acknowledged for their effectiveness in positioning this crisis in the public eye, their relentlessness in advancing the public interest, and concern for the citizens of tomorrow.

**References**

* Please note that in-text references not listed below are interviews or email correspondence. A complete list of interviews is available from the author on request.


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Local News Coverage of Disability: 
Current Themes and the Role of Nonprofit Organizations as Sources
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ABSTRACT
This research explored the concept of disability as a social issue presented through local newspaper coverage. A quantitative content analysis revealed that, when nonprofit organizations are consulted as sources, the local paper was not used as a forum to promote public awareness of disability as more than a personal issue.

Introduction
Americans live longer and face more health problems now than ever before (Fijiura, 2006), and approximately one-sixth of the U.S. population is faced with a disability (Riley, 2005). According to Nelson (2000), the disability community in the U.S. has “a fervent sense of belonging, a new sense of worth, and a new commitment to fair treatment for themselves and others with disabilities” (p. 192). Societal barriers, however, limit the amount of interpersonal contact the general public has with persons with disabilities; therefore, much of the public relies on the media for information regarding disability issues (Davies, 1994). The concept of disability may be primarily socially constructed.

Nonetheless, media representations of disability continue to not only be limited, but stereotyping and narrow in theme. Community leaders and public relations practitioners who want to promote disability acceptance, awareness, or prevention may play important roles in the appropriate delivery of crucial health messages through strategically planned campaigns (Kirkwood & Brown, 1995; Levy, 2001). Therefore, this research was designed to explore the concept of disability as a social issue presented through the media and influenced by organizations. Because nonprofit organizations have long been created to promote public awareness and understanding of disability issues, newspaper articles in which nonprofit organizations served as news sources were analyzed in order to 1) examine the typical roles nonprofit organizations serve in communicating about disability issues, and 2) describe the nature of news portrayals of disabilities in local media.

Defining Disability
Disability is not limited to concrete medical or physical circumstances. It is “a linchpin in a complex web of social ideals, institutional structures, and government policies” (Linton, 1998, p. 10). Disability scholars contend that outside “social arrangements” (Davies, 1994, p. 17) define the concept of disability; these social factors include physical, organizational, and attitudinal or cultural influences (Clogston, 1989; Davies, 1994; Depoy & Gilson, 2004). In short, the context in which disability is situated influences how disability is defined and perceived by others (Clogston, 1989, 1993; McColl & Bickenbach, 1998).

Mass media may “act as significant agents in socially constructing images of people with disabilities and disability issues in U.S. culture” (Haller, 2000a, p. 284), and this acknowledgement means that more professionals will have to work to ensure that
communication about disability issues is accurate and fair (Davies, 1994; Rapley, 2004). There are a variety of disability issues that can be illuminated by the media. For example, persons with disabilities may face ongoing personal questions about quality of life, self-concept, and the uncertainty of the future (Falvo, 1999), and continue to await full integration and acceptance in modern day society (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). In addition, discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes toward persons with disabilities are pervasive issues in spite of significant disability legislation – such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (see “Definitions,” 2000) or the Americans with Disabilities Act (see “Equal opportunity,” 2000) – and some positive shifts in media representation (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Iwakuma, 1997; Nelson, 2000) that aim to further include persons with disabilities in mainstream culture. The media may have an obligation to shape the evolving views of disability and the disability community (Nelson, 2000).

**Disability Portrayals in the Media**

Media involvement in disability issues may create a sense of community for Americans living with disabilities and encourage active discussion of disability issues that can influence public awareness and understanding (Nelson, 2000). Research has shown, however, that media representations of persons with a variety of disabilities – from physical disabilities to mental illness – are often inaccurate, insufficient, or negative in nature. These types of representations have been noted in examinations of film (see Larson & Haller, 2002; Special Olympics, Inc., 2005; Wolfson & Norden, 2000; Riley, 2005), television (see Gloag & Davies, 1992; Special Olympics, Inc., 2005, Riley, 2005), advertising (see Farnall, 2000; Ganahl & Arbuckle, 2001; Hardin, 2003; Riley, 2005), and even health communication or public service campaigns (see Wang, 1998). Persons with disabilities are often viewed as “objects of inspiration or pity” (South, 2003 p. 21), having “personal problems that must be overcome” (Signorielli, 1993 p. 29), or as being special or somehow separate or isolated from mainstream society (Levine, 2000). According to McNamara (1998), “all disabled people want is to see images of themselves as part of everyday society” (p. 10)

It is evident that portrayals of disability in the news, specifically, may need improvement to satisfy the disability community and convey the true experience of disability. For example, journalists have been cited as perpetuating disability stereotypes in their writing (Margolis, Shapiro, & Andersen, 1990; Haller, Dorries, & Rahn, 2006). Often persons with disabilities have been described as people who “can’t do’ rather than ‘can do,’” and terms such as “victim” or “cripple” are not necessarily uncommon (Margolis, Shapiro, & Andersen, 1990, p. 28). Terms that emphasize a dependent role, such as “the disabled,” “wheelchair-bound,” and “confined by a wheelchair,” have also been used (Haller, Dorries, & Rahn, 2006). Some efforts have been made, however, to address problems with disability media coverage as part of journalism training (see Johnson & Elkins, 1989; Levine, 2000), and scholars have noted changes in disability terminology, including an elimination of the word “handicap” and an increased use of the phrase “people with disabilities,” which puts “people” before “disability” (Haller, Dorries, & Rahn, 2006).

In general, there are two types of news media coverage related to disability: traditional and progressive. Clogston (1993) labeled media coverage that emphasizes an outdated social understanding of disability issues as traditional; topics such as medical treatments related to disability, government or private support of disability issues, special education or separate employment or school programs, and the person with a disability as a victim of crime are common. Often, traditional stories are associated with overly negative “pity” themes, i.e. persons
with disabilities need a lot of assistance, as well as overly positive “inspiration” themes, i.e. persons with disabilities have overcome insurmountable obstacles in order to succeed or become “equal” to others. The prevalence of these kinds of polarized themes has been noted in past commentary and research.

For example, an article published in *Broadcasting and Cable* (Anonymous, 1996) described how the political campaigns in 1996 put the “spotlight on the ‘enabling disabled’” (p. 86) when role models such as Christopher Reeve and Bob Dole served as sources of inspiration in political campaigning. Reeve and Dole were both portrayed as persons with disabilities who were determined to overcome the challenges of their disabilities. Although this type of story may positively resonate with publics, it may be that these types of portrayals narrowly categorize disability as something that should be overcome.

Well-regarded research on disability portrayals in news media has focused mainly on news coverage before and directly after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Study results have indicated limited news coverage of disability topics in general and a higher prevalence of traditional-themed topics (Clogston, 1990, 1993; Haller, 2000b). In addition, news coverage – similar to the example previously presented – has been cited as being narrow in theme. Research results have indicated that the media fall short of depicting persons with disabilities as a diverse population—not just white men in wheelchairs (Haller, 2000a, 2000b). Disability media scholar Beth Haller (2000a) argued that “there must be more awareness and creativity when telling the news of disability issues” (p. 285).

Awareness and creativity may more likely be part of the “progressive” disability news story—a story disability activists would, according to the literature reviewed, prefer. In contrast to traditional coverage, progressive media coverage emphasizes more relevant and current social influences on disability, and focuses on how our society has yet to adapt to those with disabilities. Media coverage classified as progressive includes topics related to access and disability awareness, discrimination, independent living and integrated programming, employment issues, consumer issues, and stories in which a person with a disability is the focus of the story, but the disability itself is not the focus of the story (Clogston, 1991, 1993).

Because much of the published research on disability news coverage specifically examines disability coverage from the 1990s, there is a need for more research on current portrayals. The Special Olympics Web site (2005) provides a summary of more-recent research in which media researcher Carol Pardun examined portrayals of persons with intellectual disabilities and concluded that current media – including newspapers – continue to portray these persons as victims, persons who are vulnerable, or persons that deserve pity. She concluded that media should rather “emphasize the multi-dimensional and competent aspects” of persons with intellectual disabilities (p. 3). This statement means that individuals could be better portrayed in a variety of roles and undertaking a variety of tasks, which may be more realistic approach to examining the everyday trials and successes for persons living with disabilities. This research proposed that realistic and accurate portrayals of disability may be accomplished through partnerships with news media and organizational leaders that focus on properly framing messages.

**Framing the Disability Message**

News media, in particular, may serve as a primary objective source of information for publics. How disability news coverage shapes the current conception of disability as a social issue may be illuminated by the concept of framing (Goffman, 1974a). Framing is described as a
“sophisticated concept” in which media presentations can be used “to define a situation, to define the issues, and to set the terms of a debate” (Tankard, 2001, p. 96), and framing is said to explain how individuals make sense of their social world (Goffman, 1974a). To examine media frames is to look at how the media use images and symbols, spokespersons, and language to communicate important societal messages (Entman, 1993; Messaris & Abraham, 2001; Wallack, Dorfman, Jernigan, & Themba, 1993); media may serve to “reinforce and challenge” individual-level understanding of issues (Sotirovic, 2000, p. 290).

Framing is sometimes considered simply to be a way of describing story topics or attributes; the concept may not thoroughly explain why media messages are shaped by societal influences or those in power (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Scholars argue, however, that framing has an important place in a variety of disciplines including health communication, psychology, and public relations, and that how messages are framed may influence audience perception, opinion, and action (see Hallahan, 1999; Holtgrave, Tinsley, & Kay, 1995; Rothman & Salovey, 1997; Scheufele, 1999; Signorielli, 1993; Wallack et al., 2003; Zoch & Molleda, 2006).

Organizations that communicate about disability issues are challenged to construct properly framed messages that tap into social values and illuminate the realities of disability and disability issues. In his 1974 book, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman (1974b) used several examples of persons with disabilities who agreed that disability is a social problem of negative public perception. More-current research indicates that common narrow frames of disability may affect society’s understanding of disability as a social concept. For example, in a discussion of mass media portrayals of mental illness, Sieff (2003) claims that negative frames have a strong impact on the formation and persistence of a negative audience attitude toward this population. Wang’s (1998) research that analyzed popular injury prevention campaigns concluded that images designed to be helpful to the general public may have negative and stigmatizing effects on persons with disabilities. Themes of pity, fear, and hopelessness were noted in her review, and overall, disabilities were presented as undesirable injuries that could be avoided. Wang reported the comments of several persons with disabilities who viewed the images as damaging to the public conception of disability, and stated, “for people with disabilities, a culture’s response to their disability…may ironically guarantee that people with disabilities are less well off” (p. 154).

Public communication campaigns are “driven by reform efforts, actions that seek to make life or society or both better, as defined by emerging social values” (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 2001, p. 232), and nonprofit organizations are often the leaders in pushing for reform. Research has shown that public opinion may be influenced when organizations or interest groups use appropriately framed messages (see Andsager, 2000; Reber & Berger, 2005; Stone, 2001; Stephens, Rimal & Flora, 2004). Nonprofit organizations continue to rely on mass media channels to help get their messages out to publics (Collins-Jarvis, 1997). The role of nonprofit organizations in ensuring accurate and fair coverage of disability issues may be just as important as the role of journalists and other news media professionals who tell the disability story.

Although the appropriate framing of disability issues may influence public attitude and behavior change, challenges are inherent when the media are used to communicate the disability story. Slothers (1992) criticized the tradition of person-oriented disability stories in journalism, noting that these stories often minimize disability as a societal issue. Results of a survey of 53 television health reporters revealed that reporters believe the use of personal examples will humanize stories and aid in media coverage that has a greater effect on audiences. Tanner (2004)
found that reporters would prefer to have commentary from the persons who are actually affected by health issues themselves, rather than the common reliance on health practitioners as sources.

Person-oriented stories in the news often serve as examples of what Iyengar (1991) coined episodic news frames, in which specific events or stories are used to exemplify issues. Episodic frames are in opposition to thematic frames that present a more composite and thorough picture of issues through “collective or general evidence” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 14). The common use of personal stories and episodic-type frames may be useful for reaching audiences, but may limit the need for nonprofit organizations and their professionals as news sources. Although organizational leaders may have little to no control over how their issues are presented by the news media, being available as a source of information and actively pursuing media opportunities may be a good starting points to increase effective public dialogue about the role of disability in modern life and address any current problems in the public perception of disability.

**Research Questions**

Current framing research does not examine disability news coverage in which nonprofit organizations are consulted as sources, nor does it address the specific roles of nonprofit organizations when these consultations are pursued by journalists. This study was designed as a starting point to examine more-current disability portrayals and the relationship between nonprofit organizations and news media.

The following research questions were proposed:

RQ 1: In what ways are nonprofit organizations used as news sources in local coverage of disability issues?

RQ 2: When nonprofit organizations are consulted as news sources, what are the dominant frames prevalent in local news coverage of disability issues?

Based on the literature, two hypotheses related to disability framing are proposed:

H1: Dichotomous overall frames of inspiration and pity will be predominant in local news coverage of disability.

H2: Individual persons with disabilities will be portrayed in local news coverage as either objects of inspiration or pity.

**Method**

A quantitative content analysis of local news coverage was used to address the research questions and hypotheses (see Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). The content analysis coding protocol was designed to classify how nonprofit organizations were used as news sources and also to determine the nature of communication messages about disability used by the media (a copy of the coding protocol may be obtained by contacting the researcher). Tankard’s (2001) methodology for identifying frames within news coverage, guidelines published by the Project in Excellence in Journalism (2005), and an in-depth review of disability framing literature were used to strategically develop the protocol. The protocol relayed instructions for identifying the dominant frame of the article and the dominant nonprofit organization. The protocol described the anticipated classifications – based on the literature review – for five dominant news frames for the stories coded, e.g., “people with disabilities provide inspiration to others” and “disability presents challenges for our society.” The protocol also described to recognize how dominant nonprofit organizations were used as sources, e.g., the organization was used to “provide statistics about disability/illness prevalence” and the organization was used to address “disability/illness as an important societal issue.”
The researcher developed two scales to assess 1) the overall frame of the article, and 2) the portrayal of the dominant person with a disability (personal characteristics). Detailed instructions for use of the two scales were included in the protocol. (See Appendix A for the coding sheet used during analysis).

Sample

The News & Observer, the primary source of local (dictated by the researcher’s residence at the time) news for North Carolina’s Triangle area residents (the Triangle includes the cities of Raleigh and Durham and the town of Chapel Hill), was selected because of its large circulation of anywhere from 164,294 to 211,735 households on any given day (Editor & Publisher, 2005). In order to obtain a sample sufficient enough to address the research questions and hypotheses, the researcher searched articles published over one year – between August 2004 and August 2005 – for inclusion in the study.

The search terms “disability” and “illness” were entered into the Lexis Nexis Academic database to locate stories for inclusion; full articles were then scanned individually for the use of nonprofit organizations as news sources. The term “disability” is a broad term and refers to the “limitation or restriction of activity that results from an impairment” (Falvo, 1999, p. 2). For the purposes of this study, “disability” was defined as any illness or impairment that could be classified as a chronic (as opposed to acute) condition; this allowed for the inclusion of a variety of conditions as disabilities, from cancer to mental illness to physical impairment. A total of 32 articles were selected for analysis, with an average word count of 982 words.

Coding and Analysis

Articles were coded initially by the primary researcher. A second coder was trained with the protocol and coded a total of six articles (close to 19% of the articles) without the assistance of the primary researcher. Intercoder reliability was very poor, as coders had disagreements on basic aspects of the coding protocol including crucial items – such as the identification of the dominant nonprofit organization used as a source – for which additional categories are contingent upon. A third coder was trained with the protocol and coded all 32 articles without the assistance of the primary researcher. Intercoder reliability, calculated using Holsti’s formula was 64% (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). The third coder and the primary researcher met to conduct consensus coding for all discrepancies. The final dataset was agreed upon and entered into SPSS for analysis. Initial analysis included frequencies and descriptive statistics; factor analysis was used for a more in-depth look at the overall frame and disability portrayal scales designed for this study.

Scale Validity

The overall frame scale used to classify the overall frame of the story was designed to explore the possibility that narrow frames may exist in news coverage. The five items that were used to code the overall frame of the story were designed to explore the range of very positive (scored as 1) to very negative overall frames (scored as 5). Neutral or balanced articles were coded in the middle of scale (scored as 3). Pearson’s correlations for all five items on the scale were statistically significant at the .01 level (Table 1), suggesting high internal validity for the scale. Cronbach’s Alpha for the five items was .97, and a Principle Components Factor Analysis indicated that all items load on a single factor.
Table 1
Pearson Correlation Coefficients among Overall Frame Scale Items* (n=32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (1): Fortunate/encouraging – Tragic</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item (2): Inspiring – Uninspiring</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item (3): Happy – Sad</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item (4): Empowering – Disempowering</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item (5): Positive – Negative</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 2
Pearson Correlation Coefficients among Personal Characteristic Items (n=28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (1): Happy – Sad</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item (2): Emotional-positive – Emotional-negative</td>
<td>.92**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item (3): Integrated – Alienated</td>
<td>.77**</td>
<td>.75**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item (4): Overcoming obstacles – Burdened by obstacles</td>
<td>.69**</td>
<td>.68**</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item (5): Not visibly impaired – Extremely physically impaired</td>
<td>-.48*</td>
<td>-.56**</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is statistically significant at the .01 level.
* Correlation is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Composite averages for both the overall frame and personal characteristic scales were tabulated in SPSS, and a Pearson’s correlation of .91 indicated that the overall frame scale
correlated highly with the personal characteristic scale. This correlation was significant at the .01 level.

Limitations

The results of this study are limited by factors related to the sample and difficulty in coding. While sufficient for the analysis conducted, the sample size for the study is relatively small and does not represent a sufficient sample of all local news media. Future research should focus on local news coverage that spans a longer time period and a variety of newspapers or other sources of news. While training of additional coders was done to the best of the researcher’s ability, several items on the coding protocol were difficult for coders to agree upon, including the identification of the dominant frame, dominant nonprofit organization, and the dominant person with a disability used in news coverage. These were crucial categories which affect other areas of the coding protocol. The coding protocol should be refined to ensure greater reliability between coders if it is used in future studies.

Results

Disability Groups Represented

Articles focused on a variety of disabilities (Table 3). The majority of the articles focused on mental illness (34%) or developmental disabilities, including autism (28%). “General disability” and “multiple disability” categories were also used for articles that did not mention specific disabilities or focused on more than one disability category respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Percent of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auditory disorders</td>
<td>3 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>3 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental disabilities</td>
<td>28 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General disability</td>
<td>13 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>34 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical disabilities</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>99 (32)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percents do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Organizational Characteristics and Roles

Within individual articles, multiple nonprofit organizations were often consulted as sources for news coverage; this was true for 56% of the sample. The types of dominant nonprofit
organizations (one per article), as identified according to the coding protocol, varied to a great degree. The majority (78%) of organizations were local or state organizations, or local or state chapters/affiliates of national organizations such as Wake County Developmental Disability Services (Guzman, 2005), Governor’s Advocacy Council for Persons with Disabilities (Hui, 2004a), the Autism Society of North Carolina (Hui, 2004b), and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill North Carolina (McDonald, 2005). Most organizations consulted (78%) exist primarily to directly serve persons with disabilities. Seven organizations (22%) were organizations that provide some type of special program or service related to persons with disabilities but are not primarily disability organizations; examples included the North Carolina Botanical Gardens (Hester, 2004) and the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation (Stearns, 2005).

Dominant nonprofit organizations were used in a variety of ways as sources (Table 4). The information most frequently reported in the articles included descriptions of services provided by the organization (75% of articles included this information), commentary on the personal challenges of living with a disability (47%), commentary on the importance of equal access or nondiscrimination for persons with disabilities (31%), and information about a specific event or campaign (31%). Nonprofit organizations were not often used to provide basic statistics about the prevalence of the disabilities discussed in the articles (9%) and the acknowledgement of stigma associated with the disabilities discussed in the articles (6%). Two additional themes emerged in the “other” category during the coding process; three organizations (9%) provided information or commentary on financial or economic issues related to disability, and two organizations (6%) provided information or commentary on ethical issues in healthcare. These categories should be considered for inclusion if the coding protocol is used in future studies.

Table 4
Dominant Nonprofit Organizations’ Roles when used as News Sources (n=32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of dominant nonprofit organizations</th>
<th>Percent of organizations classified % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Described services provided by the nonprofit organization</td>
<td>75 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Described personal challenges of living with disability</td>
<td>47 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commented on the importance of equal access or nondiscrimination</td>
<td>31 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided information about a specific event or campaign</td>
<td>31 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided facts or described symptoms/characteristics of the disability</td>
<td>22 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Described disability as an important societal issue</td>
<td>22 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Described treatment options for disability</td>
<td>22 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Described the challenges of loving others with disability</td>
<td>16 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained legal issues related to disability</td>
<td>16 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided statistics about the disability</td>
<td>9 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Described financial/economic issues related to disability</td>
<td>9 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledged the stigma of disability</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Described ethical issues in healthcare</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Media Frames of Disability

Of the five dominant frames proposed in the coding protocol, the most frequently occurring media frame (38% of articles reviewed) noted in the sample was that “people with disabilities or their families face/overcome challenges.” An example of this type of coverage can be found in a news article by Hui (2004b), which described the difficulties parents face in fighting for better education for children with autism enrolled in the public school system. The second most prevalent frame was that “disability presents challenges for our society” (19%), noted in articles that discussed disability issues as societal issues. The distinction between this frame and the frame that people with disabilities or their families face challenges was subtle; stories that presented disability as a challenge for our society focused less on individual stories and exemplars and more on the issue at hand and how society has dealt with it. For example, one article published on July 6, 2005, focused on the debate surrounding state institutions designed for the care of persons with mental retardation (Bonner, 2005). Disability was also presented as a “disease or health issue” in several articles (16%), and these articles tended to have more fact-based information about symptoms or treatments options for illness (see Hobbs, 2005) or tips on coping with a disability (see Weidle, 2005). Less popular frames for news coverage included the idea that “people with disabilities should be treated equally” (9%) and “people with disabilities provide inspiration to others” (6%).

Four articles (13%) did not fit into the prescribed dominant frame categories and were coded as “other.” Examples included an article that focused specifically on awareness and advocacy (McDonald, 2005) and a feature that told a story of living as a couple with disabilities (Rochman, 2005), both of which could not be classified into one of the five categories.

Table 5
Distribution of Scores on Overall Frame Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (1): Fortunate/encouraging – Tragic</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 Neutal 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of articles (n=32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (2): Inspiring – Uninspiring</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 Neutal 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of articles (n=32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (3): Happy – Sad</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 Neutal 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of articles (n=32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (4): Empowering – Disempowering</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 Neutal 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of articles (n=32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (5): Positive – Negative</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 Neutal 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of articles (n=32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
H1 was supported by the examination of descriptive statistics for each item on the overall frame inspiration-pity scale (Table 5). Descriptive statistics for each item in the scale showed fairly even distribution; more stories (n=32) fell on the positive side or the negative side of the scale, rather than neutral. On average, 20% of the articles were coded as neutral or balanced for the five items in the scale. The means for all items (range = 2.7-2.9) indicated a lean toward more positive than negative overall frames.

**Portrayals of Individuals with Disabilities**

H2 was supported by the distribution of scores on the personal characteristic scale (Table 6). Similarly to the overall frame results, the majority of dominant persons with disabilities (n=28) were coded as having positive or negative characteristics. On average, about 24% of articles presented neutral or balanced portrayals of dominant persons with disabilities for any given item on the scale. The percentages for portrayals that fall on the extremes of items on the scale, however, were relatively low (range = 6 to 13%), and the means for the four items (range = 2.7-2.8) indicated a slight lean toward more positive than negative portrayals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distribution of Scores on Personal Characteristic Items for Dominant Persons with Disabilities</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (1): Happy – Sad</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of articles (n=28)</td>
<td>34 (11)</td>
<td>22 (7)</td>
<td>19 (6)</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
<td>2.8 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>2.8 (1.1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (2): Emotional-positive – Emotional-negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of articles (n=28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (3): Integrated – Alienated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of articles (n=28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item (4): Overcoming obstacles – Burdened by obstacles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of articles (n=28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that nonprofit organizations may have work to do in order to help shape the perception of disability as a social issue. From a public relations perspective, it is surprising how few informative disability messages were noted; nonprofit organizations often exist to champion disability issues, yet news coverage did not accurately portray this. Although coverage of disability discrimination issues and specific events sponsored by nonprofit organizations existed, very little information that may be of importance to consumers was presented such disability statistics, treatment options, and an open discussions of social, legal, and ethical issues. The results of this study indicate that the services nonprofit organizations provide are often described in coverage, but this may do little to perpetuate any goals organizations related to the public perception of disability. Nonprofit organizations were used as sources of information regarding the challenges of living with disabilities in almost half of the sample. The results of this research show a lack of focus on reducing stigma for persons with disabilities and using the news media to raise disability as an important societal issue. This
indicates that local news is not necessarily being used as a forum for actually addressing the challenges disabilities create, nor does local news appear to promote public awareness of disability as more than a personal issue.

The disability themes noted in this study were not much different from other studies of disability media. Results indicate an abundance of coverage that focuses on the challenges faced by persons with disabilities or the challenges society faces because of disability issues, indicating the popularity of using the local disability news story to discuss obstacles or challenges. When the challenges of living with disabilities are illuminated, inspiration and pity-oriented themes in coverage may be inherent. The amount of educational information on disability presented in the articles analyzed was limited in scope, and few articles presented hard news about disability issues with a neutral or balanced tone. Rather, stories were often episodic accounts of personal achievements made in spite of a disabilities or difficult personal obstacles that could not be overcome because of disabilities. This is not to say that coverage of informative and accurate disability news did not exist, but this type was not the dominant type of coverage published during the time frame reviewed. Findings may help support Slothers (1992) statement that episodic stories minimize disability as a societal issue, but further analysis should be pursued to confirm this.

There were more positive stories and portrayals than negative stories or portrayals, which may indicate a shift from past studies (Haller, 2000b, 2000b, Sieff, 2003; Special Olympics, Inc., 2005; Wang, 1998), but stories with undertones of pity, hopelessness, and fear were abundant. In addition, the coverage reviewed is complicated by the fact that outdated labels such as “mentally ill patients” (Rochman, 2004, p. B1) and “autistic” (Hui, 2004b, p. B1) and phrases indicating that persons with disabilities “suffer” (see Krueger, 2004, p. A5) were relatively pervasive. Although these types of observations were not included in the coding protocol, the examples noted during the content analysis only further exemplify the lack of neutral coverage.

This research did indicate the success of using scales like the two developed for this study. The items in both the overall frame and personal characteristic scales were highly correlated. In addition, the two scales were highly correlated with one another. This indicated that when a disability story is framed in a positive, negative, or neutral light, the dominant person with the disability is also usually portrayed in this way. The overall frame and personal characteristic scales should be used in future studies and tested for further reliability. The coding protocol should be reexamined for clarity in order to remedy issues with the coding process that occurred in this study.

The overall findings of this study could be influenced by several factors. One could speculate that either journalists are not actively seeking a variety of information on disability issues or they are not publishing the information that they do obtain when they consult nonprofit organizations in the reporting process. The process of choosing, researching, and reporting the disability news story should be examined from the journalist’s perspective. Journalists should be encouraged to pursue disability stories that are informative, neutral or balanced, and accurate.

It could also be that nonprofit organizations do not have the resources to make information easily accessible and interesting for journalists, or organizations do not proactively seek to obtain news coverage – by issuing press releases, distributing media kits, etc. – that is in line with the organizations’ fundamental missions. It may be that the episodic story of one person with a disability whose quality of life is affected by the organization is the more powerful example of the benefits of the organization. Organizations may rely on the fact that the personal story of one person with a disability perpetuates an emotional relationship with the audience;
these stories may be strategically used for fundraising efforts that outweigh other organizational goals related to shaping the conception of disability as a social issue. Factors related to how nonprofit organizations frame disability issues in their public relations materials should be examined in future research studies. Public relations researchers should involve nonprofit organizations in research that examines the effectiveness of disability media campaigns and the processes organizations undergo in order to deliver messages to publics through the news. Additionally, public relations practitioners that work for nonprofits should consider the importance of actively pursuing media coverage for the disability story that can help shape the conception of disability.

References


Appendix A  
N & O Article Coding Sheet

1. Article ID: _____ - ______ - _____
2. Article #: _____
3. Date of Article: ____/____/____
4. Page: _____
5. Word length: _____
6. Disability: ________________________________

7. Dominant frame (choose one):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>People with disabilities should be treated equally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Disability presents challenges for our society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>People with disabilities or their families face/overcome challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>People with disabilities provide inspiration to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Disability is a disease or health issue</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Other</td>
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8. Specify other: ________________________________

9. Is more than one nonprofit used as a source in the article?  
   1 Yes  2 No

10. Name of dominant nonprofit organization used as source:
    ________________________________

Dominant nonprofit organization source used for:

11. Statistics about disability/illness prevalence:  
    1 Yes  2 No

12. Facts/symptoms/characteristics of disability/illness:  
    1 Yes  2 No

13. Acknowledgement of stigma of disability/illness:  
    1 Yes  2 No

14. Personal challenges of living with disability/illness:  
    1 Yes  2 No

15. Challenges of loving others with disability/illness:  
    1 Yes  2 No

16. Description of treatment options:  
    1 Yes  2 No

17. Description of services provided by nonprofit:  
    1 Yes  2 No
18. Importance of equal access/nondiscrimination: 1 Yes 2 No
19. Explanation of legal issues: 1 Yes 2 No
20. Disability/illness as an important societal issue: 1 Yes 2 No
21. Information about a specific event or campaign: 1 Yes 2 No
22. Other 1 Yes 2 No
23. Specify other use of source:

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<td>24. Fortunate/encouraging                Neutral               Tragic</td>
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<td>25. Inspiring                              Neutral               Uninspiring</td>
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<td>27. Empowering                            Neutral               Disempowering</td>
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<td>28. Positive                              Neutral               Negative</td>
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<th>CHARACTERISTICS OF DOMINANT PERSON WITH DISABILITY (in text only):</th>
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<td>29. Happy                                                          Neutral               Sad</td>
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<td>30. Emotional-positive                                          Neutral               Emotional-negative</td>
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<td>32. Overcoming an obstacle                                      Neutral               Burdened by an obstacle</td>
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Check here if no dominant person and leave 28-32 blank
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<td>33. Not visibly impaired</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Extremely physically impaired</td>
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34. Image(s) included with story:  
1. Yes  
2. No  
3. Unsure
ANT, the Challenger of Stakeholder Thinking
Vilma Luoma-aho
University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finla
Vilma.Luoma-aho@campus.jyu.fi

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Concern: Emergency Management and Public Safety

Community theory postulates that planning and response compliance increase as multiple voices join to provide requisite diversity in planning and response. Information intended to empower a community must be disseminated, vetted by various voices, and tested against past experiences. Rather than featuring an organization as the focal point of analysis, a managerial bias to crisis (Waymer & Heath, 2007), this study regards community efficacy as the focal point. Although the effectiveness one or more emergency management planning and communication agencies is a variable predicting the quality of community response (e.g., compliance with expert advice), messages from various sources—including interpersonal contacts—carry, translate, contradict, augment, and amend expert advice. Analysis can address the harmony or cacophony of the voices that express concern and propose response plans, as well as enact those plans.

Concern: Emergency Management and Public Safety
The research reported here is part of a larger data collection effort on myriad aspects of communication practices during crisis emergency response efforts. This paper focuses on an organization’s efforts to learn from the scale-up of table top drills at six locations across the United States. The first section will discuss organizational learning and its relationship to excellence in public relations. The second section focuses on the organization and the crafting of the drill protocol. The third section applies the conceptual model of integrated organizational learning to the outcome of the drills and is used to generate best practices for management of crisis from an organizational perspective.

Mitroff’s (2005) research focused on the internal environment and identified the components of crisis that an organization must attend to in order to ensure effective management of crisis: 1) detection of early warning signals, 2) test prevention, 3) preparation mechanisms for weaknesses, 4) test short- and long-term recovery mechanisms, 5) continuously learn and reassess crisis management practices, and, 6) utilize new information to restructure and improve current systems. This cyclic structure encompasses the major components of systems theory (Miller, 1996), specifically, the system characteristic of feedback. If an organization has permeable boundaries between organizational units and attends to the information conveyed between units, the organization’s culture and business practices reflect ongoing change leading to negative entropy. If an organization’s units dismiss feedback between and across units, the organization is likely to experience entropy.

Bitto (2006) suggests that crisis management lends itself to ‘silo building’ due to the diversity of the players involved in the effort. “Silo building...may be so deeply ingrained in the institutional memories of organizations that people unwittingly erect barriers to development of interdisciplinary initiatives needed for appropriate community response to catastrophe” (p. 28). Bitto suggests this practice creates “vertical conceptual silos” and prevents interagency collaboration and coordinated response. Allen & Patrick (2008) writing about concerns the law enforcement community confronts when dealing with hazardous materials and/or weapons of mass destruction and emergency responders concluded that even the language used to manage a crisis can be different. “All involved agreed that definitions should be universal and levels of responders should be clearly defined but still allow for mission-specific flexibility (p.17). Wang (2008) developed a model of managing organizational crisis through organizational learning which will serve as the theoretical framework for this research and will be discussed. Wang does not distinguish between emergency planning and crisis response protocol development or bona fide crisis response efforts in her discussion of the parameters of her model. The researcher has taken the liberty to extend her model to the first stage of crisis response planning to ascertain if organizational learning is identified during that process resulting in culture change.

Integrated Model of Organizational Learning for Crisis Management

Wang (2008) provides an extensive review of the literature on crisis and concludes crises generate threats and opportunities for an organization and when effectively managed, create organizational flexibility and opportunities for improvement and learning. However, the timing and use of the lessons learned during the management of crises situations and the relearning of behaviors is typically limited to during and after a crisis. Wang states, “[T]hough the relationship between organizational crisis, learning, and change is identified in the literature to a varied degree, the dynamics and interconnectedness among them is not adequately explored or clearly articulated” (p.435). As a result of the analysis, Wang developed an integrated model for organizational learning utilizing critical learning constructs and processes and the phases of crisis management.

As reflected in Table 1, the similarities in learning and the steps in crisis management are learning, reflection/recovery) and change or redesign. However, how the learning occurs and the process by which the information is analyzed for usefulness leading to refinement or discarding typically occurs within the organizational units, and ultimately triggers change organizationally or within the unit. A review of the current research supports that changes within each organizational unit impair the organization’s ability to sustain meaningful, long-term change. Wang’s integrated model of organizational learning posits that...
Wang’s conceptual model promotes a learning loop wherein during each step of the crisis management process an evaluation occurs across organizational units and the information is used to promote the unlearning of past behaviors and the creation and implementation of new behaviors. While public relations practitioners interface with multiple units of the organization during a crisis event in determining the key message and strategy for crisis management, Wang suggests that simultaneous evaluation should occur at the design, implementation and evaluation of the crisis management plan by all units of the organization to promote reflection, learning and organizational change.

A component of the chemical industry initiative Responsible Care® is the Community Awareness and Emergency Response (CAER) code, which requires chemical companies to create an on-site response plan. Annually, a majority of chemical manufacturing sites create and practice some form of emergency response simulation response effort designed to test the workforces’ response abilities and involve emergency responders, such as fire companies, health care providers, and police. These test-runs prove beneficial as shortcomings are identified and addressed before a catastrophic immediate crisis occurs. However, few companies rehearse how to manage communicating with external publics, for example, the media, key stakeholders and stakeholders during crisis. Grunig (1992) explains that “publics arise on their own and choose the organization for attention” (p. 128) as we can deduce, a crisis creates publics for the organization which are typically diffused linkages (Grunig & Hunt (1984) as presented in Rawlins (2006). The simulated drills occurred in July and November of 2007 and March of 2008. All drills followed the same procedure. One person from the company, the “mole” worked with the corporate EHS director to create a likely incident for the plant. Representatives from key publics were identified as call-ins, walk-ins, etc. and role cards depicting the caller’s focus, personality, and level of persistence were provided to each participant. A videographer accompanied the trained journalist to prepare the spokesperson for interacting with the media. During each exercise, community members or employees from other sites played members of the press, government agencies, and concerned family members. After the drill, all participants met and debriefed about the experience, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the response effort while a scribe recorded the conversation. Specific action items were identified for each unit of the organization and dialogue between members of each unit focused on how to improve the individual unit’s performance and streamline the effort so that all units’ response efforts were timely and efficient.

Recruiting Mom and Dad: Integrated Messages to Mobilize Parents as an Active Public to Support Youth Enlistment Decisions

Robert D. Jackson
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Abstract

The History of Military Recruiting
Research: The Road to Theory

The primary data source used for most research prior to the year 2000, including the study cited above, was a national computer-assisted telephone interview of American youth called the Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS). The survey, conducted by the DOD, began in 1975 and continued until 1999. It included as many as 10,000 interviews of youth between the ages of 16 and 24 years old (Sackett & Mavor, 2003). The information gleaned from YATS interviews included youth propensity to enlist, military advertising awareness, reported attitudes of important youth influencers toward enlistment, and various demographic characteristics. Early
waves of YATS data proved that among respondents who gave unaided mention (no previous exposure to questions about a military career) of intention to join the military, fully 37 percent followed through with the behavior (Asch & Orvis, 1994). In this respect, the YATS data yielded useful information about the connection of enlistment intention and actual behavior, as well as youth perceptions of normative support from parents and other important youth referents. ..... 271

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Vaughan and Rogers (2000) constructed a staged model of communication effects that highlights the interaction of mass mediated and interpersonal communication. The model borrows significantly from Roger’s diffusion of innovations theory that states mass media channels are more effective in the early stages of diffusion to increase knowledge of an innovation (or idea), but interpersonal channels become more important in the later stages as an individual decides whether or not to adopt the suggested behavior (Rogers, 2003). The staged model assumes an initial exposure to a mass mediated message (such as a narrated airshow message). From this point an individual moves from a precontemplation stage to a contemplation stage. Here the message is recognized, understood, and perceived as relevant. The individual also may undergo parasocial interaction, or a perceived relationship with a media character, which in this case may be a member of the Thunderbird squadron or Air Force recruiter. This interaction is heightened if an individual is able to perceive the character as real or is able to talk to the character. As the message is evaluated for relative advantages, societal norms, and parasocial interaction, an individual moves to the preparation stage. Here changes in attitude and self-efficacy occur, and intentions to perform a given behavior form. Next, various interpersonal exchanges with important others sends the individual to the validation and action stages where behavior changes actually occur. Clearly the model helps explain communication processes that affect both parents and youth during an airshow and may contribute to an understanding of how properly crafted messages can influence the propensity to enlist. .................................................................................................................. 280

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Study Two: SoD and Sales Leads for Industrial Power Conditioners ..................................................... 293
Thus, in this example, Media Cost Weighting improves correlations to leads by 64% over Story Counts and 47% over Impressions...........................................................................................................................................293

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So, in this example, Tonality-Refined Media Cost Weighting improves correlations to results by 40% over Story Counts and 25% over Impressions.................................................................................................................................295

Chart B: Pearson Correlations for SoD Story Counts, Impressions and MCW ...............295

Although not all rumors are harmful, many can cause negative results. For example, rumors can negatively affect an organization in diverse aspects such as damage to the organization’s reputation, reduction in productivity and sales, etc. In other words, rumors can affect not only a company’s credibility, but also its financial status (DiFonzo et al., 1994). ...........................................................................................................................................312

Moreover, some studies found belief as a good predictor of rumor activities when the message includes consequences or threats, or when it refers to a new event that is not clear or comprehensible for the receivers (DiFonzo et al., 1994; Koenig, 1985; Rosnow 1974; 1988). In other words, people are more prone to transmit a rumor when they believe the rumor is true than when they believe it is false. People typically do not want to do things that will embarrass them, and they tend to be reluctant to spread an anxiety-inducing rumor that may later be proven to be false (Rosnow, 1988). .................................................................................................313

Rumors can be categorized as dread and wish rumors according to the degree of anxiety that a rumor invokes (Rosnow, Esposito, & Gibney, 1988). Dread rumors refer undesirable or fearful consequences so that conjures people’s anxiety, whereas wish rumors contain desirable or hopeful consequences (Allport & Postman, 1947). .................................................................................................313
Putin era of journalism in the Urals District. The trend of media concentration under corporations and government was also common in the Ural media. Many successful media created media holdings that consisted of TV and radio companies, information agencies, newspapers, and advertising agencies (Koltsova, 2006). As in many other parts of Russia, the actively developing industry of political consultancy in the Ural region started to decline during the Putin era as well. Media relations became the most popular practice of public relations in Russian provinces (Tsetsura, 2003). ................................................................. 405

The review of journalism history from political and media perspectives provides a context for understanding the development of media relations in Russia and the Urals Federal District. It is clear that there are several major influences that shaped the nature of interactions between journalists and public relations practitioners. First, throughout its history, journalism in Russia was influenced by the government at different levels, from federal to local. Inevitably, this influence affected modern media relations in Russia, as public relations practitioners needed to cooperate with the media and took into account their interests in order to get publicity. Second, commercialization of the media made them eager to maximize their revenues through advertising. Thus, media often readily allowed advertisers to influence their editorial decisions through purchased content space, and often the line between journalism and advertising was blurred. Third, the media’s need for information subsidies created the opportunity for public relations practitioners to potentially influence editorial decisions by helping to create news content. Fourth, the existence of cross-institutional groups as the corporate owners of the media in Russia, influenced the ways media relations were practiced in Russia. 406

Thus, the previous research indicates that the described factors influence the media and media relations practices. Further, these factors are intrinsic to the Russian media in general. The research also demonstrates that the history of public relations in the Urals Federal District parallels the overall development of public relations and media relations in Russia. This may indicate that those factors may influence practices in the Urals Federal District as well. However, various regions of Russia have differences in their political and media structures (Tsetsura, 2003). For instance, municipal and federal government might have different influences on the media at the national and local levels. This may indicate that it is possible that some media influences may differ between the Urals Federal District and Russia as a whole, and it would be interesting to see how they differ. Thus, the first research question is: ................................................................. 406


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Emotions and publics’ coping mechanism. The two axes further form four quadrants in the crisis matrix: Quadrant 1 (High engagement/Conative coping), Quadrant 2 (High engagement/Cognitive coping), Quadrant 3 (Low engagement/Cognitive coping), and Quadrant 4 (Low engagement/Conative coping). In each of the quadrants is the dominant emotions (primary and secondary), based on the confluence, interactions, and inter-relations of the publics’ coping strategy as well as organizational engagement. ............................... 564

Organizational Stance and Strategies ............................................................................. 564

Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, and Mitrook (1997) first introduced the notion of organizational stance in the contingency theory of strategic conflict management. A theoretical perspective diametrically different from the excellence theory, which positioned two-way symmetrical model as normative theory (Grunig, 1996), the contingency theory argued that a more realistic description of how organizations engage its publics could be ascertained by the examination of one’s stance towards the other. The stance adopted need not be static, and could change based on the influence of organizational factors (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997). Stances were measured through a continuum, which has at one extreme, advocacy, which meant insisting exclusively on one’s own interests; and at the other end, accommodation, which meant giving in entirely. Jin and Cameron (2006) further developed a scale measuring stance as degree of action-based accommodation and qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation. Within an organization, the contingency theory had identified more than 80 variables, categorized into 11 themes (see Appendix 1), that could affect stance movement along the continuum (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999). ............................... 564

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Primary Crisis Strategy and Message Attributes ............................................................... 568

RQ 3 examined what were the primary crisis response strategies used by the organizations, as well as what message attributes were evident for those strategies. For BP case, corrective action (38.9%), ingratiation (27.8%) and justification (22.2%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). For US Air case, justification (75.0%) and ingratiation (25.0%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). For Ameren case, corrective action (88.9%) and excuse (11.1%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). For Merck case, justification (50.0%) and denial (40.0%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). For Virginia Tech case, excuse (43.8%) and ingratiation (25.0%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). For Gonzalez case, justification (33.0%) and excuse (19.8%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). Across the six cases, crisis strategies had significant influence on three message attribute continua (Defensive-Accommodative, F = 11.095, p < .001; Ambiguous-Specific, F = 11.510, p < .001; and Emotional-Factual, F = 5.248, p < .001). Post-hoc Scheffe tests were used to examine the difference between the primary crisis strategies: For denial (M = 4.10, SD = .316), it led to significantly more defensive message attributes than full apology (M = 6.50, SD = .707; p < .05) did. For excuse
(M = 3.78, SD = .943), it led to significantly more defensive message attributes than corrective action (M = 4.94, SD = .899; p < .05) and full apology (M = 6.50, SD = .707; p < .01) did. For justification (M = 3.41, SD = .867), it led to significantly more defensive message attributes than ingratiating (M = 4.42, SD = .900; p < .05), corrective action (M = 4.94, SD = .899; p < .001) and full apology (M = 6.50, SD = .707; p < .01) did. 


Appendix 2: Details of the cases studied 

Public relations in activist organizations 

Framing and Frames 

Collective Action and Master Frames 

News or Media Frames 

Issue Frames 

Public Relations and Framing 

Abstract 

Making the Case 

What Is Justice? 


Abstract 

Delphi studies 

Methodology 

Stage 1 – Pre-testing of topics by blog posting 

Topics ranked by priority in blog pre-test 

Topics – Round 1 

Response – Round 1 

Region 

Round 1 - Topics ranked by means 

Response – Round 2 

Discussion 

Conclusions 


**Triangular Communications: The Who, Why and How** 806

Lou C. Williams 806

David M. Dozier 806

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*Practitioner as Mediator* 807

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**Abstract**

Maintaining stakeholder relationships has become a central idea for both the theory and practice of public relations (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Plowman, 2007; Rawlins, 2006). Different categorizations and grounds for grouping stakeholders have been established (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997; Rawlins, 2006; Steurer 2006), yet these listings often overemphasize the point of view of the organization. Organization-centered thinking, however, does not portray the chaotic and complex corporate environment. In theory stakeholders can be neatly categorized, whereas in practice organizations are also affected by many non-human aspects such as plant and machinery, political systems, pollution, buildings and the infrastructure.
What is needed is a more holistic understanding of the stakeholder field of forces in which organizations function today. The paper introduces Actor-Network theory (or ANT, see Latour 2005) as a new way of understanding the complex organizational environment. A product of interdisciplinary science studies, ANT is best known for its holistic nature; it provides insights for situations where interaction not only between the social, but also between the technological, spatial/temporal and political entities is regarded as important (Latour, 2005; Law, 2001). ANT provides tools for understanding the complex networks and processes that practitioners face and are themselves involved in. In addition, ANT introduces the controversial idea of non-human stakeholders, and argues that what matters is not the actors’ identities but rather their interrelationships. ANT has especial value for corporate communications, as it describes the process of “translation”, by which one entity seeks consensus or agreement from other entities.

First, the paper introduces the recent research that has been published on stakeholders. Second, it covers the central aspects of Actor-Network theory, and discusses their benefits for corporate communications. Further, a model mapping four different yet intertwined spheres of stakeholders (social, political, technological, spatial/temporal) is presented. Implications for practice are discussed along with descriptive examples, and, to conclude, criticism related to the application of ANT is addressed and areas for future study are mapped.

**Introduction**

The premises of stakeholder thinking are clear: the networks an organization is involved in both restrict and facilitate its functioning, as a favorable operating environment is understood to be beneficial, and an unfavorable one harmful (Carroll, 1993; Freeman, 1984; Wood & Jones, 1995). Successful networking can be measured through the stakeholders’ opinions, and how well the organization responds to them (Grunig et al., 1992).

Organizations consist of people, and human interaction is at the centre of stakeholder thinking as well. Previous literature on stakeholders has mostly concentrated on the social networks that subsists between organizations and their stakeholders (Steurer 2006; Rawlins, 2006; Mitchell, Agle & Wood 1997; Näsi 1995). Social networks between people, however, constitute only one part of the larger networks that maintain society and organizations. Actor-Network theory (or ANT, see Latour 2005) is intended to explain complex networks in challenging settings, and offers a fresh approach to studying organizational stakeholder relations. ANT argues that what matters is not the actors’ identities or the categories they fit, but rather their interrelations. The importance of actors is thus not based on size, type or other attributes, but on their role in the network. The main contribution of ANT can be seen in the holistic understanding it offers of entities and their formation, as it emphasizes the importance of interconnectedness, constant negotiation and inscription as well as acknowledges non-human entities as important parts of the organizational environment (Somerville, 1999).

According to ANT, organizations have little control over stakeholders, and there is little inherent power. In fact, those around the organization only become stakeholders if the organization is able to *translate*, negotiate and persuade them into entering into a relationship with them and, even then this relationship is continually under reformation and negotiation. The process of translation is uncontrollable, yet organizations often assume they can have control. This heresy has caused organizational crises and even the downfall of organizations.
Actor-Network theory can offer several contributions to stakeholder thinking. First, ANT suggests that entities are not fixed and bear little significance in and of themselves. Second, ANT argues that entities such as organizations are not static nor unitary but rather subject to change over time, across contexts and relations (Singleton & Michael, 1993). Third, it is relations with other entities that produce significance, and if differences exist, as Law (2001, 4) points out, “it is because they are generated in the relations that produce them. Not because they exist, as it were, in the order of things.”

The paper is organized as follows. First, old school stakeholder thinking is discussed. Second, Actor-Network theory is introduced and its contribution is examined from the point of view of organizations and public relations. Third, new school stakeholder thinking is introduced, a holistic model describing the different stakeholder spheres is illustrated and the stakeholder relations of a large, international corporation are examined as an example. To end the paper, the strengths as well as weaknesses of this new approach are discussed and ideas suggested for future research.

Old school stakeholder thinking

Stakeholder thinking has come a long way since the first attempts to broaden the concept of stake to extend beyond the sphere of corporate shareholders. Whereas the early uses of the concept “stakeholder” highlighted the existence and rights of these stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Rhenmann, 1964; Stanford Research Institute, 1963 in Freeman, 1984), later applications have concentrated more on financial benefits (Neville, Bell & Mengüc, 2005) and on different ways to categorize stakeholders (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997; Rawlins, 2006). Stakeholder thinking has been applied to different contexts across disciplines, from information systems (Pouloudi, 1999) to environmental reporting (Steurer, 2006) and accounting (Moneva, Rivera-Lirio & Munoz-Torres, 2007). Despite the different frames, most scholars agree that stakeholders refer to “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984; 46).

Stakeholder thinking is closely associated with relationship management, as both concentrate on the social networks and relationships organizations have (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Wilson, 2001). Dealing with stakeholders, therefore, consists of continuously “balancing and integrating multiple relationships and multiple objectives” (Freeman & McVea, 2001). Relationship management is believed to contribute to organizational legitimacy, as managing its long-term relationships contributes to stakeholder satisfaction and shapes the corporation’s reputation (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Grunig & Huang, 2000). In fact, it is the stakeholders’ assessments and expectations that contribute to organizational reputation and legitimacy (Luoma-aho, 2007; Mahon, 2002).

Whether the ideas of stakeholder thinking add up to a theory, is still under debate. Some choose to call it stakeholder theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995), while others claim that the concept does not fulfill the criteria for a theory (Freeman, 1995; Key, 1999). Critics note that stakeholder thinking is lacks such theory-criteria as context and causal laws that explain the processes of interest as well as a specific theory logic (Key, 1999). In addition, stakeholder thinking has been argued to overemphasize the role of the organization, and oversimplify the chaotic and complex nature of the corporate environment (Steurer, 2006). Stakeholder thinking also faces the challenge that all theories face; categorizations are neat and clear in theory, yet in practice things are more chaotic. It is also argued that the different actors affecting the organizational operations have not been emphasized enough and that many important “stakes”
remain unacknowledged by previous studies. What is needed is a more holistic understanding of the stakeholder field of forces in which today’s organizations function.

**ANT**

Actor-Network theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005) is better known by its acronym, the name of a hardworking insect. ANT was originally created to describe innovation and knowledge creation, yet its core ideas have spread far beyond its original territory. Actor-network theory proposes “a theoretical shift in emphasis away from the centrality and primacy of human subject” (Somerville, 1999; 8), and argues that every act of establishing something is linked with the different factors influencing it, such as its surroundings, regulations, other people, technology etc. Together these influences produce a network, and an actor network is simply a heterogeneous network of aligned interests. "An actor network is simultaneously an actor whose activity is networking heterogeneous elements and a network that is able to redefine and transform what it is made of” (Callon, 1987; 93).

Actor-network theory aims to shed light on the interactions within a larger and less fixed environment than most social theories. There are three theoretical premises that help understand ANT: generalized agnosticism, generalized symmetry and free association (Michael, 1996). The approach to studying any network should seek to remain impartial on the levels of analysis and vocabulary and avoid a priori classifications. Strict boundaries between subject and object can be misleading, and do not adequately describe the various networks in operation in society.

Latour prefers to speak of ‘collectivity’ instead of society, and a collectivity is formed of networks of different actors with an ability to attribute. A collectivity is formed as a result of different actors trying to persuade others to act according to their wishes. A collectivity is a fluent net of relations; it is formed by assembling people, ideas, matter, technology, hybrids etc. The focus is on actors that have agency (or capacity to act) in a network. The ability to act, however, is not inherent in actors, but rather a consequence of the actor’s position in the network (Burt, 2002; Lin, 2001; Troshani and Doolin, 2007). Actors are defined by their relations with others in the network, and the specific focus of ANT is on the formation and maintenance of networks.

For ANT, humans are not the only beings with agency nor the only entities to ‘act’; all are actants and they play a role. ‘An actant’ (short for actant technology) is both a target and an actor itself. Each of the actants and elements in a network is active, constantly involved in redefining all other elements in the network. In an ANT collectivity (society) nothing is considered fixed or stable. Indeterminacy characterizes all the actors, and thus the collectivity is open to change. The focus is on the network in its entity, not merely on one mode and its relation to others: ANT is interested in the very essence of collectivities and natures. ANT does not wish to emphasize the importance of social networks, but instead the whole theory aims to rebuild social theory out of networks (Latour, 1998). This statement portrays ANT’s potential contribution to stakeholder thinking, as the aim here is not simply to add another type of stakeholder to the charts (for an example see Gao, 2005), but to rethink the whole organizational operating environment. Actants should be taken as they are; actor-network theory rejects the idea of defining and categorizing the environment by existing categories or dualisms, but argues that scientists should instead learn from actants (Latour, 2005).

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33 A hybrid is an anomalous combination of humans, technology and nature bound together in an inseparable way, such as HIV or tsunami or global warming. All these result from a combination of human actions, but are also partly natural. (Latour, 1993).
Formation of an actor-network

Social order and stability do not exist as given, but actors aim to convince and persuade other actors to create an alignment of interests. Translation (Callon, 1980; 1986; Singleton & Michael 1993) could be understood as a kind of consensus-seeking process, a multifaceted interaction where one entity gives a role to others. In the process, ‘heterogeneous engineers’ (Law, 1987) seek, mold and enroll allies for an argument. Should this process of translation be effective, an actor-network is created. Translation is a process of re-interpretation and representation as it “generates ordering effects such as devices, agents, institutions, or organizations” (Law 1992, p. 366).

A translation may or may not be successful, and networks are contingent in nature. There is no fixed final network, but rather all networks are molded by the inclusion of new elements and change in the relationship between actors over time. Translation never takes place in a vacuum, but the process presupposes a medium or a ‘material’ into which it is inscribed, depending on the situation. As actors may have different interests and anticipations, translations take different forms to mobilize maximum support: re-interpretation, re-presentation or appropriation of others’ interests to one’s own. In other words, by translation one and the same interest or anticipation may be presented in different ways, thereby mobilizing broader support.

The processes of translation are ongoing and several processes of translation can take place at the same time. Actors may be involved in several different processes of translation, each with specific characteristics and unique outcomes. Several stages can be distinguished in the process of translation:

1. Problematization
   This stage addresses the questions of what is the issue or problem to be solved is, and who the relevant actors and actants are. This leads to the process of finding delegates to represent groups of actors, and strong actors (focal or primary actors) aim at becoming OPP:s (obligatory passage points) for the network. OPP:s hold a central role in the network and often become indispensable for the network.

2. Interessement
   The second stage is concerned with persuasion. The focal actor motivates and negotiates with the others to get them interested and involved in the network. The roles of the other actors are not discussed, but rather the primary actor aims to convince the others of the suitability of the roles defined for them.

3. Enrolment
   This stage consists of the consent of the actors to the roles defined for them and explained during the previous phases. Although here these stages are separated, they are not always separable, and different translations may overlap. Translations also differ according to the different relations that subsist within the network.

   It is important to remember that the process of translation does not always take place in the way intended or that something may happen to rupture the network after a successful translation. Moreover, the network structure changes every time new translations take place and more interests have to be negotiated.

Previous studies applying ANT and related ideas

Studies concerning social connections and organizations on the macro level have concentrated on the importance of networks (Castells, 1996; Contractor, Wasserman & Faust,
2006), whereas studies focusing on the ANT-view of networks have mostly studied single cases, for example the actor-networks of an automatic door opener (Latour, 1988) or the engineering and building of a bridge (Suchman, 2000) or the role of the telecommunications market in strategy formulation (Gao, 2005). From the organizational point of view, Cooper (1992) examined modes of organizing related to ANT, whereas Cooper and Law (1995) viewed organizations as entities and processes. Rowley (1997) was one of the first to map multiple stakeholder networks beyond dyadic ties.

Despite its usefulness, ANT has thus far received little attention in the writings on stakeholders or on the macro level of organizations and society (or collective, in ANT-terms). Lee & Hassard (1999) note the benefits ANT provides for studying organization, such as the fact that like actor-networks, organizations today are in constant flux. This fluid nature and lack of boundaries, they argue, make ANT a suitable approach for studies related to organizations. Mutch (2002) takes a more critical stance towards organization studies, applying ANT from a social realist perspective.

Some studies have combined stakeholder thinking and actor-network theory, although this may not have been their focus. Somerville (1999) presented ANT as having something to offer for the theory and practice of public relations, as ANT is able to describe the struggle between not only social, but also other actors. Clark & Salaman (1996) focused on the processes of translation that take place in the stakeholder networks of potential employers of consultants. Starik (1995) as well as Vidgren and McMaster (1996) introduced the idea of non-human stakeholders being equally important to the more traditional human stakeholders. Their argument can be seen to be in line with Freeman’s (1984, 46) definition of stakeholders. In fact, Vidgren and McMaster (1996, 255) define stakeholders as any “human or nonhuman organization unit that can affect as well as be affected by a human or nonhuman organization unit’s policy or policies”. They note, however, that it is not always possible to treat the non-human stakeholders as if they were equal to human stakeholders. Instead of projecting human qualities on to non-human stakeholders, the focus of interest should be on the potential representatives of the non-human stakeholders (1996).

**New school stakeholder thinking**

The earlier organization-centered stakeholder mapping is becoming outdated, as the significance of actors depends on situations and contexts. Old school stakeholder thinking understood stakeholders to consist of humans, whereas new school stakeholder thinking acknowledges both human and non-human actors and thus the whole organizational field. Many human-tasks and contacts are now maintained and carried out by non-human entities such as computers or automated systems. In fact, organizations today would be paralyzed if the non-human actors that influence its operations did not play their role as planned. Examples of such non-human stakeholders include computers, cell-phones, BlackBerries as well as automatic security systems.

New school stakeholder thinking acknowledges not only non-human stakeholders such as technology or machinery, but also the natural environment and hybrids. Nature, cities, air and even buildings play a role in the life and functions of an organization, and their role should be acknowledged. For example, traffic may both enable and hinder organizational performance, as the human actors may be stuck in it or transported quickly from one continent and culture to another.
New school stakeholder thinking broadens stakeholder thinking to better suit the corporate environment of today. Figure 1 portrays the new school stakeholders as spanning four different spheres: social, political, technological and spatial/temporal. The first two (human spheres) have thus far been well-acknowledged and understood, while the non-human spheres (technical and spatial) have received little attention, almost no theorizing and very few studies despite their critical role for organizational survival today. The model is a simplification, as in reality the non-human and human elements are present on every level, but it aims to shed light on the different spheres that exist.

![Figure 1. The four spheres of new school stakeholder thinking.](image)

As the centre of figure 1 is the most commonly addressed sphere in stakeholder literature: the social. Within the social sphere, stakeholder thinking has become rather well established: in fact most existing models and categorizations address the social sphere (Friedman & Miles, 2002; Mitchell et al. 1997; Steurer, 2006). The social sphere consists of connections between individuals and groups, and the interaction is mostly human. Hence managing stakeholder relations on the social level means managing individual experiences and maintaining general goodwill as well taking pre-emptive measures aimed at diminishing the potential for conflict. Examples of stakeholder relations on this level include individual employees, customers and potential collaborators and customers, both individuals and groups.

In the second sphere, the political, connections and actions are still human, but there are more non-human aspects to consider, for example the structure of decision-making and power relations. The political sphere is apparent also in the practices of other spheres, as no stakeholder can totally be “depoliticized” or removed from the political surroundings. Stakeholders on the political level consist of humans and other entities such as elected representatives, media, organizations and society (or collective). Dealing with stakeholders on the political level means not only be managing individual experiences and maintaining goodwill, but also understanding the political structures that guide interaction as well as managing the ongoing power struggle and disputes over different issues and point of views.

The third, technological, sphere is non-human, and it consists of networks that include entities such as machines, electronic devices, software and programs. It is related to the two previous spheres, especially to the political, as many technological networks are built to support both the political and social spheres. Though non-human, this sphere has been created by humans...
and for humans, and technologies affect and guide human life. Hence it is closely related to the
social and political. Stakeholder relations on the technological sphere would consist of
monitoring, designing, repairing, and maintaining the technological structures, as well as
addressing their effects and potential consequences.

The fourth sphere, spatial/temporal, can be understood as the least human sphere, as
much of it is outside the human and organizational networks such as the natural environment,
climate, contemporary trends and policies. Other actors in the spatial sphere, however, are
related to the technological, political and social: buildings, infra-structure, city-planning and
transportation networks are all stakeholders in the spatial sphere, yet they are influenced by the
other spheres as well. There is a certain tension in the spatial/temporal sphere between the global
and the local, where local values and environments link up with the timeless and placeless global
networks. Stakeholder relations in this sphere would involve monitoring the environment, trends
and infrastructure, reporting on the changes and maintaining connections with, if not with the
non-human spatial/temporal sphere stakeholders themselves, their different representatives (law-
makers, environmental groups etc.).

It is important to remember that no sphere can be totally isolated, but in line with ANT-
thinking, all the different actors are intertwined parts of networks. This can be illustrated by an
example drawn from the daily life of many organizations, an automated identification and
security system. The system, although technological, is a human invention; it is created to keep
the unwanted out, making it also a political instrument. In addition, it is a product of its time and
place and better systems might soon supersede it. The system can also serve as an example for
other systems, if its logic is copied. In the social sphere, it adds to the sense of security for those
it admits, but it is also an element of social restraint. During its operation little attention is paid to
the system, yet should the system shut down, it may prohibit all organizational activities. Despite
their important role for organizations, old school stakeholder thinking has to a large degree
ignored such non-human stakeholders.

Translating stakeholders

Stakeholder thinking acknowledges, following the theory of corporate communications,
that organizations create or activate some publics by their mere existence (Grunig, Dozier,
Ehling, Grunig, Repper & White 1992). On the other hand, stakeholders are entities and
individuals who also exist in the absence of the organization. It is diseased to think that the only
actor and motivator of stakeholders is the organization itself. Organizations only provoke some
aspects of the already existing entities and spheres and a social relation is formed. Given that
organizations are merely one component in wider networks, the aim of organizations in ANT
thinking is become OPP’s (obligatory passage points) within networks.

Organizations aim to turn the stakeholder relationship around and aspire to become
indispensable for the stakeholders. Cultivating stakeholder relations is in fact continuous
translation; the organization’s and stakeholders’ interests are constantly negotiated and combined
through the phases of problematization, interessement and enrolment. In networks, different
actors’ needs are negotiated, and in turn these opposing interests may be translated into one and
the same solution. Translation is also a way to present one interest in different ways to mobilize
broader support: it offers a holistic way of approaching the different ongoing stakeholder
negotiations in the different spheres. The process of translation in new school stakeholder
thinking can be understood to take place on more than one level.
The different phases of translation, problematization, intressement and enrolment take place in all spheres. Although the emphasis in stakeholder thinking has thus far been on the persuasive process of intressement, organizations, too, go through the phases of problematization and enrolment. In the phase of problematization, organizations mark their terrain by mapping the issue of interest and the relevant actors, processes known in previous stakeholder literature as monitoring or environmental scanning (Vos & Schoemaker, 2006). The second phase of intressement focuses on the persuasive processes, addressed in stakeholder terms as stakeholder management or stakeholder alignment. The third stage of receiving consent and maintaining it is comparable to what the literature sees as achieving legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1997).

What then would translating stakeholders on the different spheres be like in practice? An interesting example is furnished by a typical corporate phenomenon: a merger. Old school stakeholder thinking simply maps the different stakeholder groups and individuals on the social level that might be affected. New school stakeholder thinking, however, takes a more comprehensive approach and moves beyond the social sphere of, for example, employees, investors and the media. In the political sphere, the legislature and present legislation have to be analyzed and connections need to be re-established with the authorities in the field. National, and often also international, trends and policies have to be taken into account and the political climate of the collective (society) where the merger takes place needs to be acknowledged. To organizational cultures of the two merging corporations also play a significant role. On the technological level, different computer, security and communication systems need to be installed and updated to suit the new status of the two merging corporations. On the spatial/temporal level, attention must be paid to the location and cultural impact of the new, merged entity, and sometimes new offices and spaces need to be built. New environmental impacts have to be considered, labor unions have to be addressed and even transportation needs negotiating. A failure to address all these influential spheres could hinder the merger, and make it less successful.

To conclude, translation is the path through which one entity, for example the organization, guides other entities toward its desired understanding. The guide is eventually able to speak on behalf of other actors enrolled in the network, a phenomenon often understood as partnership. When the network accepts the choices of the persuading actor as given, trust becomes the norm and the actors no longer feel a need to question the definitions and routes imposed on them. Such a network can be described as having a high amount of social capital (Luoma-aho, 2005). Although ideal, networks high on social capital are not always the norm in corporate life.

Case example and questions to be addressed

The new school stakeholder thinking offers a more holistic approach not only to theorizing the current organizational environment but also to the daily practice of stakeholder relations. Today’s organizational environment consists of political, technological and spatial/temporal as well as social elements. Relations and connections need to be maintained not only with human stakeholders, but with the whole system of society, the environment and the different hybrids. The four different spheres suggested here also indicate changes in the strategic planning of communications: although the spheres overlap, each demands its own approach and poses specific questions that should be addressed.

The existence of the four different stakeholder spheres can be illustrated in practice by the new papermill which the Finnish Metsä-Botnia corporation started building in Uruguay in
2006. The building process is lagging behind and faces huge stakeholder opposition both globally and locally. Fray Bentos is located on the border of Uruguay and Argentina close to the River Uruguay, and the pulp mill itself represents the biggest industrial investment in the history of Uruguay. Botnia seemed to do everything right along the lines of old school stakeholder thinking: In 2003 Botnia began studying the possibility of building a mill to produce eucalyptus pulp in Uruguay, while the actual decision to start the project in Fray Bentos was made in 2005, after an obligatory environmental impact assessment (EIA), socio-economic study and five public forums (Botnia 2007b). Regular negotiations with Uruguayan, Argentinean and Finnish authorities were also conducted (Botnia, 2007). In addition, Botnia invited NGOs to discuss their concern but, according to the press, the invitation was turned down (Botnia 2007b).

The problems started when the local people on the other side of the river (Argentinians) expressed their concerns about the environmental impacts of the pulp mill, and many of them reporting that their livelihoods (tourism, agriculture and fishing) would be threatened because of pollutants in the river and bad odour from the mill. A civic movement called Asamblea Ciudadana Ambiental de Gualeguaychú, which was supported by many local people, began to resist the Botnia project. In 2006, a petition with the signatures of 40 000 residents of the Argentine town of Gualeguaychú, calling for the cancellation of the project, was brought to Finland (Helsingin Sanomat 2006). The current stage of the project is dim: building is slow and opposition great. Moreover, the project and its turns remain interesting to the international media making all moves highly visible.

In the case of Botnia, the different social levels stakeholders were the individual investors, employees, local citizens and construction companies. Here stakeholder relations should aim to move beyond mere networking toward proactive planning and collaboration as well as utilizing contacts. Botnia listed those affected, yet failed to address all their concerns. Strategic questions concerning the types of involvement and types of affect should have been addressed, such as: How are the actors involved related to the resources of other spheres? Who are their contacts? What are their major concerns and worries? Who can they translate into allies for their causes? Answering these new school stakeholder questions could have helped Botnia avoid the social sphere problems.

Old school way of understanding the political sphere has been to bypass it by merely mapping for the organization certain established politics-related stakeholders, such as political institutions or decision makers. The political sphere, however, has more influence than that of its individual representatives as it includes the political system and current policies. In the case of Botnia, the different political level stakeholders consisted of the national legislature of Uruguay as well as the neighboring Argentina, ethical considerations, worker morale, national diplomatic relations and the guidelines for international commerce. All these affect the political climate and attitudes to the building process. Botnia should have addressed new school strategic questions such as: What are the newest trends in policy? Who will benefit and who will not from a given choice of action? What present laws affect the building? How is the opinion climate? How can organizational advantage be aligned with that of other actors? Who are the allies of the opposing actors and whom can they translate into joining their cause?

The technological sphere has thus far been almost ignored in stakeholder theorizing, despite the fact that computers and other technologies also enable much of the interaction in the other spheres. In the case of Botnia, the technological sphere consisted for example of construction plant, waste-management machinery, papermill equipment and communication systems that bridge the geographical gap between Finland and Uruguay. New school stakeholder
thinking would have helped Botnia through strategic questions such as: What combination of technology would best benefit the present needs of the organization? What potential threats and possibilities do they involve? Who develops and who will oppose the use of this technology? Who can hamper the technology used? What direction will future development take?

Within the spatial/temporal sphere there is interest in the trends and issues present in the other spheres. As time and place change, so do the political, technological and social spheres, which in turn affect the spatial sphere. In the case of Botnia, the spatial stakeholders consisted for example of the Uruguayan as well as Argentinian natural environment of forest and river and animals, infrastructure in the area, roads to the site and weather conditions. Some of these were represented by environmental groups who affected the spatial sphere, as they blocked the roads to the site and halted construction. The temporal sphere also includes the general green-thinking and corporate social responsibility trends evident in business today, and a general atmosphere antagonistic to heavy industry in different parts of the world, especially in the poorer countries. New school stakeholder thinking includes addressing also the spatial stakeholders. Botnia should have address such strategic questions as: How to deal with the different global phenomena in a productive and collective manner at the local level? How to maintain necessary infrastructure? How to predict and prepare for potential changes in conditions and new trends?

Legally Botnia did all the right things at all the right times. New school stakeholder thinking, however, requires more than obedience to the law. Cultivating stakeholder relations is in fact continuous translation; the organization’s and stakeholders’ interests are constantly negotiated and combined through the phases of problematization, intressement and enrolment. What Botnia managed to do was some form of intressement, but no thorough problematization and no real enrolment. Carrying out all these phases, and addressing all the different spheres of social, political, technological and spatial/temporal could have saved the corporation from serious losses.

**Discussion & critique**

Stakeholder theories have been developed to map the organizational terrain and to help organizations balance different stakeholder needs. Old school stakeholder thinking focused mostly on the social and marginalized some important spheres of stakeholders. The environment in which organizations operate today, however, is no longer dominated by only human interaction. Instead, different technologies, infrastructures and political agendas are playing increasingly important roles. Monitoring the organizational environment is especially important, as the various human stakeholders and representatives of non-human stakeholders have better access to information today and are able to act through, for example, various real time media. Issues, opinions and alternative points of view quickly enter the public arena and the media are quick to seize upon newsworthy events. This ever-changing environment requires that organizations remain constantly alert to their different stakeholder spheres.

New school stakeholder thinking understands stakeholder thinking as taking place on the four different spheres of the social, political, technological and spatial/temporal. It challenges stakeholder thinking to move to a higher level, that is, from declarations and listings toward strategic planning and analysis of the impact and existence of different networks.

While Actor-Network theory itself is rather new in the stakeholder context, it may be of value on both the macro and micro levels. On both levels, ANT highlights the interconnectedness of heterogeneous elements and questions the artificial boundaries set between the “social”, “technical” and the “natural” (Latour, 1993). Stakeholder thinking relies heavily on
classifications, orders and dichotomization despite the fact that these differences are often hypothetical. ANT challenges stakeholder thinking to include all the different elements of society that are linked seamlessly together. On the macro level of societies, ANT also offers a deeper insight into the formation and maintenance of networks. On the micro level, ANT could offer a more holistic approach to the study of the individual situations and cases today’s organizations face.

Despite its advantages, several critical arguments that concern the application of ANT to stakeholder thinking should be acknowledged. First, the inclusion of non-human stakeholders is not unproblematic. Pouloudi (1999) notes problems around the processes of identification and description: with the inclusion of non-human stakeholders, the complexity of the surroundings multiplies as the non-human stakeholders themselves often comprise several already combined elements. In addition, the notions of stakeholders’ stakes, such as voice or interest remain unresolved. Despite these continuing problems, the idea of including non-human stakeholders in the stakeholder field of forces is an important addition to the stakeholder literature, as they continually “affect and are affected” by organizational functions.

Actor network studies have their strength in individual case studies, whereas stakeholder thinking combines vast networks and entities. This single-case approach may be appropriate for studies conducted with hindsight (Latour, 1996), where the success or failure of a particular artifact is studied and has indeed provided new insights in addressing the sociology of technology. However, this approach is unlikely to be useful in cases where organizational survival is at issue. Moreover, many stakeholder networks are constantly evolving and being negotiated, which makes their analysis more difficult: the role of various human and nonhuman stakeholders cannot always be anticipated a priori.

Problems have also been noted around the amoral stance often associated with ANT. Organizations, it could be argued, can not remain mere amoral networks, but should contribute to society (or in ANT terms collectivity) and display ethical behavior. ANT theory, however, does not aim at portraying an amoral or unjust world, but rather focuses on its construction. As such, it can be of value for organizations aiming to survive in today’s complex environment.

Organizations today are operating in very complex environments. This means that they need to acknowledge many different types of stakeholders. An actor network is simply a heterogeneous network of aligned interests (Callon, 1987), a description which could be applied to the organizational environment. Actor-Network theory would suggest that stakeholders are important not because of any innate properties, but rather it is their connections and network associations that enable organizations to function. Stakeholders who are willing to enter into a relationship of redefining and negotiating have the potential to become valuable for the organization and may even add to organizational social capital (Luoma-aho, 2005).

**Concluding remarks and need for future studies**

This paper represents a first attempt to broaden stakeholder thinking outside the human sphere. New school stakeholder thinking aims to see organizations as parts of larger societal networks and thus shifts away from the old school “social sphere only” thinking. In ANT terms, an organization is merely one actor in a field of several actors with their own, even opposing aims. Moreover, the organization and its operations are understood to depend on different non-human stakeholders that thus far have received little attention. Stakeholder relations can be seen as an organizational endeavor to translate others into their network. New school stakeholder thinking broadens the horizon from merely thinking about the organization to thinking about
society at large and the other actors; it offers a more “coherent way of describing or narrating a complex world filled with ‘quasi-objects’- constructed from human and non-human elements” (Somerville, 1999; 11).

This shift in attention has already been seen in the increased interest in the literature on Corporate Social Responsibility and the important role of environmental reporting (Clarkson, 1995; Cooper & Owen, 2007; Steurer, 2005). Future studies should focus on further developing the contents of new school stakeholder thinking. Empirical testing of the network-forming negotiation phases of problematization, intressement and enrollment should be carried out. The different non-human stakeholders also require deeper study, so as to define the different types of impact and effects they have on organizations. Futures studies should also examine whether organizations are aware of the changes in their environment, and whether they are equipped to monitor the non-human spheres. The introduction of non-human spheres also call for the revision of existing stakeholder literature and modeling.

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The Public relations industry in Brazil: challenges and perspectives
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Abstract
The increase in number of agencies that have opened in Brazil reveals a developing industry. In fact, this market has been rising since the 1990’s. So, it is necessary to analyze the most important indicators to discover the behavior and characteristics of this market.
This article also proposes to analyze the entrepreneurship perspective and the growth from organizational communication and the public relations market in Brazil. Therefore, in exploring the public relations industry we should include an exploration of entrepreneurial activity in this context.
To evaluate the maturity and challenges in this sector it is very important to build a large view from this industry. For instance, there are some indicators such as the internationalization process and the increase in organizational communication investments that affect the Brazilian public relations market. For this, we are proposing to reflect on the organizational communication agencies and public relations market context.
Another point this paper proposes to discuss concerns how public relations professionals create their own agencies. Brazil figures among the most entrepreneurial countries in the world, according GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor). In fact, the entrepreneurship growth rates have shown a strong development in the PR industry.
There was a survey conducted by Abracom–Brazilian Association of Communication Agencies (2004) - that reveals updated data about the public relations market. Unfortunately, few scholars have studied the Brazilian public relations market. Kunsch (1999), who conducted research about the public relations industry in Brazil, examined some trends in this market. According her, there are about 1000 agencies and public relations firms in the market. The majority of them are concentrated in two important Brazilian cities: São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In terms of academic research, there is almost a 10-year gap in these studies. For this reason we are pursuing this research.
The investigation is a descriptive and an exploratory study. The data for this exploratory study were collected utilizing documentary techniques. The current study examines the nature of the public relations market based on previous surveys available. The objective of this first step is to lead to a quantitative and qualitative survey that will be conducted involving a comparison study among the public relations industries in Brazil, the USA and Spain. The next step proposes a survey with the public relations firms, including a questionnaire for that.
Based on Grunig’s four models of public relations (Grunig&Hunt, 1984), we can understand current and future trends of the public relations industry in Brazil. The four models are: publicity/press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical communication, and two-way symmetrical communication. In general, the public relations market in Brazil has been based on the one-way or asymmetrical communication model.
The results of this study suggest that we need to collect data and build indicators that allow us understand the public relations industry, especially in emerging markets, such as Brazil. It provides insight and it is useful for public relations practitioners to understand current trends.
Introduction

The public relations industry in Brazil, which includes public relations services and media relations, is a growing market. It is definitely an important market in the communication context that involves great amount of investments.

The perspective of increase in investments and the potential of results in communication become this market in an extremely interesting place for professionals and investors. The risk in this business and the market place require a professional with an entrepreneur profile. This kind of professional must be prepared to manage aspects concerning market, business vision, etc. It means that the market requires a highly qualified professional.

To analyze the public relations market and its professionals, it is urgent to adopt a critical view. For that it is necessary to know some features of this market, allowing acknowledge in details the profile and behavior of the public relations firms in Brazil.

In this article we intend to take a detailed look at the public relations industry, including tendencies, trends and perspectives such as the process of agencies internationalization, increase in investments, high market concentration and the downsizing in structures and the public relations department within the enterprises.

Based on the main surveys, developed by researchers and professional organizations, we will analyze the public relations industry.

First of all, we show the beginning context and the aspects that were responsible for the public relations industry growth. Then we will discuss the evolution and importance of this sector. After that, we will analyze some factors that characterize the entrepreneurial perspective in communication.

The organizational communication and public relations industry – evolution and perspectives

In the context of development in the public relations field, emerges the communication agencies offering plenty of services in communication. Notice that there is ambiguous terminology when we talk about the public relations firms. The majority of agencies self-nominate themselves as communication agencies instead of public relations agencies, which happens because there is an attempt to widen the possibility of offered services.

It is important to review, in a critical way, the reason why the market behaves in this manner and the imprecise terminology. In part, the agencies abandon the term public relations because they believe that it is incomprehensible to enterprises and society in general about the real meaning of this term.

Obviously the marketing argument remains when the agencies adopt the term ‘communication agencies’ to try to gain new clients. By the way, in this article we refer this market as the public relations and organizational communication industry. We are conscious that the scholars must discuss the terminology issues; however, in this article we won’t discuss this question in depth.

Inside the large view in this field, we focus our discussion on public relations firms and the communication agencies. They represent one important sector responsible for increasing the communication/PR value in the organizations.

We may emphasize some important aspects that reveal the communication development in the organizational Brazilian context. According Kunsch (1999) one important aspect about
organizational communication in Brazil was the communication planning for Rodhia (pharmaceutical French group) in the 1980’s. It was an innovative plan in integrate communication at a time when the country was reopened politically, after a long dictatorial period.

Another aspect, according this author, was the Enterprise Communication Brazilian Association creation in the 1960’s. It was responsible in dissemination of the corporate communication concept.

Besides the associations, organizations and people that were fundamental in the process of consolidation in this field, it is important to mention the great economic development experienced in Brazil.

For Kunsch (2005), organizational communication began with the process of industrialization and economic development in Brazil. Besides that, the big boom in communication happened thanks the development of journalism and public relations activities. “These two social communication areas began the first activities in this sector that allowed its growth in the last five decades, both as an academic and professional field.” Kunsch (2005, p.07)

Also, the entrance of multinational enterprises and the process of industrialization were key factors in developing the public relations field in Brazilian context.

Nowadays the increase in communication services in a variety of organizations - government, nonprofit organizations, private business - is a reality. Some services such as internal communications, publications and crises management have gained space in this scenario. The investments in organizational communication are increasing step by step and its importance has been recognized as essential to business survival.

**Development of public relations research field in Brazil – a brief view**

In terms of an academic field, the public relations area has been growing in Brazil. Scholars and professionals are engaged in building a solid body of theory to this field.

The Brazilian development in the public relations area reflects the maturity in this field in a both a theoretical and practical view. Since the beginning of the public relations field as a profession and the posterior institutionalization in an academic context, we have been observing its growth and consolidation.

In an academic context, public relations has been enriched with a solid theoretic corpus, as a result of scholar researchers and the pioneers from the main Universities in Brazil. Although some researchers had given important contributions analyzing, describing and proposing models to understand public relations, there is no consensus regarding a definition or theory of public relations.

The majority of concepts and the attempts to define public relations reveal to us two faces on the same coin. While the diversity of concepts may show the richness in views and proposals in the public relations field, this multiplicity in concepts may be an indicator of immaturity in this area and even some fragility revealed by the lack of unanimity in the scholars around the public relations concept.

Regarding the professional market, the activities in public relations had an evolution and became more sophisticated in the last decades. Maybe not always over the public relations title, but in essence, nowadays the public relations practices are sine-qua-non to organizations that intend to perpetuate themselves in the market and gain the respect and admiration from their clients, community, employees, and from their stakeholders.
The main theoretical contributions in the public relations field are result from researchers such as the pioneer Cândido Teobaldo de Souza Andrade (the first books were written in 60’s) and more recently we may refer to the authors Margarida Maria Khröling Kunsch and Roberto Porto Simões with books published since 80’s. Obviously other researchers have contributed to our field as well.

The expansion of public relations industry in Brazil

In Brazil the public relations and organizational communication industry has increased quickly in the last decade. Since the 90’s, fast growth in communication in the organizational context has been observed. A new posture assumed by the majority of companies may be realized concerning communication aspects. For instance, we may mention more investments in communication and the fact that communication became a strategic toll in the business context.

It is interesting to observe that in Brazil the public relations firms and the communication agencies are the core business in communication. In some European countries and Brazil, the term communication agencies was adopted for the public relations industry. Also, internal structures such as public relations departments had to change this term. Instead of public relations they are using corporate communication, organizational communication, and institutional communication.

The importance of the public relations market in Brazil is revealed not only by the increase in profits in this area, but especially by the potential to absorb new professionals into the market.

Unfortunately, there are few studies and little research regarding the public relations market in Brazil. However, we may refer to two important associations such as the Brazilian Association of Communication Agencies (Abracom) and the Brazilian Association of Enterprise Communication (Aberje). The main role of these associations has been to qualify the communication practices and spread the strategic communication in the business environment.

Despite the fast growth in the public relations industry, we are so far from knowing advertising agencies numbers and performance. One important study reveals the high concentration in the public relations market. According Aberje, only 10 % of agencies (the biggest) provide services for 80% of the biggest companies. Also, the concentration is geographic because almost 80% of agencies are based in São Paulo (the Brazilian business financial center) and Rio de Janeiro. We might deduce that the other 20% of the marketplace is fighting for more than 1500 agencies. There is no exact number of agencies operating in Brazil, but it is estimated to be over 1500 agencies.

This situation in Brazil, in terms of concentration in the public relations market in Brazil, happens because the market is restricted to big corporations, which are usually based in big cities. In fact, few small and medium enterprises make investments in communication.

According a survey developed by the Council of Public Relations Firm, in 2001 the American public relations industry made about 4.5 billion dollars in profits. The top 50 American public relations firms were responsible for about 85% of this profit and just the top 10 about 57%. These data show a high concentration in American public relations industry that is akin to the Brazilian public relations industry.

In Brazil we have the same situation that happens in the USA when we are comparing the public relations industry and the advertising industry. The American advertising industry was 7 times bigger than the public relations industry in 2001. However, in the 90’s the advertising
industry was 12 times larger. We observe the same situation happening in Brazil, where the communication field is opening and expanding further than advertising.

Other important data, according Council of Public Relations Firm, shows that the advertising industry is also highly concentrated. For instance, the top 10 advertising agencies retain 45% of the profits in this sector, while the public relations agencies retain 57% as we mentioned before. Another example that reveals the concentration in communication field is media communication. In general, media communication belongs to a few people or families, and the big ones hold the biggest part of the advertising budget.

The strong growth in the public relations market in the USA allows the entrance of new competitors in this market. The main management consultancies such as KPMG, Deloitte, Booz, Allen, and Hamilton have been invested in communication; they become strong competitors in the public relations market.

The entrance of international public relations agencies in Brazil is a reality. Some international public relations agencies come with their own structures, personnel and offices and others make agreements with local agencies.

Like the American market, the management consultancies will probably start business in the communication field in Brazil, too. Most consultancies have their own structures in Brazil. Their entrance into the public relations market depends on their interest in this potential market and their willingness to expand their portfolios.

The entrepreneurial perspective in communication

Generally speaking, the entrepreneurial potential in communication is revealed by the number of agencies that arise every year. Among the reasons for the quick development of the communication/public relations market, we may add downsizing and therefore the reduction in communication’s structures. However, one the most important reasons is the process of outsourcing in communication.

Most companies, which have reduced their internal communications structure, contract services from agencies. It represents a good opportunity to professionals who start their own public relations agencies.

The agencies are growing. We have two phenomena: the natural, the huge growth in services and the so-called Brazilian enterprises’ internationalization. The big agencies, which are consolidated, are making agreements with foreign organizations. These agencies that are growing are not only public relations firms. Truly they are communication agencies that develop activities in public relations. Today an increase in the targeting of services has happened. Unemployment is another phenomena that we may see nowadays. It is very hard to find a job. The professional must be a service provider. I think this is the profession’s future. I defend that Universities have to prepare entrepreneurs. They should teach accountability, management and how to open a business. The professionals that have the profile to become an entrepreneur have to receive qualifications in this direction, because not everyone has this profile. (Interview - KUNSCHE, Margarida in FARIAS, Luiz Alberto de. A literatura de relações públicas: produção, consumo e perspectivas. São Paulo: Summus, 2004, p.111)

However, we may not be very optimistic. Unfortunately, the stage of entrepreneurialship in communication is so far from the ideal model. Probably the most agencies that arise every
year in Brazil and take part in the statistics that estimate in over 1,500 agencies operating are result as lack of opportunities of job. In part because there are no spots available for the plethora of professionals that come to the market every year from the universities and the professionals that become unemployed after the reduction in communications structures at the companies. Another problem concerning Brazilian entrepreneurialship in communication is the fact that some agencies closed their doors after a short time in operation. This reveals the lack of skills and abilities to manage a business. In this context, the necessity to analyze the public relations market is clear.

Ribeiro (2006) highlighted that the communication industry in Brazil has grown extraordinarily because a new agency is opened each week. However, this author doesn’t agree with the opinion that most agencies will close their doors very soon. He argues that we don’t hear about agencies closing their doors. Unfortunately, we don’t have any specific data about the public relations agencies, but some statistics available show us that the companies in general have closed their doors less than two years after opening. Any way, we can understand that the market is increasing and allowing those new agencies to remain on market. Nowadays, we can observe that the market is absorbing this demand, but naturally this euphoria period will end and only the best agencies will remain in the market. We believe in a natural selection where only the agencies, which are characterized by innovation and ethic, will remain. It is important to mention that many small agencies don’t take part in sector association and they don’t even appear in official statistics.

There isn’t an exact number but some statistics estimate there are 1,500 or 2,000 communication agencies in Brazil. We have small agencies in operation (only one professional, phone and computer) that don’t generate spot jobs (self-employment) and multinational agencies. Of course the most are small agencies (maybe 80%).

According the Associations that congregate the main communication agencies, the small agencies don’t represent actual competitors, because they are responsible for a specific market share offering low prices.

The entrepreneurial activity in communication is akin to the macro situation of entrepreneurial activity in Brazil. For instance, there are a large number of entrepreneurs because of necessity or involuntary. According to a GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) survey, in developing countries like Brazil, there are high indices of entrepreneurs because of necessity (almost 50%). While in developed countries like the US, almost 85% of entrepreneurs are by opportunity.

Communication agencies in Brazil - a brief view

Considering the communication industry as an emerging market in quick expansion in Brazil, we propose a brief view based on some data from surveys and research that was developed by Associations and researchers.

Research was conducted by Kunsch (1999) trying to understand the communication and public relations industry in Brazil. The survey, that involved 60 agencies, identified the main areas, the relationship between agency and client and the types of structures. Kunsch’s (1999) research examines some trends in this market. According to her, there are about 1000 agencies and public relations firms in the market. The majority of them are concentrated in two important Brazilian cities: São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.
In this paper we analyze only some data from the mentioned survey. For example, we consider it important to analyze the profile of these agencies: the origin, the services available and the behavior of these agencies.

We don’t have updated surveys, especially academic. The research in question was conducted in 1997 and published in 1999, but we believe that some indicators remain valid to understand the sector dynamic and behavior. Obviously it is necessary to develop new research to analyze the public relations industry and update the information currently available. In terms of academic research, there is almost a 10-year gap in these studies.

The communication agencies, involving public relations services and media relations, are an important market in Brazil. In the last years

According to Kunsch (1999), some factors are responsible for the increase in this field. Among them are the outsourcing, downsizing (reduction in communication’s structure), complexity to establish a relationship between enterprises and stakeholders, and the increase in the number of communicator professionals starting their own agencies.

For Kunsch (1999) this field may raise more if we consider the companies’ necessity in terms of communication. Nowadays, communication requires specialized services and claims for a strategic position inside the organizations.

According to this survey, the majority of companies have the focus on media relations, after that we find integrated services in media relations: publishing, public relations and communication consultancy.

Important data shows that 60% of agencies consider themselves as small agencies based on their profits. Other data reveals the average number of employees in these agencies is 12.6.

Regarding how long an agency is in the market, Kunsch discovered that 40% of agencies have been for more than 10 years and only 11.7% of them have been in it for less than two years. It is important to critically review this data: We may not consider it as true in whole, because the information is based on official data. Probably the number of agencies is higher than the official numbers. If we consider the estimate at over 1,500 agencies, probably the majority of these agencies are in the market for less than 2 years.

The survey involved, in most cases, the owner-manager that had a degree in communication (78.7%).

As Kunsch (1999, p.14) noted “We can say that the communication agencies in Brazil, regardless of their main vocation, do a little bit of everything: there seems to be no assignment of each other that respect and try not to transgress the limits of functional competence.”

Ribeiro (2006) argued that the agencies market will change in direction a ‘marketing reorganization’. As Ribeiro noted, over the next five or ten years we will see a process of purification and reduction in the number of agencies. The cycle of euphoria will end and only the professionals will remain. For the author, we will observe a process of fusion, where smaller agencies will be absorbed by agencies with more professionals and with international expertise.

According to Ribeiro (2006) this scenario is a natural evolution of a sector that was disorganized and improvised, but that fought, grew and developed; now the sector is looking for an appropriate management model.

Conclusion

The research in progress attempts to update the data about the public relations market in Brazil, although at this first step we proposed to take a look at some data currently available
about the public relations industry in Brazil. This analysis will guide us to develop a survey and a questionnaire in the next steps of our research.

Some highlights may help us to understand the public relations industry in Brazil. We observed that the main profit made by the agencies comes from media relations services, according previous surveys. Despite in the last years the options in services had expanded, the agencies’ focus remains in media relations.

The current stage of communication that has been practiced by the most companies is typified as the asymmetric communication model, based on Grunig’s classification.

According to the model proposed by Grunig, the organizations and also the agencies, in general, are limited to a communication vision that elects transmission and dissemination of information, instead of comprehension between organizations and stakeholders.

In the communication market few organizations practice excellent communication. The majority is still in a nascent stage in terms of strategies and practices of communication. Despite the great potential of the market, our public relations agencies are still far from the ideal in excellent communication.

References


Applying the Extended Parallel Process Model to Stroke Communication:
A Comparison of Two Educational Posters

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Introduction

Strokes are a common occurrence in the U.S., with a stroke occurring about every 40 seconds and affecting nearly 800,000 new victims each year (American Heart Association, 2008). Despite being the third leading cause of death and the leading cause of physical disability in adults (Croquelois 2006), several studies have shown that most groups, particularly those at highest risk, don’t recognize the signs and symptoms of strokes (Ferris 2005; Billings-Gagliardi and Mazor 2005) and are unable to seek life-saving and life-preserving treatment early enough to allow for more positive outcomes.

The American Stroke Association (ASA), a division of the American Heart Association started in 1998, has worked to educate people about stroke symptoms and the need for rapid treatment. If treatment is administered within the first three hours of the onset of stroke symptoms, it is possible to minimize or prevent further brain damage. The prestigious Ad Council started a campaign to help educate the public about stroke symptoms and the need for rapid treatment in April 2003. However, even with the help of some of the most creative minds in the advertising industry, the message does not seem to be getting through.

Frustration on behalf of the author’s colleagues at West Virginia University’s Health Science Center Emergency Medicine Department about delayed treatment for stroke victims initiated this project.

Literature Review

Stroke Awareness. Recognizing symptoms of a medical condition is obviously tied to a person’s ability to take action and receive prompt medical care (Greenlund 2004). Delays can be costly to the patient, and, particularly with vascular emergencies like strokes, more effort is needed to “reduce delays at all levels in the chain of events, from symptom-onset to treatment, including public awareness and action, pre-hospital emergency services, and in-hospital emergency and critical care,” (Greenlund 2004). Some research has even cited emergency room personnel for lacking the ability to recognize stroke symptoms and the need to speed hospital admission (Handschu 2006), while other studies have shown that those who had already suffered a stroke still demonstrated poor awareness of the signs and symptoms afterward, (Croquelois 2006 and Travis 2003).

Respondents in another study chose to call 911 for just over one-third of the stroke symptoms they were presented with (Billings-Gagliardi and Mazor 2005). More often than not, respondents chose to wait and call their doctors’ offices later – an inappropriate choice in the face of a stroke, where seconds can equal vast differences in survival rates and post-treatment
quality of life. Yet another study found that most respondents didn’t even know that quick
treatment following a stroke can preserve quality of life (Travis 2003).

While much research agrees that there is a need for targeted educational programs that
can effectively increase knowledge and retention of stroke signs and symptoms (Ferris 2005),
“identification of a symptom as a stroke warning sign is of limited value unless identification
leads to urgent action,” said Billings-Gagliardi and Mazor (2005). It’s not enough to teach the
public how to recognize the symptoms of a stroke unless they’re also taught to immediately
activate emergency services as well. Billings-Gagliardi and Mazor said there is an obvious
“critical link between individual stroke symptoms and calling 911” and that a combination of
“lay and medical language” should be used to describe stroke warning signs to the public.

Further, Greenlund (2004), researching public awareness of heart attack signs among
high-risk groups, noted that “(f)urther studies are needed to identify and test methods and
messages that not only increase recognition of … symptoms but also prompt immediate action”
and that those efforts need to be directed not only toward those at risk, but their families and
friends, as well.

“Structured education programs for stroke awareness must be multi-faceted, targeting
those persons at high risk while at the same time accounting for health care cost concerns,
confidence in the medical community, and the needs of the elderly,” according to Travis et al.
(2003).

Health Communication. Communication about such health issues as strokes will be of
limited value unless they spur individuals to take action upon recognizing the symptoms.
Messages must take into account the many ways people receive and process such physical threats.
As Witte (1996) puts it: “Individual health-related behaviors are influenced by a diverse
set of messages or interactions across multiple levels of communication at several points in
time.” She also notes that in addition to interpersonal communication (doctor-patient, husband-
wife, etc.), there are several other ways that health messages are communicated: through groups,
organizations and the mass media (1996). All are influenced by the message receivers’ physical
and social environments (Witte 1996).

Scott and Curbow (2006) noted that health communication messages were more likely to
result in a detection behavior (recognizing symptoms) if the receiver was presented with a
message communicating the potential for loss, or a threat to the person’s well-being, if the
message isn’t heeded. They also noted that the person’s perception of their risk is important, and
that if the receiver doesn’t feel at risk for the situation described, a message promoting gains may
be more effective if preventative behavior change (altering diet and lifestyle to prevent a stroke
instead of simply waiting for one to happen) is the desired outcome. Other health communication
literature has described the value of loss messages, such as those about testicular cancer, which
primarily strikes a young demographic (Umphrey, 2003).

In fact, Scott and Curbow (2006) said, “the preponderance of evidence demonstrates that
indeed loss-framed messages are more effective in promoting detection behaviors,” (2006).
Witte (2001) says that it is the “perceived threat” that “motivates action” and that the greater the
threat is perceived to be, the stronger the motivation to act. This makes fear-based appeals
particularly useful when the desired outcome is a change in detection behavior and as a result
fear appeals remain a central part of most health risk communication (Cho & Salmon 2006).
However, notes Witte (1992, 2001), while fear appeals—“persuasive messages designed to scare
people by describing the terrible things that will happen to them if they do not do what the
message recommends”—are often used as a means to motivate specific health behaviors (both in
terms of detection and prevention), there are three ways message receivers can respond: by controlling the danger (with specific action), controlling their fear, or doing nothing at all.

“If individuals doubt their ability to perform the recommended response and/or they doubt whether the recommended response really averts the threat, they believe there’s no use in controlling the danger,” said Witte, Myer and Martell (2001). In this case, though the threat is perceived as high, efficacy is perceived as low and the receiver may try to control their fear instead of doing something about the danger by engaging in defensive avoidance (blocking further thought about the subject), denial (refusing to believe they’re at any risk to the threat) or reactance (believing the risk message is an attempt to manipulate them).

However, “(if) individuals believe they can perform the recommended response and they believe the recommended response works in averting the threat, their heightened perceptions of threat and efficacy motivate them to control the danger.” In other words, they believe the threat is high and they believe they can do something about it—their perceived efficacy is also high. Witte (2001) says this usually results in the receiver taking the action recommended in the message, a danger control response.

Obviously, most fear-based message senders would hope that receivers would seek to control the danger presented in the message by following the message’s recommended action, but that doesn’t always happen, according to Witte (1998). She said that “all fear campaigns should be accompanied by high efficacy messages regarding the recommended response,” but also that any fear-based campaign’s first goal should be to make the targeted audience feel vulnerable to a “severe health threat, so they will be motivated to act” (1998). The two, according to her research, must work in tandem to provoke danger-control and spur the action recommended in the message. If fear campaigns fail, it is usually because the message either did not induce a perception of susceptibility or did not promote high efficacy in regard to the recommended response (Witte 1998).

Fear-based campaigns aren’t without their unknowns and often fail for different reasons, mostly because research studies that have evaluated the use of fear appeals in persuasive messages have been inconsistent and sometimes contradictory (Witte 1992; Gore and Bracken 2005). We know little about what factors in fear appeals actually reduce fear without reducing the threat (AUTHOR Read this or die, 2006).

Witte (1992) saw three reasons why most research has failed to produce any significant theoretical developments: most researchers were using “conceptually distinct” terms (ie, threat and fear) interchangeably, focusing on the processes of message acceptance to the exclusion of message rejection and failing to address how threat and efficacy interact.

She proposed a new fear appeal theory, the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM), to address the deficiencies in previous approaches. The EPPM was designed to explain why fear appeals fail, use fear as a central variable and explore the relationship between threat and efficacy. Her model is based on the Parallel Process Model developed by Leventhal and Roger’s Protection Motivation Theory to explain when and why fear appeals work and Janis’ Fear-As-Acquired Drive Model to explain when and why fear appeals fail (Gore and Bracken 2005).

Testing Witte’s Extended Parallel Process Model in 2005, Gore and Bracken found that only a small amount of threat was necessary to spur self-protective behaviors against meningitis in the target audience and further, that messages that didn’t use both threat and self-efficacy tended to push the audience further into fear-control instead of danger control. According to Gore and Bracken (2005), “one important concept of the EPPM is the critical point that occurs when perceptions of the threat portion of a message begin to outweigh perceptions of the
efficacy of the recommended response.” Other research, too, warns that too much threat may negatively affect the processing, evaluation and acceptance of fear appeals, especially in individuals who perceive themselves as particularly vulnerable to the threat (van Koningsbruggen 2006).

Tested using a variety of research methods, including surveys, experiments and focus groups, the EPPM has been shown to be effective among a variety of demographic groups, including age and ethnicities (Gore and Bracken, 2005). In addition, it has been successfully used to communicate such health issues as skin cancer, teen pregnancy, genital warts, breast cancer, radon awareness and tractor safety (Ibid).

Given the success of health communication efforts that have included the EPPM elements of vulnerability, self efficacy, and treatment efficacy in terms of knowledge gains and intended behaviors, this study intends to test the stroke information provided by a typical Ad Council poster with one that looks identical but that includes these EPPM elements.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are being tested:

*Hypothesis 1:* Participants exposed to the EPPM version of the stroke flyer will demonstrate greater knowledge regarding stroke symptoms and the need to call 911 when they are given health scenarios than participants exposed to the standard ASA educational flyer.

*Hypothesis 2:* Participants exposed to the EPPM version of the educational stroke flyer will demonstrate greater retention of stroke symptoms and the need to call 911 when they are given health scenarios than participants exposed to the standard ASA educational flyer.

Method

A standard ASA education stroke flyer, which was developed by the Ad Council, was downloaded from the organization’s Web site. The Ad Council and ASA logos were removed. A second flyer with the same graphics was created with text that emphasized the EPPM elements of vulnerability, self efficacy and treatment efficacy. Using many of the same questions used by Gore and Bracken (2005) in their meningitis study, the researcher tested the two versions using college students to see if the vulnerability and efficacy questions held together as an index (N=20). However, even after dropping those questions that provided low alphas, no statistically significant differences were found between the two respondent groups; therefore, a second manipulation check was done after altering the text (N=14). Again, there were no significant differences between the two groups in terms of their responses to 7-point Likert scale questions of perceived vulnerability, self efficacy, and treatment efficacy. The EPPM flyer was again manipulated further, and in the third manipulation check (N=35), statistically significant differences were found in terms of perceived threat (2-tailed sig. = .014), and the other elements approached significance (2-tailed sig. = .117). Taking into consideration the small N used in the manipulation check and the researchers’ tight timeframe, a decision was made to proceed with the alternative flyer as it was.

The study uses a pre-, post-, post-test design. College students (specifically advertising students and civil engineering students, N=223) as well as senior citizens are participating. (This paper reports only the pre- post- data received at this point from the participating college students.) Advertising and civil engineering students were asked to participate in the health communication study. Those agreeing were asked to note a four-digit personal code, which was
placed on the consent form and will be used to track the post-post-test results (to be administered six weeks after the flyer exposure).

The participating students completed consent forms and were instructed to complete the pre-test, which was an instrument called the Stroke Action Test or “STAT test.” This test is a relatively new written instrument that “requires respondents to associate individual symptoms with the most appropriate action” (Billings-Gagliardi and Mazor, 2005). It contains 28 items in all, 21 of which relate to stroke situations “from all five groups of warning signs.” According to the test authors, “STAT directly assesses a critical aspect of practical stroke knowledge that has been largely overlooked and provided scores with good reliability and validity” (Ibid). Therefore, the STAT test does more than simply allow for a rote recall of stroke symptoms; it assesses how well people apply their knowledge in hypothetical scenarios, where respondents are asked to make a choice of what to do based on the situation and symptoms described: call 911; call a doctor; wait one hour, then decide; wait one day, then decide.

The authors describe the importance of the test as a more reliable measure of stroke awareness knowledge: “The importance of this distinction is underscored by our findings that 94% of examinees agreed that calling 911 is the best response to stroke; yet, on average, only 34% selected ‘call 911’ in response to specific symptoms” (Ibid, p. 1037). They note similar findings in Australia.

Therefore, the STAT test was used as the pre- and post-tests and will be used again in the post-post tests, which are under way. After students completed the pre-STAT test, they were asked to return it to an envelope and to then view the flyers in the second envelope. Either the control flyer or the alternate, EPPM-based flyer was included in the randomly distributed materials. In addition, the same basic heart attack flyer, obtained from the American Heart Association Web site, was also included as a way to deflect total attention away from the topic of strokes.

Then students were instructed to put these flyers in the envelope with the pre-test and to take the final test, which was the STAT test, which had been folded in two and paper clipped to avoid premature exposure to it and was photocopied on blue paper to help the researchers differentiate the two versions.

Findings and Discussion

Preliminary analysis of the student participants shows an increase in recognition of stroke symptoms, evidenced by an increase in the correct STAT test response to call 911 when the symptoms are described in health scenarios. Both the control group’s and the EPPM group’s correct scores increased significantly on the post-test, according to chi square and McNemar tests ($p < .001$ on 20 of the STAT test dimensions, with only one dimension not achieving significance at the .05 level).

The lowest correct response percentage of any pre-test scenario was 1.7%, representing those respondents who recognized the need to call 911 with the onset of a sudden, severe headache; the highest, 88.6% correct pre-test responses, represented those respondents who recognized the need to call 911 with the onset of a right arm that wouldn’t move and drooling.

Overall average correct answers in both pre-test groups was only 24.75%, less than the STAT test authors’ findings of more than a third. This indicates a need to educate young adults on this issue, who may experience these symptoms themselves or, more likely, be around others who do. (Mean age in this preliminary study was 20.68, s.d. 2.245; males made up 47.3% of respondents; females, 52.7%.)
However, contrary to hypothesis 1, which stated that the group exposed to the EPPM flyer will demonstrate greater knowledge regarding stroke symptoms and the need to call 911 in certain health scenarios than participants exposed to the standard ASA educational flyer, the EPPM flyer group did not perform better. In fact, in all but five of the 21 scenarios, the Ad Council flyer elicited a higher percentage that changed from incorrect responses to correct responses in the post-test. However, the post-test answers of both flyers were compared using the nonparametric independent samples Mann-Whitney test, and there was only one post-test result that was significantly different between the two groups ($p < .014$) and two others that somewhat approached significance ($p < .175$ and $p < .196$). Only one scenario score differed significantly between the two groups on the pre-test scores ($p < .036$) and two that approached significance ($p < .124$ and $p < .132$).

**Discussion**

In sum, this study’s initial hypothesis was not supported. However, it is still in progress and its results may be more telling when the data collected from senior citizens and the post-post-tests are completed.

There may be a number of reasons why EPPM elements, which have proved so successful in previous studies, have not been so thus far in this case. One reason may be that we are not measuring knowledge or perceived vulnerability or treatment efficacy using Likert scales, as much previous research has done (Gore and Bracken, 2005) and as our initial manipulation checks to demonstrate copy differences did. Instead, we are measuring applied knowledge: how much the respondent learned from the educational flyer and applied that correctly to the health scenario provided.

As previous studies have shown, this applied knowledge is harder to elicit, likely due to the additional cognitive work involved. Another reason may be that we were not patient enough in our manipulation tests to ensure clearly significant differences on the measures of efficacy, so the efficacy language might not be strong enough, compromising internal validity and, hence, the results.

Regardless, this study will provide us with some initial, albeit ungeneralizable, information regarding college students’ and senior citizens’ knowledge of strokes and appropriate action and how much they learn—and retain—from these two different educational flyers. We can also explore correlations between those participants’ who have known people who suffered strokes and both their initial and post-test applied knowledge compared to those who have not personally known stroke victims.

Further research may want to explore the idea of using a relatively recent acronym, STR (the first letters of stroke), to remember key stroke symptoms and realize the urgency to call 911: S—have the person Smile; T—have the person Talk by repeating a sentence; R—have the person Raise both arms over his/her head. Such action-oriented advice may produce more retention and appropriate action; however, there are some symptoms, such as visual impairment and sudden severe headaches, that could be more easily overlooked should a campaign using STR be initiated.

**Bibliography**


Defining the Functions of Public Relations in the Field: 
The Marketing-PR Conundrum in Community Relations 
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Abstract
This longitudinal case study researched the role of public relations in a nonprofit media organization. This nearly nine-year case study illustrates the crucial role of research in guiding an organization and the emergence of marketing functions dominance over the potential of public relation community relations functions. Fortuitously, a well-respected, national media consultant facilitated the transformation that allowed public relations functions an organizational role thus beginning a more balanced integrated model.

Every public relations educator knows the so-called realities of the marketplace. Marketing supposedly dominates while public relations functions are minimized as the advertising role is largely diminished. The newspapers, for example, recently reported nearly $25 million was spent on largely an ineffective Iowa caucus advertising emphasis (Des Moines Register, January 3, 2008).

The articulated emphasis is on the “market” as in marketing. The titles of positions, especially entry-level positions, are overwhelmingly called “marketing.” An educator can only hope public relations majors will recognize the difference between sales and the other areas of marketing (audience research, values identification of markets, etc.). So where is public relations to be practiced? How do our majors navigate the profession when “marketing” often prevails as the umbrella term in departments and/or divisions. The newest titles seek to confuse us more or at least try not to offend as much. For example, upon calling a non-for-profit for identifying who would discuss the public relations functions of their nonprofit media organization during a presentation, the response was: “As vice president, I handle strategic communication and that includes marketing, some public relations functions, and fundraising/development efforts” (Telephone, January 2008). In the research for this project, one subject insisted that the answer to the lack of organization awareness was simply “more marketing is needed.”

So what is this confusion in our American society that does not acknowledge public relations minimally or at least not fully in terms of functions? Most recently, a CEO of a major public relations agency noted with a sense of urgency that if public relations does not respond fast, our discipline may be in real difficulty (April, 2008).

To appreciate the conditions under which public relations flourishes is somewhat like the common understanding about democracy being needed before public relations is viable. In this parallel context, it must be said that public relations can only fully be practiced when there is a true dialogic intent. Several theoretical constructs point to this necessary condition.

Key Theoretical Premises
The basis for understanding the functions of public relations is primarily focused within an organizational context. An organizational infrastructure suggests how the functions are to be
practiced. Thus the “labeling” of functions is critical to the attitudes and behavior toward a particular practice. Here are examples of theoretical approaches supportive of public relations functions. Notably, this approach moves the two-way symmetrical model into an interactive conceptual process approach reflective of the rhetorical process (logos, pathos, and ethos).

Speech Act Theory. One way to appreciate the conditions under which public relations flourishes is to view the environs from speech act theory principles. Such an approach could be described as the following:

To understand that every human being must be engaged in dialogue is to truly understand communication. The full intent of this interactive process is often not explicited fully in the classroom of life. In Speech Act Theory, the communication act within a public relations environ is affected by the moment of happening, the culture, the medium or conduit of communication, the relationship of the actors, and the source per se—the self, the public, or an organization. To bring all these elements together for each utterance can be overwhelming at first. But the students need to know that contact with people is complex and these elements must be identified, understood and must be considered in every communication process. Thus when public relations is communicating and sourcing these interactions, it is critical that all these other elements be addressed. This makes the responsibility of the public relations professional much more complex than other integrative functions such as marketing and/or advertising (Neff, 2007).

Another theoretical concept allowing for a full activation of public relations functions focuses on ongoing interactive opportunities such as in the co-creation of meaning. Such a concept as Social Constructionism, for example, provides opportunities for examining communication growth in the following ways.

Social Constructionism. Organizational infrastructure that is flexible creates conditions for gaining input to guide fully the process. Research indicates that three tenets build the process of social constructionism and include the following according to Gordon:

There are three approaches to social constructionism: a) conceptions of reality (including of ourselves) are created through social interaction, b) human institutions are created through social interactions and cannot exist independently of human agreement, and c) the constructed world of everyday life is itself an important element in the maintenance and reconstruction of social reality, human institutions, and ourselves (Gordon, 105). Social constructionism truly demonstrates and highlights ‘the underlying value also represented in the rhetorical tradition: the creation of dialogue’ (115). It suggests strongly the constructionism of verbal dialogue allows more of an ethical element in communication, especially because the process is negotiated. It also indicates that “power” is an “institutional fact” not a “brute” fact (116). It is also this foundation of social constructionism that suggests the intellectual development needs and the move towards the critical theory area and that would involve another level of methodological approaches (Gordon, 116).
It is these conditions of interaction as depicted by Speech Act Theory and Social Constructionism Theory that allows the principles of good rhetorical theory to be fully explicated. Such conditions are ideal for public relations practice.

**IC in Practice: Transition from Theory to the IC Model**

Robert Heath modeled the IC relationships in terms of function. His visual or venn graphic integrated public relations, marketing, and advertising functions as integrative communication (IC). When used in concert, the IC mix produces the publicity and promotional effort. While Heath integrates these three functions, Hutton also lists the “functions” of each communication type, although in a more silo approach.

**Scope of Presentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing</th>
<th>Public Relations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Product development</td>
<td>media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical distribution</td>
<td>various government entities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location analysis</td>
<td>community relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retailing</td>
<td>investor relations</td>
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<td>Pricing</td>
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<td>Customer service</td>
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</table>

| Break-even analysis        | ins and outs of journalism        |
| competitive analysis       | legal and policy requirements     |
| package design             | (Securities & Exchange Commission/stock markets) |
| queuing theory             | charitable contributions management |
|                            | speech writing                    |
|                            | Develop/implement issues management program |

| more aggressive            | knowledge base different          |
| more competitive           | audience orientation different    |
| hyperbolic                 | mindset different                 |
| selling mind-set           | more conciliatory, peacemaking approach |
| (Hutton, 105)              |                                   |

The importance of the theoretical and conceptual approach to integrated communication is revealed by this case study. What is missing in the above public relations functions listings is the view of public relations as a process working within a variety of infrastructures interactively.

**Longitudinal Case Study Documents the Evolution of IC Priorities**

*Phase I: Initial Research*

Two major surveys (1999 and 2003) reported out the earlier stages of nine years of research on a nonprofit media organization. The first survey was a student research project and established the “news” program as having a Nielsen rating of one share. This public television station’s budget was so meager the Nielsen ratings were not affordable. Yet through the academic contact, the Nielsen company was willing to provide a copy of the Nielsen shares to validate the research findings and, indeed, the station did have an attraction of over a 100,000 viewers for the evening news.
Phase II: Model Survey Research

Phase two of the longitudinal study occurred around 2003 with the subscription list evenly balanced between two states. This opportunity to compare a base list of equal number of subscribers/nonsubscribers from two states was very insightful. The station was officially licensed in one state and the newer viewers were from the nearby state. (See Appendix I). The results of the 500 telephone interviews were presented to CPB (Corporate for Public Broadcasting) and the research model was communicated by CPB in Washington D. C. as a model of how research should be done in broadcasting.

The research did provide a practical outcome and the variance in cultural makeup of the two state regions as far as programming preference was identified. The large city area (the nearby state) was more dominated by Latino populations while the state of the station’s location represented more small town areas with more heavily European type of subscriber and, of course, the taste in programming reflected these backgrounds. One state strongly preferred Polish programming and Lawrence Welk and the other more urban state requested more Latino programming. (Survey, 2003)

Most importantly, the viewers from the nearby state verified the purpose of watching the other state’s programming. The viewers from the large urban areas 1) needed to know the news from the other state, 2) with many university alumni the attraction of the college sports programming was very important (Purdue, Indiana University, Valparaiso University), 3) others noted the programming fit their lifestyles with most noting that Charlie Rose was on too late in the urban area (public television viewers tend to be more senior and more educated).

Within the past five years a new CEO from a national search has been at the helm. As a result the station has grown greatly in terms of financial stability and in infrastructure sophistication. This impetus reflected a strong marketing thrust and, as usual, public relations functions were confined to the idea of “media relations” (although no official position was established) and certainly very subservient to the marketing functions. Even the primarily publicity and promotions efforts were treated as a marketing thrust. This situation clearly did not reflect dialogic communication with its publics including underwriters.

Notably, the effort to develop a fuller public relations role was rebuffed continually.

This phase was also punctuated by a $66,000. branding drive that was outsourced to a Chicago marketing firm, an effort that changed the logo and name but was based on insufficient research. The research made no effort to differentiate between the two states. Supposedly 25 individuals were interviewed. Unfortunately, the branding impact was largely lost on the public and in some respects confusion reigned. The few aware of this outreach simply thought two stations now existed. The logos for both names (old and new) exist to this day and both logos are officially listed in various sites, often separate.

Phase Three: Under the Leverage of a Consultant: Public Relations Functions Emerge

The Chair of the Board of Directors and CEO suddenly engaged the full board into a fast two-month strategic planning session. Dividing the board and staff into three groups (program, community, and technical), three strategic plans were rapidly developed (Fall 2007). Then a very well-respected consultant from Philadelphia was brought in to facilitate the three groups listed above. In a very surprising turn of events, the outcome assessed by the consultant basically determined the group did not know the needs of the community. The consultant then
requested that I conduct this research to determine the next step. A statement about a greater
need for service to the community was an important part of the directive.

I. Research Shifts to Community “Needs” and “Issues”

A. Stage One—Community Input from a Regional Media Perspective.

Thirty-one students from a Community Relations undergraduate/graduate public
relations class initiated the research on community in the fall of 2007. After the students were
familiarized with the public television station and the digital possibilities affecting the public on
February 17, 2009 (the transition from analog to digital), the community was profiled to
ascertain the type and extent of media infrastructure diversity.

Three key leaders interacted in class sessions with the students in response to a series of
questions: 1) describe the local public broadcasting station, 2) describe the relationship your
organization has with the regional public television station, and 3) reflect on the status of the
media in this area. Two speakers were selected for their country-wide position (most populated
county represented). Their job responsibilities allowed a large infrastructure to be connected
with the local public television. One key urban administrator not only represented the largest
town but also was considered to be a key location with high interactive contact through
communication.

The results indicated the following threads of content emphasis in regard to the
one public television station in the state of origin.

East County

1. Maybe a few press releases over the years with the local public television station but
no working relationship.

2. The county representative believes that if anything happens with television it will be
20 years down the road.

West County

1. Concerned about how the newspapers zone their news.

2. No reference to the local public television station having a role but stressed the
important of having “one voice” as a source.

Town Administrator

1. Absolutely no relationship with the local public television station.

2. The town is excited about the access channel given to the town by Comcast and
housed now at the local high school. This channel will be dedicated to resenting the council
meetings with no monitoring by Comcast.

3. This second-in-command administrator also believed that nothing will be developing
in television for another 15 years.

Interpretive Narrative

After the presentations, one very active community source was very upset that the local
public television had the capacity to cover her special event. This was not known by her
organization. Her organization planned a special event for a nonprofit. She could not attract the
Chicago media. Of course, a crime was committed within a few weeks and the Chicago media
was on site. She was very angered that the local public television station could have publicized
their event.
Another student from the community was surprised at the resources offered by the park and recreation in her area. She realized now these opportunities were not being highlighted in the media and that especially was evident with the public television station.

This stage of the research enabled the students to become familiar with the needs of the community for communication infrastructures, especially from the traditional media. The data also enabled the students to see the gap in their awareness and the reality within the seven-county area. The gap between reality and perception was great.

Stage Two: Consultant Interaction Affirms Community Focus

Several key events affected the research direction at this point and included the following.

Consultant Input

In subsequent follow-up e-mails and telephone calls, the consultant and I discussed the research focus on the “needs,” “issues,” and “opportunities” of the community. It was agreed the awareness of the public television role in the community was low and, therefore, could be assumed and not studied further at this point. It was more important to identify the community needs, issues, and opportunities and assume that the awareness of the station was low. The data then would be given to the station and according to the consultant: “the onus will be on the station to execute the findings.”

The Organization’s Position Shifts

The CEOs report to the Board of Directors indicated that the station was clearly known by the underwriters (the marketing emphasis). The report also noted projects in the community that did not have a direct association with broadcasting but were justified because the organization had some role in developing a special event (marketing emphasis). So by continuing down this path, there is no direct relationship between the community and the station’s function and role as a resource from a public television perspective. Finally, two key events that could make the local public broadcasting known and very visible are largely ignored. First, this public station has not yet announced they are the designated station to coordinate a C-Span network for the state that this station was asked to coordinate (public does not know this), and 2) the February 17, 2009 digital switchover was announced without a comprehensive public relations plan. In fact, the engineer already announced he will not be coming to work around that time. Most recently a plan was presented by the station’s marketing head with a suggestion from the board of directors that a rural, lower economic, and multicultural dimension needs to be added. The digital changeover is not just a senior citizen issue. The plan is yet to be executed. Again, the assignment may be initiated by the student agency of Valparaiso University’s Public Relations Student Society of America.

Most recently, the CEO announced the persistence to maintain the marketing thrust by the process of looking for a marketing coordinator to work more closely with the station’s public and community relations and program marketing. (December 29, 2007 CEO report). However, after it was known that the consultant was working with me on the next phase of this research, the CEO has told me he will make the position a public relations position since that is the person who will be working with the community. At the next meeting, however, this was announced as a “marketing/public relations” position will be under the marking rubric. The predominant assignment for this position is the mistaken view that public relations is essentially media relations. So now news releases are more frequently issued.

2. Research Extended into Intensive Interviews

Twenty-two 30 to 40 minute telephone interviews (includes multiple interviews and three in-class interviews) were conducted over a two-month period by an advanced public relations
seminar research class (earlier interviews were conducted during the Fall 2007 Community Relations class). The selection of the respondents represented an infrastructure grid of key organizations in a seven-county area and included education, parks and recreation, the arts, government, the library system, the childcare centers, and transportation initiatives.

An additional direction emerged strongly. The consultant confirmed for me that the CEO wants to focus on the state that the station is established in. In response, he was informed that my early research confirmed the second state was as equally focused on the state of origin’s news, sports, and programming. Definitely the attraction is on the state of station origin’s needs. Issues, and opportunities. The concept of “opportunity” was added to the discussion to provide a fuller view of the perspectives presented.

Infrastructure. As mentioned, the key representatives came from education, parks and recreation, the arts, government, the library system, the childcare centers, and the transportation initiatives. On some of the interviews (telephone broadcast through telephone speaker phone) involved multiple respondents (three respondents in the instance of the park and recreation, for example). Other respondents were interviewed two or three times. The key concepts from these interviewers for each area were the following

  Government. The Cooperative Extension representative was a member of the public television station’s Community Advisory Board (CAB). Note: the author chaired this committee. In each category the CAB members was interviewed first. The Cooperative Extension representative has the unique position of understanding the rural and urban dimensions. This perspective was crucial to the understanding of the needs and issues of a seven county area that reflected these types of environments.

  Interview One: The first topics emerging focused on agriculture—the issue of subsidies and the need for them. This extended to a discussion of creating partners for family farmers. The issue of the environment, the use of chemicals emerged at this point. Getting out the correct message was urgent. He noted that it is the urban lawn not the farmer is the primary contaminator of the environment in terms of chemicals and pesticides, for example. Food safety emerged but so much research still needs to be conducted to make the connection to disease. The question of water quality comes under this rubric. Then the entire educational process is key and he noted this is pre through 12 years of education.

  Interview Two: The second interview focused on land use—the conflict between rural and urban areas. The high cost of farming became an issue. The moment toward organic farms. The concept of education emerged again.

  Interview Three: The last interview finally connected the dots. Cooperative had a major mission to deliver an educational system. The idea of public television was not seen yet as part of that effort between cooperative extension and the educational infrastructures, however, it is obvious that there could be a major partnership here with a major role for public television.

Arts. The arts area is very active in the seven-county area of this state. Although artists that have a general involvement in the arts were interviewed first, two other artists representing dance and the visual arts in drawing, painting, etc. supplemented the perspectives.

  The arts simply do not seem to have the partnerships as evident in the other areas. The lack of funding as well as less transparency seemed to limit the growth potential.

Parks and Recreation. This group had three representatives interviewed simultaneously.

  What emerged quickly was how organized this organization is. It was long-range planning with a solid economic basis that has given this group a tremendous edge on creative responses to the community. The model has somewhat changed (events now come with a fee at
certain venues) but the quality of programming remains. The mission to save the land is obviously very evident and the plan has been visualized and executed. What is less evident is the “awareness” of these projects among the community members.

**Education.** The educational area often conducts research and/or has major partnerships with the community. One university’s research project focused on the needs and issues of the community as being race relations, economic inequality, drug and alcohol problems, transportation, and the environment. This perspective provided more variety on problems that for other organizations may not be a central focus or be much more complex to address.

**Library.** The library system is being hit hard under the current reorganization and budget reduction proposals. There does not seem to be as much of a proactive model as evidenced by the park and recreation organizations. In fact, the library system is looking at the “charging” concept developed by the park and recreation organizations with much interest. So the biggest issue seems to center around the issue of property taxes and how this issue impacts the library budgets.

Another issue that seemed to be of great concern focused on the coalitions needed to have good government. This also brought up the issue of retirement funds and how safe these accounts are with the state budget crunch.

**Childcare.** Childcare needs and issues are great. This evolved to a discussion of health care and diversity issues in the region. This area seemed to have a particularly important bent toward the support for women. This topic blended well with those in education noting that women were paid much less in the region. Furthermore, the homeless in this region were young women between 21 and 26 years who are also single mothers.

**Transportation.** The transportation issues became an issue on its own. The lack of adequate bus systems, the need for more rail service, and even the need for a more active airport were cited as critical needs. The lack of response to a high speed rail system was identified as an example of the impasse many of these topics have met. The lack of support for adding rail passage to the area is cited as one major problem in communicating needs.

Thus the results provided a rich overview of the “needs,” “issues,” and “opportunities” of a seven county area.

1. lack of one voice in the region
2. the infrastructure interconnect missing (cooperative education connecting with the educational systems)
3. the initiatives difficult to address without an awareness and dialogue, the complexities of carrying out legislative initiatives, for example. The unbalanced flow of communication and decision making.
4. The concern about changing values.
5. The challenges of long-term planning.
6. The need for input in to the communication process.
7. The need for a greater awareness of what is happening in the region.

**Final Statement**

The gap between the station’s perception of itself (marketing dominance) and the assessment data gathered from interviews and content analysis of key documents reveals a great need for a public relations perspective, particularly within a community relations environs. The “gap” between perception and reality is great. The lack of understanding of the connection
between public relations and community is reflected in the continual drive for more evenst that are directed toward revenue acquisition and less service.

An Edelman Public Relations Worldwide account executive addressing the Public Relations Society of America Educators Academy noted that public relations will always do a better job when working with the environment. Public relations is more likely to monitor, more likely to be flexible, and more likely to respond to a 24/7 environment. Marketing is not constructed to operate in such an open manner (note, again, the Hutton comparison chart presented earlier). This case study on identifying community “issues,” “needs,” and “opportunities” strongly suggests the error of relying heavily on marketing approaches from the primary broadcasting source of the region.

Results

In summary, the results identified the 1) low level of awareness about community needs, 2) the lack of identification with (public television) PTV on an individual or system basis, 3) the minimal degree of interest based on community values, and 4) the lack of an attitude/opinion/knowledge map of potential partnerships and relationship possibilities. These results reflect the need for a more public relations approach (research initiated) to move the organization toward a new vision and, most importantly, an authentic relationship with its community.

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### Appendix I

| This book’s six-point plan proposes a reconstitution and rejuvenation of public Broadcasting’s mission so it can advance into the twenty-first century as a leader in public speech. |

1. Public television must find new ways to grant individuals and constituencies space on the spectrum, access to public speech through public media.  
   -This model resembles cable access practice (portable video & expansion of cable TV)  
   -Reclaim an old project of public TV: portable video & commitment to diverse local voices was PBS in the 70s  
   -Difference in terms of resources, distribution structure, viewer access, and mission

2. Public television must encourage popular performance and televisual literacy.  
   -Must find ways for local people to perform as citizen producers, issues of media, culture, democracy, and economy—as well as textual strategies of script, framing representation, lighting, and program scheduling should be common discourse among Americans  
   -Goal: a space for tolerance for those who vary in culture, ethnicity, ideology.  

3. Public television must make a commitment to invigorated, broad-based national-local discourse.  
   -Attack trend of a shrinking public sphere  
   -Need a vigorous discussion of common problems

4. Not only must public television lose its timidity and learn to take programming risks, it should accept an overly reformist vision.  
   -Public television should be more than a workplace culture but make a difference in individual lives and U.S. culture  
   -Only a dedication to social action now can deter a future on the margins of American political life

5. Public television must develop a proactive vision of its own that is more than an alternative to commercial broadcasting purpose and practice.
-Must address the deficiencies of a market-driven commercial system
-Need to carry a positive mission—not just the label of “noncommercial”
-Dismantling of NAEB in the early eighties (loss of conferences, seminars, publications, etc.)

6. Public broadcasters must take the lead in demanding structural change in U.S. media.
- Need concepts of publicness—public good, public interest, and public property (1934 Communications Act)—like water, air
- A call for community and change in public television
- This work is too hard, too expensive, at times too frustrating to do alone.

Appendix II

Study of Station Subscribers: Comparison of Two States

Population: 2,341 subscribers (2,099 telephone numbers available)

Representation: Subscribers equally divided between Indiana and Illinois

Sample: 10% sample from each state (1,088-Indiana) and 1,011 (Illinois)

Sample size: 303 subscribers interviewed

Analysis structure: A matching nonsubscriber sample pulled from telephone directories randomly

Analysis Infrastructure: To profile the total subscriber population, the selection of subscribers interviewed was statistically structures according to the number of subscribers found within each zip cod area/cluster (at least ten addresses minimum in one or more code type to satisfy the t-per cent quota). **The ten per cent sample distribution profiles the zip codes of the total subscriber population.**

Study of WYIN Subscribers: Indiana and Illinois

- **Presented to Corporate for Public Broadcast**
- **CPB sent copy of data to PBS stations nationally as a research model**
- **Longitudinal Study: A series of research reports establishing a historical perspective and serves as the foundation for interpreting future research.** *(Research conducted by Valparaiso University’s Public Relations Research Classes)*

**Results**

1. **Total Number of WYIN Subscribers**
A total of 2,341 subscribers are listed in the printout provided by WYIN-PBS56 station CEO. The subscribers are quite equally divided between Indiana and Illinois (Indiana 1,254; Illinois 1,087).

2. **Total Number of Usable WYIN Subscriber Names**

Only 2,099 telephone numbers were usable (e.g., missing telephone numbers) and some subscribers were not residents of Indiana or Illinois. This reduced the subscriber population for this study to 1,088 subscribers from Indiana and 1,011 subscribers from Illinois.

3. **The selection of a Ten Per Cent Sample for Telephone Interviews**

A ten per cent sample from the *usable* subscriber telephone numbers for Indiana and Illinois plus additional interviews for more specifics yielded the following numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Available interviews</th>
<th>10% of Usable Sample Interviewed</th>
<th>Additional Interviews--Total Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indiana 109 subscribers</td>
<td>134 subscribers (added 25 interviews)</td>
<td>169 subscribers (added 68 interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois 101 subscribers</td>
<td>210 interviewed initially</td>
<td>303 total subscribers interviewed totally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Distribution of Sample to Represent Total Subscriber Population**

To assure the sample represented the total subscriber population, the selection of the subscribers to interview was statistically structured according to the number of subscribers found within each zip code area/cluster (at least ten addresses minimum in one or more code type to satisfy the ten per cent quota). The ten per cent sample distribution profiles the zip codes of the total subscriber population. See table below on **Subscriber Profile** for the breakdown of the ten per cent and total sample for each Indiana and Illinois town and city.

**CABLE/SATELLITE/ANTENNA MIX**

Cable, satellite, and antenna technology for the subscription sample is distributed between the two states with cable viewers clearly the preference of technology for all subscribers at any age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>(169)</th>
<th>(134)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just cable</td>
<td>82% (138)</td>
<td>66% (89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combo of cable/satellite</td>
<td>86% (145)</td>
<td>76% (102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antenna only</td>
<td>14% (24)</td>
<td>24% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN/Ill cable/satellite combined</td>
<td>81% (247/303)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Cable dominates the market in Illinois, especially the Chicago zip codes (only one satellite identified in a Chicago zip code area and that owner had cable also)*

*Cable and satellite outweigh the antenna ownership by 4 to 1 in Indiana and cable has almost an exclusive presence in Illinois.*
*The 81% cable/satellite penetration combined for both markets indicates these technologies dominate broadcasting. Indiana, additionally, is rapidly adding satellite services and this development has affected the current subscriber population significantly. Indiana satellite subscribers indicate they miss WYIN but either do not have rotary or cannot make their antenna system work. Ten percent of the Indiana subscribers are satellite owners with more indicating they are considering switching to the dish. Advertisements in the Times (Indiana) indicate a big push in Northwest Indiana for satellite opportunities and suggests a possible even greater reduction in the few remaining antenna subscribers and possibly further erosion in the cable arena, too.

When you break down the cable, satellite and/or antenna ownership by age group, the population sample having cable technology is much younger in Illinois. More 30-49 year old subscribers from Illinois claim cable technology than same-aged Indiana subscriber group. While the older 66-85 year old subscribers from Indiana peaked over all other aged groups for cable usage, the Illinois same-sample declined sharply. In contrast, the high rate of cable and/or satellite found for Indiana subscribers begins strong at the 50 year interval and continues to increase in subscribers for the 66 year old group. The overall decline in cable subscribers is primarily due to the sharp drop in Illinois cable subscribers at the 66 year old level. In addition, as little as the antenna is used, the ownership is clearly dominated by the 50 and 66 year old groups for both states (a total of 41 antenna-only homes in a sample of 303 subscribers). See table on Subscriber Profile of Basic Technology Ownership.

### Subscriber Profile of Basic Technology Ownership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cable, Satellite, or Antenna</th>
<th>Indiana/Illinois-2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) 18-29 yrs</td>
<td>b) 30-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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### PROGRAMMING INTERESTS

Those interviewed were asked for their three favorite programs. The high-ranking programs overall in Indiana focused on “specials,” “local news/local talk/ethnic,” “sports” and “gardening/crafts.” Across all ages, the 66 to 85 year old Indiana subscribers were most consistently supportive of WYIN’s variety of programming adding “global news,” “children programming,” “travel,” “cooking,” “drama,” and “educational programming” to their list.

Illinois subscribers favorite programming topics focused on similar choices: “specials” and “sports” with the 50 to 65 year old subscribers emphasizing interests in “gardening/crafts,” “educational programs,” and “drama.” The younger 50-65 year old Illinois subscribers indicated the most overall support for the variety of WYIN programs adding “local shows/ethnic, local news,” “Dr. Who,” “cooking,” and “travel” to the general list of likes.

Indiana subscribers identified “local news,” “specials,” “cooking,” “educational programming,” and “drama” as areas of need for more programming. Illinois subscribers indicated “local talk shows/ethnic programming (Hispanic),” “global news,” “specials,”
“garden/crafts,” “travel,” and “educational programming” as areas for more programming. See bolded numbers for more programming requests in table below on “Multiple Programming Interests.”

Subscriber Profile: Multiple Programming Interests

WYIN-PBS56

Indiana/Illinois-2003
(bolded numbers: respondents indicated more programming needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>Global</th>
<th>Specials</th>
<th>Pre-</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Garden</th>
<th>Dr.</th>
<th>Educational</th>
<th>Drama</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Specials</td>
<td>Pre-</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Garden</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Response</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>talk/ethnic</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>News</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Document</td>
<td>Miums</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29yrs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-65yrs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66-85yrs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86-120yrs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Age</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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THEMES/MESSAGES IN INTERVIEWS

**Programming for Indiana:**

**Theme:** *The local news is very important.* Such quotes from Indiana subscribers as “Indiana news only news center in area!” to “Leave the news alone!”

**Theme:** *Ethnic programming is satisfying in Indiana.* In Indiana the satisfaction with ethnic programming means the EuroCentric needs are being met: Polish specials, in particular, were mentioned strongly as a positive.

**Theme:** *Lawrence Welk is loved.* The following for Welk is very strong among WYIN Indiana subscribers. On a more broad programming note—many mentioned loving the “old time stuff.”

**Message:** *WYIN ignores the rich resources of programming in bluegrass from Northwest Indiana.* The roots of bluegrass are strong in NW Indiana and the subscribers feel you need to present this to the viewer.

**Message:** *WYIN has a number of gaps in programming.* Other Indiana subscriber programming suggestions ranged from “good fishing programs needed on local sites” or “need
to get the 24 food channel like they have in Indianapolis—where are the chiefs?” to just need more “talk shows,” “humor,” and “cooking!”

Programming for Illinois:

Theme. Ethnic programming is lacking. In Illinois, the idea of “ethnic” is different. Hispanics mention the need for more Hispanic programming, especially with childrens’ programming. Could not point to a program satisfying this need but requested “more Hispanic shows.”

Theme: Welk is offered at a convenient time in Indiana and that is why the 66 and older group is not subscribing with WTTW. Welk is very strong in this older group range that is devoted to this programming. The bolded numbers indicate more programming is needed and more of Welk is demanded. Stories were cited about how Welk used to be offered 3xs a week and now the station may preempt Welk for a sports program. This is of great concern to the devotees of Welk. This is why the Illinois 66 plus years subscribers cross-over to Indiana’s station for the “specials.”

Theme: WTTW is programming in favor of the younger viewers in other areas. The 50 to 85 age range in Illinois were attracted to WYIN’s programming not only because of the better scheduling of such programs as Lawrence Welk but also because of the scheduling of the quilting and the Charlie Rose programs. One respondent heatedly stated: WTTW is offering early programming to the yuppies and I can’t stay up that late to watch my programs (Charley Rose). Others noted “Charley Rose is a great interviewer and glad on at noon and do not lie it when you bump him for another program” and the single reason for being a subscriber: “Charley Rose and WTTW puts his program on at 12:30pm at night!”

Message: WYIN has a number of gaps in programming. Subscribers mentioned the need for more interviews, book reviews, history, science, and medicine. This was primarily from the Illinois 50 to 65 year old subscribers.

THEMES AND MESSAGES FOR SUBSCRIBING FROM INTERVIEWS

Reasons for Indiana Subscribers:

Theme: The 50 and older group are indicating concerns about renewing. The current economic situation and the war possibilities make these subscribers less likely to confirm interest in renewing. One Indiana subscriber noted “like programs but not this year (subscribe)—cannot afford.” Another mentioned he liked the old programs and watched on a regular basis—but income not what he wants it to be and retired so not clear he is renewing.” This soft spot in membership could affect renewals for the upcoming year.

Theme: Many mentions of good ethnic programming. However, in Indiana this means a very satisfied Polish following and very clearly subscribe for the Polish programs. Bottom line—the money will continue if these programs are on.

Theme: PBS philosophy live and well. Many mentioned (21 subscribers) the important of supporting quality PBS programming in Indiana and called this “a good investment.” Fewer (9 subscribers) identified this as a driving force behind subscriptions. However, loyalty to the station (WYIN) was a separate reason for subscribing (29 mentions by subscribers in Indiana and 40 mentions by subscribers in Illinois). However, complaints expressed after indicating station support would indicate some discontent like: “Higgins was fired—didn’t like that—a good person.”
Message: Loyalty to the station is tied to programming. Indiana subscribers like “sports,” “specials,” and “local news.” Add in the “like its programming period” (14 subscribers) makes for a strong case for the current offerings. In Indiana, it was the 66 years and older that also highly mentioned Welk as a favorite “special.” One Indiana Welk fan noted her “picture so bad (on antenna) cannot tape program, six years ago Welk 3xs a week, then went to 2xs, and now once a week if not preempted by a game. Use to give Ch 11 same dollars but now give more to PBS56 because of Welk.” But the most frequent comment would be simply “love of the channel!” and “better than WTTW.”

Theme. “Sports” brought out the joy of being a subscriber. One IU basketball fan noted “it costs to get those games.”

Theme: Satellite is affecting the viewing potential of WYIN Indiana subscribers. One Indiana subscriber noted “not watching because have to switch from satellite” or “have satellite but not easy to switch—been a subscriber for a long time.” Another subscriber clearly stated “cannot get station now with satellite so depends on how signal works out if I will subscribe again.” Yet the most compelling comment came from a subscriber that “really misses it (WYIN) since they have satellite.”

Reasons for Illinois Subscribers:

Theme: Not enough ethnic programming. Same interest as Indiana subscribers but from two different perspective: attitude and content. These Illinois subscribers are unsatisfied customers. There is not Hispanic programming to point to with pride.

Theme. “Specials” were the prime draw for Illinois viewers. Although a definite interest in Welk by those 66 years and up in Illinois (six subscribers), the younger 50 to 65 year old subscribers had other “specials” on their mind. Mentions of Dr. Who, painting, health, O’Donnell, Suzie Orman, folk music, music in general, antiques, and Vinton were clearly of interest.

Theme: Loyalty to the station is tied to programming. The 66 yrs and older subscribers that loaded the “specials” column with Lawrence Welk responses (bolded because of the frequent request for more of Welk) in Illinois were clearly subscribing because of Welk. Yet, in Illinois, a 30 to 49 year old subscriber noted “like programming—use to watch channel 11 and switched to 56.”

Theme: PBS philosophy live and well. As noted earlier, loyalty to the station (WYIN) was a separate reason for subscribing (29 mentions by subscribers in Indiana and 40 mentions by subscribers in Illinois). Cited as reasons were “married to a Hoosier wife” or a sense of “community.” Another noted “family in Northwest Indiana and want to support station.”

Theme. “Sports” brought out the joy of being a subscriber. Seventeen Illinois subscribers were members because of the sports offerings (more IU than Purdue mentions, however, with a sprinkling of Valparaiso University). One subscriber (66-85 years) noted “likes station because replays basketball games at more convenient times.”

Message: Return Dr. Who. Dr. Who is mentioned by five Illinois subscribers as a major loss when this program was dropped and cited as the reason for subscribing. One Illinois (Chicago) subscriber was very clear: “You cancelled Dr. Who and that was the only reason I donated money in the first place.”
How Women Understand, Perceive and Evaluate Credibility Of Messages about Human Papillomavirus (HPV)
Prisca S. Ngondo
University of Oklahoma
psngondo@ou.edu

Abstract
The purpose of this study is to examine women’s perceptions and beliefs about HPV messages received from different media and to understand if women have become more aware of the risks and prevention of HPV since Merck introduced Gardasil, the vaccination. This study integrates the situational theory of publics with the concepts from credibility to investigate to what extent women consider HPV a problem, how they feel connected to it and what factors constrain them from seeking information. The study also aims to evaluate how credibility of the source and message affect the variables of the situational theory of publics. I will use qualitative focus groups and one-on-one interviews with women from diverse backgrounds between the ages of 18-26. The study will add to existing knowledge and will show how the theories can be integrated to strengthen their theoretical basis. Practical implications include helping public relations practitioners tailor better health communication messages by being able to better predict the activities of the publics who observe HPV campaigns and understand cues to action and suggested factors communicators can employ to improve health communication campaigns and messages.

Introduction
The development of Gardasil, Merck’s human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination has become a major public health issue (Colgrove, 2006). According to Colgrove, the vaccination protects against the four strains of HPV, the most common sexual transmitted disease in the United States, including the two strains that cause most cases of cervical cancer.

Approximately 10,520 new cases of cervical cancer will emerge in the United States, and more than 3,900 women will die from cervical cancer by the end of 2005 (National Cervical Cancer Coalition, 2005). Although the figure is far behind the leading causes of cancer among women in the US with lung (about 71,000) and breast (about 40,000) (Edwards, 2007), HPV is increasingly becoming a concern among women and it is important to investigate information on HPV, which leads to cervical cancer, so that practitioners can create effective health campaign messages. The National Cancer Institute (2004) reported that approximately $2 billion per year is spent in the United States on cervical cancer treatment alone.

Advertisements for the vaccine are tagged “One less” meaning reducing the number of women with cancer, Edwards (2007). According to Nielsen Monitor-Plus, Merck spent $46 million on advertisements last year and $24 million from January to February 2007 (Edwards). Some of Merck’s campaign efforts included enlisting celebrity endorsers such as Susie Castillo of MTV’s TRL, and sending out 82,000 bead kits that can be assembled into “Make the connection” cervical cancer awareness bracelets (Edwards).

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to examine women’s perceptions and beliefs about HPV messages received from different media and to understand if women have become more aware of the risks and prevention of HPV since Merck launched its campaign to introduce Gardasil, the vaccination. The study also aims to evaluate how credibility of the source and message affect the variables of the situational theory of publics.

This study integrates the situational theory of publics with the concepts from credibility to investigate to what extent women consider HPV a problem, how they feel connected to it and what factors constrain them from seeking information.

Although many studies have replicated and supported the situational theory of publics, Aldoory (2001) stated that few studies have focused on health issues and women using the situational theory of publics.

The theory that will be used to understand how women make sense of HPV messages is the situational theory of publics. Aldoory (2001) noted that the situational theory of publics is one of the most useful theories for understanding why publics communicate and when they are most likely to communicate. Also, according to Aldoory, this theory is important in women’s health communication because of its central need to understand how latent and aware publics can become more involved and active in their health decisions and health care.

The theoretical concept that will be used to explain this phenomenon is credibility. The study will seek to understand how source and message credibility affect problem recognition, perceived constraint and level of involvement with an issue.

The study will add to existing knowledge and will show how the theories can be integrated to strengthen their theoretical basis. Practical implications include helping public relations practitioners tailor better health communication messages by being able to better predict the activities of the publics who observe HPV campaigns and understand cues to action and suggested factors communicators can employ to improve health communication campaigns and messages.

For the proposed study, it is important to consider some of the issues surrounding HPV and its vaccination to fully comprehend its prevalence, the impact it is having on society, and why now more than ever it is important to consider women and their understanding of the messages being presented to them.

Qualitative methods will be used to explore the research questions. According to Aldoory (2001), most research on situational theory has been quantitative, so this study will attempt to understand meaning making and how female publics conceptualize their involvement with HPV health messages about HPV health messages.

The Ethics and Politics of HPV Vaccination

HPV, a sexually transmitted disease that can lead to cervical cancer, has been in existence for a long time but has been under the radar for the most part until fairly recently when the vaccination was approved and Merck launched its campaign.

The US Food and Drug Administration approved the HPV vaccination in June 2006. The vaccine is over 90% effective in preventing new infections and precancerous cervical lesions caused by HPV types that the vaccine covers (Lo, 2006). However the vaccine has not gone unchallenged. Advocates of premarital abstinence and conservative “pro-family” organizations claim that the vaccine promotes sexual activity. Proponents of HPV maybe advocating for public health policies that increase its uptake by requiring vaccination as a condition of entry into middle school for example (Lo). Religious conservatives expressed concern that access to the
vaccine would undermine abstinence-based prevention message, and advocacy groups such as Focus on the Family support availability of the vaccine but are opposed to mandating its use (Colgrove, 2006). The campaign to making the vaccination available is being supported by groups such as the Women in Government, a Washington-based bipartisan organization of female legislators. The group issued recommendations for ensuring that the vaccine is accessible and affordable, and also recommended that states add it to their Medicaid programs and encourage private health plans to cover it (Colgrove).

Marketing for Gardasil, Merck’s HPV vaccine, began last November and almost immediately ran into controversy over its lobbying campaign (Colgrove, 2006). Merck sought to persuade state governments to make the vaccine mandatory for schoolgirls but it was discovered that Merck had given Texas Governor Rick Perry some money for campaign contributions prior to Perry ordering that Texas girls be vaccinated. Although Merck promised to stop its lobbying efforts, pundits, parents and scientist have been battling over whether the vaccine should be mandatory and whether the science behind it is legit (Edwards, 2007). According to Merrill Lynch, Merck made an estimated $144 million in revenue on the vaccination drug in the 2006 fourth quarter of the fiscal year (Edwards).

In the following section, I will give an overview of the theory and concepts to be used in the study. Previous research will also be discussed to show the relationships between the concepts and how related issues and concepts have been studied. At the end of the literature review, research questions will be posed.

**Literature Review**

First, I will define public relations and publics. Second, I will discuss the situational theory of publics and how this theory has been applied to health communication. Third, I will review the concepts of credibility and the research that has tested this concept.

**Public Relations**

Public relations is a communication profession and practice mainly developed in the United States in response to market needs, and literature in the field has evolved to include many diverse definitions (Bardhan, 2002). Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1994) defined public relations as any planned communicative action that aims to develop “mutually beneficial relationships” between clients and their significant publics. J. E. Grunig (1983) stipulated that “public relations, in a broad sense, can be defined as communication between two kinds of systems—organizations and publics” (p. 1). Public relations practitioners are those who “manage, plan, and execute communication for the organization as a whole” (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.6).

Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) pointed out that the program level of public relations has been the traditional focus of evaluative research. The researchers added that public relations programs are ongoing strategic efforts to communicate and develop relationships with publics. Alternatively, public relations campaigns are communication strategies that end either after a given amount of time has elapsed or after the goal has been met.

Although the current HPV campaign is categorized as a health campaign, it also qualifies as a public relations campaign because it is an ongoing movement without a predetermined endpoint. Every issue or campaign has a public or several publics. The current HPV campaign has publics that include but not limited to proponents, opponents, stakeholders, parents and young women.

**Definition of Public**
Ehling as cited in Grunig (1978) defined a public as a grouping which arises within a community around a controversial issue. This definition is similar to that of Dewey’s (1927) definition as cited in Grunig (1978) which stated that a public arises when a group of people: 1) face a similar indeterminant situation, 2) recognize what is the indeterminant- problematic- in that situation, and 3) organize to do something about the problem. Grunig used Dewey’s framework to define the three stages of evolution of a public. First there is the latent public, a group that is in an indeterminant situation but does not recognize it as a problem. Second is the aware public; they recognize the problem or what is missing in the situation. Third is the active/aware public- they are at the high end of range of information seeking activity and organize to do something about the problem.

J. Grunig and Repper (1992) described a four-part typology of publics: all issue publics (active about everything), apathetic publics (ignore all of the issues), single-issue publics (active on a few issues that impact a minority amount of a population).

Grunig (1983) defined publics as groups of diffused people who communicate similarly about a set of related issues actively, passively, or not at all. By categorizing publics by their communication behavior, it makes it feasible for organizations to plan a targeted public relations program for publics that fit their pattern of communication (Grunig, 1983).

One of the theories that has been used to understand how publics respond to organizations is the situational theory of publics (Ballinger, 1991; Botan & Taylor, 2004; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, Grunig, &Dozier, 2002; Pratt, 2001).

**Situational Theory of Publics**

Aldoory (2005) noted that, “the situational theory of publics is a highly regarded, well-tested theory in public relations that has significant potential for health communication” (p. 13). According to Aldoory, the theory has been designed specifically for improving the effects of intentional communication efforts, such as health campaigns, thus, the theory combines both the cognitive processes and sociological understandings of groups.

Grunig’s situational theory of publics predicts behavior according to three independent variables- problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). These three variables determine whether and how much an individual engages in either information processing or information seeking (Aldoory, 2001). Information processing is defined as taking in information that comes randomly; problem recognition is defined as the extent to which individuals recognize that issues or events are problems to be concerned about; cognition restraint is defined as the extent to which individuals see their behaviors as limited by obstacle or barriers beyond their control; and involvement is defined as the extent to which an issue or message is personally relevant (Aldoory, 2001). J. E. Grunig (1994) identified that publics seek information about an organization only when there is a problem.

J. E. Grunig (1983) noted that the situational theory of publics and previous research have confirmed that high problem recognition, high perceived involvement and low constraint recognition increase both active information seeking and passive information processing. Consequently, level of involvement also increases information seeking, but has little effect on information processing (J. E. Grunig). In other words, an individual rarely seeks information about situations that do not involve her, yet, she will process information about such a situation especially if she recognizes the situation as a problem.

J. E. Grunig’s (1994) results show that publics appear in any given situation as all-issues publics, apathetic publics, single-issue publics, or hot-issue publics. Also, Aldoory and Sha
(2006) explain that the independent variables of the situational theory of publics define these four categories of publics: all-issue publics are active on the problems, apathetic publics pay no attention to the problems, single-issue publics are selectively active, and hot-issue publics are active on a problem of widespread attention.

The situational theory of publics ability to predict thoughts and communication about an issue allows public relations practitioners to successfully manage their relationships with publics, thus positively contributing to public relations field (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).


Using the situational theory of publics, Aldoory (2001) conducted a study through the use of focus groups and interviews to explore the antecedent factors that may characterize the variable of involvement. The sample included women from different ethnic, class, educational and sexual backgrounds that explored antecedent factors that may have characterized involvement, a key variable in the situational theory of publics. According to Aldoory, the results from the study revealed that a consciousness of everyday life, source preference, self-identity, a consciousness of personal health, and cognitive analyses of message content influenced involvement with health messages.

Aldoory and Van Dyke (2006) used the situational theory of publics as the framework of their study that explored how people make meaning of news coverage of a terrorist attack on a U.S. food supply. Aldoory and Van Dyke noted that the situational theory of publics is a well-tested theory in public relations that offers a heuristic and parsimonious approach to audience reactions to hot issues covered in media.

Other studies that have used the situational theory of publics include Cameron and Yang (1991) who tested the level of personal distance participants perceived in regards to AIDS messages, and found that adding variable levels of personable closeness measurements to the situational theory could help practitioners better predict the activities of publics, and Pavlik (1988) who observed in heart disease campaigns that public relations practitioners should intimately research the complexity of knowledge within a public to determine the target levels of involvement to aim campaign messages.

Another study focused on women’s experiences with health communication was the Slater, Chipman, Auld, Keefe, and Kendall (1992) research. Slater et al. assessed female consumers’ reactions to public education messages describing chemical use. After conducting experiments and focus groups, Slater et al. found that the independent variables- problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement- were more predictive when the participants’ positive or negative cognitive responses to the message content were considered. An example is when participants had more positive thoughts and fewer negative thoughts about a message when they scored high in involvement.

I chose to use the situational theory of publics because Aldoory (2001) stipulated that the theory was one of the most useful theories for understanding why publics communicate and when they are most likely to communicate. It is appropriate to use the situational theory of publics because public relations practitioners require knowledge of publics because of their potential impact on the organization’s survival (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

I also chose the situational theory of publics because Aldoory (2001) argued that public relations appears to be essential to the success of health campaigns. She noted that “in women’s health communication, the theory is particularly relevant because of the central need to
understand how latent and aware publics can become more involved and active in their health decisions and health care” (p. 163).

**Health Communication**

According to Bornman and Bothma (2001), health communication concerns itself with how individuals in a society seek to maintain health and deal with health-related issues, that is, how health-related messages are disseminated, accessed, and interpreted.

The U.S Department of Health and Human Services (2000) defined health communication as follows:

The art and technique of informing, influencing, and motivating individual, institutional, and public audiences about important health issues. The scope of health communication includes disease prevention, health promotion, health care policy, and the business of health care as well as enchantment of the quality of life and health of individuals within the community.

Parrot (2004) added that health communication covers a broad range of topics including disease control and prevention, emergency preparedness and response, injury and violence prevention, environmental health, and workplace safety and health. For the study, I will use Bornman and Bothma’s (2001) definition of health communication because the study will show how the HPV vaccination messages are disseminated, accessed and how women are interpreting the messages.

Bornman and Bothma (2001) argued that by making use of mass media, the professionals can distribute their messages to the public, and, although long-term changes in attitude and behavior are uncertain, mass media tools can be effective for increasing awareness of health issues and paired together with other means of communication digital media, and can play an important part in changing attitudes and behavior. They noted that healthcare consumers use communication to make their healthcare needs known and to gather relevant health information to direct their own health care. If consumers are engaged in gathering information and making decisions on their own, it is important to know which sources and messages they are finding credible and retrieving this information from.

**Credibility**

Self (1996) explained that each of us believes some sources of information more than others. This is relevant for health campaigns because practitioners need to know which sources their target audiences perceive to be credible. Self summarized credibility as being defined in the following ways:

In terms of the credulity of those trusting; the characteristics of the presenter, the presenting organization or medium, and the information or message offered; and the circumstances under which the message is being perceived. It has also been defined in terms of the recipient of the message, the characteristics of the social setting within which the communication takes place, and the underlying perceived dimensions of communication. (p. 421)

According to Metzger, Flanagan, Eyal, Lemus, and McCann (2003), credibility is defined in terms of a speaker’s expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise refers to a communicator’s qualifications or ability to know the truth about a topic and trustworthiness is defined as perceptions of the communicator’s motivation to tell the truth about a topic. Metzger et al. noted that the credibility of organizational sources can be an important factor in influencing behavior.
and attitude change; the notion of organizational credibility suggests that the source of the message is not an individual person but an institutional structure with a history of experience and information.

Self (1996) highlighted the three major ideas behind source credibility. Self explained that first, sources are credible because their message’s rightness is perceived by the audience; second, sources are credible because they rightly read how to reveal themselves to particular audiences; and third, sources are perceived to be credible because of audience characteristics. Self also noted that Hovland found that high credibility sources changed attitudes more than low credibility sources, but that information was learned about equally well from both source types. This is important to judge when measuring credibility of messages because of the diverse audience who receive these messages and the plethora of information sources available.

Metzger et al. (2003) noted that the credibility of various media has been measured by comparing perceptions of the believability, accuracy, fairness, bias, trustworthiness, ease of use, completeness, reliability or attractiveness of the media themselves. When it comes to the Web as a conduit of information, most of the research focuses on political or news information, so it is important to explore media credibility and health communication.

Johnson and Kaye (1998) stated that past studies have suggested that how credible one views a medium is strongly related to how often one uses; therefore, through understanding how individuals judge source and medium credibility, we can begin to understand which media sources will serve as effective platforms of communication.

Source credibility can help us see how the consumer decides which medium is more credible – institutional, individual, media organization, special interest group, and electronic commerce. This will in turn determine whether the consumer is satisfied with the information she receives, and whether the consumer will become a frequent user of that website because she has confidence in the source and the information.

Research on media credibility has shown that believability, fairness, lack of bias, completeness, depth, and trustworthiness as the measures that have consistently emerged (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Johnson & Kaye, 1998).

Baxter and Bittner (1974) found that among high school and college students of the “television generation,” television was more credible that other media. Baby-faced female speakers were found to induce more attitude change when trust was questioned and mature-faced female speakers induced more attitude change when expertise was questioned (Brownlow, 1992).

Eysenbach and Kohler’s (2002) research to describe the techniques for retrieval and appraisal used by consumers when they search for health information on the Internet revealed that the participants assessed credibility of a website by primarily looking for the source, a professional design, a scientific or official touch, language, and ease of use. However the observational part of the research showed that no participants checked any “about us” sections of the websites, disclaimers, or disclaimer sections. Also, the post-search interviews showed that very few participants had noticed and remembered which websites they had retrieved the information from (Eysenbach & Kohler).

Kiousis (2001) evaluated perceptions of media credibility in the information age and found that of the three media channels—television, newspapers, and online news, newspapers rated the highest in credibility, followed by online news and television news respectively.

Other studies that focused on media credibility reported that older men and those with high level of education, income and media use were more likely to critical of the media (Mulder, 1981; Robinson & Kohut, 1998; ASNE, 1985). While men give newspapers the highest
credibility rating, women tend to judge television as the most credible (Greenberg, 1966; Westley & Severin, 1964). However, demographic variables had less effect on online credibility in the United States (Johnson & Kaye, 2000; 2002).

Self (1996) concluded that researchers found that not only manipulating messages changes their credibility, but repeating them or changing their position on a message alters the message’s believability. They also found that the audience hearing or viewing a message is extremely active in shaping its meaning based upon individual needs and experience (Self).

For the purposes of this study, I will use credibility to explore how women understand the meaning of HPV messages based on perceived credibility of the source and message. Additionally, the study will investigate how credibility affects women’s perceived consent to comply with HPV messages and their level of involvement with the messages.

Research Questions

Research questions were asked instead of hypotheses being stated because there is not enough research done on this topic in relation to women. The theories have not been tested enough in respect to women and health communication, so it was logical to ask research questions to refine the theories and to add to existing knowledge of the theories.

From the literature reviewed, the following research questions were developed to guide the data collection and data analysis of this thesis study.

RQ1: How do women make meaning of the problem of HPV?

The gaps in the literature exist because there are no specific studies that target women and how they make meaning of HPV information and messages since the introduction of Gardasil, the immunization. The literature does not show the processes women go through when evaluating information on the HPV messages from the various media sources. Many studies have replicated and supported the theory, but few have focused on health issues and women as key publics (Aldoory, 2001).

RQ2: How do women perceive constraints to comply with HPV messages?

Problem and constraint recognition will be reviewed in order to assess types of publics for future HPV campaigns. By exploring this question, researchers and practitioners can understand the extent to which individuals recognize that HPV is a problem to be concerned about. Also the question addresses the extent to which individuals see their behaviors as limited by barriers beyond their control. This is relevant because we can learn what these barriers are and how they can be addressed in the health campaigns.

RQ3: How do women understand their level of involvement with HPV messages?

Examining the level of involvement variable will allow for the possibility of behavior change in HPV prevention. Since level of involvement is concerned with the extent to which an individual finds the message or issue to be personally relevant, this question can help us to understand if women are feeling connected to the vaccination campaign message and HPV concerns.

RQ4: How does credibility affect how women make meaning of the problem of HPV, perceive constraints to comply with HPV messages and understand their level of involvement with HPV messages?

The research found on credibility focuses mainly on news and politics. This research will focus credibility on health information from various media sources. Understanding which sources and messages women find credible when it comes to health messages will assist practitioners in using effective channels and crafting credible messages for campaigns.
In the following section I will discuss the methods to be used, the sample of the research, the procedure and data analysis.

**Method**

The purpose of this study is to examine women’s perceptions and beliefs about HPV messages received from different media and to understand if women have become more aware of the risks and prevention of HPV since Merck launched its campaign to introduce Gardasil, the vaccination. In this section, I will discuss the methods, sample, research procedure, and data analysis for this research project. Also, I will discuss the ethical research issues that I will face as I conduct this research, and I will explain how the participants will be debriefed and compensated.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research exposes the characteristics present in a situation or population. In other words, focus group data should result in answering the qualitative questions “why?” and “how?” rather than “how many?” or “how much?” (L. A. Grunig, 1992). L. A. Grunig explained that qualitative research such as focus groups are useful in identifying the range of behaviors and attitudes inherent in human social interaction. Reeves (2000) stated that qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon from the perspectives of participants and in their own words. Accordingly, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argued that the qualitative researcher strives for depth in his or her research effort. “Qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping to always get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand” (p. 5). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) presented qualitative research as an approach interested in human understanding. By using participants’ talk and gestures as the units of measurements, researchers can study how humans internalize, analyze, interpret, incorporate, articulate, produce, and share phenomenon in society and relationships around them (Lindlof & Taylor).

My study aims to understand how women construct meaning from HPV messages they receive from various media, and if credibility of the source and message have an effect on how the individual constructs meaning from the HPV messages. According to Aldoory (2001), most research on situational theory has been quantitative. Because of the previous quantitative approaches, this study will be a qualitative attempt to understand meaning making and how female publics conceptualize their involvement with HPV health messages.

For the purposes of this study, in-depth interviews and a focus group will be used. Triangulation is the use of more than one source of data such as focus groups and in-depth interviews, “the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 8).

**Focus Groups**

L. A. Grunig (1992) observed that, “Focus groups are particularly valuable because they uncover why people think what they think and make possible unbridled conversations about sensitive issues, even among strangers” (p. 1). L. A. Grunig also noted that a focus group usually consists of six to 12 participants who are led by a trained facilitator to discuss one topic or issue in depth. Initially the discussion is general and becomes more specific focusing on the concept of the issue. L. A. Grunig stated that a group can be less intimidating or frustrating to the subjects than some other research methods because people with a common problem are willing
to share more openly with individuals with a similar issue. Group settings can provide a safe atmosphere that can generate responses more than the sum of individuals’ inputs (Lederman, 1990). McDaniel (1979) highlighted that focus groups are response oriented rather than question oriented. Hansen (1998) noted that group interviews are more cost-efficient because a wider range of people can be interviewed within the same limitations of time, resources, and research money; and groups allow the researcher to observe how audiences make sense of media through conversation and interaction with each other. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) stated that focus groups allow researchers to collect preliminary information about a topic or phenomenon however; focus groups can be used in pilot studies to detect ideas that will be investigated further using another research method.

The discussion will be moderated by a facilitator. The principal roles of the facilitator will be tailored according to Hansen (1998) guidelines:

- The issues, topics, and foci outlined in the interview guide are covered in the course of discussion (this task includes managing the time spent on each topic),
- A reasonable balance of contributions is maintained (that is, no single individual is allowed to commandeer and dominate the group), and
- The discussion is kept on course and not allowed to drift off in directions of little or no relevance

Liebes and Katz (1990) held their focus groups in people’s homes for the purposes of the study and to bring together families who knew each other. Schlesinger, Dobash, Dobash, and Weaver (1992) held most of their focus groups on a university campus because their respondents were victims of domestic violence, so a domestic setting would not have been appropriate or favorable to sincere discussion.

Other limitations suggested by Wimmer and Dominick (2006) are that in a focus group, a self-appointed group leader may monopolize the conversation and attempt to impose his or her opinion on other participants. Also, if the focus group is composed of volunteers, it may not necessarily represent the population from which they are drawn. In anticipation of this, I will use a trained moderator who will facilitate the discussion and make sure everyone has an opportunity to be heard. Since dominant talkers are often spotted in the pre-session small talk, Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested seating the dominant individuals next to the moderator so that the moderator can exercise control by the use of body language. Other techniques they suggested are for the moderator to avoid eye contact with the talker or verbally shifting attention to another participant. On the contrary, shy participants should be places directly across the table to maximize eye contact, or the moderator can call on them by name (Krueger & Casey).

Conducting focus groups will be beneficial to this study because it will allow me to collect rich data from the participants about the topic, and a focus group will allow me to collect preliminary data about my topic before I conduct the one-on-one interviews.

Personal Interviews

Hansen (1998) argued that semi-structured individual interviews or semi-structured group interviews are research approaches which allow the researcher a potentially much richer and more sensitive type of data on the dynamics of audiences and their relations to media than surveys.

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), face-to-face interviews provide greater depth and detail, and the interviewer can develop a rapport with the respondents and may be able to elicit replies to sensitive questions. Also, Reinharz (1992) noted that semi-structured
interviews were appropriate for qualitative studies investigating women’s meaning making because the technique is “consistent with many women’s interest in avoiding control over other and developing a sense of connectedness with people” (p. 20).

Disadvantages associated with interviews, as noted by Wimmer and Dominick (2006), are that since in-depth interviews are usually non-standard, each respondent may answer a slightly different version of a question; in-depth interviews are susceptible to interviewer bias and despite practice and training, some interviewers may unconsciously communicate their attitudes through loaded questions. In-depth interviews also present a problem in data analysis; a researcher given the same body of data taken form an interview may wind up with interpretations significantly different from those of the original investigator (Wimmer & Dominick).

Personal interviews will benefit the study because I will be able to cross check the data I receive in the interview sessions with the data from the focus groups. Personal interviews will also allow me to go more in depth with the questions because I will be able to probe and get more personal answers. This is a good method because the topic of the study is sensitive, so the personal interview allows for a more private session where the respondent can answer more openly than in a focus group setting.

**Sample**

I will use a purposive and convenient sample of female participants. A purposive sample consists of participants selected for specific characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who fail to meet these criteria, and a convenient sample is a collection of readily accessible subjects for study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

Potential participants who respond will be asked to recommend other potential participants. Building your sample based upon references is called snowballing. The snowball sample begins when the researcher finds someone who is willing to serve the dual role of interviewee and guide to potential new interviewees (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This person refers to the researcher people from her circle of acquaintances that fit the criteria of the study sample. These contacts may in turn refer some of their acquaintances to the researcher thus creating an expanding pool of respondents (Lindlof & Taylor).

The age of the women will range from 18 to 26 years old, and they can be of any race and sexual orientation. Participants will be limited to those that have been exposed to HPV and cervical cancer messages. The women will be recruited through advertisement in local media, fliers posted around the OU Norman campus, and listserv emails will be sent to student groups.

Respondents will be selected based on a predetermined set of screening requirements. The questions will ask whether they have been exposed to HPV and cervical cancer messages. This sample will be chosen because currently there has been a lot of attention being given to cervical cancer vaccination, and this is the age group that is being encouraged to get the vaccination. It is recommended by the makers of the vaccination that the vaccine be administered at age 11 or before one is sexually active and/or before the age of 26. In March 2007, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) formally recommended the vaccination for females between the ages of 11 and 26 (Edwards, 2007). According to Colgrove (2006), the HPV vaccine has the greatest benefit when it is given before a person becomes sexually active, thus the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that the vaccine be given routinely to girls at 11 or 12 years of age.
Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stated that in qualitative research, the sample size is usually considered to be a factor that cannot be decided until much later in the course of study because researchers sample until a critical threshold of interpretative competence has been reached.

Procedure

Prior to the focus group session and personal interviews, I will pre-test my interview guide to ensure that the questions are not confusing and the words flow smoothly. I will pre-test the questions on either colleagues or people who represent the sample. Questions will be amended per suggestions made by the pre-test process.

Hansen (1998) recommended that at the point of formal invitation, prospective participants should be told in general terms what the purpose of the focus group discussion is, where it will take place, and who the researchers are and what they represent. If an incentive is offered, Hansen advised that is should be made clear at this point what the incentive is and how and when it will be paid. Once the participants who have been approached agree, it is important to send written confirmation of their agreement to participate along with confirmation of the location, date, and time of the focus group. Participants will be contacted again immediately before the date of the focus group to remind them about the time, location and any final details. The same procedure will be used for the personal interviews.

Before the focus group and personal interviews are conducted, I will obtain prior permission from the University of Oklahoma’s Norman campus Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB ensures the research is within the guidelines and is consistent with the three ethical principals as defined in the Belmont Report. The three principals are: justice, beneficence and respect for persons. The IRB also ensures the protection of human subjects in all research.

All participants will be given a standard confidentiality form designed by the IRB to sign. The form ensures participants that their identity will be kept confidential, it informs participants that they can withdraw from the process at any time during the research and the form gives participants the opportunity to deny or approve permission to tape record the interviews.

After the focus group and interviews, participants will be thanked and compensated, and any questions or concerns the participants have will be addressed. Participants will be reminded what the purpose of the study is and how the information collected will be used. Participants will be assured that their information will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used to identify them in the study.

Focus group. The focus group interview will be conducted first. Snack and beverages will be provided during both sessions. To reduce some barriers that often keep people from participating, steps will be taken to increase the comfort levels of the group participants. These steps include but are not limited to assuring participants that their information will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms and keeping the audio tapes in a secure location; creating a good rapport between the facilitator and participants through introductions and discussing the purpose of the study; and creating a non-intimidating atmosphere. A site that is convenient and familiar to the participants will be chosen. Both the focus group and interviews will be tape recorded with the consent of the participants.

Interviews. For the interviews, neutral locations will be agreed upon by the researcher and the participants. Neutral locations can include but are not limited to the participants’ home, coffee shops, and meeting rooms or offices on the University of Oklahoma campus. Access to these locations will be gained through permission by the participant to use her home, by university officials to use office or room space. If participants need transportation to any location,
then it will be provided for them. Interviews are projected to last from one to three hours to complete. Prior to the interview process a topic guide covering the key research issues and problems will be prepared.

The same introduction and tape recording procedure will be used for both the focus group and personal interviews. According to Bauer and Gaskell (2003), the interview should start with some introductory comments about the research, a word of thanks to the interviewee for agreeing to talk and a request for permission to tape record the session. Bauer and Gaskell noted that using an audio recorder allows the interviewer to concentrate o what is said rather than thinking of notes. They also warned to double check that the recorder is working properly. According to L. A. Grunig (1992), taping serves two main purposes: First it allows the client and any other relevant audiences to see and hear everything that goes on without being intruded; and second, taping provides a comprehensive record of what is said for the purposes of analysis, review and writing of a report.

Data Analysis

All the interviews will be digitally audio-taped and transcribed by me and a third party. I will keep the digital recordings in a secure location. I will record notes and initial reactions to the interviews in a journal. In the journal, I will note initial themes, questions to bring up in future sessions, problems that I will identify during participant interaction. These “reflective remarks” are suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) to “strengthen coding, in pointing to deeper or underlying issues that deserve analytic attention” (p. 66).

I will read the transcripts and include observer comments (OCs) (Miles and Huberman, 1994) in the transcripts. The OCs should reference my reactions, assessments, emerging themes, and connections to other interviews.

Interviews and focus group transcripts will be analyzed and coded separately by looking for common themes and functions of these themes. The codes and categories from the interviews will be “checked” against those of the focus group to see if the transcriptions are of similar type or not.

The coding procedure to be used was suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994); they recommended the themes be reported on the basis of commonality and uniqueness; collapsing similar themes into one category and defining the constructs of each theme.

Coding will be conducted by frequently reading over single utterances of participants and slowly combining single statements into encompassing categories and concepts. As Van Zoonen (1994) stated, these atypical points of view will help protect against the fallacy of too much coherence in data.

Wimmer and Dominick (2006) suggested that after the data has been prepared for analysis, each unit of analysis should be put into a set of provisional categories, and as each new unit is examined, it should be compared to the other units previously assigned to that category to see whether its inclusion is appropriate. If some units of analysis do not fit in any preexisting category, new classifications may have to be created. Units that fit in more than one category should be copied and included where relevant. Wimmer and Dominick also noted that during the category refinement stage, the researcher should write out rules or propositions that attempt to describe the underlying meaning that defines the category. In the final stage of the process, the report summarizing the research should be written in an integrated and coherent explanation of the phenomenon.
Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are often discussed and debated in qualitative research. Reliability has to do with the consistency of observations: whether a research instrument will give the same results every time it is applied (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Validity has to do with the truth of the observations: whether a research instrument is accurately measuring the value of the object of study, and external validity is the extent to which the results of the study can be generalized to the population (Lindlof & Taylor).

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stated that in qualitative inquiry, validation can be achieved by evaluating several forms of evidence (triangulation) and by cycling some of the accounts back through the participants (member validation). Triangulation was explained as the comparison of two or more forms of evidence with respect to an object of research interest. Underlying most uses of triangulation is the goal of seeking convergence of meaning from more than one direction. If data from two or more methods seem to converge on a common explanation, the biases of the individual methods are thought to “cancel out” and validation of the claim is enhanced (p. 240).

For this study, two methods will be used for triangulation; I will use a focus group and conduct one-on-one interviews to collect data. For member validation, during the interviews and focus groups I will “check-in” with the participants to ensure that I understood them correctly, and I will recap at the end what I believe I heard from them. I will also choose a couple of participants to review my analysis before the final write-up for feedback about the accuracy of my reporting.

Reliability can play a role in qualitative research by applying it to data analysis where the researcher has the opportunity to check the stability of category definitions by using an intercoder reliability test. To ensure reliability, I will use constant research instruments (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Although intercoder checks are described as unrepeatable in qualitative research, they will allow me to check for proper analysis and interpretation (Lindlof & Taylor). For example, the semi-structured interviews will allow me to question the participants in a similar way without forcing them to answer questions that are not relevant to their interest or overshadowed by their view of HPV or cervical cancer.

Ethical Concerns

As a qualitative researcher, I must consider the ethical issues that I might come across during my study. Schram (2006) listed four key considerations in establishing trustworthiness of a researcher’s inquiry from an ethical standpoint: posturing and presentation of self (how do I balance my research commitments with my desire to engage authentically those who are participating in the study), disclosure and exchange (how much and what types of information so I share with participants, and for what reason), making public the private (how do I address the potential of betraying the trust of study participants), and disengaging and staying in touch (how do I build relationships amid expectations that I will eventually depart from the setting).

In an effort to avoid the ethical issues mentioned above, I will present myself to the participants and disclose to them the purpose of my study. I will also give the participants informed consent forms to sign, and as suggested by Schram (2006) “always have in mind clear boundaries for your inquiry, and then have ways to convey those boundaries to those with who you are interacting” (p. 143).

Informed consent forms will allow me to inform participants as fully as possible the study’s purpose and audience, provide the participants with enough information so that they
understand what their agreement to participate entails, allow participants to give that consent willingly and make participants understand that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Limitations

Potential limitations include the costs that are associated with personal interviews and focus groups; I will try to cut costs by first asking for volunteers for the study. As a backup plan, I am going to apply for a three hundred dollar grant from the OU Graduate Student Senate to fund my research so that I can use some of the money for compensation.

Wimmer and Dominick noted that recording equipment and physical characteristics of the location may inhibit respondents; and data produced may not be useful if respondents are allowed to stray too far from the topic that is under consideration. The equipment will be double checked before the session. Notepads and pens will be available incase the audio recorder malfunctions and notes need to be taken. More than one audio recorder will be on hand to ensure that there is at least one working device.

If respondents refuse to be audio recorded, it may cause a problem in the focus group situation. For the interviews, if a respondent refuses to be audio recorded then the interview may take longer that previously anticipated because everything will have to be written down. Participants will be warned prior to the date of the interviews so that if anyone is opposed to being audio taped, then they can be excluded from the study.

Other distractions that may occur include bad weather, few people attending, and an inadequate meeting place. If bad weather occurs, Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested contacting each person to let him or her know that the session has been canceled. If few people attend, the session will go on, but I will find out what kept people from coming. As suggested by Kruger and Casey, I will arrive early to the interview location to ensure that it is adequate and everything is set up correctly.

After the research is completed, the following section will discuss the results, conclusion, and recommendations for future studies.

References


Measuring the Impact of Employee Communication on Employee Comprehension and Action: A Case Study of a Major International Firm

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Abstract
This study describes the employee communication strategy of a global firm and the research that compares communication output and outcome data from 2004 and 2007. The paper also examines the impact of various employee communication tactics and channels in engendering employee comprehension and action in support of the firm’s objectives. Results of a global communication survey indicate that timely, complete, and accurate corporate communication and face-to-face managerial communication can help to secure employee action in favor of company goals. This case study also serves as an example of how corporate communicators can measure and evaluate their employee communication programs.

Employee communication has several purposes, and motivating employees to action in support of organizational objectives is one important one. Most employee communication functions rely on a multiple audience strategy such as face-to-face managerial communication activities and all-employee channels, including newsletters, magazines, posters, videos and intranets. Some employee communications functions add a formal feedback mechanism to their strategies. However, most of the effort is placed on producing informational material and delivering it—an output-centered model that often has no measurement strategy attached to the plan.

At the subject company, the employee communication function took a different approach. The company defined a body of knowledge—a set of topics that the organization’s management deemed most important for its employees to know—and set about to inculcate those topics into its employee communication strategy. The plan sought to improve communication effectiveness to increase both employee awareness and understanding of the body of knowledge and to motivate employees to action in support of this body of knowledge.

This study describes the employee communication strategy of this firm and the research that compares communication output and outcome data from 2004 and 2007. This paper also investigates how changes in employee communication outcome metrics are related to managerial communication, employee communication tactics, and communication channels.

Overview of the Subject Company
In 2003, the company’s workforce faced round after round of cut-backs, divestitures and layoffs. Where there were once some 100,000 employees globally, there now were just about 88,000, most of these in manufacturing locations around the world.

The company, which was organized regionally, was doing effectively no global, corporate-wide employee communication. Its intranet was minimally used, and then, only by employees in North America. Intranet news content was limited to repurposing articles from its headquarters print. A subset of this content was also placed in a database and sent by email to fewer than 200 publication editors, HR or PR representatives worldwide.
The company left most of its internal communication strategy and execution to communicators within the regional business units. The internal communication challenge, therefore, was multi-fold—no global vehicles, no global strategy, significant change management needs, a demoralized workforce and no resources solely dedicated to corporate internal communication.

The Communications department hired its first corporate internal communications manager in years in December of 2003. Among the first actions of this manager was to stop publication of the headquarters print newsletter and reallocate the resources to enhancing the intranet, which could boast of only some 4,000 daily visits.

In addition to the implementation of tactical upgrades to the intranet, the Communications department initiated a strategic planning process that included the following elements:

1. Establish, through research, a body of knowledge comprised of:
   - Required actions and activities designed to continuously improve processes and reduce errors
   - Business and industry information to fuel literacy, acumen and knowledge
   - Corporate and business strategies and priorities
   - Information designed to increase personal responsibility for asking questions and giving ideas

2. Communicate via the intranet this body of knowledge.

3. Communicate to company managers and employees information that helps provide context around the inevitable changes that result from its normal course of business.

4. Provide to managers and employees tools, tips and techniques to help them create mutual dialogue and discussion, both for singular events and ongoing needs.

5. Cost-effectively and efficiently measure outcomes of these activities, using surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews. These three outcomes were of significant importance:
   - **Action**: To what extent do employees see their activities in a wider context? How willing are employees to take action in support of company objectives?
   - **Comprehension**: What elements of the body of knowledge are employees able to discuss?
   - **Managerial Communication**: To what extent do employees observe their managers as communicating effectively?

To provide a baseline of the three communication outcomes of action, comprehension and managerial communication, the company’s Communications department implemented a survey via email to employees in 2004. Omission of employees who did not have e-mail was intentional, reflecting the need to contain costs. The baseline survey revealed deficits in awareness and understanding of many of the company’s business strategies. Less than half of the respondents said they were at least somewhat well-informed about many elements within the body of knowledge. Further, less than one-third agreed or strongly agreed that they were kept
informed about the reasons behind company decisions; less than half agreed that the information the company sent them was accurate and straightforward. Indeed, some 38% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Armed with this data, the Communications department put extra effort behind communicating the body of knowledge. Though direct appeal, Communications enlisted communicators around the world to embrace the body of knowledge, either through news stories they submitted for the corporate intranet or included in their own local print vehicles. Communications hosted a renaming contest for the intranet with employees. The employee-generated new name debuted in June 2004 followed shortly thereafter by a new intranet-based Poll. This daily poll, displayed on the home page, focused four days per week on serious business topics carved from the body of knowledge. In February 2005, a daily news E-mail debuted, with subscriber count rising to 10,500. Additional enhancements were made throughout the years.

There were noticeable improvements in communication outputs for Communications. Intranet home page views rose from 23,000-25,000 per day to 36,000-40,000 in 2007. Total pages viewed on the intranet had climbed from 3.6 million per month in 2003 to more than 10 million per month.

Although the improvement in communication outputs was encouraging, the Communications department recognized the need to compare the outcomes of managerial communication, employee comprehension and action in 2007 to those of 2004. Did scores on these measures improve in parallel to the output? If so, which tactics were most effective in affecting these potential changes?

**Review of the Literature**

As the Internet has grown into a mass communication channel, its cousin, the intranet, has also risen in importance as a channel for employee communication. Murgolo-Poore, Pitt and Ewing (2002) cite Ford Motor Company and Cisco Systems claims that intranets let people communicate and collaborate more effectively, and observe that “Undoubtedly, intranets have the potential to become powerful mechanisms for management in organizations that are increasingly fragmented and global” (p. 114). From focus group research Murgolo-Poore et al. inductively generated a 15-question intranet effectiveness checklist, of which most questions center on transformation of collaboration among employees.

Later survey research with 1,800 firms by Murgolo-Poore, Pitt, Berthon and Prendegast (2003) demonstrates that effective intranets are better equipped to disseminate information, in particular corporate intelligence. Boeing’s ability to make available vital information at employee desktops via the intranet resulted in better creativity, speed and collaboration (Murgolo-Poore et al., 2003). Murgolo-Poore also refer to Glaxo Wellcome Canada as a company that now “knows what it knows and doesn’t know and minimizes rework” thanks to its embrace of the intranet (p. 173).

Emphasizing organizational strategy via the intranet has been cited as an important employee communication goal. Sinickas (2006, February) used results from communication audits conducted with profit organizations and nonprofits to observe that understanding of business strategy in organizations is generally weak. According to Sinickas’ research, among organizations where such understanding is strong, access to an intranet yields higher scores on strategic information. Managers’ and supervisors’ verbal explanations of organizational strategy remain the most important predictor of employee comprehension of strategy. Most interestingly,
managerial explanation of organizational strategy is most useful if placed in the context of a respective business unit or geography. In another white paper, Sinickas (2006, December) outlines ways to measure and evaluate managerial communication.

Survey research with 21 large organizations by Sinickas (2005) indicates that organization should not rely solely on electronic sources of information. According to Sinickas’ research, employees prefer a combination of electronic sources, including e-mails, e-newsletters, and intranets, in addition to face-to-face sources of information. Sinickas (2006, June) also cautions against a “cascade” briefing process in which managers brief employees to impart knowledge. Sinickas’ research indicates the importance of measuring how much of the information is actually retained by people. Using a number of sources may help prevent the inevitable loss of information that travels through employee layers.

Global consulting firm BlessingWhite (2007) researched employee engagement and concluded that, “strategy isn’t getting very far out of the boardroom” – though they note that there is progress (p.2). However, a small proportion of their 714 survey respondents (19%) “believe that their organization’s strategy is well communicated, and everyone’s work priorities support that strategy” (p. 2). BlessingWhite’s recommendations include treating such organizational alignment as “the secret ingredient in engagement and retention.” (p. 4)

If communicating strategy has been identified as important, what specific elements need to be included via an intranet? In terms of identifying appropriate content, intranet consultant Ward (2007, p. 10) emphasizes the importance of automating processes on the intranet, particularly providing employee contact information and as a mechanism for gathering sales leads and improvement ideas. Further, Ward declares, “Content is king,” (2006, p. 44) and outlines timeliness, relevancy, cogency and good usability as characteristics of effective content. He also describes subject matter of particular interest to employees, based on his work as an intranet consultant and research from Hewitt, the HR consulting firm. Company goals, financial results, products/services, competition and industry trends make the list, as does the traditional action item of how employees can help the company reach its goals (Ward, 2006, p. 46).

Many case studies and research document the impact of effective employee communication. The Corporate Executive Council (2005) is explicit in connecting communication effectiveness and employee engagement, saying: “A company’s ability to communicate—specifically, to lay out a vision of its strategy and direction that is clearly understood by its employees and linked to their day to day lives—is important not because communicators assert that it is, but because employees cite it as the most important driver of their commitment to the firm.” (p. v) The CEC goes on to say that companies with more engaged employees are likely to outperform their peers. Moreover, according to the research by the CEC, of the ten top levers of intent to stay, internal communication is the highest, but two other levers are of note: employee understanding of connection between his/her work and organizational strategy, and clear organizational goals.

Case studies conducted by Collins (n.d.), Crittelli (2007), Nicholson (2003), and Witt (2006) explain and document the effectiveness of employee communication programs in their organizations. In her case study of General Motors, Collins provides a process model that delineates employee communication goals as fourfold: to provide information, to garner understanding, to foster commitment and ultimately to secure actions from employees to support General Motors’ goals. Crittelli, CEO of Pitney Bowes, articulates how his senior employee communication director measures the impact of employee communication via reach, engagement and comprehension metrics. Crittelli further emphasizes the importance of using measurement to
make immediate adjustments to communication strategy and tactics. Nicholson’s case study of Sears, Roebuck and Company and Witt’s case study of Rockwell Automation both elucidate how measurement of employee communication helps garner respect from the C suite and to better direct future employee communication programs.

In summary, research suggests the importance of intranets and managerial face-to-face communication in conveying organizational strategy to employees. Increased understanding of strategy has been shown to be related to increased engagement, collaboration among employees and employee action. Less conclusive in the research, however, are the specifics of these relationships. For example, which features of effective managerial communication are most important to fostering employee comprehension and action? Which features of effective electronic communication are most important? Scant attention has also centered on examining which combination of sources of information is most useful to enabling employee comprehension. These are some gaps this study addresses.

As explained earlier, the subject company faced difficult challenges in 2004, when a new employee communication strategy was launched with the specific goal of enhancing employee comprehension of business strategy and goals and action on behalf of the body of knowledge. In 2007, the company sought to measure and evaluate whether there were improvements in these metrics as well as what factors might have accounted for potential increases. More specifically, this case study seeks to answer the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: Did the outcome metrics of managerial communication, employee comprehension and action improve from 2004 to 2007?

Hypothesis 2: Effective employee communication will be positively related to employee comprehension of goals and strategy and to action in support of the body of knowledge.

RQ2: Which attributes of employee communication are most predictive of employee comprehension of goals and strategy?

Hypothesis 3: Effective managerial communication will be positively related to employee comprehension of goals and strategy and to action in support of the body of knowledge.

RQ3: Which attributes of managerial communication are most predictive of employee comprehension of goals and strategy?

RQ4: Which sources of information are most predictive of employee comprehension of goals and strategy?

Method

Data Collection

The Communications department disseminated an electronic survey to approximately 30,000 employees in 2007. Only employees with access to email received the survey, again reflective of the desires of management to limit cost. The email cover letter contained links to an externally hosted survey instrument in 10 languages. A total of 2,828 employees responded, for a response rate of 9.2 percent. This survey was substantively the same as the one conducted in 2004.
Respondents to the survey were employed in these regions around the world: Asia (9.7%), Europe & Africa (11.6%), South America (13.6%), North America (45.1%) and other (7%). Table one describes the various business units where employees worked.

**Measurement**

Thirty-six questions were designed to measure one of four concepts: (a) employee communication effectiveness, (b) managerial communication, (c) employee comprehension and (d) employee action in support of company goals. Employee communication effectiveness measured the extent to which employees view the communication efforts from the corporate Communications department and their regional business management as being effective. Managerial communication questions measured the extent to which employees observe their managers as communicating effectively. Employee comprehension questions measured the extent to which employees are well informed about the material the company expects them to know. And, finally, employee action measured the extent to which employees actually changed work behavior to align with the goals and strategy outlined by the company. These 36 questions were measured on a five-point Likert scale with “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” serving as anchors, except as otherwise noted.

Exploratory factor analysis of the 36 items with a varimax rotation yielded three factors, not four, that accounted for 61.82% of the variance. The one missing factor was employee action in support of company goals. Cronbach Alphas for the three factors were investigated and found to be reliable for the 11 items underlying employee communication effectiveness (.94), the 11 items constituting management communication (.95), and the 10 items measuring employee comprehension (.92). Accordingly, the respective items were added to create three indexes.

Employee preferred sources of information was measured by asking employees to rate each source according to how valuable it was to them. Employees were asked to rate 10 sources of information, including people, newsletters, email, intranet, news media and the grapevine. Source of information questions were measured on a five-point Likert scale with “very valuable” and “not at all valuable” serving as anchors. Questionnaire items and mean scores for all 2004 and 2007 data are provided in Table 2.

**Results**

Research question one asked whether the metrics of managerial communication, employee comprehension and employee action improved at the company from 2004 to 2007. As indicated by Table 2, every question representative of these concepts showed improvement from 2004. A few improvements are particularly noteworthy. Employee comprehension about the company’s business strategy increased 9.94%, the perception of accuracy of communication from the corporate Communications department increased 13.1%, managerial communication helping employees to understand how their performance contributes to company success increased 10.5%, and employee action regarding “I have the information I need to do my job effectively” increased 13.72%.

Hypothesis two posited that effective employee communication would be positively related to employee comprehension of company goals and strategy and to action in support of this body of comprehension. Table 3 provides a correlation matrix among the indexes of employee communication effectiveness, employee comprehension, managerial communication, and the individual items underlying employee action in support of company knowledge. As indicated by Table 3, there is a positive strong relationship between employee communication
effectiveness and employee comprehension ($r = .722, p = .000$). There are also moderate, positive relationships between all items measuring employee action and effective employee communication. Hypothesis two is supported.

Research question two investigated which attributes of employee communication are most predictive of employee comprehension of company goals and strategy. Multiple regression analysis was run, with the employee comprehension index serving as the dependent variable and the individual items underlying effective employee communication serving as the independent variables. As indicated in Table 4, five indicators explain approximately 53% of the variance of employee comprehension when considered collectively. The attribute, “I am kept informed about the reasons behind company decisions” emerged as the most important predictor (.264). It is also important to note how many of the communications from businesses/functions—not the corporate Communications department per se—are significant indicators of employee comprehension.

According to hypothesis three, managerial communication would be positively related to employee comprehension of company goals and strategy and to action in support of this body of comprehension. As reported in Table 3, there is a statistically significant, positive strong relationship between managerial communication and employee comprehension ($r = .59$). There are also moderate, positive relationships between all items indicative of employee action and managerial communication. Hypothesis three is supported.

Research question three investigated which attributes of employee communication are most predictive of employee comprehension of company goals and strategy. As indicated by the results of regression analysis in Table 4, four variables explain approximately 40% of the variance of employee comprehension. The variable “my supervisor helps me understand how my performance contributes to company success,” is the most important and “my supervisor is positive about the company’s prospects for the future” is the second most important when all items are considered collectively.

Research question four examined which sources of information were most predictive of employee comprehension (the dependent variable). The correlation matrix in Table 5 indicates the relationship between the various sources and employee comprehension. All relationships are statistically significant except for peers/grapevine. All relationships are positive, ranging from weak to moderate. The strongest relationships exist between employee comprehension and sources of information that are face-to-face such as immediate supervisor ($r = .387$), immediate supervisor’s manager ($r = .443$), business leader ($r = .509$), and corporate senior management ($r = .493$). The relationship between employee comprehension and the intranet is positive, but weak ($r = .31$). The results of the regression analysis indicate that five sources listed above explain approximately 36% of the variance of employee comprehension when considered collectively. Business leaders (.20), immediate supervisor (.190), and corporate senior management (.176) are the most important sources that contribute to employees’ comprehension about company-related information. The news e-mail (.08) and the intranet itself (.07) have a nominal, but positive, impact on employee comprehension.

Discussion

This case study is significant because it demonstrates the usefulness of using both output and outcome metrics to evaluate an employee communication program. As other case studies (Collins, n.d., Critelli 2007, Nicholson, 2003, and Witt, 2006) have demonstrated, public relations professionals can not rely on anecdotes or output metrics (ex: Web site hits, reach, etc.)
to evaluate efforts. Benchmarking quantifiable outcomes enables public relations professionals to better direct future initiatives and to demonstrate the value of their work. For the company’s corporate Communications department, these data provided the opportunity to support funding decisions both at the corporate and business unit levels. Summary data were provided to the company’s executive management team, which then asked for cross-tabulations for their respective areas of responsibility. The results informed the company’s communication planning processes at the corporate level for 2008, but more importantly, helped the corporate information technology function in its efforts to build infrastructure improvements. Because of the increase in use and perception of value of the intranet, the company launched a project to enhance collaboration tools, using the intranet as a platform. The demonstrated improvement also drove projects to add sites to the intranet, as well as updates to several others.

As indicated by the descriptive data presented in this study, company scores on every question related to communication effectiveness, employee comprehension and action and managerial communication increased. The metrics for managerial communication were particularly high, mostly around 3.80 on the Likert scale that ranged from one to five. The positive scores on these items indicate that company managers are doing the things they should do with respect to communication—holding meetings, listening, setting goals and offering recognition to employees.

The mean scores for employee communication effectiveness, comprehension and action averaged around 3.5. Although there is room for improvement, the company’s Communications management was particularly pleased to learn that employee comprehension of company strategy company strategies increased nearly 10% from 2004 to 2007. This illustrated that the content improvement in the intranet about communicating company strategy was working.

The survey revealed one area that warrants future attention from Communications: helping employees understand the reasons behind company decisions. This communication item was the most important predictor of employee comprehension. Because the mean score for this item was only 3.03, the company’s Communication department plans to focus more content on describing reasons behind decisions in future efforts.

Even though this was a case study of only one organization, there are important findings that have relevance for other organizations, particularly large, global companies. First, the results of this study indicate the strong relationship between effective employee communication and employee comprehension ($r = .72$). Intuitively, this relationship makes sense: timely, relevant, complete and accurate communication is positively related to employee understanding of corporate strategy and goals. This study has helped to validate this, and employee communication professionals might be encouraged to know that such tactical steps can move the needle on outcomes. The research also validates the normative positive relationship between effective managerial communication and employee comprehension ($r = .61$). As past research has suggested (Sinickas, 2006, February and December), managerial communication is a strong indicator of employee comprehension of strategy. The data here reinforce this relationship.

The research here also helps us to better understand which elements of communication and managerial communication are most useful in yielding employee comprehension. The regression analysis indicates that the most important communication items emanate from business units and functions, not corporate Communications. The importance of contextualized communication makes sense, and reinforces prior research with employees who said that organizational strategy information is most useful when placed in the context of their respective unit (Sinickas, February 2006). Public relations professionals responsible for global
communication strategy need to work closely with respective communicators in disseminating relevant content to employees.

Helping employees understand how their performance contributes to an organization’s success may be one of the most important things management can do to yield better employee comprehension of corporate strategy and goals. According to the results of this study, managers should also remain positive and share important business information with employees to increase comprehension.

Also encouraging in this study are the positive, moderate relationships between employee communication, employee comprehension, and managerial communication and employee action in support of company goals. Encouraging employees to act in alignment of company goals is one of the most important objectives of employee communication strategy. This study indicates that sound tactical efforts and strong face-to-face communication can help to secure employee action.

The last significant finding of this research relates to understanding employees’ preferred source of information. In line with prior research (Sinickas, 2005, 2006, February), the descriptive data indicate that employees most prefer communication from immediate supervisors and managers. Electronic sources of communication—intranet, emails—were also rated fairly high by employees. Somewhat surprisingly, employees rated the news media moderately high, 3.61, as a preferred source of information about the company. This finding may be explained due to the coordinated internal and external communication efforts initiated by the Communications department from 2004 to 2007. These efforts led to little, if any, disconnect between internal and external sources. Rarely was information disseminated to the external media without first posting it on the intranet to reach employee audiences.

The sources that collectively explain 36% of the variance of employee comprehension of strategy include a combination of face-to-face communication and electronic sources. This finding also reinforces the research of Sinickas (2005) that suggests employees’ preference for a combination of sources for their information needs.

One shortcoming of this study is that the research was conducted with employees of only one corporation. The low response to the survey is another shortcoming. Future research should test some of the relationships identified here with other types and sizes of organizations. Communicators might seek to link the communication metrics of employee comprehension and action with business data. Communicators might also consider implementing shorter, less time-consuming benchmarking surveys to shorten the time between assessments so employee communications initiatives can be redirected sooner if necessary. Critelli, CEO of Pitney-Bowes, (2007) outlined his ideal employee communication measurement program: one that included one or two survey questions to test reach, comprehension and engagement for instant feedback and immediate adjustment. Critelli’s model underscores current efforts among public relations professionals to measure and evaluate their activities in pragmatic ways to mesh with business strategy. This company’s measurement and evaluation efforts represent one way to do that.

References

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Business/Function</th>
<th>Frequencies and (Percentages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>193 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Functions</td>
<td>326 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe &amp; Africa</td>
<td>557 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>316 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>766 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D</td>
<td>258 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>412 (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2  
*Means for Survey Items from 2004, 2007, and Percent of Change*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee Communication Effectiveness</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am kept informed about major changes occurring within the company.</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>6.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is shared in a timely manner from the company.</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am kept informed about reasons behind company decisions.</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>4.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information I receive from the company is accurate.</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>13.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information I receive from the company is complete.</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am kept informed about major changes occurring within my business/function.</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>4.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is shared in a timely manner from my business/function.</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>2.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am kept informed about reasons behind business/function decisions.</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information I receive from my business/function is accurate.</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>9.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information I receive from my business/function is complete.</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My business/function does a good job of communicating information to all employees.</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee Comprehension</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The strategies in general.</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>9.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous improvement tools and strategies</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The company’s products and services.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>2.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The company’s competitors.</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The actions the company is taking to succeed.</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>4.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The corporate financial goals.</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>5.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the corporate goals relate to my regional business goals.</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the regional business goals relate to my departmental goals.</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>2.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the departmental goals relate to my individual goals.</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the company’s activities fit into corporate, business and individual goals</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managerial Communication</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meets with our team regularly.</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducts an annual performance appraisal with me.</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>3.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps me set goals for my annual performance plan.</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares business information with me.</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listens to me.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values my opinions.</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes me when I do well.</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>2.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps me understand how my performance contributes to the company’s success.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains the reasons behind decisions.</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly discusses my personal development plan.</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is positive about the company’s prospects for the future.</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee Action</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have the information I need to do my job effectively.</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>13.72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the communication I receive, I know what my specific contribution to our business needs to be.

As a result of communication from my business or function, I have changed my work activities.

I am well informed about the company’s expectations of me as an associate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Information</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My immediate supervisor</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>4.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My immediate supervisor’s manager</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>2.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business leaders</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>0.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate senior management</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>2.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The corporate intranet</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>-5.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional, business or country intranets</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional, business or country newsletters</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>-5.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily News e-mail</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News media</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers/Grapevine</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>-4.58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Intercorrelations Among Employee Action Items, Employee Communication Effectiveness, Employee Comprehension and Managerial Communication*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have the information I need to do my job effectively.</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.60*</td>
<td>.54*</td>
<td>.49*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Based on the communication I receive, I know what my specific contribution to our business needs to be.</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.64*</td>
<td>.63*</td>
<td>.50*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. As a result of communication from my business or function, I have changed my work activities.</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.59*</td>
<td>.53*</td>
<td>.45*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am well informed about the company’s expectations of me as an associate.</td>
<td>.58*</td>
<td>.66*</td>
<td>.59*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Employee Communication Effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.72*</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Employee Comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.59*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Managerial Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01
Table 4

Regression Analyses with Employee Comprehension as the Dependent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication Effectiveness Items as the Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2 = .526; F = 625; p = .000$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am kept informed about the reasons behind company decisions.</td>
<td>.264</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My business /function does a good job of communicating information to all employees.</td>
<td>.180</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information I receive from my business /function is complete.</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am kept informed about major changes occurring within my business /function.</td>
<td>.159</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am kept informed about major changes within the company.</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managerial Effectiveness Items as the Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2 = .40; F = 470; p = .000$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps me understand how my performance contributes to the company's success.</td>
<td>.244</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is positive about the company’s prospects for the future.</td>
<td>.198</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares business information with me.</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly discusses my personal development plan.</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source of Information as the Independent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2 = .363; F = 268; p = .000$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business leaders</td>
<td>.200</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional, business or country newsletters</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate supervisor</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Probability</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate senior management</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily News e-mail</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company intranet</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Correlations Among Employee Comprehension and Perceived Value of Information Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Information</th>
<th>$r$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My immediate supervisor</td>
<td>.387*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My immediate supervisor’s manager</td>
<td>.443*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business leader</td>
<td>.509*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate senior management</td>
<td>.493*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The company intranet</td>
<td>.317*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional, business or country intranet</td>
<td>.384*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional, business or country newsletters</td>
<td>.418*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily news e-mail</td>
<td>.322*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News media</td>
<td>.303*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers/grapevine</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .01$
“If we can put a man in orbit, why can’t we determine the effectiveness of our communications? The reason is simple and perhaps, therefore, a little old-fashioned: people, human beings with a wide range of choice. Unpredictable, cantankerous, capricious, motivated by innumerable conflicting interests, and conflicting desires”

Ralph D. Paine, Publisher, Fortune Magazine. 1960 Speech to St. Louis Ad Club

Modern technology has come up with many good ways to measure what human beings read, watch and see, but comparatively few ways to measure those “unpredictable, cantankerous, capricious confliction interest and conflicting desires. The recent rise in the influence of social media has turned the entire communications paradigm upside down. Counting column inches and eyeballs is irrelevant in an era where a single YouTube video enjoys a larger audience than Monday Night Football, the average consumer is bombarded with 5000 messages a day, and 90% of CEOs say they are dissatisfied with how their CMOs measure results.

The basic problem is that we have years of research that says that if you “expose” 1 million consumers to a message, buy 20 GRPs, or generate a million brand impressions, you will sell X number of cases of shampoo, soda or soap. We have no data that says if 1 million people download your YouTube video, you’ll sell any shampoo at all. When on-line advertising became mainstream, increasingly advertisers and media outlets counted success in terms of “Hits” or “visits” or “clickthrus” but as the dollars invested in online media have grown, it is becoming increasingly apparent that, it doesn’t matter what media he or she consumes, it matters what they do with the information once they’ve gotten it. Do they read it, believe it, trust it and or buy it?

Lovemarks, the popular marketing text by Kevin Roberts, promoted the notion that brands were essentially commodities in today’s environment and “love marks” -- i.e. brands that
generated huge amounts of loyalty and forgiveness should be the coin of the realm. The interest in “engagement” followed shortly thereafter. Increasingly advertisers wanted to create an experience that was engaging enough to earn a visitor’s loyalty and with luck, its business. As a result engagement is the new buzzword for measuring everything from the number of times that a visitor returns to the site to the time spent on line.

The real question that should be asked is do they “engage” with the brand often enough, and long enough to buy something, promote your brand or achieve whatever other outcome is desired. Essentially, it started with the notion that if a web site or a blog was “engaging” enough to get a reader to develop a relationship with the brand via that site or blog it would yield to more time spent on the site, more consumption of information and ultimately more sales. As more and more advertisers and media types realized that hits really do stand for “How Idiots Track Success” and that even unique page views were suspect, given the enormous variation in such statistics, people began to speak of measuring “engagement” – not just how “sticky” the site was, but the extent to which it enhanced the relationship between the user and the brand.

Most of the discussion of an “engagement index” is centered on the necessity for advertisers to quantify the impact of their on-line advertising. Microsoft’s new black box “Engagement Mapping” is designed to make advertisers on Microsoft web sites more comfortable with their data and more likely to place ads on Microsoft sites than on Google sites. Comscore and Nielsen’s efforts are designed to give more meaning to the numbers they provide advertisers. New efforts, have taken engagement metrics beyond these simple quantitative efforts to include many more of the qualitative and emotional responses that blogs and web sites generate.

The bigger problem is that metrics that make advertisers happy are not necessarily very useful for other communications functions. As internal and external communications functions become more involved in social media, they too need a way to measure engagement, but numbers from Microsoft, Comscore and Nielsen are only available for large consumer sites, not the corporate blogs that take up most of the resources. More problematic is that those numbers do not factor in the newer more popular social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

Popular blogger Robert Scoble (2006) has suggested that the concept of “engagement” as a more valid measure of user interaction and authority of Internet-based social media channels. His premise is that by measuring activity on a blog or social media web site as a sign of engagement, you can predict their behavior. In other words, if they come back to a blog over and over again they’ll eventually buy. If it’s a YouTube video, if they watch or do they rate it and comment on it, they are more likely to pass it on to their friends and maybe even come out and vote. Engagement is a way to determine whether you are having a dialog, or are you just yelling ever more loudly.

Brian Haven of Forrester Research picked up on Scoble’s premise and proposed an engagement index based on a variety of tangible and intangible factors including links, track backs, comments and the frequency sentiment and tonality of comments. They define engagement as:

“Engagement is the level of involvement, interaction, intimacy, and influence an individual has with a brand over time.”
Haven’s four components of engagement are:

**Involvement**—Includes web analytics like site traffic, page views, time spent, etc. This essentially is the component that measures if a person is present.

**Interaction**—This component addresses the more robust actions people take, such as buying a product, requesting a catalog, signing up for an email, posting a comment on a blog, uploading a photo or video, etc. These metrics come from e-commerce or social media platforms.

**Intimacy**—The sentiment or affinity that a person exhibits in the things they say or the actions they take, such as the meaning behind a blog post or comment, a product review, etc. Services such as brand monitoring help track these types of conversations.

**Influence**—Addresses the likelihood that a person will recommend your product or service to someone else. It can manifest itself through brand loyalty or through recommendations to friends, family, or acquaintances. These metrics mostly come from surveys (both qualitative and quantitative).

Web Analytics expert Eric Peterson, author of *Web Analytics Demystified*, *Web Site Measurement Hacks*, and *The Big Book of Key Performance Indicators*, has proposed an alternative engagement index based on web metrics. Peterson suggests that if you want to measure engagement you need to measure the following:

1. % increase or decrease in unique visits
2. Change in page rank - i.e. a list of the top ten most popular areas and how it has changed in the last week
3. How many sessions on our blog or web site represent more than 5 page views
4. In the past month, what % of all sessions represent more than 5 page views
5. % of sessions that are greater than 5 minutes in duration
6. % of visitors that come back for more than 5 sessions
7. % of sessions that arrive at your site from a Google search, or a direct link from your web site or other site that is related to your brand
8. % of visitors that become a subscriber
9. % of visitors that download something from the site
10. % of visitors that provide an email address

The problem with Peterson’s metrics is that for most organizations, that data is only available on their own site, not on competing sites, so there is no way to conduct a benchmark to understand how “engaged” visitors are with one’s own site vs. the competition. The other problem with Peterson’s Engagement Index is that, while it’s great if you can get all of the data, having only a few of these data points can be very misleading. For example, if a high percentage of visitors spend more than 5 minutes on your site, is it because the site is slow or because they really find it interesting? If the % of downloads is low, is it because they’re not engaged, or because your files are too large and they don’t have the bandwidth to download them.

Additionally, any organization relying on Peterson’s Engagement Index needs a friendly and cooperative Web Master and a fairly sophisticated system.

While both Peterson and Haven contribute important ideas to the engagement discussion, we would argue that measuring engagement necessitates following the actions and desires of the customer. Based on any one of their indices, if one’s “engagement index” improves there’s no
data to let you know whether that improvement is based on better content or a slower response times.

Another way to look at engagement is where it fits in the consideration purchase continuum. The traditional purchase process is generally described as Awareness, Consideration, Preference, Trail and Purchase. Consumers engaging with social media follow a similar progression.

The first step in the process is finding a site/blog/network of interest. This is where Search Engine Optimization (SEO) tagging and other tools come into play, enabling a user to get to the specific topic of interest. Once on the site or blog, typically a user might observe the conversation for awhile, essentially “lurking” without actively taking part, much as someone new to a social setting, might observe a party for awhile before plunging into ongoing conversations. At some point, the user gets interested and engaged enough to actually participate in the blog, posting a comment, forwarding a link. The next stage in the process is true engagement, at which point the user is involved and interested enough to become a regular visitor, perhaps commenting regularly, employing an RSS feed, and frequently cross linking to the site. Ultimately, depending on the purpose of the site, the user might actually engage the services, buy the product, join the organization or request more information.

However, to understand how and why this process at any given site, with any given group of users, one needs to fundamentally understand the relationships at play. Unless one incorporates relationship measurement into the mix, you end up with data rather than insight. We suggest adding a third level of engagement measurement and that would be based on Grunig & Hon’s relationship theory. At some point, you just need to come right out and ask your audience, do they trust you? Are they committed? Do they believe that you are committed to them? Do they interact with you only out of necessity or a sense of reciprocity, or are you working together to see the other succeed.

**Adapting the Grunig relationship metrics to an Engagement index**

More than a decade ago, Dr. James Grunig, his wife Dr. Larissa Grunig and fellow Univ. of Maryland professor Dr. Linda Hon developed a theoretical way to measure the health and strength of the relationships an organization had with its publics. After extensive research, they identified 6 components of relationships.
1. Control Mutuality -- The degree to which parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence one another. Although some imbalance is natural, stable relationships require that organizations and publics each have some control over the other.

2. Trust -- One party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party. There are three dimensions to trust: integrity: the belief that an organization is fair and just … dependability: the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do … and, competence: the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do.

3. Satisfaction -- The extent to which each party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced. A satisfying relationship is one in which the benefits outweigh the costs.

4. Commitment -- The extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote. Two dimensions of commitment are continuance commitment, which refers to a certain line of action, and affective commitment, which is an emotional orientation.

5. Exchange Relationship -- In an exchange relationship, one party gives benefits to the other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future.

6. Communal Relationship -- 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. For most public relations activities, developing communal relationships with key constituencies is much more important to achieve than would be developing exchange relationships.

Of those six we suggest that Control Mutuality, Commitment, Trust, Satisfaction and Communalities are all inherently part of engagement. A member of one’s public that is engaged would have to trust the brand. By its very nature, engagement implies commitment, because the engaged consumer is putting effort into the relationship. If one is not satisfied with a relationship, one would hardly remain engaged. Engagement in social media by definition means that the person feels that he/she has some control over the relationship AND wants to see the other succeed.

Grunig, Grunig and Hon went on to test a number of statement that measured the extent to which any of these components were present in a given relationship. By expressing agreement or disagreement with the statements using a Likkert scale (one = total disagreement; 7 means total agreement) one can quantitatively measure any relationship. We suggest that any relationship index should include the responses to the following statements:

1. This organization can be relied on to keep its promises. (Dependability)
2. I believe that this organization takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions. (Dependability)
3. I feel very confident about this organization’s skills. (Competence)
5. This organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.
6. (Competence)
7. Sound principles seem to guide this organization’s behavior. (Integrity)
8. This organization does not mislead people like me. (Integrity)
9. This organization believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate.
10. This organization really listens to what people like me have to say.
11. When I have an opportunity to interact with this organization, I feel that I have some sense of control over the situation.
12. This organization won’t cooperate with people like me. (Reversed)
13. I believe people like me have influence on the decision-makers of this organization.
14. I feel that this organization is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.
15. I can see that this organization wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.
16. There is a long-lasting bond between this organization and people like me.
17. Compared to other organizations, I value my relationship with this organization more.
18. I would rather work together with this organization than not.
19. I have no desire to have a relationship with this organization. (Reversed)
20. I feel a sense of loyalty to this organization.
21. I could not care less about this organization. (Reversed)
22. I am happy with this organization.
23. Both the organization and people like me benefit from the relationship.
24. Most people like me are happy in their interactions with this organization.
25. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship this organization has established with people like me.
26. The organization fails to satisfy the needs of people like me. (Reversed)
27. I feel people like me are important to this organization.
28. In general, I believe that nothing of value has been accomplished between this organization and people like me. (Reversed)
29. I don’t consider this to be a particularly helpful organization. (Reversed)
30. Whenever this organization gives or offers something to people like me, it generally expects something in return.

These statements can be administered in an email, phone or mail survey, which should be repeated at least twice a year to determine progress (or lack thereof) over time.

Conclusion
Ultimately organizations will need to connect high levels of engagement with increases in sales, donations or whatever other outcomes are important to the success of the organization. But having a single index to track over time will simplify the analysis of information. The important addition that the relationship survey brings is that it will answer the fundamental question of why? Why did they stop coming to your site, why are they spending less time there or more critically why are they buying less. Without the true understanding of the nature of the relationship, you won’t be able to do anything to improve the level of engagement.
Second Stage Development of the Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) Model in Crisis Communication: Emo-Action Language versus Emotional Language for Crises that require High and Low Organizational Engagements

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Abstract
Extending current theories in crisis communication, the authors have developed a more systemic approach to understanding the role of emotions. The Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model is based on a public-based, emotion-driven perspective where different crises are mapped on two continua, the organization’s engagement in the crisis and primary public’s coping strategy. This second-stage testing, representing the fourth in the series, found that on top of discovering anxiety as a possible default emotion that publics feel in crises in an earlier study, the default response organizations embroiled in crises involving hostile takeovers, accidents, natural disasters, CEO retirement, rumor, and psychopathic acts, tend to adopt is qualified rhetoric-mix stance that is full of rhetoric while doing little to reassure the publics. Where possible, organizations should move beyond initial posturing to real action, i.e., from a qualified rhetoric-mix stance to action-based stance, peppered with messages that use what we call “emo-action language”, language that acknowledges the emotional upheavals the publics experience with promises of concurrent action to alleviate their emotional turmoil. The findings, while still very much exploratory, suggest theoretical rigor in the model, with room for further refinements to generate what Yin (2003) termed “analytic generalization” (p. 33) for the ICM model.

Introduction
How to shape the appropriate strategies in response to a crisis is critical for any given organization and public relations practitioner working in the field of crisis communication. Given that the goals of crisis communication, defined as the “ongoing dialogue between the organization and its publics” prior to, during, and after the crisis (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 2) are to restore organizational normalcy, influence public perception, and regain and repair image and reputation, strategies used should be “designed to minimize damage to the image of the organization” (p. 2). Strategies, argued Massey (2001), are “message repertoires that are designed to repair the organization’s image by influencing stakeholder perceptions” (p. 155). Ray (1999) argued that strategies establish and enact “control (at least in its appearance) in the
face of high uncertainty” (p. 19). Lukaszweski (1997) argued that the strategic management of message response in crisis communication is a “fundamental communication principle” (p. 8). Designing sound strategic communications and tactics to communicate crisis so as to minimize damage to the image of the organization has been described as “management at its zenith” (Stocker, 1997, p. 203).

While most of these strategies are often characterized as direct responses to the crisis (Cowden & Sellnow, 2002; Fearn-Banks, 2002; Fink, 1986; Harrison, 1999; Massey, 2001; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Seegar & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer, 2001), Ray (1999) argued that strategies would either, (1) deny the crisis exists; (2) provide “partial, inaccurate, or delayed information”; or (3) maintain an open communication channels with constituents (p. 20).

**Current Situation-Based Conceptualization of Crisis Response**

Arguably, the two dominant theories on crisis strategies, Benoit’s (e.g., 1994; 1995; 1997; 1999; 2004) image repair strategies, and Coombs’ (e.g., 1995; 1998) situational crisis communication strategies, are designed to understand what strategies are relevant to use under what circumstances. These often stem from a *situation-based* response to crisis. The image repair theory is appropriate to be used when the situation leads to a loss of face. When face is threatened, face works is used to repair image, argued Benoit & Brinson (1994). This usually occurs when the accused is believed to have committed an offensive act by its salient audience (Benoit, 2004). Face, image, and reputation are extremely important commodities, argued Benoit and Brinson (1994), because, as a society, we pride ourselves on, and value those who enact tolerance, and sensitivity, to the feelings and traditions of others (Brinson & Benoit, 1999). Coombs’ (1998) strategies are positioned according to the situation based on the types of crises and the organization’s locus of control. On one hand, when the organization is deemed to have strong personal control over the crisis, more accommodative strategies like full apology are recommended for use. On the other hand, when the organization has weak control over the crisis, more defensive strategies like attack and denial are recommended.

**ICM Model: Conceptualizing Emotions in Crisis Responses**

While these situation-based crisis responses serve as vital roadmaps to understand the crisis situation, it is argued that a more universal and systemic approach would be to shape crisis responses from an *emotion-based* perspective: To understand what are the emotional upheavals that the publics involved in the crisis are likely to experience so that organizations can streamline their strategies to address their specific needs. Previous studies have found that the perception of a crisis, particularly from a given public, is not strictly a function of an environmental stimulus itself, but involves an interpretation of the stimulus (e.g., see Carver & Blaney, 1977). Emotion is argued to be a critical stimulus. Lazarus (1991) defined emotion as “organized cognitive-motivational-relational configurations whose status changes with changes in the person-environment relationship as this is perceived and evaluated (appraisal)” (p. 38). In a crisis, as the conflict between the publics and the organization escalates, emotions are one of the anchors in the publics’ interpretation of what is unfolding, changing, and shaping. Jin, Pang, and Cameron (2007) have developed a new conceptualization called the Integrated Crisis Mapping model (ICM) aimed at understanding the diverse and varied emotions
likely to be experienced by the key stakeholders in crises. Dominant emotions in the ICM model, developed from integrating works from psychology and crises literature, are extrapolated on two continua. On the X-axis is the publics’ coping strategy (from cognitive to conative coping), which consists of the primary public’s cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands and on the Y-axis is the level of organizational engagement (from high to low). Different types of crises, drawn from the crisis literature, are mapped into each of the four quadrants, with the dominant and secondary emotions posited.

Empirical tests have suggested theoretical rigor. In the first test to examine the emotions and level of engagement on the first quadrant involving crises pertaining to reputational damage, technological breakdown, industrial matters, labor unrest, and regulation/legislation, findings showed the presence of the anger and anxiety, as posited. Additionally, the emotion of sadness was also found to co-exist with anger and anxiety. The primary publics were found to engage in conative coping (Jin, Pang, Cameron, 2007a). In the second test to examine organizational strategies for the abovementioned crises in the same quadrant, evidence showed that organizations needed only to engage their primary publics moderately rather than intensely. This “strategic holding position” afforded a situation where organizations were able to assume a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance, utilizing a mixed bag of strategies ranging from defensive strategies like excuse and justification as well as accommodative strategies like ingratiation and corrective action to engage their publics (Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2007). The third test to examine the emotions and levels of engagement on the second and third quadrants of the model, evidence found that anxiety could be the default emotion that publics feel in crises. The subsequent emotions felt by the publics in crises involving hostile takeovers, accidents and natural disasters in the second quadrant were variations of sadness, anger and fright, while the subsequent emotions felt by the publics involving in CEO retirement, rumor and psychopathic acts in the third quadrant were fright and anger. As far as coping strategies were concerned, conative rather than cognitive coping was evident (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b).

Encouraged by the findings, the authors continue their work on this second-stage development of the model, representing the fourth in the series, by testing strategies for crises posited in quadrants two and three in the model, i.e., hostile takeovers, accidents and natural disasters in the second quadrant and CEO retirement, rumor and psychopathic acts in the third quadrant. The central questions asked are that given the findings of the variations of emotions displayed, how should organizations maintain their positions of being highly and lowly engaged in the respective quadrants? What stance should organizations then assume? What factors are likely to influence this stance? Consequently, what strategies can organizations take so that they reach out to the publics at levels that speak to them?

Data to examine these questions come from content analyses of the population of stories of crises published in the largest circulating and widely influential national newspapers, USA Today, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and Washington Post (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2006; Viguerie & Franke, 2004). The same set of data used to examine the emotions and levels of engagement in the second quadrant – US Airways’ takeover bid of

34 The authors would like to thank Timothy S. Penning of Grand Valley State University for his suggestion to refine this term.
Delta Air Lines in 2006, an example of an economic/hostile takeover; Ameren’s handling of power outages in the mid-West in 2006, an example of how an organization deals with a natural disaster; a BP refinery blast at Texas in 2005; an example of how an organization handles an accident; and in the third quadrant, Virginia Tech shooting shooting in 2007, an example of how an organization deals with a psychotic act; speculations surrounding former US Attorney-General Alberto R. Gonzales’ resignation in the early stages of the crisis when questions began to be asked of the Justice Department’s role in the ouster of eight United States attorneys in 2007; an example of rumors; the mystery surrounding Merck CEO Raymond Gilmartin’s retirement in 2005 months after Vioxx was withdrawn; an example of how an organization deals with the tainted circumstances of its CEO retirement – are extended to examine the factor-stance-strategy that influence organizational response in these crises.

This study is significant on several fronts. First, this represents the authors’ on-going commitment to test our Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model. This second-stage development represents the half way mark of our series of empirical studies and the authors are excited to see how the model is shaping up. Second, and more significantly, in the development of the Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) model, it is the authors’ goal to advance current understanding in crisis communication and offers practical insights to scholars and practitioners on how they can understand, with greater preciseness, the emotional upheavals their primary publics are likely to experience so that they can shape the appropriate crisis response and tools to manage the crisis with optimal effectiveness. Organizational response in crises through the enactment of strategies has been, and arguably will continue to be, a recurring theme in the developments of crisis communication theories (Coombs, 1999; 2004; Fishman, 1999). Last but not least, the authors aim to build a new theoretical framework by studying real life phenomenon. Saunders (2004) argued that applying theory to real life situations is “useful towards theory building” because such situations “provide observations grounded in actual organizational efforts aimed at solving actual organizational problems” (p. 140). Five cases of the same phenomenon were explored in order to construct a more robust study (Yin, 1993). These cases are studied for their instrumental value rather than intrinsic value. In instrumental case study methodology, Stake (1998) argued that the cases are examined to provide “insight into an issue or refinement of theory” (p. 88). The authors are excited to understand how well the hypotheses posited in our model hold up, and what subsequent refinements need to be made to stand the scrutiny of scholarship as well as its relevance to the practitioners’ world.

**Theoretical Framework**

*Public Responses Based on Key Emotions*

Publics are a “group of people who face a common issue” (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996, p. 84). In a crisis, the publics have been defined differently, according to their importance to resolving a situation (Lukaszweski, 1997), their functional roles (Dougherty, 1992), and their long-term influences (Ulmer, 2001). Based on previous literature, we propose that in crisis situations the primary publics comprise the following characteristics: 1) They are most affected by the crisis; 2) They have shared common interests, and destiny, in seeing the crisis resolved;
and 3) They have long-term interests, and influences, on the organization’s reputation and operation.

Based on the appraisal model of emotion (Lazarus, 1991), Jin, Pang and Cameron (2007) developed a theoretical framework to understand the primary publics’ crisis responses, as evidenced by the predominant emotion elicited by different types of crises. Four negative emotions (anger, fright, anxiety, and sadness) are identified as the dominant emotions that are mostly like to be experienced by the publics in crisis situations.

Figure 1. Integrated Crisis Mapping (ICM) Model (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007)

Anger. The core relational theme underlying anger is a demanding offense against “me” and “mine” (Lazarus, 1991). In crisis situations, the primary publics tend to experience anger when facing a demanding offense from certain organization against them or their well being. The ego-involvement of the public is engaged to preserve or enhance their identity or benefit in the situation. There is usually an issue of blaming that derives from the knowledge that the organization is accountable for the harmful actions and they could have been controlled or even prevented by the organization. The primary public might potentially favor attack as the strategy in facing the organization. At the stance and strategy level, though sometimes the public may appear cooperative, anger can be expressed indirectly in passively aggressive tactics.
Fright. The core relational theme underneath fright is facing uncertain and existential threat (Lazarus, 1991). The public is not certain about how to cope with the loss as well as how the engaged organization may handle this situation. Depending on their resource and power, they may choose avoidance or escape from the crisis as a viable recourse.

Anxiety. By definition, anxiety stems from the core relational theme as facing an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming danger (Lazarus, 1991). The public may feel overwhelmed by the crisis situation and look for the immediate solutions. Their ego-involvement is evidenced as the effort to protect their own ego-identity against the organization whom they perceive to be the direct source of existential threat. They might blame or not blame the organization depending on their environment assessment. Given the uncertainty of how to cope with the situation and what the organization might react, they tend to avoid and escape.

Sadness. Having experienced an irrevocable loss is the core relational theme of the emotion of sadness (Lazarus, 1991). In those cases, the public suffers from tangible or intangible loss or both. Their goal of survival is threatened and this loss of any type of ego-involvement (e.g., esteem, moral values, ideal, people and their well-being, etc.) caused by uncontrollable sources may lead them no one to blame and in desperate need for relief and comfort. If they perceive the loss can be restored or compensated for, their sadness may not occur or will be associated with hope. The action tendency of the public might well depend on what measures the organization may take.

Another key concept in appraisal model of emotion is the different levels of emotions felt at a given time toward a given stimulus. The primary level emotion is the one the public experiences at the first, or immediate, instance. The secondary level emotion is one the public experiences in subsequent instances, as time goes by, and contingent upon the organization’s responses to the crisis. The secondary level emotion may be transferred from the dominant emotion or coexisting with the primary level. In this study, we focus on Quadrant 2 (sadness as the primary emotion and fright as the secondary emotion) and Quadrant 3 (fright as the primary emotion and sadness as the secondary emotion) as conjured by crises in CEO retirement; accidents, rumors, psychopathic acts, natural disasters, and economic/hostile takeovers.

Operationalization of the ICM Model

As Figure 1 illustrates, the ICM model is indicated by a crisis matrix based on two axes: The analysis of the organizational engagement level in the crisis that can be examined through a scale of high engagement and low engagement, and the primary public’s coping strategy from conative coping to cognitive coping. It is argued that for effective crisis management, the organization, at varied engagement level in different issues, must understand the primary public’s emotional demands so as to communicate accordingly and align with the coping strategy needed by the primary public (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007).

On the X-axis is the public’s coping strategy. Adapting the cognitive appraisal theory in emotion (Lazarus, 1991), there are two types of coping: 1) problem-focused coping – changing the actual relationship between the public and the organization via actual measures and steps, and 2) cognitive-focused coping – changing only the way in which the relationship is interpreted by the public. Therefore, coping strategy refers to the dominant choice of the publics in dealing with the crisis situation: Either 1) cognitive coping – the public try to sort out a way of thinking
or interpreting the meaning of the crisis with regard to their well-being, or 2) conative coping – the public try to manage the situation so as to alter a troubled relationship or to sustain a desirable one by taking actions or at least show their tendency of action. Anchoring these two coping strategies to the axis, different primary publics in different crises may choose different coping strategy along this continuum. Therefore, this X-axis consists of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands (and conflicts between them) that are appraised as exceeding the resources of the public.

On the Y-axis is the level of organizational engagement, ranging from high to low. Jin, Pang and Cameron (2007) defined high organizational engagement as intense, consolidated, sustained, and high priority in allocation of resources to deal with the crisis; on the contrary, low organizational engagement does not mean cursory or no engagement, but that the organization devotes comparatively less resources, effort, and energy to deal with the crisis, either because the organization recognizes there is little it can do, or when the organization did not cause the crisis, it is depending on external help, like a regulatory agency, to help it resolve the crisis.

**Emotions and publics’ coping mechanism.** The two axes further form four quadrants in the crisis matrix: Quadrant1 (High engagement/Conative coping), Quadrant 2 (High engagement/Cognitive coping), Quadrant 3 (Low engagement/Cognitive coping), and Quadrant 4 (Low engagement/Conative coping). In each of the quadrants is the dominant emotions (primary and secondary), based on the confluence, interactions, and inter-relations of the publics’ coping strategy as well as organizational engagement.

**Organizational Stance and Strategies**

Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, and Mitrook (1997) first introduced the notion of organizational stance in the contingency theory of strategic conflict management. A theoretical perspective diametrically different from the excellence theory, which positioned two-way symmetrical model as normative theory (Grunig, 1996), the contingency theory argued that a more realistic description of how organizations engage its publics could be ascertained by the examination of one’s stance towards the other. The stance adopted need not be static, and could change based on the influence of organizational factors (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997). Stances were measured through a continuum, which has at one extreme, advocacy, which meant insisting exclusively on one’s own interests; and at the other end, accommodation, which meant giving in entirely. Jin and Cameron (2006) further developed a scale measuring stance as degree of action-based accommodation and qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation. Within an organization, the contingency theory had identified more than 80 variables, categorized into 11 themes (see Appendix 1), that could affect stance movement along the continuum (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999).

One’s stance necessarily affects one’s strategies (Pang, 2006). To study the full range of advocacy or accommodation undertaken by the organization towards its publics and vice versa, we have adapted and modified Coombs’ (1998) crisis communication strategies into the contingency framework. Ihlen (2002) argued that Coombs has built a “better typology” (p. 190) than other sets of strategies. Coombs’ (1998) typology consisted of seven strategies: Attack, denial, excuse, corrective action, justification, ingratiation, and full apology. To reflect the true
spirit of the contingency theory, we modified this framework by reordering corrective action and justification, and by adding another strategy, cooperation, into the continuum.

Advocacy Accommodation
I-----------I--------I------------------I-----------------I---------------I---------------I
Attack Denial Excuse Justification Corrective action Ingratiation Cooperation Full apology

Armed with these findings from three empirical tests so far, the authors extend this study to examine, through the crises in Quadrant 2 (High Engagement/Conative Coping) and Quadrant 3 (Low engagement/Conative Coping),

RQ 1: What stance (action-based versus qualified-rhetoric) did the organizations take toward its primary publics?
RQ 2: What contingent factor appears to influence this stance?
RQ 3: What is the strategy used?
RQ 4: How does the organization assess its strategy effectiveness?
RQ 5: How do the primary publics assess the organization’s strategy effectiveness?

Method

We attempted to continue understanding the veracity and rigor of the ICM model using content analyses of crisis cases in the second and third quadrants. Kaid (1996) argued that analyses of crisis events through media coverage are well-trodden paths taken by researchers. The purpose of case studies is to empirically investigate a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” and address a “situation in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1993, p. 59). In this study, we adopt a multiple case study design within the same phenomenon, with the primary interest of understanding how the ICM model works. The cases are thus studied for their instrumental value rather than intrinsic value (Stake, 1998). Though the cases are analyzed in detail, contexts examined, and activities explored, these play supporting roles to the researchers’ objectives, which are to facilitate understanding of how relevant they are to the model. Consequently, by applying the method on six disparately managed cases, Yin (1993) argued, is an appropriate initial attempt at theory testing (p. 64), with the aim of building “analytic generalizations” (Yin, 2003, p. 33) from the conceptualization.

Sample

Six crises are selected based on the opinions and suggestions of a group of public relations practitioners and educators. Shin, Cheng, Jin, and Cameron (2005) as well as Pang, Jin and Cameron (2007) found this to be a viable way of identifying the appropriate crises to analyze. The six cases are: Merck CEO retirement (N=10), an example of CEO retirement; BP refinery blast (N=18), an example of accidents; Rumors of Gonzalez resignation (N=18), an example of rumors; Virginia Tech shooting (N=16), an example of psychopathic acts; Ameren deals with power outages (N=14), an example of natural disasters; and US Airways’ takeover bid of Delta Air Lines (N=20), an example of economic/hostile takeovers (see appendix 2 for fuller descriptions of the cases). Data to examine Quadrant 2 and Quadrant 3 of the ICM model comes

News stories in the five major newspapers (N= 96) were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words of the organization and the crisis. News stories were excluded if 1) there was no comment made by a spokesperson from the respective organization or official from the organization or no mention of any official communication from the organization; or 2) the stories were in the same publication or there was no mention of the crisis.

**Coders and Training**

Two coders, both graduate students and familiar with the content analysis method, conducted the coding. With the help of a codebook, the coders were given detailed instruction and description of the various categories used. Two practice sessions were held in December 2006 using samples of stories to familiarize with the coding instruments. The coders worked independently and were not allowed to consult with each other about the coding. The inter-coder reliability achieved .84 using Scott’s Pi.

**Coding Instrument**

The unit of analysis is defined as a news story. This includes stories by the staff of the newspaper and wire stories from the editors. The content analysis instrument is designed to evaluate the appraisal of crisis engagement and coping strategies from organizations’ and their primary publics’ perspectives. The 96 stories were coded for the following variables:

**Organizational stance:** Items from Jin and Cameron (2006)’s stance inventory were used to examine two clusters of stances as degree of accommodation, on a 7-point Likert-like scale, with 1 as “not evident” and 7 as “very evident”: 1) The organization takes Action-Based Stance toward the public (The organization seems willing to: yield to the public's demands; Or agree to follow what the public proposed; Or accept the publics' propositions; Or agree with the public on future action or procedure; Or agree to try the solutions suggested by the public; Or any combination of these.); and 2) The organization takes Qualified-Rhetoric-mixed Stance toward the public (The organization seems willing to: express regret or apologized to the public; Or collaborate with the public in order to solve the problem at hand; Or change my own position toward that of the public; Or make concessions with the public; Or admit wrongdoing; Or any combination of these.).

**Dominant contingent factor:** Dominant contingent factor that drives the organization’s stance with regards to its public was identified, using the matrix of contingent factors as: External Threats, Industry Environment, General Political/Social Environment/External Culture, External Public, Issue Under Question, Organization’s Characteristics, Influence of Public Relations Practitioners, Influence of Dominant Coalition, Internal Threats, Individual Characteristics, and Relationship Characteristics. If there was no evident contingent factor in the story, it was coded as “99. N/A”.

**Primary crisis response strategy:** crisis response strategies by level of responsibility acceptance (Coombs, 1999): Attack, Denial, Excuse, Justification, Ingratiation, Corrective action, and Full apology, as well as 99 as N/A in case of stories with no crisis strategy evident.
Message attributes: The overall attributes of crisis communication response messages were measured on three continua, using a 7-point Likert-type scale: 1) Defense-Accommodation continuum, with 1 = “Defensive” and 7 as “Accommodative”; 2) Ambiguity-Specification continuum, with 1 = “Ambiguous” and 7 as “Specific”; and 3) Emotion-Cognition continuum, with 1 = “Emotional” and 7 as “Factual”.

Organization’s self-assessment of strategy effectiveness: It was measured on a 7 point Likert-like scale, where 1 was “very ineffective,” and 7 was “very effective”, and 99 was used if this variable was not addressed in the story.

Public’s acceptance of the organization’s crisis strategy: It was measured on a 7 point Likert-like scale, where 1 was “very unacceptable,” and 7 was “very acceptable”, and 99 was used if this variable was not addressed in the story.

Results
Organizational Stance
RQ 1 examined the stance taken by the organizations towards their primary publics. For BP case, more qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation was taken (M = 5.50, SD = .857) than action-based accommodation (M = 5.17, SD = .786) (t = 1.844, p < .10). For Virginia Tech case, more qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation was taken (M = 4.06, SD = .854) than action-based accommodation (M = 3.63, SD = .619) (t = 2.782, p < .05). For Gonzalez case, more qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation was taken (M = 4.33, SD = .854) than action-based accommodation (M = 3.67, SD = .485) (t = 3.367, p < .01). However, for Merck case, more action-based accommodation was taken (M = 4.30, SD = .483) than qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation (M = 4.00, SD = .000) (t = 1.964, p < .10). For US Air case and Ameren case, there was no significant difference in terms of the two types of stance. Across the six cases, more qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation was taken (M = 4.41, SD = .928) than action-based accommodation (M = 4.18, SD = .887) (t = 3.195, p < .01).

Dominant Contingent Factor
RQ 2 examined what contingent factors appeared to influence the stance movement. For BP case, relationship characteristics (33.3%), individual characteristics (27.8%), and external threats (22.2%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, p < .001). For US Air case, relationship characteristics (30.0%) and influence of dominant coalition (30.0%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, p < .001). For Ameren case, influence of PR practitioners (50.0%) and relationship characteristics (42.9%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, p < .001). For Merck case, influence of dominant coalition (18.8%) and individual characteristics (30.0%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, p < .001). For Virginia Tech case, influence of dominant coalition (37.5%) and issues under question (31.3%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, p < .001). For Gonzalez case, influence of dominant coalition (24.0%), influence of PR practitioners (21.9%) and individual characteristics (21.9%) were the dominant contingent factors (Chi-square = 119.342, p < .001). Across the six cases, different contingent factors seemed to make a significant difference in both degrees of action-based accommodation (F = 4.915, p < .001) and qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation (F = 4.947, p < .001). Post-hoc
Scheffe tests were used to examine the difference between the contingent factors: On one hand, external threats led to significantly (p < .05) higher degrees of action-based accommodation (M = 5.75, SD = .500) than issue under question (M = 3.75, SD = .886), influence of PR practitioners (M = 4.10, SD = .539), influence of dominant coalition (M = 4.00, SD = .674), and individual characteristics (M = 4.00, SD = 1.14) did. On the other hand, eternal threats also led to significantly (p < .01) higher degrees of qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation (M = 6.25, SD = .957) than issue under question (M = 4.00, SD = .756), influence of PR practitioners (M = 4.14, SD = .573) and individual characteristics (M = 4.24, SD = .179) did, as well as significantly (p < .05) higher degrees of qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation than influence of dominant coalition (M = 4.35, SD = .775) did.

Primary Crisis Strategy and Message Attributes

RQ 3 examined what were the primary crisis response strategies used by the organizations, as well as what message attributes were evident for those strategies. For BP case, corrective action (38.9%), ingratiation (27.8%) and justification (22.2%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). For US Air case, justification (75.0%) and ingratiation (25.0%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). For Ameren case, corrective action (88.9%) and excuse (11.1%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). For Merck case, justification (50.0%) and denial (40.0%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). For Virginia Tech case, excuse (43.8%) and ingratiation (25.0%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). For Gonzalez case, justification (33.0%) and excuse (19.8%) were the primary crisis strategies (Chi-square = 116.427, p < .001). Across the six cases, crisis strategies had significant influence on three message attribute continuums (Defensive-Accommodative, F = 11.095, p < .001; Ambiguous-Specific, F = 11.510, p < .001; and Emotional-Factual, F = 5.248, p < .001). Post-hoc Scheffe tests were used to examine the difference between the primary crisis strategies: For denial (M = 4.10, SD = .316), it led to significantly more defensive message attributes than full apology (M = 6.50, SD = .707; p < .05) did. For excuse (M = 3.78, SD = .943), it led to significantly more defensive message attributes than corrective action (M = 4.94, SD = .899; p < .05) and full apology (M = 6.50, SD = .707; p < .01) did. For justification (M = 3.41, SD = .867), it led to significantly more defensive message attributes than ingratiation (M = 4.42, SD = .900; p < .05), corrective action (M = 4.94, SD = .899; p < .001) and full apology (M = 6.50, SD = .707; p < .01) did.

For Ambiguous-Specific message attributes, denial was found to be significantly more ambiguous (M = 2.70, SD = 1.567, p < .01) than excuse (M = 4.44, SD = .922), justification (M = 4.50, SD = .938), ingratiation (M = 4.85, SD = .987), corrective action (M = 5.69, SD = .946) and full apology (M = 6.00, SD = .000). Excuse (M = 4.44, SD = .922, p < .01) and justification (M = 4.50, SD = .938, p < .01) was found to be significantly more specific than denial (M = 2.70, SD = 1.567) and corrective action (M = 5.69, SD = .946). For Emotional-Factual message attributes, corrective action (M = 5.50, SD = .894) was found to be significantly more emotional than ingratiation (M = 4.08, SD = 1.038; p < .05), while ingratiation was found to be more emotional than denial (M = 5.80, SD = .632, p < .01) and excuse (M = 5.56, SD = 1.042, p < .05).
Organization’s Self-Assessment of Strategy Effectiveness and Publics’ Acceptance

RQ 4 examined how the organization assessed its crisis strategy effectiveness, whereas RQ 5 examines how acceptable the primary publics perceive the strategy was. For US Air case, the primary publics found the organization’s crisis strategy was less acceptable (M = 3.00, SD = 1.317) than the organization assessed its own strategy’s effectiveness (M = 4.44, SD = .964) (t = -2.702, p < .05). For Ameren case, the primary publics found the organization’s crisis strategy was less acceptable (M = 3.40, SD = .894) than the organization assessed its own strategy’s effectiveness (M = 5.20, SD = .837) (t = -2.702, p < .10). For Merck case, the primary publics found the organization’s crisis strategy was less acceptable (M = 3.20, SD = .447) than the organization assessed its own strategy’s effectiveness (M = 4.40, SD = .548) (t = -6.000, p < .01). For Gonzalez case, the primary publics found the organization’s crisis strategy was less acceptable (M = 3.50, SD = .527) than the organization assessed its own strategy’s effectiveness (M = 4.20, SD = .632) (t = -2.333, p < .05). There was no significant difference between the strategy assessment from the organization and its primary publics in BP case and Virginia Tech case. Across the six cases, the organizations assessed their own strategies as more effective (M = 4.68, SD = .785) than the primary publics’ acceptance level (M = 3.60, SD = 1.227) (t = 4.990, p < .001).

Discussion

The findings are distilled into two categories: First, what the evidence suggests as strong merit; and second, evidence that suggests as some merit. Implications of the evidence are drawn, with suggestions to refine the ICM model (see Figure 2).
Organizations’ Initial Response: Qualified Rhetoric-mixed Stance as Default Stance?

RQ 1 examined the stance taken by the organizations towards their primary publics. Evidence suggests some merit that organizations embroiled in the types of crises identified in the two quadrants engaged in qualified rhetoric-mixed stance towards their primary publics rather than action-based stance. In the former, the organization is willing to express regret and apologize to the public, to collaborate with the public, to make concessions or to admit wrongdoing. In the latter, the organization is willing to yield to the public’s demands, accept the public’s propositions, and agree to the public’s suggestion for solution while in the former, it contains more rhetoric or posturing by the organization, and may or may not lead to action that supports the rhetoric. Therefore, saying what one is willing to do only tantamount to posturing, or qualified rhetoric-mixed stance. Saying what one will do is an indication of action-based stance.

Interestingly, though the authors have only analyzed three of the four quadrants so far, two consistent trends begin to surface: While the previous study found that anxiety could be the initial default dominant emotion (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b) felt by the publics in any given crisis, evidence from this study suggests that a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance could be the default stance adopted by organizations to its primary stakeholders. The findings are supported by the literature. It could be that at any given crisis, while time needs to be afforded to unearth the actual facts of the crisis, organizations need to respond quickly to the stakeholders, otherwise, as Coombs (1999) argued, “speculation and misinformation will fill the information void if an organization is silent or slow to respond” (p. 126). Adopting a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance or a rhetorical posture promising to work with the stakeholders to find a resolution to the crisis appears to be the logical manner to engage the publics at the first instance. Coombs (1999) described such responses as “form recommendations”, the posture of responding quickly, being open and consistent (p. 126). Such responses, Coombs (1999) argued, are widely accepted and practiced by practitioners. Given that crisis managers should often select strategies that “best serve to protect the organization” (Coombs, 2006, p. 255), a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance is thus argued to be the accepted initial, and possibly the default stance.

Strategies Reflect Levels of Organization Involvements

RQ 2 examined what contingent factors appeared to influence the stance movement. RQ 3 examined the primary crisis response strategies used by the organizations, as well as what message attributes were evident for those strategies. These would be discussed conjointly. Evidence suggests strong merit that relationship between the organization and publics is a dominant contingent factor in crises involving hostile takeovers, accidents and natural disasters as posited in the second quadrant, in which the dominant emotion is proposed and identified in previous studies as sadness. With relationship as a driving factor, and qualified rhetoric-mixed stance as the platform, evidence suggests some merit that the corresponding strategy used was corrective action. This appears to be congruent with previous findings that organizations involved in the abovementioned crises need to be highly engaged with their stakeholders (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b).
What, then, does it mean for practitioners? For easier comprehension, the question can also be asked this way: If, indeed, that organizations involved in the abovementioned crises need to be highly engaged with their publics (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b), how is this engagement actualized? Answer: By adopting a rhetorical posture promising corrective action to repair the damage caused by the crisis. And what motivates the organization to do that? The importance the organization places on its relationship with its publics. Even though relationship has been cited as an important factor in the crisis and public relations literature (see Ledingham, 2003; Lee & Hwang, 2007; Ulmer, 2001), it is a factor not well addressed in the contingency theory (see Cameron, Pang, Jin, 2007; Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2007). Contingency theory has thus far enacted relationship as past experiences with publics, a less supported predisposing factor (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999). While it is beyond the scope of this study to understand how relationship as a factor can be further operationalized in contingency research, the evidence in this study does present an opportunity for contingency theorists to reexamine the criticality of this factor.

In crises involving CEO retirement, rumor and psychopathic acts as posited in the third quadrant, in which the dominant emotion is proposed and identified in previous studies as fright, evidence suggests strong merit that the influence of the dominant coalition is a dominant contingent factor. Again, what, then, does it mean for practitioners? For easier comprehension, the question can again be asked this way: If, indeed, that organizations involved in the abovementioned crises need not be highly engaged with their publics (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b), how is this engagement actualized? Answer: By adopting a rhetorical posture justifying why the blame is not entirely the organization’s to shoulder, either by arguing that there is no serious damage or injury, or by shifting some of the blame to the victims. And who directs the organization to do that? The dominant coalition. Conceivably, the dominant coalition as a predisposing factor in the contingency theory (Cameron, Pang, Jin, 2007) has the overriding power and influence to dictate the course of action. In the abovementioned crises, what our studies have found are that the dominant coalition does not consider it necessary to be highly engaged with the publics, and thus adopts a rhetorically justifying posture to engage the organization’s publics.

Addressing Communication Gap between Organizational Approach and Publics’ Emotions: Use of “Emo-action Language” rather than Emotional Language

RQ 4 examined how the organization assessed its crisis strategy effectiveness, whereas RQ 5 examined how acceptable the primary publics perceived the organizations’ strategy. These are examined conjointly. Evidence suggests strong merit that the organizations involved in all of the abovementioned crises regarded its strategies as acceptable and effective, i.e., in quadrant two, organizations maintain highly engaged with their publics by adopting a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance using the strategy of correction action peppered with emotional language in their messages that are filled with emotional descriptors rather than the issue at hand whereas in quadrant three, organizations need not be highly engaged with their publics. The stance adopted is a qualified rhetoric-mixed stance using the strategy of justification littered with emotional language in their messages that address the publics’ feelings and emotions but not the issue at hand. In layman parlance, what this all means is that the organizations feel that they are doing a fine job in reaching out to the publics – but the publics do not think so. Why?
A plausible explanation is that in crises involving hostile takeovers, accidents and natural disasters as posited in the second quadrant, the publics experience a diversity of emotions, beginning with anxiety, mixed with variants of sadness, anger, and fright (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007a). Even though organizations remain highly engaged, the posturing stance adopted, though enthused with promises, does not appear sufficient to assuage or reassure the publics. Where possible, organizations should move beyond initial posturing to real action, i.e., from a qualified rhetoric-mix stance to action-based stance, peppered with messages that use what we term “emo-action language”, language that acknowledges the emotional upheavals the publics experience with promises of concurrent action to alleviate their emotional turmoil. Another plausible explanation pertains to crises involving CEO retirement, rumor and psychopathic acts as posited in the third quadrant. Even though it was found that organizations involved in these crises need not be highly engaged (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007b), the fact that the publics experience a diversity of emotions ranging from anxiety, fright to anger could mean that organizations could not afford to be seen as being in a position of low engagement, disengagement, or even no engagement. Beyond extending the rigor and rhetoric of showing compassion, concern and empathy (Seegar, 2006), where people’s emotions are at stake, there is the constant need to be seen to engage and connect with them in their hours of need. This insight is instructive for further refinement of the ICM model, that perhaps there is no such thing as high or low engagement in crisis? As the authors continue our journey of discovery, perhaps we should redefine engagement on different dimensions, probably along the lines of action-engagement in place of high engagement and emotional-engagement in place of low engagement?

**Conclusion and Limitations**

This present study represents the second-stage of testing to investigate the viability of the ICM model by integrating crisis perspectives with psychological analyses. This study, the fourth in the series of empirical tests, represents the continuing work of the authors to generate what Yin (2003) termed “analytic generalization” (p. 33) in the model. Analytic generalization is achieved when “two or more cases” (Bennett, 2004, p. 22) support the theoretical assertions (Yin, 2003, p. 33). Though much of what the authors have been studying is still exploratory, findings suggested theoretical rigor in the model, with room for further refinements. Admittedly, one limitation of this study is that the analyses are all based on media reports. First, given the small number of newspaper articles that were relevant to the crisis cases, the statistical power of detecting associations among the coding variables was limited. Second, this study excluded media releases and letters or opinion section of newspapers that might have provided valuable information on the organization’s crisis strategies as well as the publics’ expression of emotions. Further research should include examination of messages disseminated through media releases as well as interviews with practitioners and focus groups with publics involved in the respective crises. Yet, it is the authors’ thesis that studies analyzing audience reception in crises should increasingly dominate crisis scholarship for the simple argument that organizational strategies would be ineffectual if these do not appeal to the hearts and minds of the publics the organizations are trying to reach. An analysis of the papers presented at the International Public Relations Research Conference bear testimony to the authors’ argument of the increasing importance of understanding emotions in crisis research. In 2005 and 2006, there was no paper
studying emotions in crisis (see www.instituteforpr.org/files/uploads/IPRRC8_Schedule.pdf and www.instituteforpr.org/files/uploads/IPRRC9_Schedule.pdf). In 2007, there were two (www.instituteforpr.org/files/uploads/IPRRC10_Schedule.pdf) including one by the authors. Much work remains to be done. As Einstein (1936) said, “The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of everyday thinking” (cited in Bartlett, 1992, p. 635). That’s what the authors endeavor to do with the ICM model.

References


Appendix 1: Analysis of contingent factor (adapted from the Contingency theory)

1. Threats: litigation, government regulation, potentially damaging publicity, scarring of organization’s reputation in community, legitimizing activists’ claims
2. Industry Environment: changing (dynamic) or static, number of competitors/level of competition, richness or leanness of resources in the environment
3. General Political/Social Environment / External Culture (level of constraint/uncertainty): degree of political support of business, degree of social support of business
4. The External Public (group, individual, etc.): size/number of members, degree of source credibility/powerful members or connections, past successes or failures of public to evoke change, amount of advocacy practiced by organization, level of communication/involvement of public/s members, whether the public has public relations counselors or not, community’s perception of public: reasonable or radical level of media coverage the public has received in past, whether representatives of the public know or like representatives of the organization, whether representatives of the organization know or like representatives from the public, public’s willingness to dilute its cause/request/claims moves and countermoves, relative power of organization, relative power of public
5. Issue Under Question: size, stakes, complexity
6. Organization’s Characteristics: open or closed culture, dispersed widely geographically or centralized, level of technology the organization uses to produce its product or service, homogeneity or heterogeneity of employees, age of the organization/value placed on tradition, speed of growth in the knowledge level the organization uses, economic stability of the organization, existence or non-existence of issues management personnel or program, organization’s past experiences with the public, distribution of decision-making power, formalization: number of rules or codes defining and limiting the job descriptions of employees, stratification/hierarchy of positions, existence or influence of legal department, business exposure (product mix and customer mix), corporate culture
7. Public Relations Department Characteristics: total number of practitioners and number with college degrees, type of past training of employees: trained in PR or ex-journalists, marketing, etc., location of PR department in hierarchy: independent or under marketing umbrella/ experiencing encroachment of marketing/ persuasive mentality, representation in the dominant coalition experience level of PR practitioners in dealing with conflict, general communication competency of department autonomy of department physical placement of department in building (near CEO and other top decision makers or not) staff trained in research methods, amount of funding available for dealing with external publics, amount of time allowed to use dealing with external publics, gender: percentage of female upper-level staff/ managers, potential of department to practice various models of public relations
8. Characteristics of Dominant Coalition (top management): political values (conservative or liberal), open or closed to change, management style (domineering or laid back), general altruism level, support and understanding of PR, frequency of external contact
with publics, department perception of the organization’s external environment, calculation of potential rewards or losses using different strategies with external publics, degree of line manager involvement in external affairs

9. Internal Threats (how much is at stake in the situation): economic loss or gain from implementing various stances, marring of employees’ or stockholders’ perception of the company, marring of the personal reputations of the company decision makers (image in employees’ perceptions and general public’s perception

10. Individual Characteristics (public relations practitioner, dominant coalition and line managers): training in PR, marketing, journalism, engineering, etc., personal ethics, tolerance of ability to deal with uncertainty, comfort level with conflict or dissonance, comfort level with change, ability to recognize potential and existing problems, extent of openness to innovation, extent to which individual can grasp others’ world-views, personality: dogmatic, authoritarian, communication competency, cognitive complexity: ability to handle complex problems, predisposition towards negotiation, predisposition towards altruism, how individuals receive, process and use information and influence, familiarity with external public or its representative, like external public or its representative, gender: female versus male

11. Relationship Characteristics: level of trust between organization and external public, dependency of parties involved, ideological barriers between organization and public

12. Others: None of the above

Appendix 2: Details of the cases studied

Merck CEO retires: A popular pain and arthritis drug that was consumed by millions worldwide since it launched in 1999, Vioxx, which chalked up global sales amounting to US$2.5 billion in 2003 alone, was withdrawn from the market on September 30, 2004. Merck & Co, which manufactured the drug, withdrew it after a trial showed that those who took 25mg of Vioxx daily for more than 18 months were twice as likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke as those on placebo. The withdrawal was described as the largest voluntary drug recall in history. Merck said the withdrawal was to protect patients from further risks. However, the onslaught of criticism from the medical fraternity, lawsuits by patients, and investigations by the Justice Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission, continued. In May 2005, CEO Raymond Gilmartin, who, by far, had been Merck’s most prominent defender in the controversy, resigned abruptly. Merck said he retired. The population of stories about Gilmartin’s retirement were sourced from October 2004 to May 2005. News stories were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (Merck, Vioxx, CEO, retirement, Gilmartin). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 10.

BP refinery blast: On March 23, 2005, a powerful explosion rocked BP’s refining complex in Texas City, Texas, about 35 miles southeast of downtown Houston, injuring more than 100 people and killing 15 people. The blast occurred on the western side of the sprawling 1,200-acre complex in one of the units used to make high-grade fuels. According to a BP report, operators overfilled and overheated a processing tower at a unit that housed hydrocarbon liquid
and vapor. The liquid and vapor mix over-pressurized, flooded into an adjacent stack and escaped into the atmosphere. The resulting vapor cloud was ignited by an unknown source. The report added that it was human error. BP quickly admitted fault for the blast. The population of stories about this blast were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (BP, refinery, explosion, blast). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 18.

Rumors of Gonzales resignation: Former US Attorney-General Alberto R. Gonzales’ troubles intensified from March 2007 when questions were asked of the Justice Department surrounding the ouster of eight United States attorneys and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's use of expanded surveillance powers to improperly obtain personal records of citizens. A leading Democrat, Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, began to call for his resignation. Gonzales initially responded by claiming he was “not involved in any discussions about what was going on”, only to concede later at a Senate hearing that he knew about them though he did not select any of the prosecutors slated for dismissal in 2006. He claimed he had delegated the effort to his former chief of staff, D. Kyle Sampson. From March to April, rumors were rife as to whether he would resign even as he was fighting hard to keep his job. The population of stories about this rumor were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (Gonzales, attorney general, step down, resign). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 18. Gonzales did resign after all, on August 27, 2007.

Virginia Tech shooting: In what was described as the deadliest shooting rampage in American history, a gunman, Seung-Hui Cho, embarked on two shooting attacks at Virginia Tech University in April 2007, killing 32 and injuring at least 15. There was a two-hour gap between the first shootings, when two people were killed, and the second, when Cho stalked through the halls of an engineering building across campus, shooting at professors and students in classrooms and hallways, firing dozens of rounds. Cho, described as a loner, filmed himself in between the attacks. In a video sent to NBC and later broadcast, Cho vented his hatred of other students and his grandiose self-view. He killed himself after the second attack. The population of stories about this psychopathic act were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (Virginia tech, gunman). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 16.

Ameren deals with power outages: Thousands of residents in Missouri and Illinois went without power for nearly a week in the cold of the winter after a nasty storm plowed through the Midwest in early December 2006. At least 19 deaths were blamed on the storm. However, it was the St. Louis-based Ameren Corp’s dealing of this natural disaster that came under scrutiny. Missouri Governor Matt Blunt described Ameren’s handling of the crisis “unacceptable.” “Missourians expect and should receive reliable service from their utility companies,” he said. Illinois Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn called for utility regulators to investigate into the lingering power disruptions. Despite Ameren’s insistence that it had poured every available resource into rectifying the power outage, residents remained outraged. The population of stories about the handling of this natural disaster were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (power outage, storms, Ameren). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 14.

US Airways’ takeover bid of Delta Air Lines: In an effort to become the largest airline in the world, US Airways made an audacious US$8.5 billion bid for the Delta Air Lines in November 2006, even though Delta had rebuffed earlier advances a few months earlier in the
summer. Undeterred, US Airways, which operates a vast network of both international and domestic routes, this time made an unsolicited offer to the creditors of Delta, which was operating under bankruptcy protection. Delta was the fourth-largest domestic airline in the US. US Airways took the hostile takeover further by presenting its case to the Delta creditors even as Delta was trying to shore up support from its creditors that it would emerge from the bankruptcy protection as stand-alone company. The battle, however, did not last for long. US Airways withdrew its improved US$10.2 billion offer after it failed to win the support of Delta creditors, which included the Boeing Company and the federal pension agency, in January 2007. The population of stories about this hostile takeover were uploaded from Lexis-Nexis by typing in the key words (US Airways, Delta Air Lines, takeover). Stories that were relevant to the crisis were eventually filtered to 20.
Who Are the Power Bloggers as Potential Target Public in PR?:
Public Issue Involvement-Production of Messages Model

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ABSTRACT
This study seeks to identify bloggers as an important target public in public relations and identify influential bloggers - “power bloggers” - defined by the level of issue involvement and communication activities in terms of message production and consumption. It is the first study to suggest and verify a useful model “PIIPM” to explore power bloggers based on an online survey of 807 South Korean bloggers.

INTRODUCTION
Blogs have increased astronomically since their first emergence in 1997 (Drezner & Farell, 2004). According to an April 2007 study, it is estimated that 120,000 are being created everyday (Lee, 2007). This means that almost 1.4 blogs are created every second. In addition to their explosive growth, one of the main reasons for paying attention to blogs is because of their political and sociological effects on the public as opinion leaders (Andrews, 2003; Drezner & Farell, 2004; Haas, 2005; Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Matheson, 2004; Regan, 2003). Accordingly, some researchers argue that bloggers who run blogs function as journalists (Hass, 2005; Wilson, 2006).

Blogs are personalized media forms run by one person who produces and distributes messages simultaneously. Individuals can provide their personal information or stories, commentary or news on a particular subject on blogs that are in an online interactive diary format (Blood, 2003; Kaye, 2005; Kaye & Johnson, 2004a, 2004b; Lasica, 2003; Lowrey, 2006; Yang, 2007; Wall, 2005). Thus, today’s motto to describe blog media could be the “people are the messenger” while in the past it was the “[t]he medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1964). However, only a few key bloggers seem to enjoy any real clout, in terms of active political and social power, concerning information and public opinion (Blood, 2004; Rutigliano, 2007; Shirky, 2003; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). These leading bloggers have power to influence organizations’ rise and fall (Messner, 2005; Pavlik, 2007). In this sense, Edelman and Intelliseek (2005) argue that public relations experts should pay attention to these influential bloggers.

Based on the blogs’ journalistic characteristics, public relations researchers have actively included blogs to the public relations field as a meaningful research topic (Edelman & Intelliseek,
However, most studies have focused on how organizations utilize blogs as communication tools to build relationships or to solve conflicts with external or internal public sectors (Messner, 2005; Paine & Lark, 2005; Porter et al., 2007; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007; Trammell, 2006; Wilson, 2006). Few studies have focused on bloggers as an important object of study in public relations and fewer studies have suggested potential models or theories to identify them as an important target public in public relations.

Therefore, this research seeks to designate bloggers as an important target public in public relations and to identify influential bloggers, “power bloggers.” It also suggests a potential model to identify them. It is the first study to suggest and verify a useful model to investigate power bloggers and their work.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What is Blog Power?

No conclusive universal definition has emerged for “blog power.” Some researchers have named influential blogs as “A-list blogs” (Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005), “elite blogs” (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004), and “information hub blogs” (Bar-Ilan, 2005). Although their meanings are slightly different, they are commonly referred to as “well-known blogs”, “most read blogs”, and “highly interconnected blogs” (Drezner & Farell, 2004; Herring et al., 2004; Herring, Kouper, Paolillo, Scheidt, Tyworth, Welsch, Wright, & Yu, 2005; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005).

Blogs enable bloggers to communicate with blog readers without a gate-keeping process (Lowrey, 2006), because blogs collect and distribute information simultaneously (Hewitt, 2005). Thus some researchers have noted blogs’ popularity, i.e. how many people visit the blogs or the frequency with which people visit the blogs as A-list blogs (Marlow, 2004; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). Blood (2002, 2004) and Marlow (2004) have emphasized that blog power can be identified by the number of the blogs’ networks. These highly interconnected blogs enable bloggers to do active interaction and rapid transmission of information (Blood, 2002, 2004; Marlow, 2004). Additionally, Bar-Ilan (2005) argues that blog power can be explained by its contribution to building public discussion on public issues. Blogs can play critical roles in the blogosphere since bloggers can present their opinions about public issues and transmit those issues to others (Bar-Ilan, 2005). Therefore blog power can be identified by the number of blog visitors or its popularity, the number of blog’s networks and bloggers’ contributions to leading online discussions.

Who is a Power Blogger?

No research has suggested to date the models or criteria with which to identify power bloggers. A few researchers have proposed blog types based on comments on the blogs, the purpose of blogging, and the links and images related to the blogs (Herring et al., 2004). Krishnamurthy (2002) divided blogs into two types: personal vs. topical, and individual vs. community. However, Glaser (2004) criticized this classification in that it limits the relevance of blogs to only two dimensions. Thus it is suggested to divide blog types based on a more multi-
dimensional method because blogs are used for diverse purposes with various contents and structures (Bar-Ilan, 2005; Herring, et al., 2004).

There could be several potential variables which can be applied to identify and define power bloggers. This study looks at two critical variables that are often used for public segmentation in public relations as well as in communication fields: the level of issue involvement and the frequency of active use of blogs by bloggers.

Issue Involvement

Power bloggers can be defined based on Grunig’s (1983) situational theory of publics. The theory looks at the activeness or passiveness of the communication behavior of public (Grunig, 1989a). It defines that the public can be identified and classified by the degree to which they are aware of the problem and to the extent to which they act on the problem. Grunig (1989b) noted that “people communicating actively develop more organized cognitions, are more likely to have an attitude about a situation, and more often engage in a behavior to do something about the situation” (p. 6). It explains that problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement predict the public’s communication activities: information seeking and information processing. Cha (2002) suggests that problem recognition and the level of involvement can be taken together as one dimension since both dimensions are overlapped in meaning.

Some researchers argue that issue involvement is considered to be the most suitable variable to explain online communication because of its anonymity, while constraint recognition is a less important variable (Han, Park, & Jung, 2007; Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). Additionally, issue involvement is a useful variable for identifying power bloggers in that bloggers who are highly involved with current issues and topics are regarded as active bloggers in the blogosphere (Blood, 2002; Herring et al., 2004). Thus this study pays attention to the public’s issue involvement within the variables of the situational theory of publics.

Communication activities

Some researchers argue that although the bloggers have high issue involvement, if bloggers mainly consume messages by reading, scrapping, and searching for information, they cannot be categorized as online opinion leaders. They argue that only active communication in the media brings out people’s political interests and participation (Bandura, 1997; Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). Kim and Rhee (2006) have noted that it is important to understand writing as a sophisticated action based on consideration of others’ opinions. They also emphasize that only a small number of active writers lead public opinion online. In this sense, research has suggested that writing is a critical online communication activity since the highlighting and dissemination of socio-political issues begin with the expression of opinions (Kim & Rhee, 2006; Hwang, 2001).

An online opinion leader is considered to be as an actor who practices political participation diligently and an active media user who aggressively expresses one’s political opinions (Rhee, 2005; Rhee, Kim, & Kim, 2007; Rheingold, 2002). Thus blogs’ political and social effects can be defined by message production through writing strongly felt opinions. The effects thus can be increased in the interaction process through the blogs’ networks (Bar-Ilan,
In this sense, this study regards active message production - writing - as an indicator to identify power bloggers; therefore it pays keen attention to bloggers’ active message production.

**PIIPM (Public Issue Involvement-Production of Messages) MODEL & HYPOTHESES**

Based on the research reviewed above, this study proposes a “Public Issue Involvement-Production of Messages (PIIPM)” model to classify bloggers. The PIIPM model explains that bloggers who have high issue involvement provide socio-political issues on their blogs, while those who have a low level of issue involvement provide only private issues on their blogs. This model considers communication activities as the extent to which people actively communicate in terms of message production and consumption. Active bloggers use blogs actively by producing messages through writing, while passive bloggers mainly consume messages through reading, scrapping and searching for information.

The PIIPM model divides bloggers into four types: “active public bloggers,” “passive public bloggers,” “active private bloggers,” and “passive private bloggers.” (See Figure 1)

**FIGURE 1 Blogger Types**

Active public bloggers are regarded as those who are highly involved with current socio-political issues and actively produce comment and opinions. These bloggers are regarded as power bloggers this study examines. Passive public bloggers are considered those who have high issue involvement but merely consume messages rather than producing them. Active private bloggers are regarded as those who write private stories or issues. Passive private bloggers are as those who scrap private issues from other blogs and post them to their own blogs or just read those issues from their linked blogs. For the purpose of verifying the PIIMP model proposed by this research for the identification of power bloggers, this research explores whether power bloggers, who are identified based on the model, have blog power in terms of popularity.
and blogrolls.

The three hypotheses thus are proposed below:

\( H1 \): Power bloggers who are identified based on the PIIPM model will have more blog power than do non-power bloggers.

\( H1a \): Blogs run by power bloggers who are identified based on the model will have more visitors than do non-power bloggers.

\( H1b \): Blogs run by power bloggers who are identified based on the model will have more blogrolls than do non-power bloggers.

\( H2 \): Power bloggers who are identified based on the PIIPM model will be more active agents for building public discourse than are non-power bloggers.

**METHOD**

**Procedure**

An online cross-sectional survey was conducted with a national sample of three largest Korean commercial online blog portal sites which provide access to bloggers for their interaction and exchange of opinions and information. These sites are: www.allblog.net, blog.paran.com and www.tistory.com. Korean blogs were selected because Korean is the one of the countries with the most blogs and bloggers (Edelman, 2007). Internet banner ads which directly connected to the online surveys by clicking on them were posted on those blog portal sites. Bloggers voluntarily participated in the surveys. As an incentive, all respondents who completed the survey were entered into a raffle to win a monetary prize. Ten participants were each awarded $100. The data collection took place during a one month period between September and October in 2007.

The Web survey used each blog portal site on which the researchers posted banner ads. Their programs were used to create and administer an online survey, and store the responses in an online password-protected database accessible only to the researchers. The online survey software generated a unique Web address for each respondent to ensure that each respondent was allowed to complete the survey only once. The data were exported into an Excel file, which eliminated potential data entry error, and then uploaded into SPSS, cleaned, and analyzed.

**Sample**

As noted above, a national sample of three largest Korean commercial online blog portal sites voluntarily participated in the surveys. All respondents were Korean. The researchers limited their sample to those who run their own blogs. The sample total was 807, including 655 male (81.2%) and 152 female (18.8%) with an average age of 28.5 years old \((SD = 8.24)\). The mean of blogging were 2.92 years with an average blogging time of 10.48 hours per week \((SD = 12.85)\).

**Instrument and Measures**

The survey instrument was constructed based on both established scales and new scales the researchers developed from the literature review above. The survey covered blogging goals, history, experiences, attitudes, bloggers’ perceptions about socio-political issues, and demographic questions. The survey was pretested to refine question wording and validate the
measures, using online with 15 graduate students majoring in mass communication. The
instrument was modified based on their feedback and the pretest results.

Level of Issue Involvement

The level of involvement was defined as the extent to which people perceive their
connections with a situation and those who are interested in socio-political issues. A set of items
designed to measure the level of issue involvement asked participants to rate their issue
involvement on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very likely. The
questions were focused on (a) the level of the bloggers’ general interest in politics and society,
(b) the level of the bloggers’ interest in current issues and events, (c) the level of bloggers’
perception of the connection between themselves with socio-political issues, (d) the level of
frequency of bloggers’ recall of those issues, and (e) the level of bloggers’ interest in the 2007
Korean presidential election. These items produced a high reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha$.842).

Communication Activities

Communication activities were operationally defined as the extent to which people
actively communicate in terms of message production and consumption. Message production
refers to active writing activity while message consumption is regarded as reading, scrapping and
searching for information. An example of a question measuring communication activities was “How often do you post comment, trackback and articles?” Respondents were asked to rate their frequency on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very often.

Blog Popularity

Based on literature reviewed in this study, blog power can be identified by the number of
visitors in terms of a blog’s popularity, blogrolls, and bloggers’ contributions to furthering online
discussions. Visitors refer to those who visit a blog regardless their message production or
consumption. The number of visitors to a blog was measured by asking participants to respond
the automatic count number on their blogs. The blogroll was defined by the number of blogs
which connected to each participant’s blog. Participants were asked to count and respond with
the number of blogs linked to their blogs.

Public Discourse-Building Activity

A public discourse-building activity was defined by extent to which people actively seek
socio-political issues information online, raise and share issues with other people, and participate
in online discussions. A set of items measuring public discourse-building activities asked
respondents to rate a set of activities on blogs on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = not
at all to 5 = very likely. The researchers used a set of three items: (a) the extent to which
participants have raised issues and post related articles on the their blogs, (b) the extent to which
participants have scrapped articles from other blogs, and (c) the extent to which participants
discuss issues in online communities or discussion bulletin boards. These items yielded a high
degree of reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha$.822).
RESULTS

All hypotheses were tested through one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The ANOVAs determined the number of blog visitors, the number of blogrolls and the level of public discourse-building activities that were related to segmentation of four categories of groups based on the model which this study proposes. The number of blog visitors, the number of blogrolls, and the public discourse-building activities were entered as the dependent variables, and each public segmentation category variable was entered as the independent variable. All data analyses in this study were conducted using SPSS 15.0 for Windows®. A $p \leq .05$ significance level was used as the criterion to reject the null hypothesis for all statistical tests performed. ANOVA results are reported in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**
Comparisons of Blog Visitors, Blogrolls and Public Discourse-Building by Blogger Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Blogger Types</th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$F(3,803)$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of visitors</td>
<td>Passive Private</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>199,327.21</td>
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<td>11.789</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>3,887,742.81</td>
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<td>35,448,225.85</td>
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<td>The number of blogrolls</td>
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<td>4.270</td>
<td>.005</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Passive Public</td>
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<td>15.25</td>
<td>33.86</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>33.00</td>
<td>52.43</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Public</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>65.52</td>
<td>186.86</td>
<td>4.270</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The level of public discourse-building</td>
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<td>1.97</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>22.421</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Passive Public</td>
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<td>2.56</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>22.421</td>
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<td>2.09</td>
<td>.88</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Public</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.02</td>
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</table>

$H1$: Power bloggers who are identified based on the PIIPM model will have more blog power than do non-power bloggers.

$H1a$: Blogs run by power bloggers who are identified based on the model will have more visitors than do non-power bloggers.

$H1b$: Blogs run by power bloggers who are identified based on the model will have more blogrolls than do non-power bloggers.

Hypothesis 1 including both sub-hypotheses 1a and 1b was supported, as shown in the Table 1. The results indicate that blogs run by active public bloggers, those who were identified as power bloggers in this study, have the most many visitors ($F=11.789, p < .001$) and blogrolls ($F = 4.270, p < .05$) than blogs run by other blogger types. Specifically, the number of visitors for each blogger type is presented in Figure 2. The number of blogrolls is shown in Figure 3.
Hypothesis 2 was partially confirmed as shown in Table 1. Active public bloggers, power bloggers, are more active to build public discourse than are the other three blogger groups ($M = 2.6, SD = 1.02, p < .001$). However, the Bonferroni post-hoc test showed that there is no significant difference between active public bloggers and passive public bloggers in terms of the level of public discourse-building activities, while there is a significant difference between passive private bloggers and active private bloggers ($t = -.024, p = n.s.$) The comparison of the level of public discourse-building activities for each blogger type is presented in Figure 4.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

These findings provide support for the PIIPM (Public Issue Involvement-Production of Messages) model proposed here. The results confirm that bloggers who are highly involved with public issues and produce messages have more visitors and more blogrolls to their blogs. The data indicate that power bloggers participate more actively in building public discourse online than non-power bloggers. This finding is notable in light of the fact that power bloggers’ active message productivity concerning public issues leads to the popularity of their blogs and the increase of their blogrolls. The researchers conclude that the PIIPM model is both valid and reliable. The conclusions from this research imply that those power bloggers identified by the PIIPM model should have increased attention as research public in public relations.

The researchers believe that this study makes contributions to both theoretical and practical field of public relations. This study is meaningful since it is the first attempt to delineate bloggers as an important target public in public relations based on the theoretical background and to explore the influence and importance of blogs as a medium. The proposed model verifies the partial efficacy of Grunig’s situational theory for segmentation of online bloggers as a target public to study. It thus provides an opportunity for both modification and development of the existing theory. This research also provides more directions for future research in public relations. On a practical level, this study establishes practical reasons for public relations practitioners to develop and implement strategic communication that is effective in understanding and achieving better relationships with power bloggers.

This study has limitations. For defining blog power, it considered only the number of blog visitors and blogrolls. Further studies need to consider more various criteria for identification of blog power, including perceptions of the credibility of blogs, the quality of messages produced in blogs, and the extent to which other media use information from blogs. Future research also must attempt to further the development of more explicit definitions and sophisticated means to measure those proposed criteria. Further research should also suggest new variables other than the level of involvement and communication activities for identification of power bloggers.
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How is Responsibility Attributed?
The Interaction Effect of the Injured Party on the Relationship Between Damage Severity During a Crisis and Perceptions of Corporate Responsibility
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Abstract
Using a 2 (Crisis Severity) x 2 (Injured Parties) between subjects factorial experimental design, this study examined main effects and interaction effects of crisis severity and injured parties on crisis responsibility. The data produced a main effect for injured parties but no main effect for crisis severity. Also there was no interaction between crisis severity and injured parties.

INTRODUCTION
Many studies in crisis communication have focused on the perceived dimension of crises in order to investigate how the degree of the public’s blame, or attribution of responsibility to an organization, varies according to different crisis situations and strategies (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2001; Coombs & Schmidt, 2000; Lee 2005). The perception of what constitutes a crisis and who is responsible for the crisis plays a significant role in influencing crisis outcomes as either opportunities or threats to an organization (Penrose, 2000). For example, Benoit (2004) argued that the critical questions for organizations faced with a crisis are “not whether the act was in fact, but whether the act was believed to be offensive by its salient audiences,” (p. 264) as well as “not whether the accused is in fact responsible for the offensive act, but whether the accused is thought to be responsible by its salient audience” (p. 264).

Not only does this experimental study examine perceptions of attribution of responsibility for a crisis, but it also explores whether the attribution of responsibility changes with the severity of the crisis. Current crisis communication research indicates there are inconsistent findings regarding the effects of crisis severity on judgments of an organizations’ responsibility for a crisis. In contrast to Coombs’ (1998) findings that minor damage increases the perceptions of crisis responsibility compared to severe damage, a study of Hong Kong consumers by Lee (2005) showed a positive relationship between the degree of crisis seriousness and judgment of organizational responsibility for crisis. Coombs (1998) explained that the negative relationship between the severity of damage and the crisis responsibility is due to sympathy for the injured in case of severe damage. However, Lee’s (2005) contrasting findings from the experiment with Hong Kong consumers to Coombs’ (1998) U.S. experimental studies explained that the contrast finding is because Western people are more emotionally involved than a Hong Kong public. However, it is just Lee’s supposition, not the findings by measuring cultural variables within the study.

In an attempt to clarify the relationship between severity of damage and crisis
responsibility in Coombs’ (1998) attribution theory, this study posits that influences of injured parties caused by a crisis would interact with the severity of crisis damage. When comparing stimuli used in an experiment in both studies, the injured party of Coombs (1998)’ study was an organization, whereas Lee (2005) used consumers as injured parties in the stimuli. Depending on injured parties during a crisis, crisis responsibility would be moderated through the interactions between severity of damage and injured parties.

The purpose of this study, then, is to explore how a moderating variable—the injured party—affects the relationship between the severity of damage and attribution of crisis responsibility to a corporation using Coombs’ (1998) attribution theory. Thus, the present study uses a 2 (severity of damage: high vs. low) x 2 (injured party: consumer vs. company) between subjects factorial experimental design, investigating the main effects as well as the interaction effect between the severity of damage and injured party on crisis responsibility.

Theoretically, this study is the first to introduce a new variable, injured parties, into Coombs’ (1998) attribution theory, by investigating the interaction between injured parties and severity of damage on perception of crisis responsibility. It endeavors to show that a condition leading to the greatest crisis responsibility lies among combinations of the crisis severity and the category of injured parties. Additionally, this study gives practical insights for public relations practitioners in crisis management to diagnose crisis situations with more attention to those viewed as the injured party.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

*Attribution Theory*

To investigate the interaction effect of the injured party on the relationship between damage severity during a crisis and perceptions of corporate responsibility to address the inconsistent findings in crisis communication, this paper adopts Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory. Weiner’s theory is from which the concept of corporate crisis responsibility was initiated.

Weiner (1986) argued that people seek causes of an event and attribute responsibility or blame according to three dimensions: stability, locus, and controllability. Stability refers to whether the cause of the event happens frequently (stable) or infrequently (unstable). Locus refers to locus of control, which is divided into internal and external locus of control based on the main causes. If causes of the event are related to the organization itself, it is the internal locus of control; whereas causes of the event from someone or some parties outside of the organization indicate external locus of control (McAuley, Duncan, & Russell, 1992; Russell, 1982; Wilson, Cruz, Marshall, & Rao, 1993). Controllability refers to whether or not the organization has the ability to control the event that caused the crisis. Personal control indicates whether or not the event’s causes are uncontrollable or controllable by the actor, whereas external control reflects the degree of controllability for the event’s causes by another person.

*Dimensions of Crisis Responsibility*

Later in 1995, Coombs (1995) adopted Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory and applied it to look at the effect of three dimensions on crisis responsibility to see how much organizations are viewed as responsible for a crisis (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 2001). This concept of crisis responsibility was defined by Coombs (1998) as “the degree to which stakeholders blame
the organization for the crisis” (p. 180). The level of crisis responsibility is a key indicator of the potential crisis damage on the organization’s reputation (Coombs & Schmidt, 2000). Lee (2005) also stated that crisis responsibility would act as the strongest mediator between causal attribution or the degree of crisis seriousness and cognitive-affective-behavioral evaluation of the organization for a crisis.

According to attribution theory (Weiner, 1995), attribution of responsibility for a crisis affects people’s cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions toward the organization, which include negative feelings toward the organization and their degree of willingness to interact with the organization in the future. Coombs (1998) also found that stakeholders’ overall impression of the organization is influenced by perceived crisis responsibility. He found increases in perceived crisis responsibility resulted in negative impressions of the organization and lower levels of trust (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Similar to past crisis communication studies (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 1996), Lee (2005) also found similar negative correlations.

Coombs and Holladay (2002) examined an interchangeable possibility in the relationship between personal control and crisis responsibility. Although the concepts of attribution of personal control and crisis responsibility are different, their operationalizations can be measured on the same scale, measuring one factor called crisis responsibility. Thus, this study used crisis responsibility as the predictor variable indicating people’s cognitive evaluations of organizational crisis. According to Coombs (1998), people seek out and determine the causes of a crisis and attribute responsibility, and then finally evaluate crisis responsibility based on three crisis situation dimensions: (1) attribution of control, (2) performance history, and (3) severity of damage.

First, in regard to attribution of control, it must first be determined whether the organization has control over the cause. When the external control is low and the locus is internal, crisis responsibility would be much stronger than in the situation in which the external control is high and the internal locus is low. In other words, attribution of low external control means that crises are not mainly caused by the outside of the organization; thus crises are not attributed to the external publics. Otherwise, high internal locus/personal control indicates that the organizations have an ability to control and could have done something to prevent crises. Thus, organizations will be perceived to have more responsibility for that crisis when they are perceived as being able to control a crisis (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

The second dimension of crisis responsibility, performance history, can be comparable to the stability dimension of Weiner (1986)’s attribution theory. A history of similar crises can be characterized as stable. In other words, the more stable the crisis, the more crisis responsibility people attribute to the organization. On the other hand, an unstable crisis is the situation in which less crisis responsibility is attributed to an organization. In this sense, an organization’s past performance history is an important factor of crisis responsibility in that similar past crises intensify the public’s perception of the crisis responsibility and exacerbate an organizational negative image. Organizational performance history can be classified as negative and positive. Positive performance history indicates a one-time crisis event or no crisis, whereas a negative performance history reflects a series of similar crisis events. It has been acknowledged it is easier for a company with a positive performance history to maintain a positive reputation if it
experiences a crisis situation. When a crisis occurs, the credits accumulated in previous times may buffer the negative impacts (Birch, 1994; Coombs, 1998).

Finally, crisis responsibility can also be examined in terms of the severity of damage (Coombs, 1998). The level of damage during a crisis can be a key feature in determining responsibility. Previous studies on crisis damage hypothesized that the more severe the damage, the greater crisis responsibility publics would attribute to the organization (Coombs, 1995; Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2001, 2002). However, this assumption about the positive correlation between severity of damage and crisis responsibility is just due to the belief that people hold others more personally responsible for negative actions than for positive actions (Griffin, 1994). For example, even though Coombs (1998) predicted that crisis responsibility would be greater in severe crisis damage compared to minor crisis damage, the results were the reverse of the initial hypothesis on positive correlations between damage seriousness and crisis responsibility. Experimental findings showed that minor damage conditions attributed greater responsibility to the organization than the severe damage. Coombs (1998) explained that the negative relationship between the severity of damage and the crisis responsibility might be due to sympathy for seriously injured organizations. However, Coombs (1998) acknowledged that it is necessary to conduct more research to provide convincing and accurate reasons for the inverse correlation between severity of damage and crisis responsibility to test the supposition of sympathy.

**Severity of Damage and Injured Party**

Among the crisis communication research on three elements of crisis responsibility, only the severity of damage variable has showed inconsistent results on the judgment of organizational responsibility for crisis. For instance, in contrast with the study conducted by Coombs (1998) in the U.S., Lee (2005) discovered a positive relationship between degree of crisis seriousness and judgment of organizational responsibility for a crisis in Hong Kong. Lee (2005) concluded that the contrasting finding resulted from a tendency for U.S. people to be more emotionally involved than the Hong Kong public. However, Lee’s conclusions were not based on data.

It may be that a third variable, a matter of injured parties damaged by a crisis, might be at work. When comparing stimuli used in the experiments of both studies, the injured parties in Coombs’ (1998) study were organizations, whereas Lee (2005) used consumers as the injured parties. Crisis responsibility might be moderated through the interactions between severity of damage and injured parties. When an injured party is closely associated with an organization, people might attribute less crisis responsibility to the organization than to when an injured party is a consumer. For example, Park (2007) argued that the subjects who are influenced by severe damage would be a factor in the inconsistent findings on severity damage and its effect on attribution of crisis responsibility. When products are suspected of having a potentially devastating impact on consumers’ health, the greater the severity of the media portrayal and the more crisis responsibility the people attribute to the organization (Park, 2007). Thus, the consumer health crisis distinctively depends on the publics’ perception of the organization’s responsibility for the consumers’ health problem related to its products.

The severity of damage is not a function of actual damage but a matter of interpretation of the effects of the stimuli because public perceptions are varied by media portrayal or media
definition of the severity of crisis damage. For instance, even though the iPod is not any louder than other MP3 players in loudness tests, and warnings from other companies are very similar or even less informative than the ones on Apple’s iPod, the severity of hearing damage was significantly related to Apple’s crisis responsibility because the iPod’s ability to reach a volume of 130 decibels—as loud as an air raid siren or a jackhammer—was described as a cause of hearing loss in news media (Park, 2007). Also, the terms indicating high severity of hearing loss, such as ‘permanent,’ ‘impaired,’ ‘irreparable’ and ‘inherent risks’ were reported in most of the news coverage of the issue. Thus, the greater the severity of the media portrayal on consumers, the more the people blamed organizational responsibility for the consumer health crisis related to its products.

By the same token, this study examines the effects of severity damage and injured parties by using the stimuli of media news coverage. Thus, the main effects of differing severity of damage and the injured party on the crisis responsibility, respectively, will be investigated based on hypotheses created as follows:

H1: The higher the crisis severity of damage during a crisis, the more crisis responsibility people will hold toward an organization.

H2: The crisis responsibility will be greater when the injured party is a consumer compared to when the injured party is a company.

In addition, this study also explores the interaction effects of differing severity of damage and the injured party on the crisis responsibility based on the following hypotheses (See Figure 1):

H3: The injured party will interact with the crisis severity such that a company causing damage to its consumers will produce greater scope of crisis responsibility than a company that has received damages in the high crisis severity of damage.
METHOD

Design
An experimental method was adopted to answer hypotheses in this study. This study employed a 2 (Crisis Severity of damage: high vs. low) x 2 (Injured party: consumer vs. company) between-subjects factor design. Based on the combinations of two between subject factors – severity of damage (low vs. high) and the injured party (consumer vs. company), participants were be randomly assigned to one of four groups: The first group was given the condition of high severity of crisis damage and consumer injuries; the second group was treated with the condition of high severity of crisis damage and company injuries; the third group was assigned to the condition of low severity of damage and consumer injuries; the fourth group was given the condition of low severity of damage and company injuries (See Table 1).

Table 1. Experimental Design : 2 x 2 Between Subjects Factorial Design

<table>
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<th>Condition 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>High Crisis Severity</td>
<td>High Crisis Severity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Crisis Severity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consumer Injuries</td>
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Stimuli
The crisis situation context for this experiment was an airplane accident, which has been used in previous crisis communication studies (Coombs, 1995; King, 2002; Ray, 1999; Lee, 2005).
The two independent variables are crisis severity and injured party. In phase I, the level of crisis severity of damage was manipulated. Thus, a news story describing an organization’s crisis faced with an airline accident was provided. The airline company was a fictitious one because the severity level of crisis damage needs to be manipulated successfully. The content of stimulus was based on real news stories about an airline company and slightly modified (i.e. changing company’s name and an amount of damage). There were two different versions of news stories: one describing low severity of damage and the other one presenting highly severe crisis damage. Except for the severity of damage, other content of the story was the same. To be specific, in a condition of high severity of damage, the plane crashed and all passengers perished. In a condition of low severity of damage, an airplane had a small accident, including minor injuries, but no deaths.

In phase II, the injured party was manipulated to represent consumers or the company. In the consumer injury condition, only passengers were injured by the airline accident. In the company injury condition, only crew members and no passengers were injured during a crisis. These news stories will be slightly modified based on the real news stories (i.e. changing company’s name and an amount of damage). Except for the content related to the injured party, the remaining story content stayed the same.

Procedure
Students were recruited from a required undergraduate course at The University of Missouri. At the end of the class period, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Each person received one news story and a questionnaire. Participants were asked to read one news story describing an airplane accident and then to answer the questions measuring crisis responsibility and the level of severity of damage. Participants were debriefed after questionnaires were collected.

Participants
A total of 123 undergraduate students enrolled in Journalism courses at university of Missouri participated in the experiment. More females (n=88) participated than males (n=35). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 with a mean age of 20 (SD= 1 year). They were compensated with extra credit. Nearly equal numbers of around 30 participants were randomly assigned to each condition of four different combinations of severity of crisis damage and injured parties. Student participants were chosen because they are relatively homogeneous in terms of age and education. This makes for a better comparison by controlling other variables and creates a distinction between four groups of participants.

Measurement
Crisis responsibility
Crisis responsibility, or the degree to which people blame the organization for the crisis, was measured using a two-item scale adopted from Griffin, Babin, and Darden’s (1992) study about the attribution of blame. The two items are: (a) “How responsible was the organization for the crisis?” measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all responsible) to 7 (totally responsible), and (b) “To what degree do you think the organization should be blamed?”
measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all to be blamed) to 7 (absolutely to be blamed). The efficient alpha value for crisis responsibility items was .84.

**Manipulation check**
To assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulations of the different level of severity of crisis damage, two items served as the manipulation check. Those items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high) by asking following questions: “What level of severity do you feel the airplane accident was given in this news story?” and “How serious do you think airplane accident damage was?” The efficient alpha value for manipulation check items was .67.

**Analysis**
A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to check the manipulation of different levels of damage seriousness. Also a factorial ANOVA was conducted to examine the main effects and interaction effects of crisis severity and the injured party on crisis responsibility.

**RESULTS**

**Manipulation Checks**
A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was conducted to check the experimental manipulation of whether the severity of damage between low severity conditions and high severity conditions were significantly different or not. A one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference between the high crisis severity and the low crisis severity in the test, $F(1, 121) = 40.47, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$ (Low $M = 3.80, S.D. = 1.37$; High $M = 5.32, S.D. = 1.28$).

**Hypotheses Tests**
A 2 (Crisis Severity of damage) x 2 (Injured party) between subjects factorial ANOVA was conducted to test the main effects and interaction effects of two independent variables on crisis responsibility.

Hypothesis 1 examined the main effect of severity of crisis damage on the perception of crisis responsibility by predicting that the higher the crisis severity of damage the greater crisis responsibility people attribute to the organization. No significant statistical difference was found $F(1, 119) = .15, p > .05, \eta^2 = .001$. Participants viewed the organization as similarly responsible for the crisis in both low ($M = 4.2, S.D. = .18, N = 61$) and high ($M = 4.3, S.D. = .18, N = 62$) severity conditions. Thus, Hypothesis 1 about the main effect of crisis severity of damage on crisis responsibility was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 examined the main effect of the injured party on the perception of crisis responsibility by predicting that a company would be perceived as having greater responsibility for the crisis when injured party is a consumer than when injured party is a company. As predicted, a significant difference was found in the subjects’ perception of crisis responsibility when the injured party was a consumer compared to when the injured party was affiliated with the company, $F(1, 119) = 7.01, p < .01, \eta^2 = .06$: Participants attributed more responsibility to the organization when there were consumer injuries ($M = 4.61, S.D. = .18, N = 62$) than in the
condition of company injuries \((M = 3.93, S.D. = .18, N = 61)\). Thus, Hypothesis 2 about the main effect of the injured party on crisis responsibility was supported.

Hypothesis 3 examined the interaction effects of severity of crisis damage and injured party on crisis responsibility by predicting that the conditions of consumer injuries would produce a greater perception of crisis responsibility than the conditions of company injuries in the high crisis severity of damage. However, there was no interaction effects for crisis responsibility between severity of crisis damage and injured party, \(F (1, 119) = .039, p > .05, \eta^2 = .00\). Participants hold similar pattern of the crisis responsibility toward organization between the conditions of consumer injuries and the conditions of company injuries regardless of levels of crisis severity. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported (See Figure 2).

![Figure 2. No interaction effects of crisis severity and injured parties on crisis responsibility](image)

**DISCUSSION**

**Implications**

This study provides important theoretical implications to the attribution theory in crisis communication. By showing no main effects of crisis severity on crisis responsibility, this study addresses inconsistent findings about the relationship between crisis severity of damage and crisis responsibility. Severity of damage has been determined as one of the elements influencing crisis responsibility. An initial supposition built by Coombs (1998) about the relationship between severity of damage and crisis responsibility linked a positive relationship between them. However, the result of Coombs’ (1998) test was contrary to what he initially hypothesized. Coombs (1998) found that minor severity of damage produces greater crisis responsibility than severe crisis damage. In contrast to this finding, Lee (2005) found a positive relationship between crisis seriousness and crisis responsibility and argued that this positive relationship is due to the Hong Kong consumers’ cultural perspective, which is different from the US
perspective inherent in Coombs’ (1998) study. However, the impact of the cultural factor on the relationship between crisis seriousness and crisis responsibility has not been tested empirically. Thus, this study replicated the previous studies regarding the effect of crisis severity on crisis responsibility. As a result, this study suggests that the degree of crisis severity does not influence crisis responsibility. Even though the degree of crisis severity was successfully manipulated between two conditions (low vs. high) in this study, participants’ attribution of crisis responsibility to the organization between high crisis severity and low crisis severity was not significantly different.

Moreover, this study introduced an alternative variable that could possibly influence crisis responsibility. Based on the comparison of stimuli used in previous crisis communication research, this study hypothesized that the third variable, injured parties, would influence crisis responsibility. As predicted, this study showed the main effect of the injured party on crisis responsibility. In other words, there was a significant difference between consumer injuries and company injuries on crisis responsibility. More specifically, crisis responsibility was greater when the injured party was a consumer compared to when the injured party was a company. Thus, this study proposed a new variable, the injured party, to the attribution theory.

In addition, this study also examined the interaction effect between crisis severity and the injured party to determine whether the injured party moderates the effect of crisis severity on crisis responsibility. Although this study predicted that consumer injuries would produce a greater scope of crisis responsibility than company injuries in the high crisis severity of damage, there were no interaction effects between crisis severity and injured parties on crisis responsibility.

In sum, the results of this study showed the main effect of the injured party on crisis responsibility. Thus, crisis communications researchers should consider the injured party when they attempt to examine crisis responsibility, which is the critical factor in the public’s evaluation of the organization crisis.

These results also provide important practical insights to public relations practitioners who manage crises. This study shows that consumers attribute a similar responsibility to an organization for a crisis regardless of whether the crisis severity of damage is highly severe or less severe. Thus, public relations practitioners should not overlook minor crisis damage by assuming that the public may hold less crisis responsibility in the case of minor crisis damage rather than severe crisis damage. Public relations practitioners should always monitor any accident that is likely to cause damage.

Furthermore, public relations practitioners should always keep an eye on any crisis which causes damages to consumers. Specifically, the results show that people hold a greater crisis responsibility to an organization in the case of consumer injuries rather than company injuries, regardless of whether the degree of crisis severity is high or low. Thus, organizations should perform crisis response strategy immediately when consumers are suspected of having been injured from a crisis.

**Future Research**

This study only considered an airplane accident case for the experimental stimuli. Thus, future research can replicate this study by considering other kinds of crises in order to generalize
that there is no main effect of severity of damage on crisis responsibility into Coombs’ attribution theory. By replicating this study with different crisis cases, this study also has the potential to introduce an alternative variable, the injured party, to attribution theory.
Confronting Media Nihilism: How Transparency Builds Meaning during Crises
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Abstract
The traditional roles of the media in a democratic society including informing the public and facilitating social unity are changing rapidly. Factors such as media conglomeration, a “business” view of news, more sources and greater customization of those sources results in news morphing into entertainment and opinion, greater selectivity in our news sources and more conformity in our exposure to ideas.

On top of the changing role of media in a democratic society is a condition we call Media Nihilism, the rhetoric of crisis and failure or the tendency to exaggerate and “spectacularize” an event. This occurs when the media take the crisis out of its original context, give it an importance or impact it doesn’t have and actually help create a crisis where none exists. Media Nihilism robs society of the context needed to make intelligent decisions, creates a common culture of the expectation of failure and fails to inform the public completely of all aspects of the crisis.

We argue that transparency is the public relations strategy that confronts this phenomenon during crisis. Realizing that being transparent demands trust and courage from leadership, we submit that public relations has the functional responsibility for gaining that trust and inculcating in leadership the courage to be transparent.

Introduction
The traditional role of media in democratic societies
James Curran, in his manuscript Mass Media and Democracy Revisted, outlined six traditional roles ideally fulfilled by the media in democratic societies (Curan, 1997). First, the media must represent the people within a society. Freedom of the press is an essential part of this equation. Since only a very few can be part of the media, the media must represent the rest of us. This representation is typically achieved by speaking for groups or communities. The media should give a voice to those who want to be heard in order to fulfill this role.

Second, the media must act as a public watchdog. With the privilege of the power of communication comes responsibility to protect the people it represents. People look to and support the media as a system for keeping power structures in society in check. The media must represent the people’s interest and notify them of any issues on which they might want to act.

Third, the media must inform the public. In a democracy, citizens are responsible for making decisions to benefit the whole. In order to flourish, members must share the knowledge they gain. This insures intelligent and informed decision-making. In our society, knowledge is shared by both education and the media. Schools provide long-term knowledge. The media
provide knowledge of contemporary issues. The media tell us what’s happening in the world, schools give us the skills to deal with these issues.

Fourth, media must facilitate social unity. To remain united, there must be a common culture. The media help distribute culture by providing a shared experience. The more we feel connected, the greater our bond to each other and the more likely we are to truly make decisions for the common good.

Some scholars also add agenda setting as a role of the media. The theory holds that the mass-news media have a large influence on audiences by their choice of what stories to consider newsworthy and how much prominence and space to give them. Agenda-setting theory’s central axiom is salience transfer, or the ability of the mass media to transfer importance of items on their mass agendas to the public agendas. I would add that in trying to tell us what’s important, they interpret facts and provide context for issues, which also defines how the agenda is defined

The changing model

This model is changing rapidly, however. Mass media are consolidating into large conglomerations, driven by economies of scale, global competition and a desire for synergy. Fewer people control more outlets. These conglomerations are businesses and profits matter. If people aren’t watching/reading, there are no profits for the conglomeration. This has created more of a marketing approach to news.

While mass media is consolidating, from the end-user’s standpoint, there are more options for gathering information than ever before. Thousands upon thousands of messages a day assault us. Most of these sources serve ever-narrowing publics. One only has to look at the number of niche publications in the magazine industry to understand this trend. Many of these sources allow us to customize the kind of information we receive.

Why this matters…and why the model is changing so rapidly

We have become a society of voyeurs, intent NOT on gathering information critical to decision-making, but in watching what is happening to others. Think about all the “reality” shows on television and the number of times the networks have given us “breaking news” about the latest mis-adventures of some celebrity.

This tendency drives the “business decisions” of the mass media conglomerates, giving us more of the same and less information critical to making informed decisions. Fewer outlets means representation becomes that of the average, less diversity of ideas and fewer agendas.

More options means a cacophony of voices, which seems contradictory, but many of these voices are people just like you and me. Information morphs into opinion. Feeling overwhelmed, we tune out and don’t listen to ANY messages.

Individual customization means greater selectivity in our exposure to ideas. Cognitive dissonance plays a role in this selectivity. We tend to pay attention to those ideas that already align with our own. The media’s important watchdog and agenda-setting function is significantly reduced. Non-traditional sources matter too in the search for information. How many people get their “news” from blogs today? Bloggers are becoming opinion leaders in the dissemination of news. But, we tend to read the blogs of those with similar views to ours. So, is
it news…or opinion? If people are going to make the right kinds of decisions in governing themselves, they need a wide array of information.

**Media Nihilism**

On top of the changing role of media in a democratic society is a condition of news we call Media Nihilism. Hogan (1989) defined Media Nihilism as the rhetoric of crisis and failure. Extending this view, we see Media Nihilism as the media's tendency to exaggerate and “spectacularize” an event. A significant aspect of Media Nihilism as we define it is “reification,” a concept initially proposed by Karl Marx and advanced by Guy DeBord in his 1968 work “The Society of the Spectacle” (Debord, 1968). This “reification” involves: 1.) Separating out parts or the whole of the crisis from the original context in which it occurs; 2.) Placing it in another context, in which it lacks some or all of its original connections; and 3.) Conferring powers or attributes which in truth the crisis does not have.

In other words, Media Nihilism creates a distortion of both reality and society’s awareness of the critical issues relevant to a crisis. A single, spectacular element of the crisis is separated out or focused on. This focus usually recasts the element as something sinister, often as a conspiracy, and strips it of context. The crisis becomes greater and more rooted in the concept of failure for which there appears no recovery. Indeed, seldom are suggestions for solving the problem promoted at all unless they increase the tension or conflict within the crisis.

*What this phenomenon means to society during a crisis*

Neil Postman suggested in his seminal 1985 book *Amusing ourselves to death* that television confounds serious issues with entertainment, demeaning and undermining political discourse by making it less about ideas and more about image (Postman 1985). Here we're extending Postman’s concern over the decline of the media to suggest that Media Nihilism robs society of the context needed to make intelligent decisions, creates a common culture of the expectation of failure and fails to inform the public completely of all aspects of the crisis.

Media Nihilism also breeds irrationality. Decisions are made on the basis of emotion and not fact. These are seldom solid decisions for the common good. Indeed, these “knee-jerk” reactions often generate restrictions that harm…or at least impede…a society’s quality of life. Decisions made on the basis of emotion often lead to more poor decisions. These poor decisions become an avalanche, which is nearly impossible to halt. Making poor decisions also becomes a vicious circle.

A common culture of “the expectation of failure” leads to broader societal malaise from which it is difficult to recover. For example, this expectation of failure can lead to a type of social alienation, an antagonism between individuals who are otherwise in harmony or estranging one from traditional community and others in general. This social alienation results in individuals having shallower relations with other people than they would normally and leads to difficulties in understanding and adapting to each other's uniqueness (DeBord 1968; Althusser 1965).

A culture of failure can result in increased power distance (Hofstede 2001). Less powerful members of society lose confidence in “the system” and expect and accept that power
will continue to be distributed unequally. As people “give up,” unable to effect change, economic disparities deepen. Societal values change for the worse. No one expects anything to get better.

Public relations isn’t blameless here. We often fail to anticipate crises and plan accordingly. We don’t use all available communication channels to engage in conversations and gather feedback. Our organizations are also guilty of “paralysis through analysis” either spending too long gathering information before engaging or planning in such excruciating detail that they lock themselves into their plan and lose their flexibility.

Transparency and the role of public relations in confronting Media Nihilism

One of the public relations tools that confront Media Nihilism is transparency. Transparency, as used here, means openness, communication and accountability. In this context, transparency is deliberately making available all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner which is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal, and which enhances the reasoning ability of publics (Rawlins & Stoker, 2006).

When meetings are open, statements and financial information is made freely available, rules and decisions are open for discussion, those in leadership are less likely and able to subvert the system for their own benefit. But transparency also requires two-way communication. Provided with information, there will be questions, protests and suggestions. People interested in the topic will try and influence the decision. Modern democracy has as its foundation this interchange.

Truly transparent communication confronts Media Nihilism by presenting sufficient information for the public to make an informed decision. It fills the information void created when the media focuses on the most spectacular. It authentically represents the people within a society by assuming that people are rationale, that people are intelligent and that, while they may be fooled from time to time, they ultimately make the right decision.

Transparency facilitates social unity by providing context and perspective from which common meaning or a common culture is found. This, in turn, creates the greater bond needed to successfully whether problems and challenges, which in turn increases the chances we are all able to make better decisions for the common good.

Transparency also builds trust. Rawlins found that transparency and trust are highly correlated. “Organizations that are participative, share substantial information, are willing to be accountable, and are open will be more trusted” (Rawlins, 2007). While his study was conducted with employees, the results suggest that this correlation between trust and transparency will hold for other stakeholder groups as well.

Rawlins and others (see for example Fort, 1996 and Koehn, 1996) have also suggested that trust is a two-way street. A transparent organization trusts its stakeholders to mean well and “respond generously to our trust in them” (Koehn, 1996, p. 201). This trust is often repaid with active and fervent loyalty including stakeholders stepping up to publicly defend the organization in the midst of crisis.

A great example of transparency at its finest, facilitated in large measure by the public relations experts, can be seen in the serious crisis that resulted from Don Imus’ comments about the Rutgers University women’s basketball team. At no point in the Rutgers University
communications team’s planning for the media onslaught did they prepare the players or coaching staff with tightly worded key messages before the press conferences. In this highly sensitive time, they never asked their players to do interviews, nor did they prohibit the players from doing so. Rutgers simply trusted the “news makers” to use their own words to “say the right things” according to Greg Trevor, senior director, media relations at Rutgers (Trevor, 2007).

It isn’t easy to be transparent, however. Leadership is often unable or unwilling to be transparent. Transparency takes courage, and public relations must lead the way, through our preparation and deeds, to gain that trust and make it easy for our leadership to have the courage to do the right thing before it’s needed in time of crisis.

But, let’s not forget that, much like the traditional role of the media in a democratic society, public relations must represent both the organization and the people within a society, protect the people it represents, both internally and externally, inform the public so that intelligent and informed decisions can be made, and facilitate social unity. In deed, we are often referred to as “the conscience of the organization.” It is our job to translate what our publics are saying and have the courage to suggest and help make changes within an organization. Indeed, all of these principles are embodied and codified in the PRSA Code of Ethics (PRSA 2000).

Call to action

This then is our call to action. Public relations must lead the way, through our preparation and deeds, to gain leadership’s trust. By so doing, we make it easy for our leadership to have the courage to do the right thing before it’s needed in time of crisis. For the good of society, we must make every effort to confront Media Nihilism at every turn. And we must do so with transparent, authentic communication.

Bibliography

Managing from the middle: The role of mid-level gatekeepers in mobilizing grassroots activism and encouraging facilitative relationships
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Abstract
Interviews with 14 activist editors examined issues related to newsletter content choice, issue frames, sources, and mission. Findings suggest that national issues with frames that are symbolic or localized are most salient. Editors saw their role as facilitating relationship building and activism among members, leading to theoretical implications in PR.

Introduction
Activist organizations rely on the involvement of a variety of publics at different levels. Many activist organizations have paid staff, sometimes on international, national, regional, and local levels. These organizations may have volunteers who serve in structured positions. And they have members – those people who agree ideologically with the cause and serve as the grassroots to build awareness and support the interests of the organization on local, often interpersonal levels.

Power in an activist organization is dispersed. The national headquarters may have the power of the purse strings – controlling budget and the flow of dollars to local operations. The regional or local operation has the power of knowledge – understanding how their members perceive and respond to issues of interest to the organization. Members have the power of numbers – they can reach out and generate interest on a person-to-person level, perhaps with more effect than the most comprehensive public relations campaign from the national or regional divisions. Conversely, members can ignore issues or resist organizational initiatives.

This study analyzes the role of a specific job description in activist organizations – newsletter editor. A newsletter editor has the authority to choose subject matter, emphasis in content, sources and so forth. A newsletter editor essentially plays the role of public information specialist (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) or in-house journalist for the group. As a de facto journalist, newsletter editors may employ journalistic standards for selecting or assigning newsletter content.

Activist organizations are highly effective at employing traditional public relations strategies and tactics. Analysis of such organizations can serve to inform both public relations practice and scholarship. This study analyzes the opinions of newsletter editors in the Sierra Club in an effort to understand the roles an editor and newsletter content play in building relationships in an activist setting. There are two goals of this study. The descriptive goal is to
examine editorial decision making in an activist organization. Understanding more about how and why decisions are made should prove useful both to activist leaders and to organizations that find themselves engaging with activist organizations. The theoretical goal is to examine the role of interpersonal interaction as part of an organizational-public relationship (OPR).

**Background**

The Sierra Club is an activist organization whose mission is: “To explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth’s ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out these objectives” (Mission Statement).

Founded on May 28, 1892, the Sierra Club and its founding president, John Muir, understood the value of public relations (Sierra Club History). Muir had been an advocate for protection of the Yosemite Valley, writing and publishing about the valley beginning in the late 1860s. The Sierra Club notes, “Soon his words reached the larger audience of the New York Tribune and other influential publications” (Origins and Early Outings, Chapter Two). In 1889, Muir and Robert Underwood Johnson, Century Magazine editor, “planned a campaign for a Yosemite National Park – a campaign that succeeded the following year when Congress established the park” (Origins and Early Outings, Chapter Three). The first Sierra Club member publication, Sierra Club Bulletin (the predecessor of Sierra magazine) was published in 1893 (Origins and Early Outings, Chapter Four).

Today’s Sierra Club consists of 64 chapters and more than 750,000 members in the United States. The national organization relies on its Sierra magazine, Web site (www.sierraclub.org), direct mail and e-mail updates to communicate policy statements, national agendas of the Sierra Club, and mobilizing information to members. On the local level, most chapters publish a newsletter – ranging from tabloid newspapers to simple photocopied and stapled formats. From its inception, the Sierra Club has relied heavily on traditional public relations strategies and tactics to further the organization’s goals.

**Literature Review**

*Public relations in activist organizations*

Public relations scholars are often former practitioners in large organizations or are current consultants to such entities and may, therefore, have developed an “intellectual myopia” when it comes to studying activist publics (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000, p. 7). A research agenda that focuses primarily on activism from a corporate perspective neglects the role public relations plays in grassroots activism.

Activism has been defined by public relations scholars as “the process by which groups of people exert pressure on organizations or other institutions to change policies, practices, or conditions that the activists find problematic” (Smith, 2005, p. 5). Activists have been defined as “a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics, or force” (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, p. 446). By these definitions, environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club are activist.
Strategies used by activist organizations warrant their own stream of public relations scholarship. Studying activist organizations is important because of their “unique communication and relationship-building needs,” according to Taylor, Kent and White (2001, p. 264).

Ferguson (1997 as cited in Smith & Ferguson, 2001) noted that activist organizations face similar challenges to other organizations and therefore must use strategic communication to achieve their goals. While organizational public relations programs aimed at activist publics have more frequently been the subjects of public relations scholarship, Smith and Ferguson (2001) wrote that activist organizations employ public relations tactics, too. Activists use public relations to rectify conditions they deem undesirable and to maintain the activist organization itself through membership involvement and growth. “Tactics used to maintain activist organizations” are little studied by public relations scholars (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 296).

Understanding how activists attempt to address the communication needs of members via chapter newsletters contributes to a normative theory of activist public relations. According to Heath and Bryant (2000), “Normative theories are advanced to propose ways to improve human communication” (p. 10). The dearth of research on specific activist communication tactics requires broad research questions. Since newsletters serve as a means to reach organization members, and because understanding how editors attempt to create meaning for members is important, the first two research questions address issues of newsletter content.

**RQ1:** How do editors choose content?
**RQ2:** What are sources of newsletter content?

**Framing and Frames**

Broadly, framing refers to “the way events and issues are organized and made sense of” (Reese, 2001, p. 7). Leading social movement researchers Snow and Benford (1992) defined a “frame” as: “An interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses ‘the world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objectives, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment” (p.137).

Frames are structures of meaning that also are used by numerous political actors and sponsors to advance particular interests. Researchers have studied at least three types of frames: collective action, news or media, and issue frames.

**Collective Action and Master Frames**

Leaders of all types of organizations use framing approaches to attempt to define and categorize issues and events, highlight particular interpretations of them, and establish preferred meanings for organizational members (Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000). In doing so they seek to align members’ understandings and interpretations with the organization’s mission, goals, and values. Leaders use a variety of approaches inside organizations to manage meaning, including metaphors; packaging of values and beliefs in company stories; ceremonies, rites, and rituals; slogans and catch phrases; the “spinning” of particular events and issues; and organizational artifacts, among others (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996).

Framing processes and frames used by social movement groups, or what are called collective action frames, have received a great deal of research attention from sociologists and
represent a significant component of the framing literature (Nelson & Willey, 2001). In this perspective, social movement groups are signifying and framing agents who actively produce and disseminate ideas and meaning - products that are frames.

Frames play vital strategic roles for social movement organizations. They inspire action, attract members and resources, and legitimate the group’s claims and work (Snow & Benford, 1992). Frames help link individual and group interpretations, values, and ideologies (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986), and “proffer, buttress, and embellish group identities that range from collaborative to conflictual” (Hunt, Benford, & Snow, 1994, p. 185). Collective action frames help construct a sense of community, identification, allegiance, and shared history among members (Fine, 1995), and they empower members by “defining them as agents of their own history” (Gamson, 1995, p. 90).

Master frames (Snow & Benford, 1992) perform similar functions but on a larger scale. The encompassing nature of master frames with their enduring ideological themes shapes how other challengers must interpret and present their own causes and creates possible linkages among a number of groups (Mooney & Hunt, 1996). For example, framing oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge not only as a threat to the environment but also as a threat to traditional ways of life and wilderness values may resonate with the beliefs and experiences of (and potentially unite) a large number of environmental groups, Native American organizations, and preservationists. Such linkages are important because the broader a community of political actors, and the clearer its identity, the more likely are its chances for success (Pan & Kosicki, 2001).

News or Media Frames

Mass communication researchers have generally been more concerned with news frames, or how mass media report news coverage of issues and events. Mass media are important actors in that they frame issues and public discussion of issues in certain ways (Gans, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Pan & Kosicki, 2001; Tuchman, 1978). Gitlin’s (1980) definition of news or media frames in his account of mass media coverage of the Students for a Democratic Society movement in the 1960s is frequently cited: 

*Media frames, largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports. Media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual* (p. 6).

Issue Frames

Nelson and Willey (2001) distinguish between news frames that are constructed by media personnel and issue frames that emanate from other communicator sources and are conveyed or reported in mass media coverage. The researchers define issue frames as: “Descriptions of social policies and problems that shape the public’s understanding of how the problem came to be and important criteria by which policy solutions should be evaluated” (p. 247).

If framing is a central communication process in policy debate and formation (Berger, Hertog & Park, 2002), then virtually everyone engaged in the discussion in question – social
movement groups, businesses, policy makers, think-tank experts, issue entrepreneurs, and so forth – attempts to frame issue definitions, agenda items, solutions, and outcomes. In this way, issue framing is a strategic means to “getting the message across” and “winning the argument” (Pan & Kosicki, 2001, p. 48). Entman (1993) summarized the strategic essence of issue framing:

To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in the communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (p. 55).

Public Relations and Framing

Public relations professionals play central roles in constructing and using frames in the service of groups and organizations. Hallahan (1999) argued that framing theory provided a rich approach to analyzing what happens in public relations practice and that organizations must develop common frames of reference about issues with publics in order to establish effective relationships with them. He identified seven types of framing applicable to public relations, that is, professionals may attempt to frame situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibility, and news.

Thus, frames and framing processes are important to organizations of many types that seek to manage meaning and influence the perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and behaviors of organizational members and other external publics. Given their roles as organizational communicators and communication experts, public relations professionals are centrally engaged in the construction and dissemination of particular frames for their groups and organizations. For public relations researchers, frames may be examined in organizational communication channels such as newsletters, brochures, advertisements, annual reports, speech texts, policy documents, position statements, and Web sites, among others (Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Johnston & Klandermans, 1995), to assess how organizations strategically use frames to achieve various goals.

Because framing is such a central communication issue for public relations activities, and because editorial choices are intertwined with framing issues, the next three research questions relate to framing and message salience.

RQ3: What issues do newsletter editors believe are most salient to members?
RQ4: What messages do editors believe need to be communicated to their readers?
RQ5: How, if at all, do national issue frames resonate with chapter editors?

Relationship Management

The study of public relations as relationship management has been promoted by Ledingham and Bruning (2000). Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000) conceptualized a relationship as dependent on “exchanges, transactions, communications and other interconnected activities” (p. 16). Relationships form, according to Broom et al., “when parties have perceptions and expectations of each other, when one or both parties need resources from the other, when one or both parties perceive mutual threats from an uncertain environment, or when there is either a legal or voluntary necessity to associate” (p. 17).
Hon and Grunig (1999) argued that “the most productive relationships…are those that benefit both parties in the relationship” (p. 11). They also noted that relationships develop because “one party has consequences on another party” (p. 12). These antecedents to relationships describe the intersection at which activist organizations and their members are often found. Hon and Grunig (1999) suggest that relationship maintenance requires access, positivity or making the relationship enjoyable, openness, and network building, among other things (pp. 14-15). Hon and Grunig (1999) noted that relationship maintenance can be measured by both outcomes and process (p. 18). They suggested measuring outcomes such as control mutuality, trust, satisfaction and commitment. Hon and Grunig (1999) wrote:

> Often mutually beneficial exchanges can begin to build trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction. Then, a public relations professional can help to build a long-range communal relationship where the level of these four indicators will become even higher and remain stable over time. (p. 21)

Morgan and Hunt (1994) identified commitment and trust as variables that mediate successful organization-public relationships. Hutton (1999) believed that “relationship management refers to the practice of public relations as an exercise in identifying mutual interests, values, and benefit between a client-organization and its publics” (p. 208). He wrote that mutual trust, compromise, cooperation and win-win situations are hallmarks of successful relationship management. Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000) defined OPRs as “the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics” (p. 18). Huang (2001) also wrote that trust, control mutuality, relationship satisfaction, and relationship commitment are the essence of organization-public relationships (p. 65). Therefore, newsletters that promote trust, control mutuality, relationship satisfaction, and relationship commitment, should serve the cause of relationship building. The next research question addresses the organization-public relationship by inquiring:

**RQ6: How, if at all, do editors attempt to build relationships through newsletters?**

**Building public relations theory**

Hung (2005) defined organization-public relationships (OPR) as “when organizations and their strategic publics are interdependent, and this interdependence results in consequences to each other that organizations need to manage constantly” (p. 396). Hon and Grunig (1999 as cited in Hung, 2005) noted “an OPR begins when there are consequences created by an organization that affect publics, or when the behaviors of publics have consequences on an organization” (p. 395). Hung introduced a relationship continuum in which exploitative relationships are at one end and represent an organization’s concern for self interest, and one-sided communal relationships anchor the other end, representing an organization’s concern for other’s interest.

She suggested that three of the eight relationship categories on the continuum fall within what she defined as the “win-win zone”. Those three relationship types are: exchange, covenantal, and mutual communal. Hung defined an exchange relationship as when “one party provides benefits to the other with the expectation that the other will reciprocate with some benefits in the future” (p. 416). She defined a covenantal relationship as one that emphasizes “the exchange of opinions between two parties and…both are committed to a common good” (p.
416). Hung wrote that a mutual communal relationship “emphasizes the psychological intention to protect the welfare of each other” (p. 415).

The final research question extends relationship theory by applying it to activist organizations.

RQ7: How does OPR theory apply to the interaction between activist newsletter editors and organization members?

Method

An in-depth interview guide was developed based on the literature review and a content analysis of chapter newsletters and media coverage (Reber & Berger, 2005). Reber and Berger (2005) identified master and sub frames, regarding the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, coal-fired power plants, and sprawl issues, used by the Sierra Club to communicate with its members and the public. Content analysis of Sierra Club chapter newsletters, and regional and national newspapers identified the occurrence of message frames and sources in their study (Reber & Berger, 2005).

A geographically diverse purposive sample of thirty-one newsletter editors was selected. The editors were, when possible, first contacted by e-mail to invite participation. If no e-mail address was available, the editors were invited to participate through a telephone call. Fourteen editors agreed to be interviewed (RR = 45%). This number of interviews allowed the researchers to achieve the saturation point when few new findings were revealed (H. Rubin & I. Rubin, 1995).

Interviews were conducted by telephone and tape-recorded in spring and summer 2003. The interviews lasted from 35 to 55 minutes. The conversations were transcribed so that the researchers could comb the interviews for themes through an adaptation of the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The names of the newsletter editors remained confidential.

Findings

RQ1: How do editors choose content?

When editors were asked “How do you choose the topics that will be covered in the newsletter?,” three broad themes emerged. Eight of the 14 editors said topics were chosen based on their own expertise or the expertise of an editorial board. Four of the 14 interviewed said that the calendar largely directs choices, that is, political elections, Club elections, and seasonal issues. The third and smallest category (2) said content choice was driven primarily by the need to fill space.

Expert Driven

Among the eight editors who said content choice was based on their own or others’ expertise, some said that the choices were corporate (e.g., made by a governing body or editorial board). One editor said, “We base [editorial choices] on our chapter priorities that are determined each year by the executive committee.” Another editor said she communicates with group chairs and chapter officers by e-mail, telling them what she wants them to write about for
a specific issue. Yet another said he personally made content decisions, but admitted that about half the space is devoted to set components such as outings and group meetings announcements.

An editor with long-term membership in the organization said he made content choices based on his own expertise. “What I do when I send out the notice of a deadline … I have an idea what’s going on in the state and I’ll specifically ask people to write something on this subject because I know…there is new information that the chapter needs to know…that the membership needs to know about.”

**Calendar Driven**

Another set of editors (4) said choice was dictated by seasons or cycles or recurring events. One editor told us, “We have rough themes where we do try to emphasize the particular area each issue. Obviously, during the political season it would be political endorsements. Or if it’s in the spring, obviously, we try to push outings and every once in a while we’ll do special themes like maybe focus on our inner-city outings program. …We kind of have a rough calendar that we follow.”

Seasons were a sub-theme among this group of editors. One reported, “There is a story I picked up…on family outings. It’s just natural for the summer season. So sometimes it’s seasonal. It’s very often seasonal depending whether it’s political or public comment time or election oriented or outings time. Other times it stems directly from things that…we want to tell our membership about and things that we want to ask them to do.”

Another editor said there are “key dates every year that you know you press for news to develop. Things such as elections…or the annual banquet in spring. Those are the two biggies that kind of an entire issue can be devoted to. Sometimes around the election cycle we will have a theme of campaign issues or perhaps [profiles of] candidates.”

**Need Driven**

Two editors admitted that their decisions were often based on the need to fill the newsletter. One noted, “It’s pretty much if somebody submits something and it’s, you know, credible and goes with our philosophy it gets put in. I might edit it down if I think it’s too long or something, but I very seldom reject anything.”

The other editor said, “I have not had to do a lot of choosing to be honest… It’s kind of all I can do to fill up the … allocation that I have…. So, I usually don’t have to do too much choosing between articles.”

**RQ2: What are sources of newsletter content?**

Editors were asked, “What source do you use most frequently for newsletter content?” Again, three broad themes could be identified, though the first two of the categories seem interconnected.

Six of the 14 editors interviewed said that *chapter members or other volunteers* were their most frequent sources. An editor who summarizes this category said, “Our newsletter is by our members for our members.”

The second category, mentioned by five of the 14 editors, was *organizational leaders and national sources*. Of course, leaders are likely members but presumably they have a different level of involvement and knowledge. An editor who said he uses group chairs, members, chapter
officers, and the national Web site occasionally, noted the first three sources were dominant because “we try to keep our chapter news focused on local and state-wide issues.” Others in the second category talked about contributions of paid staff, issue coordinators and others.

Finally, three editors said they relied on experts from various backgrounds to provide content. This category is represented by an editor who said she used input from other groups working on similar issues and experts on the issues.

**RQ3: What issues do newsletter editors believe are most salient to members?**

When editors were asked, “What topics do you think interest members the most?,” more than half (8) of the 14 included outings in their response. Outings are planned events, often hikes, led by local experts. These events allow members to interact with each other and the natural environment. In addition to outings, local issues (5 of 14) and pervasive issues (4 of 14) were dominant categories.

**Outings**

The editors who suggested outings as the content category of primary interest to members cited learning about what the organization is doing and being with other members as the driving force. One editor was especially candid, “I suspect most people don’t read the news content and they mostly use it either for the group news or for the outings.”

Another said members like information about outings because they can see “the results of what they or the staff or the Club has done.” Outings are easy for members to be involved in, according to two other editors. One said outings are important because “it’s something that they can be involved in…much more easily than lobbying and changing legislation…. They like meeting other Sierra Club members.” Another editor seemed to agree, “The outings are the big thing, just getting out and enjoying and understanding nature and getting closer to it is a huge thing for the Sierra Club.”

**Local Issues**

Editors who cited local issues as having the most interest to members said their readers were most attracted to information that affected their immediate vicinity, chapter, or “daily lives”.

**Pervasive Issues**

Pervasive issues are those that are common regardless of region, though they may be more salient in some areas. For example, one editor said that recycling was the most important issue for his readers: “Everyone feels like getting involved in [recycling]. It’s something that they can contribute toward the environment.” Another editor reinforced this notion, saying that people wanted easy-to-understand issues with easy solutions. Two editors cited air quality issues as most salient to members.

**RQ4: What messages do editors believe need to be communicated to their readers?**

The answers to the question, “What is the most important message you believe you should be communicating?” revealed that the editors find education and activation of their readers significant. Nine of 14 said they explained to the readers why being active is important and how these readers can become active. One editor summarized the importance of an active membership. He said, “This is a Sierra Club. Our mission is environmental protection.”
Everybody has a role in it. There are things that people can do. You can go on outings. You can participate in Earth Day clean-ups. There are a lot of things that we can do with the Sierra Club.” The responsibility of activist members was a common theme among these editors. Some said their most important message was to announce “opportunities to get involved” or “the power of the individual to make a difference.”

One editor said succinctly, “Everyone should do their part. If everyone did a little bit we could all do a lot.” Another said the most important message is, “To stop and think about what we are doing to the environment, and to educate and act. Without knowing, you are not going to act on something, and without acting nothing is going to change. It’s just going to continue to go downhill.”

One editor was specific regarding how he tried to get across the message to “get active.” He said, “Most articles have an action component to them. They end with what you can do. Write your congressman or call this person or show up at this meeting… You are not just putting out news that’s doom and gloom or powerless. You put out news that is empowering.” This is a good example of what Lemert, Mitzman, Seither, Cook & Hackett (1977) referred to as mobilizing information (MI), which allows individuals to act on their attitudes. MI provides people with information about upcoming events, contact points, and suggested activities or tactics for involvement.

Another editor said that her most important message is “every individual has a voice on environmental matters. …We’ve got a responsibility to the future and everybody has a responsibility to know what’s going on and to do their part in trying to control it.”

Other editors were more general in their response. One editor summarized the general information message, “The only message that I try to convey is that they have an organized, cohesive network of people who care about the environment and the issues that the Sierra Club considers important…that they can access easily.”

**RQ5: How, if at all, do national issue frames resonate with chapter editors?**

Three issues of interest to the national organization, based on Reber and Berger’s study (2005), were analyzed from the perspective of newsletter editors. The three issues were the national Sierra Club’s positions on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), coal-fired power plants (CFPP), and sprawl. The goal of this question was to evaluate the efficacy of the national organization in selecting and framing issues in such a way that they are seen as pertinent by chapter newsletter editors.

Reber and Berger (2005) identified several master frames based on analysis of the Sierra Club Web site (see Table 1). These frames were used to analyze editors’ responses regarding the position of the national Sierra Club on these three issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Sierra Club Master Frames</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANWR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) drilling threatens one of America’s greatest natural wilderness treasures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) drilling will not solve America’s energy needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) drilling threatens our traditional ways of life and wilderness values</td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) a comprehensive energy policy based on conservation, alternative sources of</td>
</tr>
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energy, and improved efficiency standards is necessary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CFPP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) CFPPs cause environmental problems and alter the climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) future generations must be protected from climate change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) viable, clean and sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels exist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) scrubbers and new technology should be required on CFPPs to lessen their impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) the U.S. cannot maintain its world power status while relying on fossil fuel as its primary energy source</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sprawl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) sprawl threatens our environment, health and quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) sprawl has real economic and human costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) “smart growth” helps solve sprawl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ANWR**

Twelve of 14 editors identified the master frame that drilling in ANWR threatens a wilderness treasure. Many of them, when asked for the national Sierra Club’s position on ANWR said simply, “No drilling.” None of the other three master themes related to ANWR were noted.

When asked whether the editors think the ANWR issue is important to chapter members, 12 of 14 said the issue was important. However, most of the editors did not cover this issue in their newsletter with much frequency because it was not a local issue. Four of the 14 members specifically said that ANWR was important as a symbol.

One editor said ANWR “really galvanizes all the membership.” Another said, “I think they kind of see it as one of the last places we can save.” Still another editor opined, “I think that the Alaskan thing is more of an emotional kind of hook Sierra Club members hang their hat on and it’s just really easy to do. It’s just really poignant, but it’s no more important than saving our local bays and that kind of stuff. It just has a broader appeal because Alaska is so beautiful and pristine.”

**CFPP**

Seven of the 14 editors said that the Sierra Club’s position on CFPPs was to require scrubbers and new technology to lessen their impact. Three of the editors identified the master frame that alternatives to CFPPs exist. Two of the editors said that CFPPs cause environmental problems.

Only six of the 14 editors said that CFPPs were an important issue to their chapter members. Five of those six said the issue was important because it had local significance.

An editor said that CFPPs were an important issue to his members “for much more practical and direct personal reasons since [his state] is down wind from [a] massive complex of power plants and we have serious ozone pollution. . . . And the number of childhood asthma cases in hospitals at any moment is substantially elevated due to all of this.”

**Sprawl**
Five of 14 editors, when asked for the national organization’s position on sprawl cited the master frame, “smart growth”. Two cited the frame that sprawl has real economic and human costs.

Only one of the 14 editors said that sprawl was not an important issue to the chapter’s members. This editor believed that sprawl was not a “hot button” issue because members feel powerless to stop it.

**RQ6: How, if at all, do editors attempt to build relationships through newsletters?**

This question was addressed by discussing the newsletters’ missions and by revisiting some of the data we have already analyzed. When asked, “What is your newsletter’s primary mission?”, a few editors offered formal mission statements, but most provided more informal ideas about what the newsletter should do for the chapter and its members.

Nine of the 14 editors said that the mission was *member-focused*. These editors facilitated interaction among members, promoted activism and empowered members, encouraged group activities, and gave members a feeling of community. For example, one editor saw the newsletters as “a communication tool for members by members between members of the chapter.” Another editor believed that the role of the newsletter is “to keep a rather large membership in touch with the issues and make them feel like they are a part of the Club.” Some other informal member-focused mission statements included: “to educate and spur people to do something,” “to keep our members updated on local chapter and group level activities, outings, and events,” “to motivate the public to activism of one kind or another,” “to provide the [substantial number of] members in [our] county with a semblance of community,” and “to activate people whether that means to volunteer, to donate, to come to meetings, to write letters.”

As was previously noted, and reinforced in the mission statements, outings and moving members toward activism are perceived as important to these editors. Eight of 14 editors mentioned outings as among the most salient content for members. Nine of 14 editors said that they choose content that serves to activate members or provide them a means of getting involved in work of the Sierra Club.

Five of the 14 editors noted a mission that was more *organization-centric*. In other words, these editors appear less concerned about interaction with and among members and more concerned with providing a forum for the organization’s message. This mission is more asymmetrical and thereby not OPR-focused. One editor summarized, the newsletter’s mission is “to give up-to-date information on what the chapter is doing so that the membership at large knows what issues the chapter is working on [and what are the upcoming] important things.”

**RQ7: How does OPR theory apply to the interaction between activist newsletter editors and organization members?**

As noted in RQ6, about two-thirds of the editors interviewed saw their job as informing members of ways to interact with each other and build community. This OPR role does not neatly fit in any of the relationship categories outlined by previous scholars (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2005) and suggests a new point on Hung’s (2005) relationship continuum that ranges from least accommodative to most accommodative of publics with eight relationship points—exploitive, manipulative, contractual, symbiotic, exchange, covenantal, mutual communal, and one-sided communal.
The relationship building role of the newsletter editors, discovered in this study, is certainly on the accommodative end of the spectrum – discounting exploitive, manipulative, contractual, and symbiotic relationships. However, this role also does not correspond to the relationship exchange (benefits provided with expectation of reciprocation), covenantal (exchange of opinions in the interest of common good), mutual communal (psychological intention to protect the interests of one another), or one-sided communal (providing benefits to each other whether or not there are benefits in return).

We therefore suggest a new point on the accommodative end of the continuum that we label facilitative. It would fall within Hung’s “win-win zone” between covenantal and mutual communal. A facilitative relationship is developed when the organization intentionally develops ways for individual members of the public to interact with one another, thereby enhancing the individual members’ experience through interpersonal relationship building. Thus, a void is filled in the OPR literature by introducing a means by which organizations can encourage interpersonal relationship building among members of the public. This interpersonal interaction may or may not benefit the organization. From a strategic perspective, of course, the organization would hope that the OPR would be enhanced. But based on the input from Sierra Club newsletter editors, the interests of the organization are not of primary concern; it is the importance of relationship building among members in the interest of advancing education and activation that is crucial.

**Discussion**

As noted at the outset, this research attempted to meet two primary goals – one is descriptive and related to editorial decision making, the other is theoretical and related to relationship building. The findings will be discussed in three ways related to these goals: (1) how content is developed (addressed by RQs 1 & 2); (2) how message strategies affect editorial decision making (addressed by RQs 3, 4 & 5); and (3) how editorial decisions affect relationship building (addressed by RQs 6 & 7).

**Contributions Toward a Descriptive Theory of Activist Public Relations**

Most editors (8) suggested that content selection was purposeful and based on the expertise either of the editor or of the editor in consultation with an editorial or executive board. A few (4) revealed that content selection was more rote and largely dictated by regularly scheduled events, activities or seasons. The least (2) said that their decisions were based on filling the space they had – most submitted material got printed. These findings demonstrate that editorial decision making is a process of discerning, and most editors are judicious in their content selection. This provides strategic communication opportunities for both the national and the grassroots organization, if the editorial decision making model is identified by strategists.

Sources of information come largely from the chapter, according to these editors. Six said most of their content came from members, five said that most of the content came from chapter leaders or national sources, and three cited the contribution of experts outside the Club. These findings suggest that the newsletters are serving their purpose of engaging members and providing them a voice.
Local issues (5) and outings (5) were the subjects that editors said their readers cared about most. But almost as many (4) mentioned subjects with universal appeal such as recycling or air quality as being most salient to their members. While only five editors mentioned outings as their top-of-mind response, eight mentioned outings as important content. This preference for outings suggests that members of the Sierra Club place a high priority on opportunities to build relationships with other members. The involvement in outings also demonstrates that the members want a way to be involved directly, even if it is just through hiking. Of course, it also suggests that those who join a membership organization are of like mind.

The importance of this finding is to the programmatic opportunities it suggests for activist and membership organizations. Organizations must look for ways to facilitate interpersonal interaction between and among members. Beyond the outings, the findings reinforce what politicians and journalists already know – what matters is what’s local. Proximity has a direct relationship to consequence and therefore ignites self-interest and, perhaps, activity. Thus, editors of the newsletters choose content based on its ability to activate.

The final category related to editorial decision making strategy is the salience of national frames to newsletter editors. The most-cited frame by editors was that the national message regarding ANWR was no drilling (12). No other ANWR frames were cited. Three frames were cited related to CFPPs. Seven editors said that the national position was for scrubbers or new technology to be applied to CFPPs. Others repeated the national frames that there are alternatives to CFPPs (3) and that the plants cause environmental problems (2). Two of the national Sierra Club’s sprawl frames were in evidence. Five editors said that the Club’s policy was “smart growth”. Two said that sprawl has real economic and human costs.

These top-of-mind responses from editors regarding national message framing provides some insight into the effectiveness of national frames. Simple, direct concepts such as “no drilling,” “install scrubbers,” and “smart growth” appear to have the most communication power. This may seem self-evident in a sound-bite age, but to engage members in activist organizations that are driven by policy, as most environmental organizations are, the wonkish language must be traded in for simple, memorable phrases or even slogans.

Editors saw the three issue categories differently when asked how important the issues were to their members. Twelve said ANWR was important to their members, but acknowledged that it was not covered in the newsletter with much regularity. Some editors said the subject was adequately covered in the national publications. It was notable that four of the editors said the value of ANWR as an issue was largely symbolic. Even though ANWR has little local impact, and is therefore not covered in the newsletters, it has salience to members, perhaps for its symbolic value. On the other hand, the importance of CFPPs as an issue to members is much more related to location. Finally, sprawl has the greatest salience for members, as 13 of 14 editors said the issue was important to their chapter’s members. In summary, ANWR has topical power as a symbol; sprawl has power for its local impact; CFPPs are only powerful if they have a local impact.

Contributions to Organization-Public Relationship Theory

These editors believe that they contribute to chapter success when they provide ways to build relationships between members. Nine of 14 editors said they choose content based on its
ability to activate members or provide them a means of engaging with other members. They see their role as facilitating interaction, promoting activism or empowerment, encouraging group activation, and building a community. This notion has theoretical implications regarding OPRs. When an organizational leader (e.g., newsletter editor) sees their role as facilitating interpersonal interaction among organizational members, the benefit to the organization is indirect, at best. Perhaps this facilitative role is logical for activist organizations or membership organizations, but what about corporations?

Organizations are entering a new phase of relationship building because members of publics have new ways to interact with each other (i.e., blogs, ratings programs, interactive advice), but this interactive business is nothing new to grassroots activist organizations. So perhaps public relations practitioners and scholars in all fields can learn from activist organizations. OPR research, like public relations research generally, has focused on corporate concerns rather than activist or membership organization concerns. By empowering public members and focusing efforts on the individual (i.e., member) rather than the unit (i.e., public), a new theoretical role emerges. As mentioned earlier, that role is facilitative – providing a way for individual members of the public to interact.

This facilitative role could have positive or negative implications for organizations. Happy interacting members of a public will likely build loyalty and trust toward the organization. Unhappy interacting members of a public will likely erode confidence and trust and might incite dissent. The implications of this type of relationship building and OPR need to be carefully considered and studied. It would appear to have applications for all organizations, but especially membership, religious, volunteer, and activist organizations.

Limitations and Future Directions

As all qualitative research, the findings of this study are not generalizable. This study is further limited because it focuses on a single organization and one communication channel. Future research should concentrate on analyzing the facilitative role of public relations practitioners in a variety of organizational settings. The earliest development might be best done via case studies and in-depth interviews with practitioners and members/employees. As the concepts develop, surveys across organization types would advance our understanding of the practice and value of facilitating relationship building within publics.

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To address the persistent problem of public relations campaigns conducted without a theoretical basis or framework, this article proposes a new methodological approach: the converse case study. Rather than case studies serving as PR practice exemplars, converse case studies would provide examples of how theory could be applied to guide communications and enhance relationship-building efforts. The converse case study involves exploring social science theory applications by deconstructing a “theory lacking” PR campaign and reconstructing it within a theoretical framework that could have improved the effectiveness and outcomes of the PR campaign. To illustrate the method, a particular converse case study is examined: the “Click and Win” public relations campaign. “Click and Win” used emails and a promotional contest directed toward college students at a large university to increase their awareness of campus-based mental health services. The PR campaign is examined in separate components, which are then reconsidered within a theoretical framework that proposes at each step how specific social science theories – from psychology, public health, computer-mediated communications, and economics – could have better informed and enhanced the PR outreach effort. Implications are discussed regarding the use of converse case studies to integrate communication theories into daily practices of public relations.

The case study has served as an essential contributor to public relations knowledge in academics and professional practices alike. Yet there is not a standard for theory application to case studies. In social sciences in general, the case study has moved toward a more robust methodology. (Yin, 2003) Similar to Yin, the case study method in public relations is presented as a qualitative, systematic method of data collection. (Stacks, 2002) However, PR literature does not consistently apply a theoretical framework for case study research. (Cutler, 2004)

In public relations practices, and the PR profession in general, the case study is not generated in a systematic, methodological process. Rather, case studies are promoted within the industry in terms of their ability to serve as exemplars in public relations practices. (PRSA) NO theory is required of these exemplars. Theory-lacking case studies likely feed into the perpetual problem in the public relations industry to operate as a field of technicians, focused on producing outputs, with limited or no measures of audience effects or outcomes. (Macnamara, 2006) To advance best practices in business management, including public relations, requires theoretical explanations, and an evidence base, along the lines of evidence-based medicine. (Rousseau, 2005) The benefits of public communications being developed based on theory are numerous: theory provides a justifiable framework, evidence indicates potential outcomes, and the systematic approach allows PR practitioners to have much stronger direction for developing effective communications and, equally important, to eliminate ineffective communication practices.
Given the popularity of the case study approach, the gap between academic emphasis on a theoretical framework for case studies and “theory-lacking” practice in the PR industry is problematic. To address this particular academic-practitioner paradox, the converse case study proposed here offers a method to integrate theory into PR practice. Rather than examining a case as an exemplar, the converse case study examines a theory-lacking PR campaign, which is considered in terms of how theory could be applied to guide communications and enhance relationship-building efforts. The converse case study method explores social science theory applications by deconstructing the theory-lacking PR campaign into individual components, and reconstructing the campaign within a theoretical framework that offers empirically-tested evidence as the basis to infer effectiveness. In summary, converse case studies would provide examples of the benefits of theoretically based public communications that are most likely to generate desired outcomes.

This article first gives a brief overview of the academic literature and PR practitioner concepts of the PR case study. Within that context, the converse case study method is illustrated using a PR campaign, a public communication effort at a large Midwest university that primarily used email to raise awareness among students about campus-based mental health services. The “Click and Win” email campaign is deconstructed, with theories from multiple disciplines applied at key steps within the communications process. The discussion details how the specified theories could have influenced the effectiveness of the communication campaign and, based on empirical evidence, predicts potential outcomes of the public communication. Finally, the article addresses reliability and validity issues, and proposes a structure for a consistent approach to creating converse case studies.

Overview of PR Case Studies

There are widely divergent definitions and uses of the case study within academics and PR practices. This overview highlights specific points which help to define the converse case study construct.

Within social sciences, the case study follows the theoretical inquiry process of posing questions and, through research, discovering answers. The case study is a research method that systematically studies the details of a case, or multiple cases, and explains a phenomenon in a particular context so that, in the end, the researchers have a better understanding of what happened, and how and why it occurred. (Fiske, 2004) The nature of the case study differs from other theoretical inquiries, as Stacks (2002) notes, in that its foundation is observation of actual occurrences. Case study represents an example of Earl Babbie’s grounded theory, which explains phenomena based on “the patterns, themes, and common categories found in daily interaction.” (Stacks, p. 72) Grounding is important to the converse case study in that the case involves “real world” communications, not abstract relationships.

Case study research methods have been refined in recent years. Yin (2003) expanded on the case studies method within social sciences research to three categories: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case studies. By establishing multiple research uses for case studies, Yin rejected the traditional hierarchical view that case studies could only be viewed as a preliminary research strategy. Further, Yin defines the case study as a research tool that can produce qualitative and quantitative evidence. The converse case study would fit within the
explanatory or descriptive case study category; its purpose is not to explore the “what” aspect of the phenomenon, but to explain the “how” and “why” in linking theories to a communication campaign to advance understanding of public relations and advocate more informed PR campaigns.

Perhaps the most widely used approach to case studies in public relations textbooks is a process developed by Jerry Hendrix (see Hendrix’ revised edition, 2006), which presents the case study as a challenge and resolution of a problem through four phases: research, objectives, programming, and evaluation, better know by the acronym ROPE. A weakness of Hendrix’ process is the case studies do not provide, or suggest, any theoretical bases, nor does the process provide any depth of explanation for the communication decisions or the outcomes (McCown, 2004). However, this weakness has been overlooked in academic textbooks and public relations practices. Numerous PR textbooks provide case study examples (such as Lattimore et al, 2007) that follow the ROPE formula. First, the situation or problem is explained. Research or analysis of audiences may be included at this step, but only on a practical, not theoretical, perspective. Objectives for the PR campaign are explained next, followed by a stage defined as execution, implementation, or strategies and tactics. The final step is results, or evaluation, of the PR campaign. There is no specific step, or explanation, to determine and apply theories to guide the PR campaign or provide evidence for justification of why the communications would work.

The PR industry has adopted the ROPE approach as well. The Public Relations Society of America, one of the largest PR practitioner associations in the public relations industry, designates annual Anvil Award winners, which become a source of case studies for Hendrix, Lattimore et al and other public relations textbooks. PRSA and the award recipients themselves position their Anvil awards as exemplars in public relations practice. However impressive the results of the Anvil winning campaigns, the PR campaigns are not explained within a theoretical context, which is essential to systematic exploration of what works and does not work in public communications, and what the underlying causal relationships are between public communication and effects on public relations. In contrast, the converse case study would follow scientific standards for case study, establishing a systematic method that can be consistently applied and serve as a guide for future cases. (Yin, 2003)

The Converse Case Study Process

Applied theory is the core component of the converse case study. The purpose of this case study method is to marry theory to PR practice, using a structured research process. Additional components of the converse case study process, drawn from the literature noted above, would include: an observational approach, using an actual PR campaign, which provides a real-world example to deconstruct and demonstrate applications of theory in communication; an explanatory approach to the case, to provide insights on how and why to use theory at any given stage of a public relations campaign; and predictions of PR campaign outcomes, which could be projected based on empirical evidence drawn from the literature for theories that are proposed to apply to the PR campaign’s components.

The converse case study deconstructs the actual PR campaign into components derived from the research process: 1) analysis of the targeted audience; 2) establishment of outcomes, in terms of desired audience behavior; 3) analysis of proposed message content and context, and
distribution channels of the messages; 4) evidence of effectiveness toward achieving outcomes. In this final stage, the applicable theories have been identified and the PR campaign is reconstructed and reconsidered in light of the theoretical framework to determine how the results would be impacted and predict potential for improved outcomes and results.

The “Click and Win” PR Campaign

The PR campaign presented here to illustrate the converse case study process is the “Click and Win” public relations campaign conducted by the University of Minnesota. The purpose of the “Click and Win” campaign was to increase awareness among students at the Twin Cities campus for the university’s new Student Mental Health website.* The site provides students with information about campus-based and online mental health services, including counseling and crisis/urgent consultation contacts on campus; a free online tool for self-assessment of mental health; and links to additional resources.

The campaign was part of the university’s efforts to address an increasingly problematic public health issue of rising mental illness among college students. Diagnosis of depression, the most common mental illness, was reported among campus populations at twice the rate of the general population (ACHA-NCHA, 2006), with 15 percent of college students compared to 6.7 percent of U.S. adults. Overall experiences of depression are more widespread than that. According to ACHA, about two in five students (43 percent) reported they felt so depressed during the school year, it was difficult for them to function.

The campaign was conducted over a two-week period in February 2007. The primary communication was two emails, sent a week apart, via a general list serve to university email addresses for all students enrolled at the campus. The premise of the “Click and Win” contest was to entice students to visit the mental health website to submit an online entry for a drawing, with a chance to win $1,000. The contest entry required students to answer three multiple-choice questions, described as a “pop quiz,” with answers found on the home page or links. (See Appendix A for email sample and quiz.) Advertising and marketing materials promoted the contest through various venues around campus. (See samples in Appendix B.) The budget for PR campaign was small, $3,300 for ads and marketing materials and $1,000 for the cash drawing. There were no costs in the budget associated with the email distribution, which used the university’s centralized computing services.

The audience was comprised of over 48,000 undergraduate, graduate and non-degree students. About one in four students were minority ethnicities and about 7 percent were international students. Slightly more of the students were female (52 percent) than male. The undergraduate average age was 21.6 and graduate average age 31.5, with the majority of students ages 19 to 34.

Results of the PR campaign focused on two measures. During the day of the first email distribution, the Student Mental Health website saw a significant increase in traffic, with over 10,000 page views.\textsuperscript{35} Previous to the PR campaign, an average of 10 daily page views had been

\textsuperscript{35} Note: Page views were measured here instead of unique Web visitors. Since campus computers could have multiple students visiting the Website and even remote computers could be used by more than one student, individual ISP addresses would not measure actual student visitors. A better measure is the number of students who registered for
recorded. A total of over 15,000 contest registrations were received. After excluding registrations that were duplicates (students could register only once) and eliminating quizzes with incorrect answers, about 12,000 students qualified for the drawing. The email response rate was “higher than expected,” according to the PR campaign project manager. Registration of 12,000 among 48,000 total students who received the email represents a 25 percent response, considered a typical response rate for marketing campaigns.

**Targeted Audience Theory**

In deconstructing the PR campaign, the individual components to be analyzed are: the targeted audience of 48,000 students enrolled at the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities campus, the objective of raising awareness of the new Student Mental Health website, the messages conveyed to the targeted audience to achieve the objectives, and the outcomes of the public communication.

A first step in applying theoretical perspective to the targeted audience is to consider the scientific paradigm for the public communication. Paradigms provide categories or schools of thought for theories, particularly those that have been applied to communications in the past. (See summary, Bryant & Miron, 2004) In this case, 48,000 students is a massive population. However, the target audience is not expected to act en masse, but as individual agents, acting on their own to assess the public communication and, as individual selves, to take action. This perspective points toward the field of psychology, and its focus on individual behavior. While mass communication literature in general may not rely heavily on psychological theories (Bryant & Miron, 2004), modern public relations practices have strong historical roots in the psychology of audiences. (Bernays, 1952) Increasingly, advertising researchers and practitioners have used psychology to develop more theoretically-based practices, but most public relations practices have not followed that path. (Macnamara, 2006)

Specific psychological theories to apply in this case may be best determined by the topic of communication: mental health services. This indicates health communications, which in recent years have relied predominantly on behavioral theories. (Fishbein & Cappella, 2006) In assessing the various behavioral theories, Fishbein and Cappella suggest an integrative model that encompasses what they refer to as “a limited number of variables” that seem to have the most influence on behavior. Primary variables – attitudes, norms and self-efficacy – feed into behavioral intentions. Behavior can then be predicted based on intentions, skills and abilities, and environmental factors. In this case, a better understand the targeted audience could be drawn from empirical research on college students’ attitudes, norms and self-efficacy about mental health services.

Recent research on college students’ stigma and attitudes toward counseling (Vogel, Wade & Hackler, 2007) provides insight. Based on the article’s literature review and findings, the targeted audience in this case study could be profiled as follows: having negative perceptions in general about psychological counseling (public stigma) and negative perceptions about oneself in feeling the need for or seeking counseling help (self stigma), with males perceiving greater negativity than females. Implications from Vogel, Wade & Hackler (2007) are that public
communications should try to reduce self-stigma, by emphasizing mental illness is not the individual’s own fault and can be successfully treated, and to reduce public stigma, recognizing the need to address differing perceptions of stigma between males and females. The emails used in the “Click and Win” campaign offer a discrete method for the targeted audience to access student mental health service information. However, the email communication does not directly address the issue of stigma and, indirectly, ignores stigma perceptions by encouraging students to “forward this email on to your friends!” (See Appendix A, Office for Student Affairs, 2007)

Norms about mental illness may be drawn from results of surveys by the American College Health Association (2006), which includes University of Minnesota students. The results imply students may either experience functional depression themselves, or are likely encounter students who are depressed. Thus, depression could be perceived as socially normal behavior, not a mental illness treated with psychological counseling.

Other variables of perceived self-efficacy, skills and abilities, and environmental factors are addressed in an assessment of “well-accepted service principles” in the public health field by Mowbray et al (2006) for recommendations to improve campus mental health services. Findings applicable to the case study targeted audience: a greater need to raise awareness about campus-based mental health services among incoming new students and their families; awareness needed among faculty and staff to offer multiple access routes for students to receive counseling; information needed with step-by-step guides for students to access mental health services.

The implications of applying integrated health communication theory and appropriate evidence from psychological studies and public health service standards are that the “Click and Win” campaign may have improved effectiveness by either segmenting its audience or focusing on a narrower, or altogether different, segment of the campus population. Segmentation could mean separate emails to females and males, or email messages that specifically address differing gender perceptions. A narrower segment could be public communications directed only at incoming, or new, students and their parents. Or refocusing the PR campaign toward faculty and staff, to ensure they would have the capabilities and information to provide multiple access points for students needing mental health services.

Establishment of Outcomes

The “Click and Win” campaign’s stated objective was to increase student awareness of the university’s new Student Mental Health website. The objective could be more clearly stated in defining expectations for student intentions that would result from the information about the Student Mental Health website. Ultimately, the question to be answered in setting the PR campaign’s objective was what should students do when they received the public communication? If their resulting behavior was peripheral, to register for the cash drawing on the website and not use the mental health services in some fashion, did the PR campaign succeed?

A more effective approach to setting the objective is to apply theory. Based on the integrated health communication theory described above (Fishbein & Cappella, 2006), awareness would be considered an antecedent that contributes toward attitudes, norms and self-efficacy. An objective to address attitudes would set the goal of reducing students’ stigma toward seeking mental health services. An objective of addressing norms would emphasize information regarding the need for depression to be treated with psychological counseling, with info on
accessing counseling services. An objective of addressing self-efficacy would focus on ease of use and multiple routes for students to access mental health services. Meeting the restated objective may affect not only the PR campaign’s outreach efforts via email, but also require the Student Mental Health website to have content that would also support the objective.

Analysis of Message & Messaging Theory

Messaging needs to be developed to maximize its impact, to not only deliver information but to be persuasive, particularly in the realm of health care communications. (Rothman, Bartels, Wlaschin & Salovey, 2006)

The message content for the “Click and Win” campaign was integrally related to the primary distribution channel: email. In examining the theoretical applications for this campaign, the first consideration is how the messaging could meet targeted audience and campaign objectives outlined in the two previous sections, given the chosen distribution channel. A second consideration is whether email would remain the primary messaging distribution channel, or whether there were alternatives channels.

The “Click and Win” campaign had limited options, given its budget (less than $5,000) and its desire for students to click through to the Student Mental Health website, which had a URL link embedded in the emails. The challenges were multiple. First, the email needed to get students’ attention, then motivate them to view the Student Mental Health website and, as proposed in the Objectives section above, to affect the students’ attitudes, norms or self-efficacy regarding campus mental health services. The premise of “Click and Win” was that the cash drawing, offering students a chance to win $1,000, provided the motivation. Based on website hits, the cash incentive succeeded in attracting about 25 percent of the 48,000 targeted students. Again, the psychological perspective appears most applicable to this case through theories on motivations of individuals to add insight about the email readers and guide the PR communications. In this case, the processing of the information by users of mass media could be understood as peripheral, appropriately described through the Elaboration Likelihood Model. (Cacioppo, J.T. & Petty, R.E., 1979) ELM fits the situation in that the “Click and Win” PR campaign, the subject line of the email to all students promoted the chance to win $1,000, without mentioning mental health at all. (See Appendix A) The URL link led students to find out more about mental health services. However, as ELM predicts, and evidence has confirmed (Bagozzi, Gurhan-Canli & Priester, 2005), peripheral processing can be persuasive to message recipients, but only on a weaker level. Any changes to attitudes by the students who did click through would be unstable and easily altered. Further, students may have a negative reaction to the messaging, since the email does not directly describe the purpose of the “contest” and considering the stigma attached to mental health counseling described in the Targeted Audience section above.

Applying ELM, an alternative message would follow the central route of information processing, with motives to encourage students to find out more about campus mental health services. In the public and self stigma context, the message may be more effective if the message directs students to think of others, such as friends or classmates, in need of mental health counseling. In this situation, the economic theoretical framework of prospect theory (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981) would contribute considerable understanding to the choices of messaging to
email recipients. As Rothman et al (2006) describe, the loss frame is most effective in affecting motivation in situations when the health appeal involves risk of a relatively negative, or unpleasant, outcome. In this case study, the students may be affected by stigma or disinterest in mental health services. But the loss-frame health appeal to students to seek help for friends, classmates or others would reduce the risk to the email recipients and could, simultaneously, raise their fears about failing to help others (such as losing a friend through suicide). An appeal to help others with mental health needs, by guiding them to campus mental health services, could then have been more directly addressed in the email subject line, the content of the email message and the Student Mental Health website.

The direction of a health appeal to students to help others would also fall within the theory of Two-Step Flow of Communication (Katz, 1957), in trying to engage recipients of the PR campaign’s mass email to convey the information via interpersonal communication. Two-step Flow suggests an alternative distribution channel for the PR campaign. Rather than directing the email to students, the public communication may be more effective directed toward faculty and staff, who could then convey the information to their students. The interjection of interpersonal communication into the PR campaign’s outcomes could also encourage further conversations to reinforce the campaign messages, a critical aspect to mass-mediated (in this situation, computer-mediated) campaigns to have a lasting impact. (Southwell & Yzer, 2007)

Evaluation of Effectiveness

At this stage in the converse case study, the theories applied to the PR campaign and related evidence from the literature set the framework for projecting the potential of the public communication’s effectiveness. The evaluation reconstructs the PR campaign based on guidance from the theoretical and evidence basis as follows: the audience would be targeted by segments, either along gender lines or more narrowly focused on incoming, new students; the outcomes would be structured along the health communication integrated model, specifically directed toward intentions for behavioral change in attitudes, social norms or perceived self-efficacy toward accessing mental health counseling or other campus mental health services; the messaging would be reshaped to address public and self stigma surrounding mental health counseling, and to increase motivation and central processing of the information, the message would be targeted toward students in terms of helping others in need to access campus mental health services.

The reconstruction and reshaping of the “Click and Win” PR campaign is not intended as criticism toward the campaign developers. Rather, it offers a real-world scenario that provided a demonstration of how theory can inform and enhance understanding of public communications, and contribute to strengthening relationships.

Limitations

The converse case study method creates a proposed reconstruction of actual PR campaigns. Ideally, the reconstructed format would be tested in practice to determine if the outcomes improve. In developing examples of theory application, converse case studies assume a knowledge base of applicable theories that might be appropriate to enhance understanding of a case. While this may be considered a limitation, it could also be a motivation for PR
academicians and PR practitioners to become more familiar with application of theories, which is the purpose of converse case studies.

**Conclusion**

This article explores one PR campaign set into the converse case study method, the “Click and Win” email campaign to increase awareness of campus-based mental health services among students at a large Midwest university. By applying theory to each individual component of the campaign, the public communication is refined and reshaped to be directed toward more specific, and effective, outcomes. Future direction for the proposed method would be to establish a systematic examination, and application of theory, to numerous PR campaigns. Ideally, as noted in limitations, the reconstructed case studies could be implemented and tested for outcome effectiveness.

**Acknowledgement**

* Special thanks to Britt Bakke, University of Minnesota Boynton Health Service marketing and design manager, for providing explanations and documents about the campaign.

**References**


Mowbray, Carol T.; Mandiberg, James M.; Stein, Catherine H.; Kopels, Sandra; Curlin, Caroline; Megivern, Deborah; Strauss, Shari; Collins, Kim; Lett, Robin. (2006) Campus Mental Health Services: Recommendations for Change, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Vo. 76, No. 2, pp. 226-237.


Student Mental Health Services, University of Minnesota, www.mentalhealth.umn.edu.

APPENDIX A – “Click and Win” email & marketing material

From: Office for Student Affairs [bulk-nr@umn.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, February 14, 2007 7:59 PM
To: (student’s name)
Subject: Last chance - Click and Win 1000 dollars - U of M Sponsored

Last chance to Click & Win!
Click & Win University of Minnesota, Twin Cities
Complete a 3 question quiz for a chance to win $1,000!
http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu Deadline for clicking is 2/16/07.

HOW DOES THIS CONTEST WORK?
Just visit http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu between February 5th and 16th and complete a 3 question quiz about the website. It only takes a couple of minutes! Just for filling out the quiz you will be entered into a drawing for a $1,000 Visa cash card!

WHO CAN ENTER?
Contest is open to all University of Minnesota, Twin Cities students.

Forward this email on to your friends! Each student may only enter once.
The Student Mental Health website is a web resource for students, their parents, faculty, and staff who wish to learn more about mental health and related resources at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. This website and contest are brought to you by the Provost Committee on Student Mental Health. For more information, call Disability Services at (612) 626-1333.

Sponsored by the Provost Committee on Student Mental Health, Boynton Health Service, the Office for Student Affairs, and Coca-Cola.

To be removed from this mailing list, click or copy and paste this address on your web browser:
http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu/Click_And_Win/remove.html

“Click & Win” Pop Quiz

Feb 5 - Feb 16: Complete a 3 question quiz about this website and be entered into a drawing for a $1,000 Visa cash card! Open to all U of M, Twin Cities students.

Contest details...
Answer 3 simple questions for a chance to win $1,000!

1. What number should you call for non-dangerous Crisis Care?
   - 612-379-6363
   - 612-333-5945
   - 612-690-3397
   - 612-555-2251

2. How much does an Online Self Assessment cost?
   - Only $5!
   - Only $20!
   - Just a co-pay!
   - It's free!

3. What does E-CHUG stand for? (hint . . . Look under Alcohol Resources & Screening.)
   - Elective Check-Up Given
Thank you for entering the Click & Win Contest! Please provide the following to enter into the prize drawing. This information will ONLY be used to notify the prize winner. Each student may only enter once.

Full Name: 
U of M E-mail: 

1. Open to all University of Minnesota, Twin Cities students enrolled spring semester 2007.
2. Each student may only enter once. Duplicate entries will be eliminated and student name and University of Minnesota email address will be verified.
3. Contest opens 8:00am Monday, February 5 and closes at 4:00pm Friday, February 16, 2007.
4. Grand prize is a $1,000 Visa cash card. Prize is sponsored by Coca-Cola.
5. Prize drawing will be held Friday, February 23, 2007. Winner will be notified via email.
6. When the winner has been notified, an announcement will be posted on the contest website. http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu
7. Name and University of Minnesota email address will not be publicized or shared with any outside parties. This information will only be used to notify the contest winner.
8. This contest is an effort to increase student awareness of
the Student Mental Health Website. The Student Mental Health Website is a web resource for students, their parents, faculty, and staff who wish to learn more about mental health and related resources at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. The website and contest are brought to you by the Provost Committee on Student Mental Health. For more information, call (612) 626-1333.
Measuring Influencers: The IQ Mapping Tool
Completed Study
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Abstract
In Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations, (L. Grunig et al., 2002), Grunig et al note that: “Public Relations contributes to organizational effectiveness when it helps reconcile the organization’s goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies. This contribution has monetary value to the organization.” Our belief is that this is particularly the case with elite stakeholders who have a disproportionate influence over public opinion, policy and business.

Engaging these elite constituencies (notably individuals from within the media, NGOs, organized labor, consumer interest groups, academia, think tanks, etc.) is most effective when it is informed by a sophisticated understanding of the stakeholders themselves. This understanding must include a comprehensive assessment of both the orientation and prominence of each stakeholder, at the points at which these qualities intersect with the interests of the client organization. This assessment must be quantifiable to allow for a comparison between stakeholders, and to facilitate tracking of shifts in stakeholder orientation and prominence over time.

A search revealed that there are few, if any, solutions to the challenge of quantifying the orientation and prominence of specific stakeholders as they relate to issues of interest to organizations. While Hill and Knowlton’s new “Influencer Network Analysis” can be used to trace influencers who drive media coverage, this automated tool does not have the capability to map influencers in relation to each other on the specific issues of importance to clients. In response to what we saw as a pressing and unfulfilled need for accurate influencer measurement, Ogilvy Public Relations set about designing a tool that would provide qualitative depth, high specificity and quantitative standardization.

Ogilvy PR’s "Influencer Quotient" or IQ Mapping tool is an innovative tool for assessing the influence and opinion of key individuals in relation to a specific client issue. It is an expert analytical approach that combines qualitative analysis by trained researchers in combination with quantitative scoring against a standardized framework of investigative questions. Its goal is to locate each target stakeholder on a map that charts both their influence (in terms of driving the attitudes and behaviors of others) and their public opinion of the issue of interest to our client. We hypothesized that scoring these two dimensions based on a battery of standardized questions would generate an “Influencer Quotient” or “IQ Score,” which, combined with qualitative data, could offer a true assessment of influencers’ opinions and influence level in regards to a specific organization or issue.
Grunig argues that relationships are multi-dimensional, and this work also begins from the premise that influencers’ orientation towards issues consists of multiple elements. The tool thus uses in-depth secondary research to answer 19 questions exploring 6 dimensions of influence and 3 dimensions of opinion, which are used to score an organization's key influencers on two axes, resulting in a four-quadrant "map" of influence.

Through several rounds of pilot testing and multiple implementations, we have found that this tool is an effective and accurate way to quantify influencers' positions. The tool can also be used to measure the effectiveness of ongoing influencer engagement by tracking changes in influence and opinion scores over time. The objective of this paper is to demonstrate the effectiveness of this tool as an influencer mapping.

**BACKGROUND**

The value of engaging elite stakeholders has long been known to public relations practitioners. In their 2002 book *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations* (L. Grunig et al., 1992), Grunig et al note that: “Public Relations contributes to organizational effectiveness when it helps reconcile the organization’s goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies. This contribution has monetary value to the organization.”

However, mapping the universe of elite individuals has been inconsistent at best and ad hoc at worst. There is a dearth of methodological approaches for measuring and quantifying various dimensions of stakeholder influence and opinion, which has contributed to uninformed and uneven stakeholder outreach, which is prone to subjective biases. Furthermore, tracking the effectiveness of this outreach is difficult with no way of quantifying opinion and influence.

An automated system may be a good start at measuring individuals’ media and online presence and connectivity. However, such a system misses many nuances and can not provide a robust investigation into the multitude of factors which comprise “influence” and “opinion” relative to a particular issue of interest to a client. We set out to develop a tool which would use research analysts to aggregate and evaluate information, while applying methodological rigor to this process to produce consistency. While labor intensive (running one individual through our tool takes between 4 and 8 hours), we have found this to be a thorough technique which leaves no stone unturned and allows for a combination of quantitative standardization and qualitative flexibility that is best-suited to capturing the real world of target influencers.

**SOLUTION**

The Influencer Quotient (IQ) Mapping tool is based on the premise that elite influencers’ opinions and levels of influence are measurable and, to some degree, fluid.

The cornerstone of the IQ mapping tool is a simple grid divided into four quadrants. The axes represent the two attributes we are measuring, Opinion (X axis) and Influence (Y axis). Each influencer is scored and receives a set of coordinates quantifying their level of influence and their opinion of a given issue. These coordinates determine where they are placed on the map, while the “issue” forms the background surface of the map.
The scoring is based on a multi-dimensional system which attempts to capture multiple components of both influence and opinion in a comprehensive but simple way. We have determined six dimensions of influence and three of opinion.

**Identifying an Issue**

The IQ map loses much of its meaning and relevance unless it is constructed in terms of a specific perceptual issue. This, the first step for both client and PR agency is to determine their strategic communications focus in relation to the elite individual stakeholders. Is it to communicate the company’s commitment to sustainability? Is it to transmit the organization’s importance on a specific social or health issue? Is it to create greater confidence in the company’s ability to be an industry leader?

Too often, the temptation is to map without first committing to the strategic goal. But this renders the map less accurate and outreach less effective. Identifying the issue creates a framework for filtering large amounts of stakeholder information to locate the true influencers on an issue and their orientation towards it.

**Selection of Influencers**

Any universe of influencers is hypothetically infinite. The first step in the mapping process is to filter this universe down to those individuals who will actually be mapped to make up the IQ constellation. In order to determine whether an individual is a viable candidate for the mapping tool, they are subjected to three criteria:

- Visibility: Have they had some type of media presence in the past year?
- Activism: Have they taken a stand in relation to the identified issue? Are they an important player in the arena of this issue?
- Means: Do they have organizational affiliations, connections, or other resources which can serve to amplify their voice?

Generally, a person must meet 2 of the 3 criteria to be considered for the mapping process. There are exceptions (such as an individual who may be dominant in a particular community); however, the criteria are generally enforced in order to ensure that those who are mapped are the most relevant elite influencers.

In developing the list of influencers to be mapped, representing a range of sectors and organizations is also important. We typically map influencers across a range of sectors, such as industry analysts, NGOs, digital influencers, and journalists.

We also assume that every influencer is associated with an organization, such as the New York Times for a journalist or the United Autoworkers Union for a labor leader. In some cases, especially in the online space, influencers are not affiliated. However, most are incorporated in some way and so we use this as their organization affiliation.

**Influence**

Influence is assessed across the dimensions of: Prominence; Mainstream Media Reach; Digital Media Reach; Investment in Issue; Authority and Connectedness; and Grassroots Reach. Each dimension is scored from 0 to 30 based on the scoring against specific questions. There are between one and four questions per dimension. The 0 to 30 scale for specific questions allows
for great differentiation between individuals than a standard 0-10 scale. The higher the score, the higher the person climbs on the vertical Influence axis.

In the standard mapping model, there is no weighting of dimensions. However, weighting is possible and can be determined on a case-by-case basis depending on the client and issue being investigated. Thus a client in the online space with new media interests may want to weigh the influencers’ scores for the Digital Media Reach dimension. A summary of questions driving dimension scores is below.

- **Prominence**
  - What organization is this person affiliated with? What is their level within the organization? How credible, and how resourced, is the organization?
  - An individual who is a high-ranking member (CEO, president) of a well-established, credible and highly resourced organization (the Sierra Club, for example) will score much higher on this dimension than, for instance, a field reporter from a small regional newspaper.

- **Mainstream Media Reach**
  - When thinking about the issue being considered, what share of voice has this person had in the media vis-à-vis other stakeholders? How credible and wide-reaching are the media sources where this person is quoted?
  - Appearing regularly in top-tier media will increase an individual’s score on this dimension.

- **Digital Media Reach**
  - When thinking about the issue being considered, what share of voice has this person had in the digital media vis-à-vis other stakeholders? How credible and wide-reaching are the online media sources where this person is quoted?
  - For the purposes of this tool, digital media sources are ones that do *not* have an offline equivalent. Presence in the New York Times online edition should not be considered in scoring this question; presence in a webzine, blog or online message board should be.
  - Digital Media Reach is assessed by looking at credibility scores on Technorati for any blogs where this person is mentioned, in addition to the number of top page mentions returned when this person’s name and identifying characteristics (e.g., “Dan Becker + Sierra Club”) are entered in the top 4 online search engines (Google, Yahoo, MSN, and Ask).

- **Investment in Issue**
  - Is this person fully devoted to the issue at hand, or is it one of many topics that they are concerned about?
  - This dimension is important in evening out scores; highly influential individuals whose energies and resources are divided among many issues, for example politicians, often have high Influence scores which are tempered by low scores on the Investment dimension.

- **Authority and Connectedness**
How extensive is this person’s network of relationships? How high level are this person’s connections? To what degree does he or she have on-record visibility?

- An influencer who sits on boards, collaborates on research or presentations, or is often associated with other influencers, accumulates points on this dimension. A score is also increased markedly if this person’s connections are with influential policy makers or industry leaders, although less so if they are consistently connected to mid-level individuals.
- On-record visibility looks at how much this person is in the public eye. Have they published books that are widely read, or only a few specialized articles for a niche audience? Do they regularly present at conferences?

Grassroots Reach

- In contrast to the dimension of Authority and Connectedness, the Grassroots Reach dimension looks at the individual’s ability to mobilize people who may be less influential, but who gain power through numbers.

It would be highly unlikely for any one individual to score in the top third across all dimensions. However, the multidimensional approach to measuring influence ensures that influencers with different strengths can be measured against each other. Thus, a college student with a widely read blog may score low on the dimensions of Prominence and Authority and Connectedness, but high on Digital Media Reach and Grassroots Reach, while a senior politician may score the inverse. Theoretically, these two individuals could have the same overall Influence score, although it is driven by very different modes of influence. This approach allows clients to have a 30,000 foot view of their universe of elite influencers—one that is not skewed by too much emphasis on one sector or another.

Opinion

Similar to the Influence axis, the Opinion axis consists of multiple dimensions, each of which is scored based on answers to between one and three questions. However, there are two important distinctions in the scoring of the Opinion axis.

Firstly, the axis runs from -45 to +45, with 0 representing a neutral position. While a person cannot have a negative amount of influence, they can have a negative opinion, and this scoring system assesses negative as well as positive opinions.

Second, the three dimensions of the Opinion axis (Editorial Opinion and Consistency, Organizational Opinion and Consistency, and Accessibility) are not evenly weighted. A person’s individual view is viewed as a more important driver of their overall opinion than the opinion of their affiliate organization and is therefore given more weight. Accessibility is considered the least important as a metric.

Editorial Orientation and Consistency

- This dimension is given the most weight, with a scale of -20 to 20. An influencer’s publicly stated opinion about the issue at hand is considered the most important driver of their placement on the Opinion axis.
Consistency is also considered: Has this person been consistently positive or negative, or have they waffled over time? Have they been swayed from one side of the axis to another, and is there any indication that they could be swayed again?

Organizational Opinion and Consistency
- Less important than an individual’s opinion is the position of any organization they are affiliated with. This dimension is scored on a scale from -15 to 15.
- Again, consistency is considered in scoring this dimension.
- For individuals who are not affiliated with any organization, we consider the person to be their own organization and assign the same score for this dimension that was given to them for Editorial Opinion and Consistency.

Accessibility
- Does the client already have an established relationship with this person? If so, what is the nature of this relationship? Would this person be amenable to contact from the client? Would they initiate contact?
- This dimension receives the lowest weight, with scores from -10 to 10.

RESEARCH PROCESS AND SCORING
Analysts utilize only publicly available sources to answer the 19 individual questions that are used to determine influence and opinion. Examples of sources include databases such as eMarketer, Nexis, Factiva, and Global Business Browser; corporate, organizational, academic, and government websites; individual voting record, biographies, profiles; Technorati; and search engines (Google, MSN, Yahoo, Ask).

Scores to individual questions are averaged to obtain a score for each of the 6 Influence dimensions and the 3 Opinion dimensions. Each sum of dimension scores is the axis score, ranging from -45 to 45 for Opinion and -180 to 180 for Influence. To simplify mapping, the overall Influence axis score is divided by 2, resulting in a score between -90 and 90.

Scores and justification for each individual question score are compiled for each influencer. In addition, influencer dossiers are built which consist of all sources used to determine scores.

Supporting Materials
Customized files for each influencer mapped contain background materials used to inform all scores in the form of articles, biographies, and other secondary data. Often the materials contained in these files can shed light on previously unknown pieces of information, for example, that an established influencer was employed by the client themselves immediately out of college for a year. These files can have use beyond the initial scoring process, however. We fully expect that clients will keep them on hand and add to them as more information becomes available. A review of an influencer’s background materials prior to a meeting with this individual can serve as a thorough update on his or her positions, activities, etc. In addition, we recommend that clients keep a log in each file documenting all contact and attempted contact with the influencer. This enables the client to analyze what types of outreach are more successful.
**INTERPRETATION**

As the sample map below shows, final coordinates for individual stakeholders place them throughout the map.

To utilize the findings, influencers are divided into 5 groups based on where they fall on the map. While similar approaches can be taken to engage all members of one group, individual reports are used to customize engagement strategies.

*Bottom left quadrant: Low Influence, Low Opinion*

If a thoughtful selection process was used to determine which influencers are to be included in the mapping process, generally very few people will fall in this quadrant. Those that do end up in the lower left quadrant can generally be “monitored,” meaning the client should remain aware of any movement in their opinion and/ or influence. It is generally not worth investing many resources to change these people’s opinions; rather, it is preferable to make sure their influence does not increase.

*Bottom right quadrant: Low Influence, High Opinion*

This quadrant is ripe with potential advocates. Influencers who end up here often include academics, think tank representatives, and local politicians. The goal is to engage with these individuals in such a way as to increase their visibility, for example by providing them with
speaking opportunities or partnering with them on research projects. Information on individual influencers can provide guidance as to effective and appropriate engagement mechanisms for each individual.

Top left quadrant: High Influence, Low Opinion
This quadrant can be considered a “danger zone,” containing influencers who are outspoken in ways that may be detrimental to the client or the issue at hand. Changing their opinion may not be possible; the best we can hope for is to inform them in ways that may moderate their opinions. They may be difficult to reach directly due to low accessibility scores, but may be reachable via other influencers with whom they are connected.

Top right quadrant: High Influence, High Opinion
This quadrant is the “sweet spot” for influencer engagement. Influencers who fall into this quadrant are positive towards the issue at hand and are also among the most influential individuals. Importantly, they do not always need to be actively engaged. Often all that is needed is maintenance of the current relationship.

Center: Neutral
Spanning all four quadrants, individuals who fall within a small circle at the intersection of axes can be considered the “movable middle.” They do not have opinions that are so strongly negative as to be unchangeable, and their influence level is neither too low to be changed nor too high to render them impossible to reach. While the top right quadrant is obviously the target location for all influencers, individuals who fall outside of this quadrant but within the neutral space should still be regarded as valuable candidates for communications outreach.

USES
Mapping Individuals
The mapping process was used for a major automotive company to develop an engagement plan with customized outreach strategies for each influencer based on their opinion and affiliations. The issue was the future market success of the company. For each influencer a target message and mechanism for delivering it were identified. Examples included:

- For a prominent academic in the field of Labor Relations, the primary message to be delivered was the benefit experienced by the company in light of recent labor talks. Planned outreach mechanisms included an in-depth briefing and invitations to participate in company-sponsored research initiatives.
- For an automotive trade journalist, the message to be highlighted was innovation. Plans were made to invite the journalist for “sneak peeks” and behind-the-scenes insights to products that he otherwise would not have access to.
- For an environmental advocate, the plan included emphasizing messages of fuel efficiency technology and hybrid vehicle production. This advocate was invited to an individual briefing at company headquarters, including meetings with relevant technology and operations personnel.
After six months of concerted outreach efforts, these influencers will be re-mapped to measure the effectiveness of our efforts.

**Mapping Organizations**

The mapping process was adapted for a client who wanted to find an ideal third-party organization to partner with in their quest to raise the prominence of a health care condition on the national agenda. In this case, we adapted the “Opinion” axis to measure the relevance of each organization for a partnership with our client. The Influence axis stayed the same and allowed the client to assess the visibility of different groups.

The map was supplemented with internal information about the relationships the client already had with each group. By triangulating this information with the secondary data available through mapping, the public relations team was able to pare down the original list of 48 organizations to a short list of the five most influential and engaged groups with whom the client already had relationships.

In addition, using results from the mapping, we created a “second tier” list of influencers who had relationships with the client but who were not as influential or relevant according to the map. The hope is to engage these groups after a period of concerted outreach to increase their influence and/or relevance.

**Tracking Influencers Over Time**

The IQ map is a fluid measurement mechanism; it is possible for people to shift their position on either or both axes. It is also possible for someone to “fall off” the map, as in the case of an individual whose level of influence drops to the point where he or she is no longer relevant. Importantly, only a drop in influence can remove someone from the map; opinion can always be mapped, no matter how much it changes. This ability to remove former influencers from the map ensures that it will remain relevant and actionable.

**CONCLUSION**

The range of uses for the Influencer Quotient mapping tool make it a powerful resource for public relations. With a few mathematical or content adaptations, this tool can be used to qualify, assess, and track individuals or groups for a range of purposes, including justifying a need for engagement, measuring effects of outreach, and characterizing relationships. While mapping is a labor-intensive process, we believe it provides enormous value to clients.
Smoking does not cause cancer! A content analysis of Tobacco Industry Research Committee (TIRC) press releases published in ten nationally-based newspapers

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Abstract
From 1954 to 1988, the Tobacco Industry Research Committee (TIRC), with the help of John W. Hill of Hill & Knowlton from inception to about 1962, was charged with protecting cigarettes from attacks from the American Cancer Society and the U.S. Surgeon General. This study utilized an historical analysis of John W. Hill and Hill & Knowlton, as well as a content analysis to investigate how 28 press releases were published and presented in 10 nationally-based newspapers, including the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Some variables coded included location of article within the paper, subject of the article, percent of the article relating to the press release, size of the article, and source of the article. The study found no relationship between press release and volume of coverage. This is explained by Hill’s instance that the TIRC campaign focus on media relations and not press promotion.

1994, thousands of internal documents from Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corporation and its parent company BAT Industries became available to the U.S. Congress, who subsequently made them public (Glantz, Barnes, Bero, Hanauer, & Slade, 1995). Included in these documents were confidential internal reports and memos from the tobacco industry, as well as claims of a link between smoking and cancer, regularly published beginning in the 1950s.

After World War II during the science boom, universities and hospitals received an increase in funding that helped doctors and other researchers investigate a strong link, rather than a mere association, between cancer and smoking (Miller, 1992). During the early 1950s, the Federal Trade Commission also accused cigarette manufacturers of misleading health claims. Cigarette consumption and stock prices fell after several reports suggested a link between smoking and cancer (Miller, 1995).

In 1953, tobacco companies hired John W. Hill, representing Hill and Knowlton public relations firm, during the cigarette scare to devise a public relations campaign. Hill suggested the formation of a research committee who would sponsor independent, scientific research on the health effects of smoking. On January 4, 1954, the tobacco industry in a press release/advertisement announced the formation of the Tobacco Industry Research Committee (TIRC). Later, in 1958, TIRC continued to assume the public relations functions while the
Council for Tobacco Research provided funding for scientific research. Eventually, TIRC was incorporated into CTR (Glantz, Slade, Bero, Hanauer, & Barnes, 1998).

TIRC was an “independent organization that funds unbiased research into the health effects of smoking” (Glantz et al, 1995, p. 220). According to Glantz et al. (1995), tobacco industry representatives stated TIRC “was created for public relations purposes and that it later fulfilled political and legal roles” (p. 220).

According to Miller (1995), Hill and Knowlton argued a medical controversy, rather than a health hazard existed, taking full advantage of the media’s belief that all sides should be represented in a controversy. John W. Hill was the primary liaison to TIRC and Hill and Knowlton handled all press inquiries and released material usually in response to inquiries and accusations (TIRC January 18 memo, 1954). Only results from new studies and grants were proactively announced to the public. Also during this time, columnists, news and magazine writers, and commentators were turning to TIRC for more information (Hill & Knowlton, June 14 report, 1954). TIRC articles typically appeared alongside accusations of the smoking-cancer link.

In 1955, Hill and Knowlton suggested a “more active and outspoken position” should be taken with TIRC (Hill & Knowlton April 28 report, 1955). Changes in media discourse may have contributed to the return of cigarette consumption in the late 1950s to the same levels before the suggested link of smoking and cancer was announced (Miller, 1995). One reason as to why TIRC was successful in their public relations efforts was the lack of funding and knowledge of public relations practices the anti-tobacco groups, such as the American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, and the American Heart Association, had to wage against the tobacco industry (Miller, 2002). This proactive approach continued until 1998 when the CTR closed as a result of a settlement between the tobacco industry and states (New York State Archives, 2008).

The Wisconsin Historical Society established the Mass Communications History Collections in 1955, which features papers of prominent individuals, corporations, and other organizations. John W. Hill’s papers and documents (112 archive boxes total), primarily from 1947 to 1964 are located there, including correspondence with TIRC, as well as press releases, books, research findings, etc. (Wisconsin Historical Society, 2008). Part of the John W. Hill collection included 35 TIRC press releases from March 17, 1954 to November 15, 1988. According to Miller (1992), most press releases were in response to anti-tobacco claims and generally the press releases drew favorable coverage. This study will analyze in-depth to what extent and in what context these 28 press releases appeared in 10 national newspapers.

Method

Twenty-eight press releases distributed from July 1, 1954 to November 15, 1988 in ten daily newspapers were coded (see Table 1). Daily newspapers were chosen based on prominence, location, and circulation size. Each news release was tracked in each newspaper for eight days following the release date.

Of the 2,240 newspaper issues evaluated, 625 newspaper articles mentioned some type of tobacco (cigarettes, cigars, dip/snuff, multiple, or other) and/or were related to cancer. Forty-five of those articles included material from TIRC press releases and 84 mentioned TIRC or the
Tobacco Institute (TI). Each article dealing with tobacco types, regardless whether it mentioned TI or TIRC, was evaluated. The number of words per article ranged from 0 to 278 with a range of 4 to 88 lines referring to the release (see Table 2).

**Intercoder reliability**

Two independent coders evaluated 10 percent of the articles for intercoder reliability before the initial coding. Any disagreements were resolved and the remainder of the articles was coded.

**Results**

Among the 625 articles, nearly half of the articles’ (42.9%) subject matter dealt with tobacco being hazardous to health/causes cancer followed by general tobacco information (43%). Other articles did not equate smoking with cancer (16.6%) and attributed a virus or the environment to be cancer-related (Table 3). The majority of articles were straight news (86.6%), distantly followed by editorials (3.4%) (See Table 4).

Forty-five articles published in ten newspapers mentioned or referenced material in the press releases. Of the 45 articles, 75 percent reported both sides while 15 percent attacked TIRC. Only one article supported TIRC or smoking (See Table 5). Regarding source attribution, TIRC (30%) was most frequently the initial source quoted followed by two government bodies, Congress (22.5%) and the Surgeon General (20%) (See Table 6). Most of the articles based on the press releases suggested smoking caused cancer (56.8%) while one-third (36.4%) reported smoking is not linked to cancer (Table 7).

**References**


Appendix: Tables

Table 1 *Inclusion of tobacco articles and releases in the ten daily newspapers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Daily Newspapers</th>
<th>Tobacco articles per paper</th>
<th>Articles based on releases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta (Journal) Constitution</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston (Daily) Globe</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Tribune</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cleveland) Plain Dealer</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco Chronicle</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page number of article</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day run after release</td>
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<tr>
<td>Words per release</td>
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<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of pages article run</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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Table 2 Mean characteristics of news releases
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<tr>
<th>Article topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco hazardous to health/causes cancer</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking not linked to cancer</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer related to virus</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General tobacco financial information</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific tobacco company information</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment &amp; smoking causes cancer</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment causes cancer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General TIRC/TI information</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article type</td>
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<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight news</td>
<td>541</td>
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<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
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<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters to the editor</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Syndicated columnists</td>
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<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help columns</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidebar to accompany article</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Table 5  *Messages in newspaper articles of published press releases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article subjects (N =45 )</th>
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<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attacked TIRC/Smoking</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports TIRC/Smoking</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports both sides</td>
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<td>75.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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</table>
Table 6  *First source cited in newspaper articles of published press releases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIRC/TI</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Cancer Society</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Medical Association</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for Disease Control</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgeon General</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Conferences</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Public Health Association</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
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Table 7  *Topics of newspaper articles relating to published press releases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article topics (N =45 )</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco hazardous to health/causes cancer</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking not linked to cancer</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer related to virus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General tobacco financial information</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific tobacco company information</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment &amp; smoking causes cancer</td>
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<td>Environment causes cancer</td>
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<tr>
<td>General TIRC/TI information</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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ABSTRACT

In the mid-1990s, Bechtel Corporation, which builds transportation infrastructure, power plants, refineries and petrochemical facilities, pipelines, telecommunications networks, mines and smelters, and environmental cleanup projects worldwide, experienced communication problems among its senior management. Bechtel’s management introduced leadership covenants emphasizing mutual respect, open and honest communication, loyalty, and teamwork. These covenants were not taken from other organizations or organizational literature but represented a “home-grown” effort to tear down communication barriers and reinforce moral values among the company’s thousands of employees across the globe. First, the partners signed the covenants, then senior- and mid-level management and finally all employees worldwide were asked to read and sign the covenants. As a result of adopting these covenants, Bechtel has improved communication and changed its culture. This paper will show how organizational covenants, as a model of transformational leadership, internalized company values, strengthened employee loyalty, enhanced authority, and improved communication.

This is a home-grown product. It was not out of someone’s cookbook for managing business. We created it and tailored it to Bechtel, because Bechtel is a very complex company.

Jack Stromberg, managing director of Bechtel Enterprises

In the mid-1990s, the senior partners and owners of Bechtel Corporation (numbering about 50 at any given time) launched an initiative to improve communication and working relationships among themselves. A global construction company, Bechtel builds transportation infrastructure, power plants, refineries and petrochemical facilities, pipelines, telecommunications networks, mines and smelters, and environmental cleanup projects throughout the world. As the company expanded in the 1990s, senior management’s communication barriers began to affect performance. The senior partners developed nine “Leadership Covenants” and in June 1997, senior partners and a cross section of mid- and senior-level employees signed the covenants (Covenants offer code for success, 1998).

Now every new employee is expected to read and live by the Leadership Covenants. It is considered an honor among long-time employees to be the first to share the Leadership Covenants with new employees. Copies of the covenants have been printed on posters, wallet-sized cards, and the company website. They are usually formatted in the following way (including the use of bold type):

1. Treat Bechtel colleagues with mutual respect, trust, and dignity and believe they are acting in the best interest of the company.
2. **Help each other**; ask for and give help and welcome it freely (it is not a sign of weakness). Go out of the way to provide extra support to fellow employees. **Share experiences and lessons learned**, both successes and failures.

3. **Communicate early, honestly, and completely** with all who have a direct interest in the subject. Listen to others’ points of view.

4. **Earn trust** by accepting and honoring agreements, keeping promises, and discussing needed changes before acting.

5. **Work to understand Bechtel Group, Inc. goals and strategies** and proactively support time through discussions, communications, and actions (for example, sharing resources).

6. **Never undermine colleagues** directly or indirectly.

7. **Work jointly to resolve disagreements** in good faith. If necessary, go to a higher authority together, then accept and support the solution.

8. **Contribute constructively** by exercising the highest level of professional and ethical behavior.

9. **Promote continuous use of the covenants.** *(Leadership Covenants, 2007)* Since the incorporation of the covenants about ten years ago, communication has improved, not just among senior management, but among employees across the world. It is not uncommon for employees to evaluate superiors based on their adherence to the leadership covenants. As principal vice president and manager of leadership and development for Bechtel, William K. “Bill” Redmon (personal communication, Nov. 30, 2008) is tasked with implementing leadership training and gauging the leader performance in regards to the Covenants. A former university professor and psychologist, Redmon noted that employees do not view the Covenants as something imposed from above but as a social compact by which to judge interpersonal communication, relationships and mutual respect. Redmon explained, People give feedback to each other saying, “I’m not sure that’s covenant based.” Also, when they raise this issue, people are expected to give feedback about what should be done to improve. We also expect that feedback will be given face-to-face and not behind people’s backs. It’s built into the way we talk to each other, even informally. This sort of day-to-day use of the covenants is self-prescribed, which shows a commitment to the values. *(Personal communication, Nov. 30, 2008)*

By enhancing feedback and face-to-face communications, the Leadership Covenants strengthen, and maintain interpersonal and institutional relationships and facilitate internal communications. Covenants also form the building blocks for creating community. Leadership covenants also play a role in organizational change and transformational leadership.

Bechtel’s Leadership Covenants are unique and directed at changing organizational behavior, but the concepts of covenant-making and covenantal leadership have existed since Biblical times. This paper will review current research on the concept of covenants and their application in contemporary organizational life and communication. Special focus will be given to explaining the nature of covenants and the process by which covenants are established. Second, the paper will explore the connections between covenants, communication and culture, particularly cultures and values associated with privately owned companies, such as Bechtel. The paper will then provide a theoretical basis for the Leadership Covenants by aligning them to
research in Transformational Leadership. Next, the paper will examine Bechtel Group Inc., its history, culture, and application of the covenants. It will conclude with a discussion of the Leadership Covenants with Redmon.

Creating a shared community

Bechtel’s Leadership Covenants may be unique, but covenant leadership is not a new concept. Indeed, much of what has been written about covenants is based on the Old Testament and Judaic tradition (Pava, 2001; Pava, 2003; Caldwell, 2005). Bechtel’s Leadership Covenants are consistent with the Judaic tradition that places priority on individuals, their interdependence and connections, and their moral responsibility for each other and the larger community (Caldwell, 2005).

The leading writer on covenantal leadership is Moses Pava, the Alvin Einben der Chair in Business Ethics at Sy Syms School of Business, Yeshiva University. Pava (2001) defined a covenant as a long-term (even timeless) “voluntary agreement among independent but equal agents to create a ‘shared community.’” The goal of covenants, Pava contended, was to “help foster human growth, development” and satisfy “legitimate human needs” (p. 86).

Freeman (1980) noted that a, “Covenant is a relationship.” And individuals enter into relationships “to guarantee survival as a meaningful person” (p. 73). Relationships provide a means for self-discovery, and a chance to identify with a group purpose that transcends individual self-interests. Through the shared experiences offered by relationships, the individual develops a “sense of community with persons who would otherwise be strangers” (p. 73). Freeman noted that covenant relationships are not without their risks. One gives up freedom for security and individuality for community.

To freely choose to give up freedom and individuality to increase order, security and community creates a paradox. The downside of the paradox is that order and security come at the expense of freedom and individuality, but Pava (2001) contended that the upside is more likely -- individuals retain their identity and freedom while still members of “a living community” (p. 86). In the Bible, God promised Abraham posterity and prosperity if he and his seed abided the covenant. The covenant neither robbed Abraham or his seed of their individuality and freedom; indeed, the relationship was at once individual, between God and Abraham, and communal, between God and Abraham’s seed (see Genesis 17: 4-12). This presupposition of individual legitimacy (Freeman, 1980) meant that the source of power in the covenant relationship is individuality, and, “The greater the individuality expressed by the partners, the greater is the overall power available” (p. 74).

Thus, responsibility for interpreting the covenants falls upon the individuals. Covenants are somewhat ambiguous for a reason. Unlike contracts, covenants offer a lot of room for participants to impose their own meanings. In interpreting contacts, courts are bound by the specifics of the contract; they cannot impose any interpretation beyond what is spelled out in the contract. Covenants, on the other hand, place responsibility on the individuals involved to interpret and administer the agreement. A better judicial analogy to apply to covenants is the relationship between the U.S. Supreme Court and the Constitution. The Court adjudicates the validity of arguments based on which interpretation best fits established precedent, tradition, and
current conditions. The Constitution’s value is in its vagueness, not its specificity. It allows the Court breathing room for adjusting and adapting to contemporary issues and problems.

The covenant process
The process of entering into covenants is not unlike creating a moral constitution for the organization. Freeman (1980) identified a three-stage process of negotiation, implementation, and maintenance for creating covenants. For negotiation to succeed, there first must exist a “precondition of trust” among the parties (Freeman, 1980, p. 75). Stated another way, trust enables covenants. Sufficient good faith or “willed trust” (Fort, 1996, p. 214; Koehn, 1996, p. 201) must exist among individuals to persuade them to surrender some of their freedom and individuality for the sake of the covenant. This act of good faith and gratitude allows individuals to freely enter into an agreement that will be reciprocal without any predetermined expectation of reciprocity. In this way, covenants avoid the trap of two-way symmetry or dialogue that may burden communication with quid pro quo relationships, not based on trust but mutual exchange (Stoker & Tusinski, 2006; Peters, 1999).

Covenants are not based on exchange of consideration (as in contracts) but on a common commitment to values, and those values define the relationship. Thus, the covenant relationship is open to criticism and examination. Communication becomes more candid and honest, and individuals and institutions establish trustworthy reputations. This establishment of a trusting relationship is often the product of efficient internal relations where the CEO or communications expert realizes that “effective communication is how we all successfully connect with and engage with others every day, taking them on our personal journey of ideas. But they only come along if they trust us, if they feel we respect them and if our journey is meaningful to them. So communications is about feelings, not just facts.” Companies embracing this theory of internal communications focus on candid and open communication rather than props and structure (Gray & Robertson, p. 27-28). The mark of trustworthy institutions is that their “decisions and the reasons for such decisions are open to examination and evaluation by stakeholders” (Fort, 1996, p. 214). This institutional act of good faith makes “trusting … a matter of policy” (Koehn, 1996, p. 201). Koehn explained,

Because human relations are extremely nuanced, involving risks we cannot calculate and conditions of action we cannot predict, and because descriptions of actions are open to dispute, we are, in this view, better off simply proceeding on the assumption that others mean well and will respond generously to our trust in them. (Freeman, 1980, p. 201)

Though not talking directly about covenants, Koehn’s concept of trusting as a matter of policy describes the covenant relationship. Each party trusts that the other will live up to the covenants otherwise they would not enter into the covenant. This creates an environment in which communication can flourish. The covenant organization can give its members a great deal of autonomy because it trusts them to honor the covenants. Organizational members can honestly communicate with superiors because they are secure in the protection provided by the covenants. In the Bible, God showed he was trustworthy by protecting Abraham and freeing Israel from Egyptian captivity (Freeman, 1980).

Once established, covenants articulate a “new relationship” (Freeman, 1980, p. 75). This new relationship is reinforced and remembered through subsequent events. For example in the
Bible, God’s covenants with Israel were remembered through holidays, Sabbath observance, particular foods eaten, and distinctive clothes worn. At Bechtel, a common covenant ritual is for employees to be the first to introduce a new employee to the Leadership Covenants. About a week after joining Bechtel in 2007, Nancy Higgins, the chief ethics and compliance officer, visited Jock Covey, senior vice president and manager of corporate affairs, in his office.

And when I came in to talk about the job, he handed me a copy of the covenants and said that this was one of their traditions, and he introduced me to the covenants and asked me if I would be willing to work with that—which was very impressive. And you know, he told me some stories about them and suggested that I follow up with some others about that, and I was quite impressed by that. (Nancy Higgins, personal communication, Nov. 30, 2007)

This kind of ritual, introducing new employees to the covenants, helps to implement and maintain covenants. Note, that Covey asked if Higgins would be willing to work with the Leadership Covenants and then shared stories about them. He also encouraged her to talk to others. These actions represent more than just a ritualistic introduction; they reflect an effort to socialize new employees, to provide “commentary” that binds the present with the past (Freeman, 1980, p. 77).

Covenants are maintained through authority (Freeman, 1980). In the Bible, God assigned authority through revelation or by calling an authority to act in God’s name, but rabbinical tradition has evolved to achieve authority through socialization. “Ideally, everyone could become an authority through socialization” (p. 77). This diffusion of authority throughout the organization allows each member to monitor and advocate the use of the covenants. The covenant relationship authorizes members to assume responsibilities once reserved for top management. One should not confuse authority with power in this situation. Power stems from the ability to enforce one’s commands. Authority, on the other hand, is based on reasoned elaboration where the superior takes the time to truly communicate with their subordinates thus characterizing the subordinates involvement in the decision making process (Holzhausen, 2002, p.34). One’s communication has authority because one can provide good reasons for taking a particular action. Unlike the person exercising power, a person with authority provides something “more than advice yet less than command” (Friedrich, 1972, p. 47).

Thus, covenants do not empower employees; they provide them with good reasons for taking action. “What makes a particular course of action authoritative, that is to say, vested with authority, is that convincing reasons may be offered in support of it” (Friedrich, 1972, p. 48). In the case of Bechtel, the Leadership Covenants provide for employees to question the actions of a supervisor on the basis of whether the actions are consistent with covenant behavior. The response, as Friedrich explained, is not based on “Why I should obey?” but “Why should I agree?” What matters is “the capacity for reasoned elaboration of a communication” (p. 52). By freely entering into covenants, individuals endow the covenants with authority, and they endow their covenant-related communication with authority. The covenantal organization also achieves authority in its communications if the communications are consistent with its covenants.

Friedrich (1963) argued that all authority is “the authority of communications” (p. 53). Any communication achieves authority through rational discourse and participation in this discourse enables individuals to look upon the communication “as ‘their own,’ as something
which they have taken hold of, as much as ‘it’ took hold of them” (pp. 53-54). Subjects of authority actively, not passively, participate in their communities. As these individuals enjoy the “augmentation and implementation” (in essence, the success and self-actualization) provided by authority, they become “engaged” (p. 54). This engagement engenders a deeper sense of loyalty, one in which parental discipline is replaced by self-discipline and organizational values become personal values. Evidence of this kind of loyalty exists in companies considered as examples of covenantal leadership.

Covenantal Organizations

Who are today’s covenantal leaders? Pava (2001) identified four current and former chief executive officers: Aaron Feurstein of Malden Mills, Tom Chappell of Tom’s of Maine, Max De Pree of Herman Miller, and C. William Pollard of ServiceMaster. An analysis of the media coverage of these companies shows that they have common characteristics. First, the CEOs of these companies are charismatic leaders who combine their religious convictions with their business practices. These companies treat their employees like family and customers like friends and neighbors. They place people and people’s development, and in some cases even the environment, ahead of the bottom line. This leadership formula, with its utilization of good internal communication has served these companies well. With the exception of Feuerstein’s Malden Mills, these companies remain financially successful.

For three generations, the Feuerstein family operated Malden Mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts. In 1995, Aaron Feuerstein grabbed national attention when he refused to lay off workers after his textile plant burned down. He paid out $25 million to keep people on the payroll and became famous for caring more for his workers than profits (The Mensch of Malden Mills, 2003; Bailey, 2003; Teal, 1996). He based his decision on Jewish law, but his interpretation appears more paternalistic than covenantal. “You are not permitted to oppress the working man, because he’s poor and he’s needy, amongst your brethren and amongst the non-Jew in your community” (The Mensch, 2003, para. 14). He built a new state-of-the-art facility in 2001, but filed for bankruptcy protection in 2003. The mill was later sold, filed for bankruptcy a second time, and as of 2007, its future dubious. All attempts by Feuerstein to regain control of the company failed. After losing the company, Feuerstein became popular on the as speaker, talking about business and spirituality. In news articles, Feuerstein did not talk about a covenantal relationship with his employees, but he did say he rebuilt the mill out of a moral obligation to employees and the community.

Tom Chappell of Tom’s of Maine also does not mention covenants by name, he advocates a form of “common-good capitalism” that reflects a commitment to a shared community (Kinsella, 1993, para. 12). His company is passionately green. Company products include phosphate-free laundry detergent and natural toothpaste, and its production operations are environmentally friendly. His employees are encouraged to donate 5% of their paid work time to community service, and his company gives 10% of pre-tax profits to charity (Barash, 1996).

His relationship with customers and employees is defined by a concept learned while earning a divinity degree at Harvard University. Chappell read “I and Thou” by Jewish philosopher Martin Buber and realized that what made him uncomfortable with marketing was
its emphasis on I-It, treating people as objects, rather than I-Thou, treating people as people. “Kate [his wife and partner] and I had built Tom’s around treating our customers and employees as real people with family histories and futures, not as abstract categories and statistics” (Chappell, 1994, para. 14). The I-Thou relationship reflects the covenant relationship.

This covenant philosophy helped Tom’s of Maine expand from $20 million revenues in the mid 1990s to $45 million in 2006. That year Tom and Kate Chappell sold a majority of the company to Colgate-Palmolive. Tom Chappell referred to Colgate as a partner chosen from among three candidate companies because of Colgate’s “deeply held values… of caring and teamwork” (DeBare, 2007, para. 13). Colgate agreed not to change Tom’s of Maine, allowing it to retain its employees, its manufacturing facility in Maine, and its unique corporate values.

Max Dupree, the former CEO of furniture manufacturer Herman Miller Inc, does talk about covenants, and Herman Miller is known for its emphasis on social and fiscal responsibility. For Dupree, leadership is all about focusing on what really matters (Staub, 2002). Dupree, now retired, wrote that a covenant exists between leaders and the people who populate a corporation or institution (Pava, 1981). Leaders should set the example for what “caring, purposeful, committed people can be…” He purposely placed emphasis on what people and corporations can become, not necessarily what they do. “Covenants bind people together and enable them to meet their corporate needs by meeting the needs of one another,” he wrote. “We must do this in a way that is consonant with the world around us” (Dupree, 1989, p. 15; quoted in Pava, 1981, p. 90).

C. William Pollard, Chairman of the Board of The ServiceMaster Company, also emphasizes the learning and development of his employees, saying the firm is like a university (Pollard, no date). Implicit in Christian stewardship, according to Pollard, is an obligation to use profits as a means of investing in people, giving them meaning and purpose in their lives. Pollard relates his Christian faith to his business decisions and business relationships. “So I continually ask what Jesus would do, and when I ask that question, it typically leads to disclosure,” he wrote. “To put it another way, when I am dealing with a difficult ethical issues, I ask myself, Can I stand up in front of one thousand people in ServiceMaster and explain my decision?” (para. 30). His ability to disclose his reasoning helps him judge whether he has chosen the right course of action. In sum, Pollard and other covenantal leaders see value in individual and institutional development and consider profits as both a medium and outcome of being a covenantal organization. Their philosophies of business often find a home in the organizational cultures of private, family-run businesses.

**Covenants, Communication and Culture**

Culture evolves from an organization’s efforts to create a common approach and mindset to dealing with external and internal problems and opportunities (Schein, 1990). Cameron and Quinn (1999) contended that healthy organizational cultures are shaped as much by the group’s values as they are by market forces. Deeply held values contribute to a strong culture, which has been a constant in successful companies. Culture reduces uncertainty, establishes common values and norms, unites people in a common cause, and creates a shared vision for the future (Cameron and Quinn, 1999). Covenantal companies strive to create a democratic culture in their organization and one way that they do this is through this is by truly valuing, “individual goals
and feelings as well as typically organization objectives,” through their internal communication models “which actively fosters the connection between two sets of concerns by encouraging individual contributions to important organizational choices, and which allows for the ongoing modification of the organization’s activities and policies by the group” (Holtzhausen, 2002, p. 32).

In researching organizations, Cameron and Quinn (1999) identified four distinct cultures: Hierarchy, Market, Adhocracy, and Clan. Hierarchy cultures emphasized structure, procedures and top-down management. Because they valued stability, predictability, and efficiency, hierarchy cultures developed specific guidelines and rules for operation and production. Market cultures were designed to respond to external forces and thus valued competitiveness, productivity, and meeting demand. Like a sports team, the emphasis was on winning. In the Adhocracy culture, the focus was on adjusting and adapting to changing market conditions. At home in the software, filmmaking, and aerospace industries, Adhocracy cultures required innovation, flexibility, and creativity to deal with a business environment in which high uncertainty and ambiguity were the norm.

This hierarchical nature of companies is strongly correlated to the various styles of internal communication described by Thomas Roach (2007) a professor of communications at Purdue University when he says,

“A hierarchy of values is represented by how companies handle communication. ‘Worst-case-scenario’ cultures limit their communications to giving orders and penalizing employees who talk back or ask questions. At the next level are companies that ask for feedback but don’t act on it. They recognize the need for communication, but don’t know how to operationalize it. Then there are the companies that encourage feedback and act on it with media. They put out announcements, newsletters and training videos. Companies at the highest level manage culture through communications process. Everything from the hiring process to employee review to the company picnic is infused with two-way communication” (p.1).

Clearly, the communications model used by the company strongly influences the overall leadership style and culture.

The fourth culture, Clan, best describes the type of culture that exists at covenantal organizations. Cameron and Quinn (1999) described Clan cultures as acting like a family. Management looked out for its employees. “Shared values and goals, cohesion, participativeness, individuality, and a sense of we-ness permeated clan-type firms.” Clan-type firms emphasized “teamwork, employee involvement programs, and corporate commitment to employees” (p. 36.). In Clan cultures, committed and loyal employees working in teams were considered the organizations best asset for dealing with marketplace challenges. Leaders acted as facilitators, mentors, and parents. Clan cultures also establish trust through internal communications by assuring that “feedback will be accepted without negative reaction, encouraging dialogue that might otherwise be stifled … [which will] affect the openness and comfort level of the people about raising issues” (Wood, 199, p. 138-139).

The close relationship between leaders and followers in the Clan culture creates the conditions necessary for Charismatic and Transformational Leadership (Caldwell, 2005).
Bechtel’s Leadership Covenants have played an important role in transforming the organization and authorizing employees to assume a more active role in the organization.

**Leadership theories**

Leadership research in the twentieth century focused on the leaders improving organizational performance by wielding influence on subordinates influencing subordinates (Fernandez, 1991). Thus, much of the early research tried to determine which traits effectively rallied and motivated subordinates, but most studies found weak relationships between leader traits and employee behavior (Howell, Bowen, Dorfman, Kerr, & Podsakoff, 1990; Bolman & Deal, 1991). The failure of traits to translate into effective leader behavior led to studies tying leadership to structural variables, such as control over communication (Freeman, Roeder, & Mulholland, 1980) As Gray and Robertson (2005) explained, “in countless organizations, employees say that their senior executives are not visible (which employees interpret to mean that they don’t care), they give few clues as to the future direction of the company, they are not open and honest, they don’t involve and consult those affected by change, they fail to recognize achievement and sometimes they even punish those who raise issues” (p. 26) Often, however, contextual problems, such as a poor economy, undermined even the best structured companies.

Contextual factors led to the development of situational theories that emphasized the influence of contextual factors on leadership. These theories looked at the way situational factors influenced leader behavior or examined how these factors moderated leader effectiveness (Yukl, 1989, p. 262).

Other theories also seemed to zero on one specific aspect of leadership while disregarding other applicable factors. Path Goal theory (House, 1971) focused on the leader persuading followers that they could achieve goals. Situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988) linked the leaders’ use of task or relational approaches depended upon subordinate maturity. The Leader Substitutes theory (Kerr & Jermier, 1978; Howell etal, 1990) showed how subordinate or group characteristics acted to substitute for or neutralize the effects of leadership. The Leader-Member Exchange theory (Graen & Cashman, 1975) described the process in which a leader develops an in-group and out-group communication network of subordinates. Each of these theories described an aspect of leadership but provided few prescriptions for changing organizations, a key component of leadership.

A leader gives direction to mechanisms for social change (Kotter, 1990). This type of leadership imbues the organization's business, technology, and culture with a shared vision and strategy of what the organization should become and how to achieve this goal. This is important to understand because as Gray and Robertson (2005) explained, “senior executives, especially the CEO, provide leadership [through their communication model] to align the organization with its vision. They set the direction and their behavior determines the tone and culture – how the vision will be achieved” (p.26).This kind of change does not occur by controlling communication but through engaging and encouraging communication inside and outside the organization. As Wood (1999) explained, “the basis of effective communication is the commitment of top management. As with any activity, successful and effective communication is planned, constructed and managed… the purpose of internal communication is not merely to
inform but to effect change in attitudes and behavior. Good communications encourage
innovative action in pursuit of strategic objectives.” (Wood, 1999, p. 137)

The leader must use communication to align the stakeholders (those affected by change)
and help them understand and believe in an alternate vision of the future. Kotter said aligning
leads to empowerment. "One of the reasons some organizations have difficulty adjusting to rapid
changes in markets or technology is that so many people in those companies feel relatively
powerless" (p. 107). A shared vision gives followers a sense of direction so that they
can initiate action.

Recent theories that most closely reflect this philosophy of leadership are Charismatic
and Transformational leadership. Charismatic leaders inspire followers in a way similar to
superheroes or spiritual figures (Yukl, 1989; Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders, on the other
hand, inspire followers to lead themselves (Burns, 1978). These theories focus on developing
leadership skills among people at all levels of an organization. They also emphasize connectivity,
a shared sense of purpose, continuity, stability, and morality (Lipman-Blumen, 1996; Sifonis
&Goldberg, 1996; Shtogren, 1999; and Costa, 1998). The desired end product of a
transformational leadership style corporation then becomes the autonomy of all its members
developed through balanced communication that “implies differentiation, individualization,
autonomy through responsive decision making and agency. An agent is not free from structure
but rather plays a role in the communication process by making others aware of the tensions and
contradictions in the workplace.” (Holzhausen, 2002, p. 31)

Of these theories, transformational leadership has produced a significant body of research
since its introduction in 1978 (Bass, 1999). As organizations have flattened and the workforce
become more educated, “professionals saw themselves as colleagues rather than in superior-
subordinate relationships” (p. 10). Transformational leadership’s emphasize on autonomy,
personal responsibility, aligning with organizational values, and moral behavior resonates with
this modern workforce. Further investigation of the theory reveals the transformational nature of
Bechtel’s Leadership Covenants.

**Transformational Leadership**

The transformational leader encourages followers to transcend their self-interests through
inspiring examples and high standards, the promise of intellectual challenge and reward, and a
commitment to follower’s individual development and progress (Bass, 1999; Walumbwa, Wang,
Lawler, & Shi, 2004; Feinberg, Ostroff, & Burke, 2005). Transformation occurs when followers
think more critically, consider how they can improve and innovate, and become more involved
and invested in their work (Walumbwa et al., 2004). Followers reciprocated with increased
commitment to their organizations and increased identification with their leaders ideals and
beliefs (Walumbwa et al., 2004; Feinberg et al., 2005). Transformational leaders set the example
for followers through clear and consistent behavior. Subordinates adopt the leader’s behavior,
mission, and goals as their own or at least agree with those attributes (Feinberg, Ostroff, & Burke,
2005). This creates a collective will such as in Bechtel where Bill Redmon describes a process
where the company “attempts to create a culture where people talk to each other every day about
each other’s concerns including two-way communication where the employees tell their manager
what is needed as well as the manager telling the employees. According to Redmon, “if you
open up all these channels and make it comfortable and routine to give and receive feedback, then you can solve a lot of problems.—Telling people what they need to do to improve without offending them is a critical practice.” (personal communication, Nov. 30, 2007).

Caldwell (2005) aligned covenantal leadership with charismatic leadership and transformational leadership. He cited Charismatic leadership’s emphasis on individual learning and development and the ability to inspire trust and a common vision. Transformational leadership fits with the covenantal view of changing the status by “articulating a compelling vision of new possibilities” (p. 502). These possibilities include inspiring followers to adopt moral values and standards established by the leader. This is where Bechtel’s Leadership Covenants influence the behavior of those who adopt them. As Redmon explained, “they articulate values and standards by which their covenantal relationship can be evaluated” (Personal communication, Nov. 30, 2007).

Bechtel’s leadership is provided by CEO Riley Bechtel and senior management. The Leadership Covenants help to articulate his vision and that of his senior management, allowing them to transform organizational behavior by appealing to their common commitment to the covenants. Changing the organization becomes a group project, but how can subordinates be inspired to transcend their self-interests and lead themselves? How does communication from the top achieve authority? The Leadership Covenants help to address this problem. They serve to provide common criteria for judging leaders and followers throughout the company. As Wood, (1999) explained, “every organization has a history and culture, reflected in current working practices, but during any given period, the chief executive has a pervasive impact. It is his or her attitude that is directly reflected by the state and health of the communication function” (p. 137).

Their success over the last ten years in transforming Bechtel cannot be separated from the cultural values and philosophies that developed over the corporation’s history. These lessons will help to explain why Bechtel’s Leadership Covenants are at once unique and universal.

Bechtel

Founded in 1898 by Warren Bechtel, Bechtel Corporation is listed by Forbes Magazine as the ninth largest privately owned company in America (Forbes, 2007). With its headquarters in San Francisco, Bechtel manages construction and engineering projects across the globe. Its 2007 revenues surpassed $20 billion and it employs 40,000 people worldwide.

The most unique aspect of the company is its ownership. Since Warren Bechtel partnered with his sons, Warren Jr., Stephen, and Ken to incorporate as W.A. Bechtel Company in 1925, the company has remained in the family for four generations. The leadership covenants articulate commitments, philosophies, and values that have been embedded in the company’s culture over the years. It is difficult to establish a direct correlation between the covenants and company success, but the company has enjoyed five record years in a row. Among its major successes, according to Forbes, have been such projects as the Hoover Dam, Bay Area Rapid Transit, The Channel Tunnel, Jubail Industrial City in Saudi Arabia, and Hong Kong International Airport. Bechtel’s current projects, Redmon said, are evidence that the company is “sought after around the world for signature projects.” He continued,

Look at the Tacoma Narrows Bridge; I mean this is a very challenging place to build a bridge. We are rebuilding the London Underground, including refurbishing existing
stations and building new lines and stations and revamping significant parts of the rail system in the UK, improving capacity and getting high-speed rail service into London. These projects continue for fifteen to twenty years some of them. (Bill Redmon, personal communication, Nov. 30, 2007)

The evolution of the company’s philosophy and values were best explained in an article written by Stephen Bechtel Jr., Warren A. Bechtel’s grandson. Stephen Bechtel Jr. joined the company after stateside service in the Marines during World War II (Bechtel, 1996). He earned a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering and a master’s of business administration from Stanford. He worked in the company’s pipeline division, rising through the ranks from field engineer to superintendent and division manager over all pipeline work. In 1960, he was appointed president of the company and lead the company through rapid expansion in the 1960s and 1970s and rapid downsizing in the 1980s. At its peak in the early 1980s, the company boasted $14 billion in revenues and 44,500 employees. Five years later, revenues dropped to $4.5 billion and the number of employees plummeted to 17,400. Stephen Jr. retired as president in 1990, and his son Riley succeeded him.

Early in his life, Stephen Bechtel Jr. noted, he learned personal values from watching his father conduct business. He was not a good athlete, but as manager of the varsity football team, he learned he could get a letter without having to play the game. Later, he achieved success at sailing, an experience that taught him that “steady at the helm” was good advice in sailing and in business. His experiences in the pipeline business reinforced the need for constant learning and growth. When he had to take a test to become certified as an engineer in New York and other states, he viewed the experience as a health challenge to brush up on his education. He developed a “personal philosophy of trying to improve both my own performance and the performance of the operation in which I was involved.” Instead of trying to make radical changes when things are going well, he learned to change by “evolution, not revolution” (Bechtel, 1996, para. 27).

But when the economic situation changed in the 1980s, Stephen Bechtel Jr. realized that the whole organization, not just top management, has to be aware of changes in the marketplace and take action. Although the company “kept its head above water” during the economic downturn, it could have done a better job of downsizing. The key, Stephen Bechtel Jr. said, was letting the firm’s top performers know they were secure while at the same time being honest about the situation. The company made mistakes, he said, but learned a lot from those mistakes. It was during the hard times that Stephen Bechtel Jr. also learned to do a better job of articulating its culture to its employees. When the company was growing, employees “perceived what we were all about,” but during more difficult times, culture was not so easily transmitted (Bechtel, 1996, para. 38). Bechtel explained,

In 1987, with the help of our younger senior management, we began a major effort to better communicate our corporate cultures to our people. With the input from all levels of the organization, we developed and issued a more in-depth written statement of Bechtel’s Mission and Vision. This statement, which described how Bechtel would operate as a market-driven company, expressed our philosophy of management and our goals and values. (para. 39).

The company also moved from an emphasis on individual accountability to a team approach, resulting in more cooperation, cohesiveness, and focus. Teams may reduce clarity in
regards to responsibility and authority, but by striking a balance between individual responsibility and authority and teamwork and cooperation, the company will enjoy more success. Considering the paradox of covenant relationships, Bechtel was obviously struggling with the challenge of providing order and freedom in the years before it created the covenants.

In 1992, under Riley Bechtel’s leadership, the company launched a Continuous Improvement program emphasizing leadership and learning at all levels of the organization. The company’s 1990s Leadership Model sounded a lot like the definition for Transformational Leadership. “Today’s effective leaders influence others to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the organization” (Bechtel, 1996, para.44). It also included strong commitments to trust and ethical behavior and a need to develop leadership ability in others.

Over the years, Bechtel has received a lot of bad press from activist groups ranging from environmentalists to opponents globalism. More recently, its $680 million Iraq reconstruction project awarded after the U.S. invasion drew criticism that the company was profiteering from the war. In 2006, a section of concrete fell from the ceiling of a tunnel on the Massachusetts Turnpike, killing a 38-year-old woman. Bechtel worked as the management consultant for the project, which was known as the Boston Central Artery/Tunnel project or Big Dig. On Jan. 23, 2008, the company agreed to a settlement with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the U.S. Attorney for the District of Massachusetts.

Stephen Bechtel Jr. recognized that the company’s culture might contribute to some external criticism in his 1996 article. “With the benefit of hindsight,” he wrote, “I recognize that my ‘penchant for privacy’ as an individual, along with the privately owned status of our company, made us targets for speculation—we were accused of being secretive. Being more open and accessible earlier in our history might have alleviated some adverse publicity that we experienced” (para. 57).

In the mid 1990s, the company’s senior management placed special emphasis on communication and as a result, created the Leadership Covenants. First aimed at the senior leadership, the covenants were diffused throughout the company in 1998. When he began consulting with Bechtel that same year, Redmon marveled at top management’s level of commitment to the covenants and to transformation and improvement. “When I got to Bechtel,” Redmon said, “it provided an interesting contrast with other companies because it was a much more focused, intense, productive, honest culture.” A former university professor and leadership consultant, Redmon was just about finished with a consulting project at Bechtel when senior managers persuaded him to stay and “complete the job.” The uniqueness of the culture and the sincerity of its leaders persuaded him to join the company full time.

Redmon said even Stephen Bechtel remains active in the company’s leadership initiatives. “He [Stephen] was in my office the day before yesterday, we were talking about Leadership 2015, which is a new set of expectations of what a Bechtel leader does.” A paper explaining the program was sent out to several work counsels and advisors for input, and Stephen Bechtel attended one of the meetings, taking detailed notes. The former 82-year-old chairman emeritus visited Redmon in his office and asked him to consider various things in the final version of the paper. “I meet with him frequently to talk about leadership issues, and we go over things that he’s interested in and [talk about] how to ensure effective leadership in the future and, especially, personal responsibility,” Redmon said. Stephen’s commitment “epitomizes a lot of the values
expressed in the covenants and the company value statement. It is a commitment across generations. That kind of engagement drew Redmon to the company because he saw it manifested in Stephen, his son Riley Bechtel, Riley’s children, and the senior partners. “This is not lip service, this is serious business, this is commitment that goes way beyond something you send to shareholders to keep your stock price up” (personal communication, Nov. 30, 2007).

For Redmon, seeing senior management, including the chief executive officer, willing to complete leadership training and get upward feedback every six months was a big surprise. He also was impressed with the response. “Everyone participates,” he said. When Bechtel’s senior management decided to do the training, they acted immediately, sending out letters saying what the problem was and how they were trying to implement a solution. The senior management then said that they would be the first to be trained. “That’s a step beyond the usual. And it makes a difference to our employees,” he said. When Bechtel’s senior management decided to do the training, they acted immediately, sending out letters saying what the problem was and how they were trying to implement a solution. The senior management then said that they would be the first to be trained. “That’s a step beyond the usual. And it makes a difference to our employees.”

Senior management’s commitment to covenant leadership stems in part from the culture that has developed during several decades of family ownership and management. The sheer size of its construction projects means that Bechtel bets its reputation and financial future on the finished product. As the general contractor, Bechtel manages relationships with customers, building partners (some of whom are also competitors), subcontractors, and local communities. To maintain quality, micromanagement is the norm, and yet there is no way to control every aspect of multi-billion-dollar projects. “The single most important principle in the way we manage, I think, is to ‘micromanage’ or get into the details without offending people,” Redmon explained. “That is, leaders have to tell their people when something is going wrong in time for them to correct the situation without them feeling like they’re being punished.” On the other hand, the company tries not to constantly second guess people by hovering over them. “There’s a way to get details without doing that, you’ve got to do it with respect” (Personal Conversation, Nov. 30, 2007).

This paradox is similar to that associated with covenant leadership. On one hand the individual gives up freedom and individuality for order and security; on the other hand, the individual actually gains freedom and individuality as part of a task force, the active component in Bechtel’s corporate community. As philosopher Josiah Royce argued, the individual reflects a social group in that he or she “consists of various selves.” (Quoted in Trotter, 2001, p. 82). Each self is expressed through one’s purposes, and the actions taken to accomplish those purposes. For example, individuals may follow different scripts depending upon whether they are at home, work, or play. Each present activity is based on a particular memory from the past and expectation for the future. These scripts both enable and constrain individual activity within each of these aspects of life. One does not discover these various selves through introspection but through expression, by acting out the script over time and in different settings. For Royce, the community, like the individual, is made up of various selves whose shared experiences and expectations lead to common interpretations of past events and shared directions for the future (Trotter, 2001). Royce defined loyalty as desiring common interpretations.

Bechtel’s Leadership Covenants create a shared community by recognizing an individual’s need to choose his or her loyalties and the group’s need for a common interpretation.
of history and a common expectation for the future. In a sense, the covenants are concrete expressions of individual and group loyalty. Because Bechtel’s workforce is drawn from different countries and cultures, the company initiates the covenant process by “negotiating” interpretations through socialization. For example, the covenants emphasize respect, but Redmon said the company understands that while the concept is universal, its interpretation is not. So Bechtel “encourages people to talk about what treating people with respect means and how it is applied in day-to-day situations” (Personal conversation, Nov. 30, 2007).

Both the covenants and the process by which the covenants are implemented emphasize communication. The last eight covenants place a priority on engaging fellow employees in discussion, communicating early and honestly, working together as a team, contributing the common good, and promoting the use of the covenants. Communication problems led to the introduction of the covenants, and internal research has shown that the covenants have helped to make communication one of the company’s strengths. Redmon explained that their efforts have been aimed to take away the stereotype that employees cannot speak their mind to managers without fear of reprisal. The goal is “to level things out and create a culture where people talk to each other every day about each other’s concerns.” And this is not just top-down communication, he said.

I think the most important element of communication is in a business culture is standing up and saying what it is that should happen and what the thought process is…. speaking up regarding your convictions even though it’s unpopular is the staple for Bechtel.
(personal conversation, Nov. 30, 2007)

To maintain the covenants, Bechtel performs regular assessments, providing feedback to managers about how their teams view their performance. The company also has leadership seminars in which discussion and deliberation are emphasized. These meetings occur at all levels of the company.

You’re talking about thousands of people having a dialogue about leadership in formal feedback sessions every six months and, hopefully, on an informal basis every day. Every supervisor in the company will meet with their direct reports. We have more than 3,000 supervisors who will do this. It will change the way people think. Now if you teach people to accept this feedback and use it, the process will be perpetuated by its value. Leaders who follow the covenants respect others and avoid being defensive, pushing back and or hostile; that sort of thing changes people and the company in a significant way.

With the institution of the Leadership Covenants and the leadership training and assessment, leadership effectiveness has improved throughout the company. Redmon knows this because individual and group measures show leadership scores going up. Overall satisfaction with the company is about 80 percent. Satisfaction with the Leadership Covenants also ranks high. At Bechtel, the covenants have assumed a meaning that goes far beyond a mission statement or a set of principles listed on a plaque. They have come to represent the company’s culture, a culture in which open, honest communication is valued regardless of whether it comes from the top or the bottom.

Conclusion
Bechtel’s Leadership Covenants were instituted in the late 1990s to improve communication, but they have accomplished more than that—they have changed the culture and come to represent the new culture. In part, the Covenants have succeeded because they complement the unique culture at Bechtel, its private ownership and primary mission as an engineering, construction, and project management company. Further research is needed to determine if Covenant Leadership could work in publicly owned companies, nonprofits, or government agencies. Can this type of leadership be effective in Hierarchy, Market and Adhocracy cultures? Also, it would be important to determine if good internal communication can be translated into good external communication.

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How Misleading Communication about Sustainable Tourism is Conveyed by the Media
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Abstract
‘Responsible’ tourism is all the rage nowadays. Parallel to the offer commercialized by specialized tour operators on the sustainable niche, traditional tour-operators have also begun to claim the sustainability of their offer. One can henceforth ponder on the legitimacy of the names they appropriate.
The aim of the study is to assess the sustainability of their offer and eventually their legitimacy in claiming themselves to be responsible.
The survey was carried out among 18 French traditional on the internet sites and their catalogue perusals and 10 (in fact more because of regrouping) specialized tour operators.
Results shows that various actions have been undertaken, relayed by communication, to promote an environment-friendly sustainable tourism in the broad sense of the term. Awareness is therefore genuine; it remains nonetheless all too often symbolic.

Introduction
The forecast of the World Tourism Organisation until 2020 indicates a sustained unflinching growth of the international tourist sector over the last four years which confirms that tourism is one of the fastest growing economic sectors.
Tourism is influenced by various trends that result in an offer of previously unseen tourist products. Among these evolutions, we shall be focusing on those which concern a more responsible kind of tourism, involving both supply and demand.

A more responsible form of tourism
This responsibility encompasses all the partners involved in the tourist offer as well as the environment (nature and heritage). The term « sustainable » under the condition it truly includes the three social, environmental and economic pillars would be perfectly suited if it did not lead to so much misunderstanding. The offers encountered, which claim to be specialized in a more responsible kind of tourism, have in turn taken on a variety of names : solidarity, ecological, green, ethical, fair, responsible, alternative, sustainable, participative, native, ecotourism, community-oriented tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, agritourism…. For the customers, this creates more confusion than clarity even if their specialization, whether environmental or solidarity, can easily be explained by their origins.

36 World Tourism Barometer, WTO, www.UNWTO.org 2007. + 4% of the international arrivals planned in 2007. In 2020, these arrivals should exceed 1.5 billion giving rise to 2000 billion in revenues, excluding domestic tourism.
As a reminder we have included the definitions given by the WTO (World Tourism Organisation) and UNAT (Union Nationale des Associations de Tourisme) of four terms that emerged to qualify a form of tourism that strives to be « different » and « responsible »

*Four definitions linked to « responsible » tourism*

**Sustainable tourism**

The principles underlying sustainable tourism have been laid down by the WTO as early as 1988. The latest version of the definition of this concept dates back to August 2004. "Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability”.

As a result, sustainable tourism must:

1. Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity;

2. Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance;

3. Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them

**Fair tourism**

Comprises service activities, commercialized by tour operators, targeting responsible travellers and devised by the host native communities, (or at least to a large extent with them). These communities take a very active part in the evolution of the definition of those activities (possibility to modify them, to reposition them, to suspend them).

They also substantially take part in day-to-day management (by restraining the number of middle people that do not support the principles of fair tourism).

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37 Source: http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/fr/concepts.htm, 2004
The social, cultural and financial benefits of these activities must be chiefly distributed locally, and shared fairly among the members of the native population.

Associations that claim to promote fair tourism are supposed to submit to the control of the Plateforme pour le Commerce Equitable.

**Ecotourism**

Ecotourism is « responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of locals »\(^{38}\).

According to the World Tourism Organisation it is possible to summarize its general characteristics as follows:

1. Ecotourism encompasses all forms of tourism revolving around nature and in which the main incentive for the tourist is to study and appreciate nature as well as the traditional cultures that are present in natural areas.
2. It includes education and interpretation.
3. It is generally-speaking organized, but not solely, for small-sized groups by small-sized specialized local firms. One also encounters foreign operators whose size varies and that organizes, manage or commercialize ecotours, usually for small groups.
4. Ecotourism generates limited negative spin-offs for the natural and socio-cultural environment.
5. It encourages the protection of natural areas:  
   - by providing economic advantages for the host communities, for the organisations and administrations that watch over the protection of natural areas;  
   - by creating jobs and sources of income for local populations;  
   - by fostering awareness among locals as well as tourists of the necessity to preserve the natural and cultural capital.

**Solidarity tourism**\(^{39}\)

Solidarity tourism encompasses those forms of « alternative » tourism that highlight the human factor and interaction and that support a logic of territorial development.

The involvement of local populations in the various stages of the tourist project, the respect of people, of cultures and of nature and a fairer distribution of the resources generated are the founding stones of this form of tourism.

This paper uses “sustainable tourism” as defined by the WTO.

*The response of tour operators*

According to their conception of responsible tourism and to their origin - adventure, solidarity or development tourism -, the specialist tour operators are responsible for the profusion of labels and enterprises; the offer is therefore fragmented, eclectic and hard to decipher on a given market, which, though expanding, only represents 1% to 2% of the global market.

For their part, traditional tour operators embark upon more responsible operations while they are accused of much wrong-doing: mass tourism, destruction of the environment, overlooked socio-cultural impacts, etc… Those which until now did not much advertise the

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38 International Ecotourism Society: www.ecotourism.org/
39 Term used by UNAT (Union Nationale des Associations de Tourisme): http://www.unat.asso.fr/f/unat/ts/tsr.html
initiatives undertaken have begun publishing ethical charts in answer to the sustainable development trend.

This research seeks to examine the travel offers of two types of tour operators - conventional and specialist - in order to assess their “sustainability” from the viewpoint of an informed customer. The idea is to evaluate their products from the perspective of the criteria listed in the WTO-certified definition in order to check to what extent these are deceitful or genuine.

Methodology

Supply in terms of responsible tourism originating from traditional and specialist tour operators will therefore be examined according to the acknowledged sustainability criteria (social, environmental, economic) and according to sub-criteria pertaining to each of their components.

Among the environmental criteria, the three following elements have been foremost rated: the conservation or restoration of the architectural heritage and landscape friendliness, the protection of nature, of wildlife and flora, the conservation of hard-to-come-by resources.

Among the social criteria, the four following elements have mainly been rated: the working conditions (wages, recruitment, training…) of the local labour and the local purchasing policy, the encounter and interaction of tourists with local populations, the respect of local cultures, and lastly, the positive social impact of partnerships and the capacity of locals to become players in their development. In addition to this, to a lesser extent, customer and employee safety.

Among the economic and financial criteria, the four elements following have foremost been taken into account: financial transparency (profitability…) the percentage of the price or of the turnover that finances partnerships or projects, the economic spin-offs for the local population and customer satisfaction.

The survey has mainly focused on the offer in island and desert resorts – fragile areas that require more specific protection– of the Mediterranean basin, as it alone concentrates 25% of the accommodation capacity throughout the world. It concerns the offer of stays and tours by both types of tour operators in 2006 and 2007.

These have been selected according to the availability of their brochures and their internet sites and because they are landmarks in the trade. It is therefore those two media that have been favoured for the spring/summer 2006 and fall/winter 2007 seasons.

Ten tour operators and players of the tourist industry have been analyzed for the purpose of this survey as far as the specialists go, with actual access to 28 of them, Arvel alone encompassing 18 (appendix 1). Eighteen tour operators/and traditional non-specialized players make up the second group (appendix 2). Six of them that do not offer any information do not appear in the results which therefore show 12 only (appendix 1).

The responsible initiatives of both groups have been studied in terms of communication targeting their customers, of their announcements (ethical chart…) and of actions implementing them in the explanatory leaflets of the commercialized stays and tours. It is however difficult to measure the gap between what is advertised and the actual reality.
Non-specialized agents

Non-specialized tour operator break-down

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-specialized tour operators</th>
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<th>Social Aspect</th>
<th>Financial Aspect</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Fram</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre &amp; Vacances</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voyages-SNCF</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six tour operators offer no information: Opodo, Last Minute, TUI, STI, Merilia, Look Voyage

- **environmental criteria**

  a. The conservation and the restoration of the architectural heritage of a visited region is mentioned by Jet Tours; the Unesco tours are designed to enable travellers to discover exceptional cultural sites rarely open to the public; the tour operator thus elected to enhance and contribute to the protection of world heritage sites. Likewise, since several of the Accor hotels are located in the vicinity of Unesco-listed sites, Accor has formed, since 1999, a partnership with this organisation. Certain hotels, such as the Sofitel Palais Jamaï Fez (Morocco), Cartagena Santa Clara (Colombia), Frances Santo Domingo and Nicolas de Ovando (Dominican Republic) or the Novotel Budapest Centrum (Hungary) are even Unesco-listed buildings. Accor takes into account their richness relating to their heritage when renovating them. In a more frugal and less involved manner, Héliades and Thomas Cook inform about the architectural heritage of a region.

  b. Integration into the landscape is mentioned by Pierre et Vacances which commits to integrating the environmental recommendations in the conception, construction and renovation of its sites. At Héliades, agritourism holidays offer to embark on the discovery of genuine villages, with traditional refurbished houses. At Accor and Club Med, integration surveys precede the launch of construction sites and the respect of nature is a requirement.

  c. The protection of the nature, wildlife and flora is mentioned by only five tour operators. Héliades proposes to discover certain endangered species; Nouvelles Frontières, through TUI, one of the major groups in the tourist industry, has supported
in 2007 the year of the dolphin. Accor has been leading, since 2002 in partnership with the association Nausicaà, awareness fostering initiatives regarding the protection of the sea bed in the Red Sea and in Polynesia; Pierre et Vacances organizes « nature » workshops and encourages awareness of its partnership agreements with the WWF. As for the Club Med, customer awareness is fostered via botanical visits, plant labelling, lectures on the protection of nature, guided hikes, etc…

d. The conservation of energy resources is mentioned and delved into by Club Med, the Accor group, Pierre et Vacances, Nouvelles Frontières, Thomas Cook. Measures undertaken (for instance: heat-generating solar panels, automatic power regulation, energy saving light bulbs…), assessment system and yearly commitments are herein described; it is however hard for the tourist to gauge the actual progression of the projects.

Water management is mentioned by Club Med, Nouvelles Frontières, Accor and saving it is encouraged among customers. The initiatives are described (mixer taps, linen changed upon request, reprocessed waste water, instruments for controlling consumption, etc…) and commitments made.

Selective waste disposal is briefly mentioned by Nouvelles Frontières and Thomas Cook and described in thorough detail by Accor and Club Med. Greenhouse effect gases are mentioned by Voyages-SNCF and Club Med which assesses the savings (for instance: on the Moroccan coastline). As for the management of paper, it is only undertaken by Pierre et Vacances without many concrete elements.

Some tour operators may make very vague announcements (example Thomas Cook, Fram) without mentioning tangible initiatives. Others (Austral Lagon, Direct Tours, Marsans) fail to evoke the elements of environmental protection. Certain such as Austral Lagon, specialized in islands offer numerous 4-wheel drive safaris, all of them guided, jet skis and quads, helicopter flights, in the course of stays defined as « ecotourism/preserved nature» in Polynesia. Its recent takeover by Jet Tours (May 2007), itself a subsidiary of Club Med group, may alter its approach.

- social criteria

a. Regarding **the wages of local employees** and **their working conditions**, Accor and Club Med advertise work satisfaction, raises in the basic wages, the implemented initiative plans for progression. Regarding **the recruitment and training of the local guides and employees**, Fram underlines that 90% of their wage-earners abroad are natives; Héliades that the hike group leaders are locals, as well as the hosts; Jet Tours specifies that some of the Unesco tours have local guides as well as the custodians of the site and architects who lecture during these tours. Club Med boasts 73.3% of local jobs in villages (August 2005). Finally, Accor group establishes per region statistics of the male/female ratio in terms of jobs, including executive positions, the percentage of the wage bill devoted to training and the number of its expats. Accor
recounts notably an experiment carried out during the renovation of the Buddhist temple Bat Chum in Angkor in which the team was supported by young Khmers in order to provide them with training and a job in relation to the protection of their cultural heritage.

**Purchases** are mainly undertaken locally at Accor, Club Med for approximately 55% of the purchasing linked to the running of a village, reaching 80 to 95% as far as food is concerned. Thomas Cook’s policy is to only import what is not available locally; Héliades promotes country produce in order to buy directly from the producer. Only Accor (« sustainable purchases » 2004 chart) and Club Med involve their suppliers in their ethical values through fair trade. None state the fact that they do not resort to child labour.

b. **The safety of employees and customers** is mentioned by Accor and Club Med. The committee for the prevention of risks of Accor group sets up a network of local correspondents, trains its hotel managers, organises audit and inspection missions in that field. Club Med has set up Quali Signs; a specific system involving hygiene and safety enables to analyze 17 indicators of control self assessment through films and meetings at the outset of each season.

c. To encourage **interaction** between locals and tourists, Nouvelles Frontières organises discovery activities enhancing local cultures (eg: Guadeloupe, Mauritius). Fram has set up a foundation that strives to render 6- to 12-year-olds more receptive to the cultures of the various countries to turn them into « Citizens of the World ». In its Unesco tours, Jet Tours offers travellers the opportunity to meet site managers and archaeologists. Marsans offers customers who so wish the possibility of acknowledging for themselves the progression of the projects it supports through its partnerships with local associations. Finally, Héliades encourages interaction by sometimes putting travellers up with locals in small authentic villages that are the stop-offs for small-group hikes. The discovery of local culture is only skimmed over: introduction to the native language, to local dancing and exhibition of local artists (Nouvelles Frontières). As far as local cooking or gastronomy goes, Nouvelles Frontières mentions introductory workshops offered in the paladin hotels; at Héliades, local cooking is available in guest- and boarding houses; as for Fram, it offer its customers the possibility to choose between international and local food.

The respect of local cultures and traditions is the stage that follows their discovery and translates into customers behaving so as not to offend or shock. Thus, in 2006, Club Med committed to fostering awareness among its employees of the local culture and behaviour; it abides by the Charte du Voyage and the Charte Nationale d’Éthique du Tourisme. Likewise, Thomas Cook builds awareness among its customers of the social issues present in the destinations through the NGO Care. None mention compliance with regulations regarding tobacco, alcohol or gambling.
**Prostitution** is mentioned only in reference to child sexual exploitation: Fram is involved alongside the association ECPAT as are Thomas Cook and Club Med. In 2005, Nouvelles Frontières signed the « government chart against the child sexual exploitation in tourism »; Corsair screens a film by this association on some of its flights. Accor massively trains its employees to fight this scourge and Club Med sends mail and documentation to its customers prior to their departure in « Rendez-vous Vacances ».

d. **The positive social impact** can be measured thanks to the numerous projects led by tour operators in partnership with local associations. Marsans, Nouvelles Frontières, Club Med, Accor and Directours best embody this type of initiatives among our sample. Without trying to be exhaustive, we shall list a few examples:

- Marsans encourages the development of economic activities such as growing sugar cane (eg. The Maison de Sagesse association with the village Batey Mamey) or photography. The local populations hence profit from the spin-offs of tourism.
- Club Med launches numerous microprojects in villages according to local needs: remedial classes, libraries, book collecting (eg: Espérance en Casamance with Fondation de France), « education» programmes.
- Nouvelles Frontières via its support of the association TFD (Tourism for Development) contributes to financing and monitoring microprojects of equipment and training among destitute populations in very touristy countries.
- Directours has chosen to support the NGO created by Jacques Attali in order to develop microloans. It thus gives a leg up to young entrepreneurs lacking the sufficient starting funds. The tour operator clearly explains its operation and the checks run by the NGO scoring body, PlaNet Finance.
- Accor hinges its initiatives around child sponsorship with Plan, a community-oriented development organisation and explains in length how it functions; likewise with the Red Cross or in fighting hunger.

The ultimate stage is to train locals for management positions, to render them autonomous and active in their own development. The training initiatives mentioned by Nouvelles Frontières, Thomas Cook (partnership with the NGO Care) concern foremost the most destitute regions and the sustainable tourism initiatives. Those undertaken by Directours via microloans, by Accor group and Club Med appear more geared towards the rise in competence and the development of the employability of staff (GO and GE teams in the villages, commercial teams) thanks to internal schools, Club Med Schools and Club Med University.

e. Regarding the social criteria of sustainable tourism, some are not much involved (Directours), others are completely absent (Austral Lagon, Pierre et Vacances, Voyages-SNCF). Some may even have a negative socio-cultural impact.
- The economic/financial criteria

a. Financial transparency is broached by none of the tour operators. Neither regarding profitability (except in the yearly reports if the company is listed on the stock exchange), which could back up the choices of the customers, nor in the breakdown of the price paid, which could inform them of what is truly paid to the locals (and therefore of the eventual « leaks »). Other references to the transparency of price have, besides, been demanded for a long time by consumer associations without having ever been satisfied…

The financing of projects locally is not detailed, either in percentage of the price of the holiday, or in terms of actual profit. A few figures are revealed by Accor without it being possible to place them into perspective.\textsuperscript{40}

b. The economic spin-offs for the local population listed by Fram, Marsans, Nouvelles Frontières remain vague, not only in terms of achievements but also financially, since none is detailed. The integration into the local economy is only evoked by Accor group (eg: Berimbau programme in Brazil in 2003; Agrisud in the field of agricultural development).

c. If one were to integrate customer satisfaction – linked to the quality/price ratio and to what the customer is ready to spend on responsible tourism – one would notice that no tour operator mentions this aspect. Word-of-mouth that could promote loyalty is never mentioned; on the internet, only the traditional complaints are expressed: cancelled flights, delays… (Thomas Cook, Accor, Club Med for instance).

d. One notices that many tour operators are absent on this criterion: Austral Lagon, Héliades, Jet Tours, Pierre et Vacances, Voyages-SNCF. Many financial leaks characterize these major players of the tourist industry which stay tight-lipped regarding these sensitive subjects.

The economic and financial criterion of sustainable tourism is therefore -as one may see -completely under-invested by the traditional tour operators among the firms surveyed.

Specialist tour operators

Specialist tour operator breakdown

\textsuperscript{40} For instance, Accor : 80 000 euros to « Tickets donnés, repas partagés », 23 000 euros to the Red Cross in Spain, 25 000 dollars to Toys for Tots in 2004, etc…
environmental criteria

a. Architectural heritage is mentioned by VBVA which organizes meetings along the topic of the renovation of old neighbourhoods, by Chamina whose ecolodges are likened to shelters suited to their natural habitat and whose City Trek encourage the discovery on foot of the heart of large towns. La Balaguère evokes the respect of this heritage. All insist on the conviviality of small-sized groups, far from mass tourism, away from the well-travelled tourist paths and that actually contribute to the conservation of architectural or even natural heritage.

b. The natural heritage, the protection of the environment are discussed in depth by Saïga: discovery, reconciliation of man with nature, policies of conservation of nature, field observation of the wildlife and the flora: « the holidays target budding naturalists, nature lovers, open-minded people » in order to « interpret a landscape, discover the behaviour of animals, environmental niches, perceive the living character of the desert ». In the Azores for instance, one promises an immersion in the world of dolphins and whales. The willing tourists may even dapple alongside scholars in a research project, stay in a survey mission among scientists and technicians (example: collection of data at sea).

At Chamina, one promises an introduction to orientation (map reading, use of a compass); hiking, a feature of all the holidays on offer is always enriched by specific themes. One insists on the closeness with nature, the protection of endangered marine wildlife. The hikes are also a speciality at Arvel while Allibert and La Balaguère take an interest in forests: Unesco heritage tertiary-era forests at La Balaguère (in La Gomera – Canary islands), reforestation operations for Allibert (Bulgaria, Kenya).

c. The management of rare resources is a concern of Chamina in terms of accommodation and transport (sailing boats or feluccas), for Allibert which uses gas in the desert and reduces the consumption of wood, for La Balaguère that describes hiking as « the main means of transport ». Allibert gives travellers the opportunity to make a donation as a compensation for the emission of CO₂ linked to air transport. Arvel recommends saving natural rare and precious resources, notably water (Charte
du Voyagiste) and Allibert recommends to save water and to avoid spoiling the sources and rivers with hygiene products.

Allibert organises operations to collect waste with the hikers and local teams. Arvel recommends to avoid producing waste and to use biodegradable products (Charte du Voyageur). Allibert is thus a member of Club Planète Gagnante created by the l’Agence de l’Environnement de la Maîtrise de l’Energie (ADEME).

- social criteria

a. Most of the specialist tour operators in the field of responsible tourism seek to support encounters and interaction with the local populations, through the type of accommodation selected, the presence of a local team, the meals taken in the host’s house, the choice of local professional coordinators. This is illustrated, for instance, by Chamina, Saïga (encounters with nomadic breeders and villagers), La Balaguère (encounters with Sardinian shepherds in the « pinnettu »…), Arvel (in Croatia), Explorator, VBVA (encounters in Cuba with the Federation of Cuban Women, the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution, craftsmen…), Allibert (partnerships with local families and associations).

b. The respect of local cultures is another leitmotiv among responsible tour operators: the respect of populations, of the laws and customs or traditions or local mentalities, taken into account by most are nonetheless described with their more specific aspects: Déserts, in relation with the nomadic world; Allibert to incite them to measure the power of religious traditions (example: Crete); Arvel to motivate travellers to respect the local value of time and the religious calendars (Charte du Voyageur); La Balaguère underlines that « customs induce to delve into the richness of insular traditions that are alive»⁴¹ and Saïga evokes « a rare human experience at the heart of a fascinating culture »⁴². La Balaguère also requires of the travellers to adapt to a different culture and lifestyle, in a genuine spirit of interaction, tolerance and respect and « to be patient⁴³ ». Arvel also requires of them « to be aware of our ethnocentricity and to travel inconspicuously », « to ban any behaviour that may be perceived as offensive» and to « measure the direct and indirect effects of their spontaneous generosity »⁴⁴.

Certain tour operators are yet more specific: Arvel requires particular care towards ethnic minorities; Allibert writes that « taking pictures of villagers or nomads must be based on interaction» and speaks of the dress code and the language in what

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⁴¹ Karpathos, p. 45  
⁴² Kanak tribes in New-Caledonia, p. 8  
⁴³ La Balaguère, hikes and holidays on foot, summer 2006, p. 62  
⁴⁴ Charte du Voyageur, p. 8 and p. 10
contributes to « the right attitude »; VBVA organises lectures on the topic of slavery in the framework of trips to Cuba.

Local cooking or gastronomy belongs to this shared culture. Thus, Chamina, La Balaguère, Arvel and Explorator mention it in the framework of some of the countries visited. Among overlooked behavioural aspects, let us point out the compliance with the law (tobacco, alcohol, gambling, etc …) only mentioned by Chamina and the respect of children mentioned by Arvel which strongly condemns sexual tourism.

c. **Supporting the local economy** also belongs to the principles on which responsible tourism hinge. Therefore, most of the tour operators mention recruitment and training of local guides or group escorts (Allibert, Déserts, La Balaguère, Chamina); some emphasize their competence: at Saïga, each conceptor-guide retains the intellectual property of the trip; the discovery of natural heritage is devised by guides with varied degrees of competence in the fields of nature and ecology. Allibert also undertakes initiatives to improve the working conditions of the local teams. Déserts trains its guides to enable those in the field to attain this position in the framework of their partner structures and for their level of competence to be on par with their quality criteria.

Working with natives (Arvel, Vagabondages, La Balaguère) to the benefit of local populations while embracing sustainable development is the aim of many specialist tour operators. The transfer of competence concerns most often porters, guides and sherpas (Allibert); guides, cooks, camel drivers (Déserts), sometimes affects the organisers (La Balaguère), the set up of local teams (Déserts). However, local purchasing and the refusal of child labour are merely skimmed over except in the case of Allibert which recounts a fair trade project (Turkey) and Saïga which entertains a respectful relationship with its service providers.

d. **Partnerships** with the players in the field of development are formed but few of them are located on the islands visited. Arvel, for instance, mentions the NGO Tourisme et Développement Solidaire (in Benin), Allibert speaks of the association Globetreukkers, VBVA and Saïga (with the NGO Institut de Recherche Tethys) have also formed partnerships. As for encouraging locals to become players in their development, there is still a long way to go… One also notices that references to safety issues are practically unmentioned (staff and customers) except by Déserts which proposes an answer to all problems.

- economic criteria

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45 Allibert, p. 19
46 Saïga, p. 2
a. In financial terms, the economic spin-offs for the locals remain vague. At Saïga, the conservation programmes « support the local economic development via the participation of locals and by taking into account their socio-economic interests»\(^{47}\). Arvel denies taking part in predatory tourism by resisting the «frequent mercenary temptations in this business sector » and claims « that it is easier and more lucrative to propose products that disregard populations and their environment by overlooking the local realities »\(^{48}\). According to Allibert and Déserts, tourism must foremost benefit the host countries in terms of development and economic spin-offs.

b. The amount of money devoted to financing local projects is sometimes more specific. Allibert publishes a financial commitment of investment of over 30 000 euros yearly. At La Balaguère, 5% of the price of the trips is allocated to development projects financed by its stockholder’s equity. Likewise VBVA participates financially in the promotion of the business of the structures that welcome the travellers (6 000 euros in 2006). Déserts alleges being transparent but remains vague about the proportion of the price of the trip allocated to supporting local populations.

The traveller is invited to contribute (Saïga, La Balaguère, Chamina) generally approximately €15 per person, in return he or she will monitor some of the financed projects, a contribution that the tour operator can match with the same amount (La Balaguère).

c. Transparency is said to be faultless as for the use of the funds collected for the purpose of local development (La Balaguère). The development projects must be viable; the tour operator publishes a yearly report on the internet. For its part, Arvel declares it does not operate a profit-making business: « the financial results are not a goal but an essential means to finance a consistent global project »\(^{49}\). The other tour operators surveyed remain silent…

d. Customer satisfaction is, generally speaking, in part linked to the price of the holiday. Seven people out of ten have selected La Balaguère through word of mouth. Several tour operators allege that they work out the price to the minimum or propose the best quality/price ratio (Chamina, Arvel, Allibert). Solidarity discounts may even be granted to some by Arvel. Yet, some do not deny that their price offer is not necessarily the most attractive (plane ticket at Chamina, Arvel)\(^{50}\).

**Evaluation of the communication of tour operators**

\(^{47}\) Saïga, p. 8  
\(^{48}\) Arvel, p. 5  
\(^{49}\) Arvel, Charte du Voyagiste, p. 2  
\(^{50}\) Chamina, p. 70, Arvel : Voyages Solidaires, p. 3, « prices notably higher to the local standards in exchange of services »
An initial exploitation of the survey, admittedly a little arbitrary, consists in noting whether a tour operator is present or not on a given criterion and to compute the results obtained\textsuperscript{51}.

<table>
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<th>Financial out of 4</th>
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<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>20 out of 36</strong></td>
<td><strong>23 out of 48</strong></td>
<td><strong>9 out of 48</strong></td>
<td><strong>56 %</strong></td>
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<th>Social out of 4</th>
<th>Financial out of 4</th>
<th>Total out of 11</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>12 out of 27</strong></td>
<td><strong>26 out of 36</strong></td>
<td><strong>15 out of 36</strong></td>
<td><strong>44 %</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The non-specialized tour operators
  - communicate better about the environment (56%),
  - slightly less about social aspects (48%),
  - badly about financial aspects (19%).

\textsuperscript{51} The number of citations of each tour operator on each scale was compared to a percentage of a number of total citations possible.
The best scores were obtained by Accor (9 citations) then Thomas Cook and Club Med (7 citations). The best and equally the most balanced on all three criteria is Accor group.

- The specialist tour operators
  - communicate far better about the social aspects (72%),
  - not as well about the environment and the financial aspects (44% and 42% respectively).

The best scores were obtained by Allibert, La Balaguère, Arvel (9 citations) and Chamina (8 citations). The four highest scoring are also those that are the most balanced on the three criteria.

- The specialist tour operators prevail on the social aspects (72% versus 48% for the non-specialized); the non-specialized communicate better about the environment than the specialists (56% versus 44%); finally, the economic and financial aspects are much better handled by the specialist tour operators (42% versus 19%). The specialists therefore have the upper hand only on two of the three criteria of sustainable development - the social and economic aspects-, which is surprising. Besides, it would be wrong to claim that the non-specialized do not communicate about the responsible tourism criteria bearing nonetheless in mind that six of the players/tour operators surveyed remained silent on this topic.

Discussion

The concept is all the rage and the awareness is genuine among traditional tour operators. Most of the tour operators surveyed evoke responsible tourism, at least in terms of the general policy of their group presented on their internet site or in the introduction to their catalogue. Even those that do not show any commitment or specific initiative have often signed the Charte du Voyage.

There is therefore a genuine general awareness of the negative consequences tourism may generate, notably on the environment. This is doubtlessly inherent to the debate on global warming that challenges the overconsumption of water in dry regions or highly polluting air transport.

At a time in which corporate social responsibility is a preoccupying issue, most tour operators have therefore understood it was becoming vital to display more or less pronounced commitment to reconcile leisure and the protection of the environment in the broad sense of the term. The traditional tour operators, whose expertise is often mirrored by the price of their stays or the quality of their hotels, also lend themselves to the game, even if sustainability remains peripheral in the conception of their offer.

The initiatives undertaken are still far too tokenistic: indeed, if the presence on such and such a criterion can reveal a strong commitment, such is not necessarily the case. Most of the
non-specialized tour operators present on the selected criteria are present for initiatives still too symbolic. Certain initiatives, quite praiseworthy, appear on the other hand quite trivial within the business of a group, such as the protection of a single natural site. Responsible tourism hinges more on awareness and on a change in behaviours than on an isolated initiative. Let us remark that this can translate into simple initiatives such as water saving and does not necessarily require massive investments. Finally, the presence on one criterion is often due to a specific holiday or type of holiday that does not mirror the globality of the offer.

It so happens most of the information uncovered stems from general declarations or one-off initiatives showcased in the introduction to the catalogue, rather than the description of the tours themselves, which shows that the initiatives undertaken are intended to be seen rather than to have an impact on the holidays of each traveller.

The survey therefore reveals that generally speaking, the initiatives undertaken are image-impacting initiatives aimed at appealing to the customer rather than selected in the framework of a global responsible stance; a definite lack of transparency is to be deplored: the conspicuous announcements or commitments in principle abound, but little is known about the actual initiatives undertaken, and even less about the follow-up and spin-offs of projects when these are clearly presented; tour operators are as a whole selective in their responsibility: if their economic interest is at stake, they will often accept to act, but will remain reluctant to invest in projects that yield nothing.

For instance, Nouvelles Frontières, Marsans, Look Voyages, TUI have signed the chart, although the last two communicate no information whatsoever about the actual commitments in the explanatory leaflets of their stays.

On the criterion customer/employee education for instance, Héliades and Pierre et Vacances are both present; for the former, this is the result of information provided for travellers about wildlife, the flora and the architecture by guides, whereas for the latter, a large number of actual initiatives are undertaken to develop the responsibility of tourists and employees, like Héliades in the previous example (agritourism by Héliades, UNESCO tours by Jet Tours…).

**Conclusion**

There is therefore among traditional tour operators a growing responsible approach perhaps more in reaction to the evolution of society than to a specific demand on the part of customers. This stance hinges for the time being more on well-understood economic interests than on a purely responsible commitment, but this first step offers the possibility of a necessary involvement in the protection of fragile ecosystems and economies. In this perspective, the implementation of systems of control and labels seems necessary in order to prevent the multiplication of declarations in principle and to promote genuine sustainable initiatives.
Among the specialist tour operators as well as among the traditional tour operators, one notes a great diversity\textsuperscript{52}. In both cases, key elements such as the development of the local economy have been the subject of no impacting initiative. This just goes to show that the concept of responsible tourism is still too multifarious: seldom is it well understood and implemented, whether willingly or not. The recent nature of the emergence of the term justifies for the time being the prevailing vagueness regarding it. It remains to be seen whether the upcoming years will allow the concept to grow clearer and the initiatives to materialize.

On the other hand, fairly frequently a given specialist tour operator will launch several similarly-oriented initiatives, which is far rarer among traditional tour operators. The offer of specialist tour operators is in general designed to be responsible. One actually finds far more information in the explanatory leaflets of the stays, which goes to show that the grand speeches actually come to life. The stance of specialist tour operators therefore turns out to be less symbolic and more convincing than that of traditional tour operators. The travellers targeted are not however the same: here the people targeted are willing to grant importance to the responsibility of their holiday. Nonetheless, most travellers do not engage in so detailed observations.

The following stage could consist in comparing the offers of conventional and specialist tour operators in order to consider a possible convergence between these two players so as to better elaborate and commercialize the more sustainable products.

We would like to express our gratitude to Laure Lapostolle and Giovannino Oppia, research assistants for this project.

\textsuperscript{52} Vagabondages is present on 2 criteria, Chamina on 7
APPENDIX 1

28 tour operators/players specialized in responsible tourism
Two media: catalogues and the internet 2006-2007
Areas to protect: islands and deserts in the Mediterranean basin

Internet sites surveyed:

- Chamina Voyages - www.chamina-voyages.com
- Saïga - www.saiga-voyage-nature.fr
- La Balaguère : group hikes and travel - www.labalaguere.com
- Arvel* : association of 18 tour operators - www.arvel-voyages.com
- Allibert - www.allibert-trekking.com
- Vagabondages - www.vagabondages.com
- Explorator - www.explorator.fr
- Déserts - www.deserts.fr


Catalogues studied

- Saïga, 2006: Greece, Italy, Corsica, Sardinia. Other islands: the Azores, New Caledonia, the Reunion Island.
- La Balaguère, Randonnées et voyages individuels, summer 2006 : Corsica, Porquerolles island, Port-Cros island, Crete, Karpathos island. Other islands: Madeira, the Canaries, Lanzarote, Cap Verde, the Reunion Island.
- Arvel, summer/autumn 2006: Cyprus, Cyclades islands, Paros, Crete, Cres island- Croatia, Sicily, the Canaries, the Balearic islands, Malta.
- Allibert, Le monde à pied, 2006 : Ischia, Capri, Crete, Cyclades, Cyprus, the Balearic islands. Other islands: the Canaries, the Azores, the Reunion island.
- Explorator, 2006, other islands: Cap Verde, Madeira.
- Vacances Bleues Voyager autrement, 2006, Other islands: Cuba.
APPENDIX 2

Conventional tour operators/players

Two media: catalogues and the internet 2006-2007
Areas to protect: islands and deserts in the Mediterranean basin

Internet sites surveyed:
- Thomas Cook - www.thomascook.fr
- Accor - www.accor.com
- Austral Lagon - www.austral-lagons.com
- Directours - www.directours.com
- Fram - www.fram.fr
- Héliades - www.heliades.fr
- Jet Tours - www.jettours.com
- Marsans - www.marsans.fr
- Nouvelles Frontières - www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr
- Pierre & Vacances - www.pierreetvacances.com

Six further tour operators/players consulted offer no information:
- Opodo - www.opodo.com
- Last Minute - www.lastminute.com
- TUI - www.tui.fr
- STI - www.stivoyages.fr
- Merilia - www.merilia.com

Catalogues studied
- Jet Tours, Les circuits et croisières, summer 2007, p. 10 and pages describing the UNESCO tours.
- Héliades, Randonnées pédestres, summer 2007 catalogue, Greece and the Greek islands, agritourism, p.3.
- Directours, (no paper catalogue since 2000), internet site www.directours.com, pages Edito and Qui, quoi, comment ?
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The Potential for Organizational Justice as a Conceptual Framework for Understanding Symmetry and Dialogic Processes in Public Relations
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Marist College
teamtuite@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
Organizational justice explains perceptions of fairness in decision-making situations. This theoretical essay (complete research) uses organizational justice to interpret findings from a 2006 dissertation, and concludes that it offers a potentially useful framework for examining organizations’ government and public relations efforts and organizational publics’ participation in organizational decision-making.

A recent qualitative dissertation (Tuite, 2006) revealed that even in a highly charged partisan political environment, government relations professionals demonstrated a deep affinity for and espousal of symmetrical values (e.g., dialogue). Moreover, the words and deeds of that study’s participants likewise communicated a disdain for attitudes and behaviors that evinced asymmetrical values. This theme emerged repeatedly in the study’s data, and in trying to make meaning of this theme, the researcher used the concept of organizational justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Anonymous suggested organizational justice (OJ) as a conceptual framework for understanding not only this theme but for understanding symmetry and dialogic processes in government relations and public relations as well.

This theoretical essay explores these findings while attempting to integrate the concept of OJ — whose subtexts of communication and participatory decision-making are the two essences of public relations — into the public relations theoretical mainstream. In doing so, many aspects of the argued nexus of OJ and public relations are explored. These aspects include the notion of “voice” in decision-making processes, which affects the perceived fairness or justness of those processes (Bies & Moag, 1986), and several nearly uncanny parallels between theories and concepts in OJ and in public relations.

Background and Context for Tuite (2006)
Tuite (2006) examined government relations, an academically underexplored specialized form of public relations, by exploring the individual lived experiences of boundary-spanning government relations professionals (GRPs) in Maryland. Specifically, these GRPs worked for organizations that were enduring a major “jolt” (A.D. Meyer, 1982) in their political environment. More specifically, this dissertation sought to understand their experiences

Kim (2005), which quantitatively explored the role of organizational justice in employee-organization relationships, was the first major effort in public relations to integrate the concept of organizational justice into the public relations body of knowledge.
throughout the jolt and the implications of that “sudden and unprecedented event” (p. 515) on their work.

**Boundary Spanners**

Boundary spanners are people who act as liaisons between and manage the interdependence of organizations and elements in their environment. They function literally on the brink of the organization’s environment, as detectors, interpreters, relaters, and communicators of environmental changes and other goings-on. They do so, so their organizations can contend appropriately with those continual environmental changes and goings-on (Aldrich, 1979; J.E. Grunig, 1991; Jemison, 1984; Leifer & Delbecq, 1978).

**The Jolt**

The jolt was the election of Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., in November 2002, as Maryland’s first Republican governor in nearly four decades. Maryland is widely considered to be a one-party (that is, Democratic) state. Depending on an organization’s political status in Maryland, the jolt of Ehrlich’s election might have had either positive or negative implications (and thus his election would be perceived as a “boon” or as a “bane,” respectively). This is why Ehrlich’s election qualified as a jolt: It had the potential to turn “losers” and “winners” during the previous administration of Democrat Parris Glendening into “winners” and “losers,” respectively, during Ehrlich’s administration.

**Participants and Methods**

Tuite (2006) focused on GRPs affiliated with not-for-profit charitable organizations, issue advocacy groups, and trade associations operating in Maryland. The researcher identified potential participants by analyzing media sources, organizational Web sites, and lists obtained from the Maryland Government Relations Association and the Maryland State Ethics Commission. All of the in-house GRP participants occupied upper-echelon management positions in their organizations. The for-contract GRP participants held senior-level positions at their direct employers (i.e., lobbying consulting firms) or owned their own consulting firms. The researcher eventually completed telephone interviews with 44 participants; 40 usable interviews were analyzed.

**A Potential Framework for Understanding Government and Public Relations?**

One intriguing insight gleaned from Tuite (2006) was that opportunities for symmetry — in other words, dialogue — under the Ehrlich administration were limited compared with expectations based on opportunities under previous administrations, regardless of whether the jolt was welcomed by participants’ organizations. The Ehrlich administration seemed to function as a less open (or more closed) system in the political environment of Maryland than had previous administrations. This constrained GRPs’ abilities to implement the personal influence model of public relations (J.E. Grunig, L.A. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995) with the critical stakeholder of the Ehrlich administration. Diminished access, compounded by
the weakened power of social circles (Kadushin, 1968; Weedman, 1992), diminished GRPs’ opportunities for dialogue. Participants in Tuite (2006) were concerned about the implications of the new process of Maryland politics ushered in by Ehrlich’s election on their organizations. Some “bane” participants wondered if they would continue to get a “fair shake.” Some “boon” participants hoped that at last they would be able to get a fair shake. Generally, participants were concerned about process first and outcomes second.

This directly relates to a particularly noteworthy finding from Tuite (2006) that is the subject of this theoretical essay: Participants communicated an affinity for symmetrical values (e.g., engaging in meaningful dialogue, willingness to work with non-likeminded organizations, amenability to compromise). Further, their words and deeds likewise communicated a disdain for attitudes and behaviors that were disingenuous, uncommunicative, secretive, purposely unproductive, biased, closed minded, strident, dogmatic, partisan, and even mean. In other words, they decried attitudes and behaviors that evinced asymmetrical values. This theme emerged repeatedly in the data, such as with regard to the worldviews and communication practices of the Ehrlich and Glendening administrations and of participants’ organizations.

The researcher believes that this comes down to dialogic processes. Participants were specifically concerned that one, opportunities for dialogic processes had diminished under the Ehrlich administration; and two, that the administration’s perceived and demonstrable asymmetrical presuppositions seemed to supersede the inherent symmetrical presuppositions of those processes.

The researcher recently collaborated on a research article that explored procedural justice in public meetings (McComas, Tuite, Waks, & Sherman, 2007). This dimension of OJ (along with OJ’s other dimension of distributive justice), provides a useful framework for interpreting many of Tuite’s (2006) findings. Indeed, the researcher believes this framework is so useful that public relations scholars should consider it for conceptualizing and understanding government relations and its “parent” function, public relations.

Making the Case

OJ is a concept that social psychologists and organizational theorists have used for years to explain individuals’ perceptions of fairness and satisfaction in situations that involve decision-making, resource allocation, and uncertainty. Much of this initial research was conducted in legal settings like courtrooms (e.g., Leventhal, 1980; Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980) but researchers have explored the concept in workplaces (e.g., McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997) and in medical settings (e.g., Kulik & Holbrook, 2002). It has been applied using a systems-theory approach (e.g., Bussman, 1997), an approach frequently used to study public relations (Tuite, 2006; Long & Hazleton, 1987). Lauber and Knuth (1999) explored it in

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54 Drawing on the work of Kadushin (1968), Weedman (1992) defined a social circle as “a set of individuals connected to one another by some form of social choice” (p. 258). “Social circles” has been the researcher’s shorthand term for one’s network of personal and professional contacts. It logically can be assumed that members of social circles discuss their jobs and thus exchange work-related knowledge, insights, and gossip and that exchange occurs more quickly, frequently, and readily among members than non-members (Burt, 2000).
public-policy processes. They noted that research on justice in policy making was lacking, even though more than a decade earlier Lind and Tyler (1988) pointed out the obvious fact that the concept of justice could lend insight to decisions made by political authorities.

Arguably, OJ would be useful in exploring organizations’ government relations efforts because these efforts are usually motivated by organizations’ self-interested desires to participate and wield influence in governmental decision-making processes. Additionally, OJ may be a useful framework for exploring organizational publics’ (e.g., employees or community members) participation and influence in organizational decision-making processes.

Some justice scholars have come close to exploring justice within contexts that certainly smack of public relations. Saxby, Tat, and Johansen (2000) explored justice in consumer relations, using it as a framework for understanding consumers’ perceptions of fair treatment in organizations’ resolution of their complaints. Elsbach (2001) studied justice in crisis and reputation management, using it to explore organizations’ explanations and apologia related to internal decision-making processes that led to legitimacy-threatening events.

The entire notion of “voice” in decision-making processes — which affects the perceived fairness or justness of those processes — de facto is about communication (Bies & Moag, 1986). This further hints at the nexus of justice and public relations, because public relations is a communication function of management (as per Long and Hazleton’s [1987] definition55). Justice scholars have teased out the communication implicit in many aspects of procedural justice, one of the two dimensions of OJ. For instance, communication figures largely in the informational component of procedural justice. One of Leventhal’s (1980) widely accepted criteria of procedural justice is that decision-making authorities make available accurate, transparent, truthful, candid, and timely information about the decisional process (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; McComas et al., 2007). Such information effects informational justice.

Communication scholars are just beginning to study communication as a discrete aspect of justice, realizing it is a fruitful framework for studying communication and vice versa. McComas, whose research focuses on communication procedures and participant satisfaction in public participation processes (e.g., the U.S. Food and Drug Administration advisory committees), believed that communication scholars, until now, largely have ignored the concept of procedural justice (McComas, personal communication, March 3, 2006). Besley and McComas (2005) and McComas et al. (2007) signal that this is changing.

The Nexus of Organizational Justice and Public Relations

Kim’s (2005) dissertation quantitatively explored the role of organizational justice in employee-organization relationships. This was the first major effort to integrate the concept of organizational justice into the public relations body of knowledge. A review of several major theoretical works in public relations (e.g., J.E. Grunig 1992; L.A. Grunig, J.E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Heath, 2001), scholarly public relations journals, and repositories of scholarly papers (e.g., the conference papers database of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass

55 Long and Hazleton (1987) defined public relations as “a communication function of management through which organizations adapt, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organizational goals” (p. 6).
Communication) for instances of public relations scholars’ use of justice research came up empty. The researcher is following Kim’s (2005) lead to bring the “outside” concept of organizational justice — whose subtexts of communication and participatory decision-making are the two essences of public relations — into public relations.

Justice’s parallels with many public relations theories and concepts are nearly uncanny. Example 1: The researcher found at least three justice scholars who described concepts equivalent to J.E. Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) two-way asymmetrical model, which organizations employ to influence, even manipulate, stakeholders, giving them “false” voice. Sampson’s (1993) “accommodative justice” is exemplified by organizational participatory mechanisms that accommodate participants’ voices but not their influence. The organization is neither influenced by those voiced concerns, nor was that their motivation for letting participants to voice concerns. Cohen (1985) described “pseudoparticipation” efforts wherein an authority intentionally misleads people into believing they wield influence a decision while using those efforts to persuade people to accept a decision that the authority already made. (Public relations scholars Hung [2005] and Kim [2005] used the term “pseudo-symmetrical” to describe such efforts.) Pateman (1970) wrote of participatory mechanisms whose goal is the persuasion of participants rather than consensual decisions: The organization “has a particular goal in mind and uses the group discussion as a means of inducing acceptance of the goal” (p. 69).

Example 2: The researcher found much in the justice literature that is reminiscent of public relations concepts more affirming than the two-way asymmetrical model. Folger (1986) said that justice “stems from recognition of a principle that decision-makers should allow people who will be affected by a decision to have some voice in the decision-making process” (p. 152). Folger’s statement embodies the rationale for the two-way symmetrical model, whose use is a major determinant of public relations excellence, excellence as explained by the dominant metatheory of public relations, the Excellence theory (Dozier, L.A. Grunig, & J.E. Grunig, 1995; J.E. Grunig, 1992; L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). This model fosters excellence because its dialogic, deliberative, consultative process brings outside voices into organizations’ internal decision-making. It gives stakeholders “true” voice by offering opportunities for organizations and stakeholders to influence each other to affect the outcome of organizational decisions (Jemison, 1984).

J.E. Grunig, the main architect of the two-way symmetrical model, has emphasized that what makes this model an ideal, ethical, and effective model of public relations practice is its process, not its outcomes (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). Process is why J.E. Grunig (2001) argued that it is ethical to talk with “morally repugnant groups” (p. 15) — giving them procedural justice — but it is unethical to accommodate their desired outcomes — giving them distributive justice (the other dimension of OJ). Spicer (1997), a public relations scholar whose collaborative advocacy model is essentially the two-way symmetrical model, noted that symmetry is less about achieving consensual outcomes than it is about the dialogic, collaborative process that brings

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56 Anonymous and McComas (2001) found that many public participation concepts parallel public relations concepts, yet the two bodies of literature rarely, if ever, draw from each other. That justice would inform both these literatures and is used by public participation scholars but not public relations scholars is not surprising.
parties to that outcome. *Thus, the essence of procedural justice is symmetry and the essence of symmetry is procedural justice.*

**What Is Justice?**

Justice, as an academic concept, is rooted in ethical philosopher John Rawls’ conceptions of fairness and justice in the allocation of societal resources (e.g., see Beauchamp, 1980; Hillier, 1998; Rawls, 1958). Humans have an innate sense of fairness and justice; even young children will engage in games such as “Rock, Paper, Scissors” to arrive at decisions fairly. Justice results from the fairness of authorities, procedures, and structures in a society (e.g., the legal system, political system, organizations, and even families.). Their fairness provides opportunities for people to get what they are due or owed, or what they deserve or “can legitimately claim” (Beauchamp, 1980, p. 133).

Justice is socially constructed. It is constructed from a sense of how things ought to be, or “oughtness” (Colquitt et al., 2001). It is constructed from subjective perceptions that may be rooted in cultural topoi and religious and philosophical systems (e.g., An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; Hillier [1998] suggested justice was based in part on the “golden rule” of “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” [p. 16]). It is constructed from counterfactual thinking, those “what might have been” (Colquitt, 2004; Folger, 1986) and “if onlys” (Folger, 1986, 1993; van den Bos, 2001) that allow people to distinguish the normative from the positive. Counterfactuals are based on social comparisons about, for example, how much justice one person gets compared with another; speculation; experiences; and norms (Colquitt, 2004). Participants in Tuite (2006) used counterfactual thinking in their judgments of various aspects of the Ehrlich administration and their and other organizations’ legitimacy and inclusion. They compared the contemporary reality to the past (i.e., the Glendening administration) and the imaginable (e.g., how things would have been if not for all of the post-jolt partisan polarization).

**Two Dimensions of Organizational Justice**

Organizational justice has two primary dimensions (Colquitt, 2001). Distributive justice relates to the fairness of the outcome of an interactional decision-making process. Procedural justice relates to the fairness of that process (Bies & Moag, 1986). Most justice researchers focus on this latter dimension because it is the predominant predictor of organizational justice. A person’s perceived fairness of a process is causally related to the perceived fairness of the outcome and his or her acceptance of and satisfaction with that outcome (Barrett-Howard & Tyler, 1986; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 1994; Weiner, J.A. Alexander, & Shortell, 2002).

Procedural justice determines the commitment a person feels toward the group of which he or she is a part (e.g., a political system or an organization; Fuller & Hester, 2001; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). Procedural justice also determines a participant’s voluntary behaviors on the group’s behalf (e.g., voting or buying products; Colquitt, 2001). Further, a person will be more accepting of outcomes, even if he or she is unfavorable, if he or she perceives that the decision-making procedures and authorities were fair. These last two points would explain why customers who engaged with human customer-service agents (as compared to automated call systems) were more likely to volunteer constructive advice and accept unsatisfactory outcomes (W.C. Taylor, 2006). Dealing with humans gives customers a higher sense of procedural justice than automated systems. It also explains the feelings of many participants in Tuite (2006) about
decisions rendered by the Glendening and Ehrlich administration without their organizations’
true voices. A higher sense of procedural justice can compensate for a lowered sense of
distributive justice.

People seek procedural justice because it provides them with process control, which is the
ability to voice their views and arguments, and decision control, which is the ability to influence
the outcome of allocation decisions that affect them (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Thus there is an
implicit element of self-interest in procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992).
The general scenario of procedural justice — a decision-making authority allocating resources
for which “selfish” parties compete — echoes Tuite’s (2006) general scenario of politics as an
asymmetrically presupposed game in which organizations compete, through dialogic processes,
for resources political stakeholders may allocate to them. Such a general scenario of politics, as
Tuite (2006) asserted, may lend insight into why government relations is an anomaly to the
Excellence theory (Dozier et al., 1995; J.E. Grunig, 1992; L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). Given the
similarity of the scenarios, procedural justice may offer new insights from which to explore the
government relations anomaly.

The Group-Value Model of Procedural Justice

Tyler and colleagues (Tyler, 1989; Tyler, 1994; Tyler & Bies, 1990; Tyler, Degoey, &
Smith, 1996) have developed a group-value, or relational, model of procedural justice. This
model has particular relevance for Tuite’s (2006) findings, as the researcher will illustrate here.
Fair procedures symbolize that the decision-making authority respects and values people (Folger
& Cropanzano, 1998; Tyler, 1994). This may explain why participants in Tuite (2006) assessed
their organizations’ political status based on their inclusion (and the quality thereof) in official
dialogic opportunities with political stakeholders. It may also explain why participants were
frustrated by Ehrlich administration aides’ perceived non-interest in social circles. Social circles
represent unofficial dialogic opportunities.

Participation in fair procedures validates individuals’ status vis-à-vis the authority and
within the larger group. Tyler (1994) noted that people want this information because they want
to know their status, which provides them with clues about their legitimacy and their
interdependence with others in the group. This information is telegraphed by whether decision-
makers treated them with respect, propriety, dignity, sensitivity, honesty, and objectivity during
the procedures (Bies & Moag, 1986; Lind, MacCoun, Ebener, Felstiner, Hensler, Resnik, &
Tyler, 1990; Tyler, 1989, 1994; Tyler et al., 1996; van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997).
Decision-makers’ “morally appropriate conduct” in these processes means that they care about
individuals’ interests, not just their own (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, p. 49). Their motives are
mixed, a characteristic that the group-value model of procedural justice shares with the two-way
symmetrical model and symmetrically presupposed worldviews. Finally, morally appropriate
interpersonal treatment effects interpersonal justice. A necessary component of interpersonal
justice, which is another dimension of procedural justice, is communication (Colquitt et al.,
2001; Greenberg, 1993).

The group-value model of procedural justice is useful for exploring the justice in
procedures involving interdependent members of a group (Tyler, 1989; Tyler et al. 1996). A
group could be comprised of the entities in a political environment or the members of an
organization. Thus, this model may be useful for exploring phenomena — like public relations — studied using systems-based organizational theory because interdependence is central to systems theory (Baum & Rowley, 2002). The model’s “robustness” varies with the degree of interdependence (and frequency of interaction) between group members (Tyler et al., 1996): The greater the interdependence or the more frequent the interaction, the more robust the model. It is also a particularly useful model when uncertainty abounds (Besley & McComas, 2005; van den Bos et al., 1997; van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998; van den Bos et al., 2001) — as it did in the Maryland political environment at the time the research for Tuite (2006) was conducted. This uncertainty could stem from a group member’s status; the relationship with the decision-making authority; and the trustworthiness, objectivity, and motivations of the authority. These were all sources of uncertainty perceived by participants in Tuite (2006). Fair processes provide information that quells these uncertainties, information that ameliorates concerns that a decision-making authority will use the procedures to exploit participants (van den Bos et al., 1997).

Again, this reflects Tuite’s (2006) findings about the importance participants placed on social circles and participation in official dialogic processes such as task forces and routine meetings. Tyler’s (1989; Tyler et al., 1996; Tyler & Folger, 1980) research on the group-value model of procedural justice in the political and legal systems is particularly illustrative given the political context of Tuite (2006). People have expectations about their relationships with and treatment received from public officials (e.g., politicians and police officers). Expectations are based on normative ideals, implicit associations (Gladwell, 2005), and experiences. Tyler and his colleagues found that interpersonal treatment and relationships mattered more than anything else, including control in the process and outcome favorability, in a person’s judgment of his or her experiences in the political and legal systems. This may also explain why social circles figured so prominently throughout the findings of Tuite (2006). The interpersonal treatment GRPs did or did not receive from political stakeholders, as opportuned through social circles, was a salient aspect of their work lives.

Tyler and his colleagues (1989; Tyler et al., 1996; Tyler & Folger, 1980) have repeatedly interpreted this as that people care about procedural justice because they care about having voice and respect even when those do not translate to process or decision control. Participants evidently want something more valuable than the opportunity and ability to influence outcomes (Tyler, 1994); they want interpersonal justice. This is a departure from Thibaut and Walker’s (1975) original instrumental conceptualization of procedural justice. This all echoes themes that emerged in Tuite’s (2006) findings: Participants desired constructive relationships with decision-makers and opportunities to participate in dialogic processes (e.g., as would occur in social circles) now; they would worry about the outcomes later. This is also why lobbying ethics laws tend to target social circles and “good old boy” networks. These unofficial dialogic opportunities are not opportuned for everyone; they effect interpersonal and procedural justice only for members. Conversely, they may also undermine the procedural justice potential of the official dialogic processes that non-members are “limited” to participating in.

Perceptions of procedural justice in the political system affect participants’ perceptions of decision-making authorities in that system (e.g., the Maryland General Assembly or the U.S. Congress [Tyler, 1994]). Again, this was the case with participants in Tuite (2006), regardless of their ideological leanings or affects toward the Glendening or Ehrlich administrations.
Stronger perceived fairness of political decision-making procedures translates to greater satisfaction with and stronger support for decision-making authorities (Colquitt, 2001; Lauber & Knuth, 1999; Phillips, 2002; Tyler & Caine, 1981; Tyler, Rasinski, & McGraw, 1985). This would apply to organizations, enacting the participant role, that interact with the government, as the decision-making authority. This insight also informs situations where stakeholders (e.g., employees) enact the role of participant and organizations enact the role of decision-making authority.

**Implications of Retributive Justice for Organizations**

Fuller and Hester (2001) wrote about how the “appearance of justice” in politics is important. Political authorities may engage in appearances to mitigate citizens’ dissatisfaction, or even “hostility” (p. 282), with decisional outcomes (Tyler & Folger, 1980). But this raises the question of whether political authorities — or really any decision-making authority such as an organization — are concerned with the appearance of justice (as accommodative justice, pseudoparticipation, or the two-way asymmetrical model would accomplish) or with truly doing what is fair by people in terms of interpersonal, information, and procedural and distributional justice (as the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model would accomplish).

Individuals’ anger, resentment, discontent, and frustration with perceived unfairness and injustice — being dealt with asymmetrically — may fuel their desire to seek retributive justice against decision-making authorities (Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, & Corkran, 1979; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). They want to reply in kind. They have nothing to gain; thus they have nothing to lose, as the curvilinear constraint-symmetry relationship predicts (J.E. Grunig, 1984). In fact, research has shown that people who unwittingly participate under falsely pretensed decision-making processes (e.g., pseudoparticipation mechanisms) often see outcomes as less fair than people who did not participate at all in the processes. “False” voice heightens procedural and distributive injustice more than “no” voice — being a persona non grata. Their frustrations at having their time and effort wasted, being exploited and disrespected, and having their raised expectations dashed may lead to a primitive desire to punish those who are the sources of frustration (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Folger et al. (1979) called this the “frustration effect” (p. 2254).

Frustration caused by procedural and distributive injustice (and arguably interpersonal injustice) may even lead to antisocial behaviors such as rioting (Tyler & Caine, 1981). More mildly, the frustration effect may lead to (and may lend social scientific support to) Ornstein’s battered Congress syndrome (Marcus, 2006) or activism such as strikes, boycotts, and the punitive exploitation of legal loopholes to punish organizations (Tuite, 2003). The frustration effect may also have some interplay with J.E. Grunig’s (1997) situational theory of publics, specifically regarding the evolution of active publics into activist publics and the constraint recognition variable. S. Alexander, Sinclair, and Tetreck (1995) called for more research on this visceral form of justice within the justice body of knowledge. This researcher agrees, but with the caveat that both justice and public relations scholars should conduct such research because retributive justice appears to be a useful framework for exploring activism against organizations.

**Closing Thoughts**
Although grounded in the completed research of Tuite (2006), the essay abounds with ideas in progress about the potential for OJ as a framework for understanding symmetry and dialogic processes in public and government relations. The researcher’s application of the concept to findings from Tuite (2006) facilitated the interpretation and heightened the understanding of these findings beyond what those interpretations and understandings may have been had the researcher stayed within the traditional boundaries of the public relations theoretical body of knowledge. The researcher’s intent here, through the essay’s explication of OJ and discussion of the concept’s theoretical overlapping with public relations concepts, was to advocate that other public relations scholars consider OJ as a framework for conceptualizing and interpreting future research on government relations and public relations and to bring OJ into the public relations theoretical mainstream.

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Public Relations, Public Diplomacy, and Soft Power: Conceptual Convergence or Credibility Crisis?
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Abstract

For decades, scholars and practitioners have debated the issue of separation or convergence between public relations and public diplomacy. Some have viewed these as separate functions; others have claimed they are similar and convergent. These concepts have been associated with efforts to achieve national political goals by attracting foreign audiences with soft power (e.g., popular culture, ideals, and values) and threatening audiences with hard power (e.g., military force and sanctions). Recently, post-Cold War regional conflicts and the war against terrorism have fueled integration of these two concepts in political-military strategic communication and information operations programs.

Public relations and public diplomacy can guide strategic communication and information operations with ethical principles and objectives that seek to promote constructive relationships. However, some political-military programs like information operations and strategic communication involve deception and psychological operations that are designed to defeat adversaries. These communication behaviors may be acceptable in times of war but not in times of peace. Hence, integration of public relations and public diplomacy in such programs could suggest a conceptual convergence that threatens the credibility of both.

This paper reviews historical trends and literature to explicate both public relations and public diplomacy; documents and provides support for conceptual convergence in theory and practice; and discusses the opportunities, limits, and risks of integrating these concepts in strategic communication. Finally, the authors provide a model of conceptual convergence and propose future study to enlighten scholarship and professional practice in public relations and public diplomacy.

Post-Cold War conflicts – including the war against terrorism – have been punctuated by activists, insurgents, and terrorists who use asymmetrical means to attack alliances, coalitions, or nations that possess much more formidable economic, political, and military power (Nemeth, 2000). To manage these threats, political-military organizations are integrating elements of soft power with elements of hard power. The integration of disparate communication activities like public relations, public diplomacy, psychological operations, political and economic sanctions, and military force through information operations, perception management, and strategic communication programs has led many to question the effect of this convergence on the credibility of public relations and public diplomacy.
The dominant perspective views public relations as strategic management of communication and relationships between organizations and publics (e.g., Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2005; J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2001, 2003a). Public diplomacy is often regarded as a complimentary but separate concept characterized by international or intercultural communication between nations and foreign publics (Belay, 1997; Adelman, 1981). However, some scholars and practitioners have drawn parallels between public relations and public diplomacy and have cited convergence between the two concepts (Kunczik, 2003; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Signitzer & Wamser, 2006).

Integrated information operations, campaigns, and programs serve as a catalyst for further study of the relationship among public relations, public diplomacy, and other communication functions. The role of public relations in integrated information operations has become the focus of controversy and debate among government and political leaders, public relations professionals, diplomats and journalists. To some, information operations “can make an important contribution to defusing crises” (U.S. Joint Staff, 1998, p. I-4). To others, information operations as a military strategy conjures images of information as a weapon (Beelman, 2001; van Dyke, 1997), which raises important ethical questions about the role of public relations in such operations.

The integration of public relations and public diplomacy in integrated communication programs that are designed to project hard as well as soft power raises exigent questions about convergence and credibility that must be addressed in practice and in theory. Unfortunately, public relations scholars have been slow to study this clash among communication concepts or apply theory in a way that might produce answers to practical problems associated with integration of soft and hard power in this communication context. Meanwhile, scholars and practitioners in public diplomacy, psychological operations, and other political-military communication disciplines have moved quickly to set and implement policies that determine the role of public relations in integrated communication activities (Robinson, 2006).

Only recently have public relations scholars and practitioners started to complement political-military approaches toward public relations with their interest in strategic communication (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, in press). President of the International Public Relations Association Robert W. Grupp envisioned the association’s mission as promotion of corporate diplomacy, which he defined as complementary to public diplomacy:

Corporate diplomacy means at least two things. It means a company embeds the value of collaboration deeply into its operations and practices; and it means the company extends the reach of its relationships to include groups, cultures, organizations, even governments, which don’t necessarily involve the company or client directly but which ultimately affect the sustainability of the business. (Grupp, 2008, p. 7)

This paper will review historical trends and literature from theory and practice to explicate public relations and public diplomacy. This review will document empirical evidence that supports the notion of conceptual convergence between public relations and diplomacy in theory and in practice. Discussion will explore the opportunities, limits, and risks of integrating
these concepts in political-military programs like information operations and strategic communication. Finally the authors will propose a program for future research to enlighten scholarship and contribute to professional practice through the study of contemporary cases of public relations and public diplomacy.

**Literature Review**

Studies of public diplomacy have in recent decades occupied an area of special interest in public relations research. However, the association of public relations and public diplomacy with soft and hard power and integrated communication programs has attracted scant attention from public relations scholars. This review will explicate these concepts and support subsequent discussion of convergence.

**Public Relations and Public Diplomacy**

*Public relations* is generally defined as strategic management of communication and relationships between organizations and their publics, or in the public sphere (e.g., Cutlip et al., 2005; J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Seitel, 2007; van Ruler & Verčič, 2002; van Ruler & Verčič, 2005; van Ruler, Verčič, Bütschi, & Flodin, 2004). A global theory of public relations has advanced this view by incorporating political as well as cultural and societal variables (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; van Ruler & Verčič, 2002; van Ruler, Verčič, Bütschi, & Flodin, 2004).

National governments and political-military alliances often refer to the public relations function as *public information* or *public affairs*. This nomenclature derives from the historical model of public information associated with legislation and regulations that restrict public relations activities within the government agencies of some nations (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Figure 1, below, depicts the model of public affairs that operates in support of U.S. joint military operations.

![Figure 1. Exact reprint of U.S. joint force public affairs organization (U.S. Joint Staff, 2005, p. III-3).](image-url)
Public diplomacy. The field of international relations focuses on relationships among national governments (Signitzer & Wamser, 1996). Within this field, diplomacy is conceptualized as the management or negotiation of relationships among these governments through international or intercultural communication (Adelman, 1981; Belay, 1997). Globalization of national economies, evolution of new media channels, and expansion of social networks allow more actors to participate in international relations. These trends have also given rise to new forms of diplomacy: public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and media diplomacy (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006).

Public diplomacy consists of direct communication among governments and foreign publics; cultural diplomacy relies on favorable attitudes toward a nation’s culture to facilitate diplomatic relations; and media diplomacy utilizes news media channels to conduct open diplomacy (Adelman, 1981; Belay, 1997; Hiebert, 2005; Melissen, 2005; Signitzer & Wamser, 1996). In contrast to diplomacy, which is characterized by discrete, formal, and official communication, public diplomacy and its cultural and media counterparts are open, informal, and mobile (Steinbock, 2003). Public and media diplomacy extend international communication beyond the realm of professional diplomats and other government officials to anyone with access to the Internet or global news media. Figure 2, below, depicts public diplomacy as seen in actual practice by Britain Abroad. In this figure, public diplomacy activities range from short-term, urgent, but manifest activities (e.g., crisis management, news management) to long-term but latent activities (e.g., student exchange programs).

**Figure 2**: Public diplomacy spectrum (reproduced with permission of the author, Jonathan Griffin, formerly Britain Abroad)

Recent studies have also addressed post-Cold War international communication concepts like preventive diplomacy and coercive diplomacy. The former concept uses diplomacy to prevent disputes or escalation of existing conflict (Rubin, 2002). Coercive diplomacy uses direct
measures like threatening an adversary with political, military, or economic force to prevent conflict or achieve diplomatic goals (Jentleson, 2000; de Wijk, 2003).

Convergence of Public Relations and Public Diplomacy

Signitzer and Coombs (1992) were among the first scholars to explore conceptual relationships between public relations and public diplomacy. Drawing a distinction between the two fields, they observed, “While public relations theory may be well suited to explain and to predict the communication behaviors of ‘ordinary’ organizations … diplomacy theories, for now, are better suited to the understanding of relationships between a nation-state and its foreign publics” (p. 138).

Questioning the notion that public relations and public diplomacy are separate functions, Signitzer and Coombs (1992) concluded after an extensive review of research conducted by U.S. and European scholars that “a relationship between the two areas does exist” (p. 145). Furthermore, “Public relations and public diplomacy are in a natural process of convergence” (p. 146). Signitzer and Wamser (2006) explored further this convergence process and identified similarities between the two functions. They observed that public relations and public diplomacy are both strategic communication processes that manage communication, relationships, and consequences among organizations and their publics; and that both perform research, advocacy, dialog, and counseling. Citing economic and political trends, the authors also concluded that large organizations and multinational alliances are beginning to act like nations, which is causing public relations and public diplomacy to become “more and more intertwined in our times” (p. 444).

However, audiences differ for public relations and public diplomacy. Notionally, public relations managers focus on communication among corporate leaders and organizational publics, while public diplomacy managers focus on communication among national leaders and foreign publics (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006). For example, the U.S. Department of State assigns its public affairs managers responsibility to “inform the American people and to feed their concerns and comments back to the policymakers” (U.S. Department of State, 2008a, p. 2). Its public diplomacy managers communicate with “people throughout the world … isolate and marginalize violent extremists … [and] foster a sense of common interests and common values between Americans and people of different countries, cultures and faiths throughout the world” (U.S. Department of State, 2008b, p. 2).

In other studies, Peterson (2002) suggested that diplomacy now relies on “a sustained, coordinated capability to understand, inform, and influence people and private organizations, as well as governments” (p. 15); and Melissen (2005) noted that the “modus operandi of the new public diplomacy is not entirely different from the public relations approach” (p. 21). Wilson (1996) concluded that “the creation of strategic cooperative communities also applies to public diplomacy” (p. 21). Kunczik (2003), citing the growing importance of strategic publics and international news media organizations in public diplomacy, wrote, “Public relations for states is closely connected to the mediation of foreign policy” (p. 408). Furthermore, Alastair Campbel assigned Britain Abroad responsibility for “rebranding” Britain around the world under the Blair government, which replicated business concepts of branding and re-branding in the international relations of a country (United Kingdom).
Yun (2006) examined conceptual convergence of post-Cold War public relations and diplomacy and found that principles of excellence theory in public relations also applied to excellence in public diplomacy. Zöllner (2006) also pointed out a convergence of public relations and German public diplomacy after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Collins (2003) examined ways that public relations and public diplomacy have converged with other communication functions like psychological operations in NATO’s international political-military alliance. Several other scholars examined how convergence of public relations and public diplomacy influences mediation of messages and perceptions about national policies and values, responses to natural disasters, and conflicts like terrorism (Dutta-Bergman, 2005, 2006; Wang, 2007; Zhang, 2006, 2007).

**Soft Power and Hard Power**

During the 1980s, scholar and diplomat Joseph Nye authored the concept of *soft power* in the field of international relations (Ikenberry, 2004). According to Nye (2004a), “Power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants” (p. 2). Elaborating on this concept, Nye (2003) explained:

Soft power is the ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading others to adopt your goals. It differs from hard power, the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will. (p. 2)

Nye (2004a) traced the foundation of soft power to a nation’s “culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (p. 11). He also observed that a nation’s loss of respect and credibility in the international arena could lead to erosion of this foundation, which weakens the efficacy of soft power and makes use of hard power more likely. Increased use of hard power, often perceived as less ethical than soft power, could lead to further loss of national credibility and increased instability (Nye, 2002, 2003, 2004b, 2004c).

Literature about soft and hard power also suggests that the two concepts are linked and must operate in concert with one another. Van Ham (2005) argued that soft power provides hard power with a “cloak of legitimacy (morally or under international law)” (p. 52), which can help overcome resistance and reduce costs. Conversely, “soft power requires the necessary resources and commitment to put words into actions” (p. 52).

Review of this literature suggests that soft power, public relations, and public diplomacy share conceptual similarities, at least in terms of their association with ethical communication, credibility, and variables like social culture, political systems, and media systems. Nye (2004b) defined soft power in such a way as to make it directly relevant to business communication, which aligns international relations with organizational behavior.

**Strategic Communication and Information Operations**

*Strategic communication.* For decades, Western nations have considered strategic communication as a vital element of national power – operating alongside political, economic, and military power. Van Dyke (2001) reported, “The U.S. national security policy even describes information as an element of national power and advocates its use as a means to shape public
perception and promote U.S. democratic ideals around the world” (p. 13). Alliances like NATO have incorporated integrated approaches to communication that synchronize these elements of power (Combelles-Siegel, 1998).

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against targets on U.S. soil prompted further study of strategic communication as a practical concept. In a U.S. defense science board task force report, Vitto (2004) underscored the importance of communication as a component of national strategy but warned, “[Strategic communication] is in crisis, and it must be transformed with a strength of purpose that matches our commitment to diplomacy, defense, intelligence, law enforcement, and homeland security” (p. 2). Calling for a more coherent approach to strategic communication, Vitto added, “Public diplomacy, public affairs, psychological operations (PSYOP) and open military information operations must be coordinated and energized” (p. 3).

Subsequently, the U.S. government defined strategic communication as a focused or integrated communication management process designed to influence key constituencies. This process consists of four phases (see Figure 3, below), which are comparable to the behaviors in strategic public relations management (Cutlip et al., 2005; Guth & Marsh, 2005; J. Grunig & Repper, 1992). According to the U.S. military’s Joint Staff (2007):

Strategic communication is the focused United States government processes and efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable to advance national interests and objectives through the use of coordinated information, themes, plans, programs, and actions synchronized with other instruments of national power. (p. xii)

Figure 3. Strategic communication process (adapted from Thorp, 2007).

A paucity of scholarly research in this area, especially within the public relations body of knowledge, makes it difficult to locate in theory this contemporary concept of strategic communication. Military scholars are, however, addressing strategic communication from the perspectives of public diplomacy and battlefield management. According to Eder (2007):

The principal benefit of strategic communication derives essentially from the principle of war called mass. Strategic communication means massing information among all agents of public information at a critical time and place to accomplish a specific objective....
Dribbling out mixed, unsynchronized information instead of massing the release of unequivocal messages backed by a substantial body of facts is especially destructive during times of crisis. (p. 62)

Descriptions of strategic communication as a coordinated (Vitto, 2004) and synchronized (Eder, 2007) process suggest a scholarly conceptualization of communication described in theories like the excellence theory of public relations (Dozier, 1995; J. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Contemporary definition of strategic communication in the light of public relations theories has been offered by Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, and Sriramesh (in press).

**Information operations.** Information operations (IO) has been defined as integration of “electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, military deception, and operations security, in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own” (U.S. Joint Staff, 2006, p. GL-9). Public affairs (e.g., public information or public relations) and public diplomacy are considered to be among IO’s related capabilities (Metz, 2006; U.S. Joint Staff, 2006). Combelles-Siegel (1998) observed how NATO supported peace operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina with an integrated information campaign that “coordinated and synchronized use of different information activities” (p. 2) like public relations, public diplomacy, and psychological operations. Figure 4, below, depicts the configuration of a typical information operations cell.

![Figure 4. Configuration of a notional information operations cell, adapted from U.S. Joint Publication 3-13 [Information Operations] (U.S. Joint Staff, 2006, p. IV-5).](image-url)
The concept of information operations is sometimes associated with *perception management*, especially among many European nations and Western alliances. Collins (2003) defined perception management as “actions used to influence the attitudes and objective reasoning of foreign audiences and consists of Public Diplomacy, Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), Public Information, Deception and Covert Action” (p. 13).

Contemporary literature has addressed ethical concerns that arise from integration of public relations and public diplomacy with information activities like psychological or deception operations that could be used to confuse, deceive, or even coerce audiences. Van Dyke (2005) studied NATO’s public relations management in Bosnia-Herzegovina and proposed an ethical communication model that could be used to guide integrated information activities – even those that engage in coercion. Some nations and international political-military alliances have enacted policies that keep the public relations (or public information and public affairs) and information operations functions separate but coordinated (Myers, 2004; F. Veltri, personal communication, January 2, 2008). These policies are designed to preserve the “institutional credibility [required] to maintain public trust and confidence” (Myers, 2004, ¶ 1).

**Discussion**

Analysis of historical antecedents to public relations and public diplomacy indicate as Signitzer and Coombs (1992) and Signitzer and Wamser (2006) suggested that these two concepts are in convergence – in practice if not in theory. This discussion will trace these antecedents through the post-Cold War, demonstrate how conditions of war and peace have influenced convergence of public relations and public diplomacy, and identify risks and opportunities associated with conceptual convergence.

*Communication in War and in Peace*

*Revolutions.* According to J. Grunig and Hunt (1984), the 18th century American Revolution in the United States was “one of the most important products of public relations-like activities in history” (p. 17). Cutlip et al. (2000) added that “today’s patterns of public relations practice were shaped by innovations in mobilizing public opinion” (p. 103) that formed part of Revolutionary War propaganda campaigns. According to Isaacson (2003), Benjamin Franklin performed dual roles as a diplomat (ambassador to France) and as a journalist and public relations practitioner (writer, printer, and newspaper publisher) in support of the revolution. Thus, Franklin and the American Revolution serve as early examples of how persuasive power can be generated by integrating public relations and diplomacy.

The Industrial Revolution and Information Revolution also promoted convergence between public relations and public diplomacy. The Industrial Revolution increased the need for communication experts and contributed to the growth of professionalism in public relations (Cutlip et al., 2000; J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Among these experts was public relations pioneer Edward L. Bernays, who sought to achieve public relations goals through the spread of cultural ideas about art, science, and social programs that would appeal to the mutual interests of organizations and their publics (Brummett, 2000).

Subsequently, the Information Revolution changed the way members of society interacted with each other through the Internet and global social networks. Pratkanis and
Aronson (1992) reported, “Western societies experienced a change in the nature of social relationships – from small, cohesive communities emphasizing personal relationships to a web of impersonal, secondary relationships” (pp. 23-24). Thus, the Industrial and Information Revolutions demonstrated how concepts of public relations and public diplomacy (e.g., cultural diplomacy) were becoming further intertwined.

World Wars I and II. Integration of propaganda and persuasive approaches to public relations continued to gain prominence during and after World Wars I and II. Governments organized groups of journalists and created offices like the U.S. Committee on Public Information in World War I to mobilize domestic and allied support (Cutlip et al., 2000; J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Kunczik (2003) explained how combatant nations like Germany, Britain, and the United States used publicity and propaganda to attack the credibility of enemies, cultivate international images, and validate their war respective efforts. This period also led to further integration of public relations and public diplomacy: “After World War I the character of diplomacy slowly changed. The mediation of foreign policy intensified and today nearly every act in the (open) conduct of foreign policy takes public relations (the effect on the respective image), into account” (Kunczik, p. 405).

World War II-era public relations and public diplomacy efforts were influenced by public criticism of government control and censorship of information during World War I. This criticism brought into question the integration of propaganda, public relations, and public diplomacy typified by the Creel committee. Crossen (2003) reported: “Controlling information was a touchy subject in the early 1940s. The very word censorship reeked of totalitarianism” (¶ 3). Hence, governments moved to establish offices like the U.S. War Information and the Advertising Council and encouraged journalists to follow a voluntary code of war-time reporting practices (Crossen, 2003). These types of policies represented early government efforts to pursue media diplomacy, to distinguish between propaganda and public relations, and to be seen as responding to rather than manipulating domestic public opinion (Parry-Giles, 2005).

Cold War. After World War II, the threat of nuclear war created an urgent need for careful public communication and diplomacy among nuclear-armed nations. As the Cold War intensified, government leaders increased efforts to integrate public relations and diplomacy while distancing these activities from clandestine propaganda efforts. The demand to manage such conflict encouraged leaders to create specialized information agencies and adopt strategic communication management policies that promoted dialog through coordinated communication activities like public relations, public diplomacy, negotiation, persuasion, and coercion.

Cold War-era public relations scholars and political scientists also began to study and apply communication along a continuum of conflict and cooperation – or war and peace. Communication scholars began to study public relations as a strategic management function that could be applied to conflict resolution (Ehling, 1984, 1985, 1992; Ehling & Dozier, 1992). Development of the excellence theory in public relations also explained how public relations should be kept separate from but integrated with other communication functions (Dozier, 1995; J. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig et al., 2002). Meanwhile, political scientists developed concepts like preventive and coercive diplomacy that could be used to deter nuclear war (Jentleson, 2000; de Wijk, 2003); and Nye (2002, 2003, 2004a, 2004b) introduced the concept of soft power as a cooperative rather than coercive approach to diplomacy.
Public relations and public diplomacy converged further and entered into a controversial reunion with propaganda as information became a weapon in the war against terrorism. According to a U.S. defense science board strategic communication task force report (Vitto, 2004):

The events of September 11, 2001 were a catalyst in creating a new way to think about national security. The Global War on Terrorism replaced the Cold War as a national security meta narrative. Governments, media, and publics use the terrorism frame for cognitive, evaluative, and communication purposes. (p. 17)

As the Cold War waned, bi-polar conflict between two world super powers ebbed into smaller but more numerous, multi-polar conflicts among many nations and non-state actors. Ironically, the end of the Cold War lulled many into a temporary sense of security and former Cold War adversaries began to demobilize defense and diplomatic capabilities.

The move to demobilize reduced the value of large military forces, diplomatic programs, and soft power (Blinken, 2003; Krauthammer, 2000; Nye, 2002, 2003, 2004b, 2004c). Nye (2004) argued, however, that “soft power was becoming more important, not less” (Nye, 2004, p. 8) as new communication technologies like the Internet enabled activist groups and individuals to convert information into power and challenge much larger organizations and states (Armistead, 2004; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1997; van Dyke, 2005). Peterson (2002) indicated that individuals now possess “more soft power to influence global affairs directly, indirectly, and through their governments” (p. 15).

Strategies of conflict also became more asymmetrical as non-state actors, radical groups, and terrorist networks began to challenge nations with great military and economic might. As Nemeth (2000) explained: “Without a tactical or strategic edge, adversaries [since Vietnam] have sought means other than equal military strength in order to deny an opponent strength or support” (p. 14). Terrorist groups began to perfect the use of information power to spread fear and intimidation among large populations of people while nations and alliances used the same power to counteract and even pre-empt terrorist tactics.

The information revolution and war on terror moved public relations practitioners and diplomats to the front lines of conflict. The nature of the post-Cold War era’s limited political-military engagements and operations other than war (OOTW) – including peace operations – increased the value of public relations, public diplomacy, and other non-lethal soft power elements (Clark, 2000). For example, Phillpot (1996) described a typical NATO military staff meeting that he witnessed in Bosnia-Herzegovina during NATO’s first full year of peace implementation operations there:

Immediately behind [the military commander] Nash, are two rows of staff officers. In wartime, the first row would be operational staff providing instant updates on fire support, air support, armor movements, intelligence, and logistics…. Sitting behind Nash instead is a staff more familiar to a big-city mayor: a political advisor, an expert on civilian relations, representatives of two joint commissions, a public affairs specialist, and a staff lawyer. (p. 60)

As planning for the war against terrorism matured, government public affairs specialists and diplomats began working closely with military psychological operations (PsyOps) specialists – sometimes perceived as the contemporary equivalent of World War I and World War II era...
propagandists. Reversing 20th century efforts to separate propaganda from public relations and diplomacy, Western nations and alliances began to integrate these and other communication functions within programs like information operations, perception management, and strategic communication. Some attributed this trend to efforts by nations to control information (Sharkey, 1991); others as a necessary means to consolidate information efforts and coordinate messages (Vitto, 2004).

Integrated Information Activities and Strategic Communication

As in the wake of World War I, government attempts to control messages and media channels in late-Cold War and post-Cold War conflicts resulted in public backlash. Adopting the British model of battlefield information control in the Falklands conflict in 1982, the United States attempted to control media access to combat operations in Grenada in 1983, in Panama in 1989, and in the Persian Gulf from 1990 to 1991. The United Nations also adopted the British approach to managing news media during its operations in the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1995, which drew accusations that military spokespersons “routinely lied to reporters and did so with vigor and the conviction that the importance of an accurate and independent press was subordinate to military strategy and success” (Beelman, 2001, p. 17). News media organizations, frustrated with restrictions imposed by political and military authorities, mounted increasingly stiff opposition to information control.

Mindful of strained relations with news media, the NATO alliance revised its approach to public information, psychological operations, and diplomacy in military operations. These plans were still under revision in late 1995 when NATO launched its peace operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. NATO quickly approved an integrated information campaign designed to impart timely and accurate information to strategic audiences based on free and open reporting of its operations in the former Yugoslavia.

The NATO model became a predecessor to contemporary information operations and strategic communication programs that integrate and coordinate information activities. The United States published one of the world’s first information operations manuals in 1996 (see Beelman, 2001). In 1999, the concept of information operations began to encompass non-military government agencies when U.S. President Bill Clinton established an international public information (IPI) program to manage and synchronize messages originating from all U.S. government agencies (Adair & Blanton, 2006). Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States began development of a broader communication strategy that would evolve into strategic communication (e.g., U.S. Department of State, 2007) and provide a “different and more comprehensive approach to public information efforts” (Bush, 2002, p. 31).

Beyond U.S. borders, other national governments and multinational alliances developed and applied integrated information programs as a primary source of national power. These programs were often perceived as types of soft power, since, as illustrated in Figure 5 (below), public communication activities could substitute for harder forms of economic or military power in early stages of conflict and in post-conflict assistance efforts (U.S. Institute of Peace, 1999).
Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: A New Convergence Model

Integrated communication programs like the political-military approach to strategic communication described in this paper have created a new model of convergence in international relations and organizational behavior. This model explains how public relations and public diplomacy, once considered separate concepts, are now converging within areas described by strategic communication.

First, globalization and new media channels have enabled many large organizations to wield types of economic and political influence once reserved for individual nations (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006). Therefore, international relations and organizational activities on a global scale often overlap. Second, scholars and practitioners have demonstrated similarities between public relations and public diplomacy that suggest convergence in practice and in theory. Third, strategic communication’s coordinated approach to communication management synchronizes various forms of international and domestic information activities with other elements of national power.

Hence, strategic communication has become the point of convergence for organizational behavior and international relations – and their subordinate functions of public relations and public diplomacy, respectively. Figure 6a (below) depicts the general area of convergence among international relations, organizational behavior, public diplomacy, and public relations. Figure 5b (below) depicts the specific point within this area where public diplomacy and public
relations converge during the coordination of communication plans, processes, themes, messages, and other elements of communication behavior.

Figure 6a. Van Dyke & Verčič’s model of public relations-public diplomacy convergence (area of conceptual convergence).
Figure 6b. Van Dyke & Verčič’s model of public relations-public diplomacy convergence (point of convergence).

Conclusion

The development of information operations and strategic communication programs as soft and hard power applications over the last two decades has progressed more rapidly in practice than in theory. Public relations and public diplomacy have a long history of academic study, even though each concept has evolved along different disciplinary tracks. Furthermore, convergence of public relations and public diplomacy has been relegated to limited academic study as a normative concept. Thus, the positive concept of this convergence in integrated, strategic communication programs is being constructed on a shaky theoretical foundation, far from the attention of most public relations scholars. The paucity of public relations research in this area needs to addressed, before errors in practical application become a credibility crisis for public relations and public diplomacy. Future research efforts need to take into account the opportunities and risks associated with convergence and integration.

Historical trends provide ample evidence of convergence, at least in practice, between public relations and public diplomacy. According to Vitto (2004):

- Distinctions between public affairs and public diplomacy continue to shape doctrine, resource allocations, and organization charts. But public diplomacy and public affairs practitioners employ similar tools and methods; their audiences are global and local. This conceptual distinction is losing validity in the world of global media, global audiences, and porous borders. (p. 12).

Less clear, however, are the implications of this convergence – and the influence of integrated communication programs on the credibility of public relations and public diplomacy. The following sections describe the implications of convergence between public relations and public diplomacy and propose a program of research to examine these implications.

Opportunities

Conceptual convergence between public relations and public diplomacy and the role of these functions in integrated information activities presents distinct opportunities for the field of public relations.

- Places value on public relations. Military public affairs practitioners and scholars have observed that integrated information activities promote recognition of public relations’ value as a strategic communication management function in organizations (Jurkowsky & van Dyke, 2000; Kirby, 2000; van Dyke, 1997, 2005). For instance, as Philpott (1996) observed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, information operations provide public relations managers with a seat at the decision-making table. Kirby (2000) also acknowledged, “Though controversial, this integration will continue, making PA [public affairs] more than just a bit player in information management campaigns” (pp. 3-4).

- Facilitates strategic message coordination. Assigning public relations a key role in coordinating messages reinforces its role as a strategic management function. L. Grunig et al. (2002) described a message-only approach that limits public relations to a role of developing and disseminating messages only after leadership makes a decision. An information operations
approach elevates the public relations managers to a “full-participation approach” (p. 383), which includes public relations in the coordination of messages as part of a strategic decision-making process. Kirby (2000), in a Naval War College study, concluded that public relations “has become an added capability to IO efforts, aiding in the coordination of themes and messages” (p. 3).

**Provides opportunity for ethical communication management responsible for legitimacy of action(s).** L. Grunig et al. (2002) compared public relations with the conscience of an organization, since it serves as “the management function primarily responsible for introducing moral values and social responsibility into organizational decisions” (p. 554). Involvement in integrated communication programs provides public relations managers with opportunities to introduce a reflexive framework in decisions about applying activities like psychological and deception operations (van Ruler & Verčič, 2005). Van Dyke (2005), in a study of NATO’s integrated information campaign in Bosnia-Herzegovina, reported that the involvement of public relations managers helped senior military commanders weigh “the ethical nature of [military] actions and how the outcomes of those actions could be perceived by strategic publics” (p. 306). Van Dyke’s study also led to creation of an ethical framework for integrating a range of communication approaches, from dialog to coercion that could apply to strategic communication.

**Promotes public relations as an integrated but separate function.** Studies in the excellence theory in public relations support the need to integrate communication functions. The excellence theory, however, calls for separation among public relations and other functions and “some form of structure for integrating communication activities” (L. Grunig et al., 2002, p. 277). Programs like information operations and strategic communication are refining just such structures. Figure 4 illustrates how communication functions are integrated in a notional information operation cell, while Figure 1 depicts how public relations and information operations functions are kept separate and coordinated. NATO has applied similar structure to the relationship between its public relations and information operations efforts. According to F. Veltri (personal communication, January 2, 2008):

> PA and Info Ops are separate, but related functions … both require planning, message development and media analysis, though the efforts differ with respect to audience, scope and intent…. While coordination is essential, the lines of authority will remain separate, the PA reporting relationship being direct to the commander. This is to maintain credibility of PA and to avoid creating a media or public perception that PA activities are coordinated by, or are directed by Info Ops. (p. 7)

Such structures permit public relations and information operations to “remain aware of each other’s activities for maximum effect and to achieve success in both operational areas” (Myers, 2004, p. 3).

**Risks**

**Loss of credibility and public trust.** Post-Cold War employment of public relations and public diplomacy alongside psychological operations to deliver attractive and deceptive messages has created a controversy reminiscent of the backlash over World War I and World War II propaganda efforts:
Much the same thing occurred in World War II, when [U.S.] congressional leaders scorned the ‘unwholesome’ domestic propaganda operations of the Office of War Information (OWI).… Legislators in 1943 … were unwilling to permit OWI domestic operations to continue to the war's end. Taking quick and direct action, they fiscally clamped down on the agency, literally starving it for funds. (Cone, 2007, p. 15)

Rothrock (1997) also advised against information programs that “conflict with or exceed the imperatives of the national will and the crucial bond of trust between people and their government” (p. 223). Loss of such trust, he wrote, would “be the greatest [information] disaster that can be imagined” (p. 223).

Thus, history is repeating itself, as government offices and programs designed to coordinate public information, diplomacy, and propaganda activities begin to draw hostile fire from legislators, journalists, and public watchdog organizations. In 2002, the United States government closed its new Office of Strategic Influence, which some alleged was providing “news items, possibly even false ones, to foreign media organizations as part of a new effort to influence public sentiment and policy makers in both friendly and unfriendly countries” (Schmitt, 2002, p. 1). Despite the office’s closing, journalists continued to allege U.S. government efforts to withhold or manipulate information, manage perceptions, and even influence foreign news media (Borger, 2002; Gerth, 2005; Schmitt, 2003; Shanker & Schmitt, 2002, 2004). Left unchecked, this trend could erode support for public relations programs.

Blurring of conceptual and disciplinary boundaries. L’Etang (2004) warned that integration of public relations and diplomacy can obfuscate the relationship between the two concepts. This, in turn, can create confusion and controversy that is not necessarily in the best interests of a nation or the public relations profession. Documenting the convergence of public relations and diplomacy British history, L’Etang wrote:

As public relations developed as a discrete occupation, so did its role in national policies. This attracted attention from the media, which became aware that increasing unseen, paid-for interventions by public relations practitioners were taking place within the political process. It also became apparent that some public relations practitioners were becoming involved more directly in international diplomacy, and not always in the British interest. These developments were seen as controversial by the media and, to some extent, within the public relations field itself. (p. 146)

Mistakes in communication can lead to escalation of conflict. Practical applications of communication activities that are not guided by theory and ethics (e.g., Bowen, 2000, 2004; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995) can be uninformed or, worse yet, catastrophic in terms of escalating conflict and associated costs. Misuse of information power could prolong or amplify the adverse consequences of conflict (Luttwak, 1999). According to Deutsch (2007), “Our current [U.S.] government’s style of strategic communication and public diplomacy … demonstrates little insight into human behavior” (p. 125). He added, “We must get this right now, not later, or … terror in the Middle East – or in our own heartland – will go on and on” (p. 125).

The above risks and opportunities witness the progress of communication management in international relations, on both sides of public relations and public diplomacy. In many ways, the centrality of this communication process in contemporary military and political operations parallels the similar entry of communication into the center of many business activities.
Practitioners and students of public relations must observe, study, and exploit opportunities offered by these developments through research and case studies. Hence, we propose to overcome the fear of getting hands dirty with reality and start digging.

Reference List


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CAN PUBLIC RELATIONS PUT THE TRUST BACK IN ORGANISATIONS?
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Abstract
The last two years have seen top South African and international companies being accused or criticised for activities that do not serve the interests of their stakeholders. A sad result of this and other organisational philanderings is that the name of public relations – already tainted – is sullied even more. The ethics of organisational management, the ethical impacts of public relations, and the ethics of public relations practitioners are addressed in this paper. In deliberating the sticky ethics issue, the current role of public relations in the organisation as well as public relations education in South Africa are also discussed. It is suggested that the value chain can be used to assist public relations in overcoming its uncertain position in the ethics debacle by firstly placing it firmly in the organisation’s value chain as a support activity alongside those of human resources, firm infrastructure, and technology development; secondly that the placement of public relations as support function in the value chain is a good argument for the allocation to public relations of its rightful place in the organisation’s formal chain of command; and thirdly, given the acceptance that public relations is a support function not only to marketing and sales, but also to inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, and service, it becomes necessary to revise the educational curriculum of public relations students.

Introduction
The product recalls on a massive scale during the first months of 2007, followed by an apology to the Chinese government by toy manufacturer Mattel has, more than any other single event, brought the issue of ethics in business into sharp focus. Following in the wake of a number of preceding “misdemeanors” by organizations such as Enron, Worldcom, and others, this event has one unique consequence – Mattel was sued by its shareholders for its sloppy handling of the matter. In all other respects, the toy recall echoes to a greater or lesser extent the “typical” behaviour of an organisation when caught, as it were, with its pants down. The following sequence of events seems to unfold with monotonous regularity:

- Accusation.
- Denial.
- Guilty verdict.
- Rationalization.
- Assurances of future holiness.
Of course, the real “golden thread” running through all of this is the invisible hand of the “spin doctor” manipulating opinion, ensuring everyone stays on message, selecting the right media moments, writing and re-writing media releases for best persuasive effect, and all of the other little tricks up the sleeve of the “engineer of consent” a phrase that Bernays coined.

Do organisations like these stop for a minute to ponder the hypocrisy of what they are doing? one will be forgiven for asking – surely an organisation cannot be innocent one day, and guilty the next, and free of blame the day after? If it were true, in the reported words of PT Barnum, that a fool is born every minute, even the most obtuse business manager will realize that – in the words this time of the great Abraham Lincoln – you cannot fool all of the people all of the time. This is becoming apparent in a time when both media and consumers – not to mention governments and regulators – are looking at ways in which to hamstring organisations trying to ensure “proper” conduct in future. Business managers will be quick to point out that legislation and regulation are burdensome and costly, harming the consumers’ pockets in the long run. This may be true, but using this form of rationalization does not absolve the errant company.

A sad result of this organisational philandering is that the name of public relations – already tainted – is sullied even more. Another result of course is that consumers are becoming ever more wary of promises of good service and superior product performance, and thus more reluctant to part with their hard-earned money. Against a background such as this, public relations itself is questioning whether – and how – to go forward. Ranging from bestsellers such as The fall of advertising and the rise of PR by Al and Laura Ries to the publication of serious reports like The professional bond – public relations and the practice by Judy VanSlyke Turk, publications querying the future of the profession abound. What lies ahead for public relations? Answering this question requires firstly that the current landscape be surveyed.

Current situation in public relations

That public relations is unsure of its own role in the organisation is apparent from a number of books and journals consulted. In South Africa, much debate centres around the position that public relations should occupy in organisational management. In this case, it seems as if some new theoretical guidance should be developed to help position public relations not only in the organisation, but also in relation to other management functions.

There are challenges in public relations education that need to be met. Most authors on the subject of public relations education provide some guidance to the content of the curricula, as well as what should and should not be included in public relations education. The implication of a re-alignment of the role of public relations is that curricula need to be revised.

The ethics of organisational management, the ethical impacts of public relations, and the ethics of public relations practitioners themselves need attention, since our discipline is coming under increasing fire for being perceived as unethical.

These three themes, briefly introduced above, guide the literature review discussed below.

Role of public relations in the organisation

One of the major causes of concern for public relations practitioners is the fact that public relations in the organisation is seemingly not taken seriously, and that public relations is not used to its full strategic potential, but merely as a tool to be used to “save” the organisation from
unsavoury public comment. Furthermore, public relations practitioners are unsure about their role in the organisation – as are other departments. In the words of Rensburg & Cant (2003: 46): “[T]he role of public relations should be clarified in the organisational dynamics to prevent it from overlapping with other functions, causing confusion and ineffectiveness.” This confusion manifests itself in a number of ways, one of which is the two-fold role of technician and strategist.

Current literature distinguishes between the technician and strategist roles of public relations practitioners (Steyn & Puth, Skinner et al. 2004: 6, Cutlip et al., 2000: 8). As **technicians**, public relations practitioners are used as communication specialists who use techniques such as publicity, seminars, open days, and product launches – to name a few - in order to obtain a favourable impression of the brand or product.

As **strategists**, public relations practitioners will strive to obtain a favourable image for the organisation among its various stakeholder groups, thereby building the organisation’s reputation, which in turn will positively affect the performance of the marketing activities. Rensburg & Cant (2003: 53) reinforce the fact that the position of public relations in the organisation is a matter of debate, but also take care to make the point that public relations should play a more encompassing role in the organisation. They point out that it shares a characteristic with advertising in that public relations is sometimes a function that is outsourced to public relations consultancies. A question that needs to be asked – and answered – is whether it is at all advisable to outsource the public relations function.

Support for the role of public relations as strategic function is coming from a number of sources. Indeed, the notion that public relations should be seen as “more” than a “mere” technical function of the organisation is supported by a number of texts, including Skinner et al. (2004: 6) and Cutlip, Center, & Broom (2000: 76). For Heath & Coombs (2006: 27 – 30) the strategic role of public relations is clear-cut. Using public relations, the organisation will seek to build and maintain **relationships** with stakeholders that are of **strategic significance** to the organisation. Their focus, however, does not fall as much on the stakeholder (or public), as it does on the relationship. To them, this is also what distinguishes public relations from marketing – the focus on relationship-building with groups **other than customers**. Their classification uses the word “relationships”, and they identify a number of “relationship-building responsibilities”:

The focus on relationships as identified above by Heath & Coombs is reflected in the definition of public relations adopted by PRISA – Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (Skinner et al., 2004: 4):

> “Public relations is the management, through communication, of the perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders.”

Interestingly, some marketers (see, *inter alia*, Kotler & Armstrong, 2006: 447), agree that the role of public relations is to build and maintain relationships with a number of stakeholder groups. Of course, a focus on relationships does lend gravity to the excitement with which public relations practitioners in South African welcomed the focus of the King II Report
on stakeholders and relationships with stakeholders. The relationship-building role of public relations, as advocated by a number of authors, and as implied by the PRISA-definition, is used by practitioners and academics to justify the strategic nature of their role.

The reputation of the organisation, long held to be a primary responsibility of public relations, is therefore the result of what an organisation says and does. Grunig (2006: 3) also draws a link between the organisation’s relationships and its reputation. The point is that “[t]he essential objective of corporate communication should be to make the organisation more effective through mutually beneficial communication between the organisation and all its stakeholders” (Steyn & Puth, 2000: 3).

This focus on stakeholders, seen in a number of definitions of public relations, paves the way for investigating the use of Porter’s value chain analysis. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006: 42) describe the value chain as the “series of departments that carry out value-creating activities to design, produce, market, deliver, and support a firm’s products”. Significantly, public relations is not positioned in this value chain – only marketing is. However, understanding of the value chain – series of departments – implies that relationships (focus of the PRISA-definition) need to be formed, maintained, and managed. This leaves much room for public relations to come into its own.

The literature reviewed for this section in order to establish how public relations sees its role in the organisation makes for fascinating reading in the sense that there is currently no clear and unambiguous guideline for the role of this function:

- It is either in-house or outsourced.
- It either reports to marketing or it does not.
- It is either corporate affairs, or public affairs, or corporate communication, etc.
- It deals in a number of activities, but it does not know exactly which.
- It recruits from a variety of fields, such as journalism, languages, and communication.

One quaint solution to the dilemma faced by public relations (regarding its bad name, as well as confusion about its role) is proposed as a simple name change. Authors like Steyn & Puth (2000), who strongly advocate a name-change, also argue that public relations today plays a wider role than in the past, and should therefore be named differently. However, a name-change in itself will not result in a “new, improved” view of public relations (or corporate communication; reputation management and suchlike) if practitioners themselves kept on practicing “old” ways. If it remains “business as usual”, the name-change would simply result in a form of spin-control – an activity of the “spin doctoring” discipline itself.

In stark contrast to the name-change school stand the views of VanSlyke Turk (2006), who identifies challenges for public relations not as a name-change issue, but rather one of re-training, re-examining, and restructuring the practice of, and education in, public relations. Her argument is that the discipline will only benefit if it reinvents itself as a responsible academic discipline firmly rooted in the business and communication sciences.

Public relations education
A research survey conducted in 2004 in South Africa found that public relations practitioners are confused about their role in the organisation. One contributor to this confusion is the fact that public relations practitioners “have educational backgrounds that sometimes do not include formal training in public relations” (Venter, 2004: 165). The research survey did not prod respondents on their particular backgrounds, and it may provide interesting insights were these backgrounds to be discovered. Newsom et al. (2004: 13) do, however, point out that:

“Public relations functions have been delegated to people from other fields: lawyers without any background in public relations or even communications; former media personnel who have been on the receiving end of public relations material but have no theoretical background; management-trained executives whose business school education did not include any courses in public relations; or marketing experts who have no knowledge of the overall communications components.”

The educational background of current public relations practitioners may in part explain why there is indeed confusion about the role of public relations in the organisation, and this background will need to be established through further research.

However, the problem in public relations education is wider than that of practitioners studying in fields other than public relations. The content of the body of knowledge needs to be revised from time to time to keep up with the dynamic changes taking place in the world surrounding public relations. There is also a recognised need for “reflexivity in public relations theory and practice ... continuously reflecting and overturning the theories in the field”, as Holtzhausen (2002: 36) points out. Apart from the content of the subject (public relations) itself, the curriculum also will need to be revised from time to time.

A lack of sufficient education and training in areas such as marketing, business management, and strategic planning among current practitioners of public relations may partly explain why Porter & Kramer (2006: 80) say that “the prevailing approaches to CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) are so fragmented and so disconnected from business and strategy as to obscure many of the greatest opportunities from companies to benefit society”.

VanSlyke (2006: 85) reports on the state of public relations education and training by stating: “[T]he need for public relations education is escalating rapidly, surfacing new issues that must be addressed and resolved”. However, while the report focuses not only on the need for public relations training and makes suggestions for curricula, it fails to refer adequately to the broader context – strategy, management, and marketing to name but three – within which public relations operates. Currently, this is precisely where public relations training (especially in South Africa) is most at a loss.

The point is simple: in order for public relations to play a strategic role in organisations, and in order for this function to contribute its fullest potential to organisational effectiveness, a broadening of the existing body of knowledge along with an adaptation of existing public relations curricula at tertiary institutions is required. A current cited lack of theory and training among public relations practitioners contributes to the confusion identified earlier in this section.

Ethics
In spite of the best intentions of lawmakers, regulators, and – lately – boards of companies, ethics is still persistently observed more in the breach than in the observance. Simply, it is not easy to behave ethically under all circumstances. As Micklethwait & Wooldridge (1997: 201-202) put it: “There is a yawning gap between what people say and what they do”, while at the same time no single company or person is “against ethics” per se.

The problem seems compounded by the fact that the pressures of financial gain – created mainly by shareholders – lead to situations where management teams yield to the temptation of making unethical decisions. In the words of Kane (2003: 11):

“[T]he fundamental dilemma of corporate and public governance is that, at the margin and over short periods, it often pays to hide adverse information. The result is that an ethician could say that outside stakeholders deserve more complete accountability than can be fashioned from the ethical standards that insiders set and the gaps in the information flows outsiders receive”.

Hiding information, one of the most visible – though by no means only - ethical breaches, seems as rampant today as it was in the past, along with a number of other ethical transgressions. In order to understand the ethical transgressions at play in the modern world, it is necessary to understand what is meant by “unethical conduct”.

Malan & Smit (2001: 25) outline a number of behaviours that they term “general ethical transgressions”, such as high executive pay, creative accounting, built-in obsolescence and forcing customers to buy more than they need. Marketing itself does not escape the breach of ethical behaviours. Smith & Quelch (1993: 4) cite “price-fixing, bribery, deceptive advertising, unsafe products” as some examples of unethical marketing practices, while arguing that unethical marketing practices would render the organisation morally bankrupt. They describe marketing ethics as “the application of ethical considerations to marketing decision making” (Smith & Quelch, 1993: 10), and argue fairly extensively that marketing should not be seen as a business function that is value-neutral. Using the 4 Ps of marketing as a departure, they identify a number of ethical issues in marketing:

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<th><strong>Product</strong></th>
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<td>• “Me-toos”</td>
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<td>• Environmental impacts of product and packaging</td>
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<th><strong>Price</strong></th>
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<td>• Horizontal/vertical price fixing</td>
<td>• Exclusivity and other forms of discrimination in distribution (e.g. red-lining)</td>
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• Price gouging
• Misleading pricing (e.g. non-unit pricing, bait and switch, inflating prices to allow sales markdowns)
• Channel control (including franchising relationships)
• Gray marketing
• Anti-competitive trade promotions e.g. slotting allowances
• Lower standards in export markets

(Smith & Quelch, 1993: 13)

**FIGURE 1: MAJOR ETHICAL ISSUES IN MARKETING**

Evidence of these kinds of behaviours is to be found abundantly in the South African marketplace. In three different industries – motor vehicle manufacturing, banking, and food production – some of South Africa’s biggest companies have in recent years been found lacking in ethical behaviour:

- Some of South Africa’s top motor vehicle companies, including Volkswagen, General Motors, DaimlerChrysler, Subaru, Nissan, and Citroen, paid penalties to the Competition Commission ranging from R8 million to R31 million after being found guilty of “price-fixing and anti-competitive trading conditions” ([http://business.iafrika.com/news/667845.htm](http://business.iafrika.com/news/667845.htm)) [accessed on 22 January 2006]. Of course, these companies first denied charges of improper behaviour.

- South Africa’s top four banks have not escaped criticism. In the words of Whitfield (2006: 10) “If you’re a client of a South African bank looking for a better deal when it comes to bank charges, we have bad news for you. Not only does it remain practically impossible for an ordinary person to make like-for-like comparisons of the charges levied by SA’s different banking groups, but most of the big banks have also actually upped their charges over the past year”.


Of course in their promotional materials, companies like these claim that they are not transgressing ethical rules and are operating within the confines of the law. Regarding the enquiry into banking practices, Nedbank – one of South Africa’s big four banks – has used its website to proclaim its whole-hearted cooperation with an enquiry into banking practices in South Africa:

“Nedbank welcomes the Competition Commission Enquiry bringing banking issues into public debate. We are committed to understanding and meeting the banking needs and
aspirations of all South Africans. We at Nedbank have already been hard at building great products and reducing banking fees for our clients”
(http://www.nedbank.co.za/website/content/competition/index.asp) [accessed on 7 March 2007]

Absa (one of the “big four” banks in South Africa), for their part, state the following:

“Responsiveness, efficiency and quality are among the high goals that we set for ourselves, together with integrity and transparency in all our dealings. We value our people and invest in them to ensure the delivery of these goals, while constantly working to better our knowledge and service standards”
(http://www.absa.co.za/absacoza/content.jsp?VGN_C_ID=9358a0dc8f57f010VgnVCM1000003511060aRCRD&VGN_CI_ID=c2a273fc6d17f010VgnVCM1000003511060aRCRD) [accessed on 7 March 2007]

However, in spite of their protestations to ensuring that “banking needs” are met, and that “responsiveness, efficiency and quality” are primary goals, these banks (among others) have been found lacking. In a third annual review of bank charges in South Africa, Finweek (Whitfield, 2007: 12-14) found the following:

- There are “pockets of change in the structure and composition of bank charges”, but “they are few and far between”.
- A number of banks have actually increased the cost of banking.
- Not much is being done to implement “better disclosure and simpler pricing structures”.
- Branches and head offices experience a “disconnect” regarding the “understanding of bank charges”.
- South African consumers do not have a “single, reliable source of information ... should they wish to conduct a comparative study of their own into the bank charges they pay”.
- Bank staff do not focus on consumer needs, but are “trained to offer a specific package”.

On the whole, the investigation led by Finweek, and conducted by Horwath Forensics, is rather damning:

“While banks grapple with increased consumerism and the threat of State intervention, they find themselves having to balance the demands of their clients with the needs of profit-hungry shareholders. So far, the shareholders are winning” (Whitfield, 2007: 12).

After being penalised by the Competition Commission, Tiger Brands CEO Nick Dennis said that the price fixing actions “ran counter to the ethical standards for which we are known and respected” and promised to take disciplinary action. He added that “[w]e do not tolerate anti-competitive behaviour in any of our businesses. It is deeply regrettable that this has occurred”
A pattern seems to emerge:

- Companies promise their customers good service and products of high standards.
- Companies are accused of ethical contraventions.
- Companies use public relations techniques (like media releases) to deny their culpability.
- Companies are found guilty of ethical malpractice.
- Companies ask forgiveness, again using public relations techniques.

This raises the issue of who it is that tells the lie. It becomes obvious from the few examples cited above that one of two statements made via the companies’ public relations departments is patently false. They either are guilty or are not guilty. Denying wrongdoing before paying penalties and then issuing a shame-faced mea culpa smacks of downright lying. It is actions like these that breach the trust that exists between customer and company. The question that must be asked, however, is whether it is the public relations department or agency that decides to lie, or are they ordered to issue these lies by someone higher up in the organisation? This needs to be established empirically, although it may be inferred from the literature covered that public relations, when acting as a technician, may just be free of guilt in the decision to lie. It is inconceivable that the CEO of a company will allow technicians to lie when he/she wants to protect the organisation’s reputation.

It may be accepted that no organisation sets out to be unethical or consciously attempts to erode customer trust. However, the actions by these organisations – intentional or otherwise – serve to create in the customer’s mind a doubt whether they are getting their fair share of the ethical cake. South African organisations like these face a dilemma. On the one hand, the public believes that these companies behave unethically, and at the other hand these companies protest that they wish to treat their customers ethically. Legislation and regulation are used to guide organisations in the minimum ethical behaviour, which to an extent limits the organisation’s goal of maximising profit. Implementing regulations contained in legislation may be costly and cumbersome, as Harvard Business Review reported in an article dealing with the effects of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002: “Smaller companies in particular complained about the monopolization of executives’ time and costs running into the millions of dollars” (Wagner & Dittmar, 2006: 133). Costly and time-consuming activities may be seen as running contrary to the imperative of profit. The unethical organisation may try to find loopholes in the regulations to avoid paying money, or spending time, in complying with those very rules and regulations that may help the organisation behave in a more ethical manner. This kind of behaviour was evident in the reaction of some organisations to the imperatives of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act:

“Naspers said the decision to delist from Nasdaq was driven by high costs of maintaining the listing and registration in the US and complying with US obligations, especially the provisions of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002” (http://www.thetimes.co.za/article.aspx?id=465692) [accessed on 20 May 2007].
Legislation, it seems, has some effect on forcing companies to comply with consumer-protecting measures, but owing to the fact that it can be costly and time-consuming, may have the effect that companies find ways and means to completely circumvent such legislation, as is clear from the example quoted above. This action was taken by one of South Africa’s largest – and arguably highly respected – companies, one that claims to be ethical. If organisations that are serious about maintaining ethical standards are taking steps to circumvent legislation aimed at ensuring more “proper” conduct, it is an open question what less ethical organisations may do to also avoid the costs of compliance. While actions such as these are not to be condoned, they do underline the long-held belief that the law is, at best, a blunt instrument. Surely there are other ways in which organisations can – and in fact should – protect the interests of the consumer and the society in which it operates?

The tension between profit, consumer value, ethics, and the interests of the community are grouped under the so-called “societal marketing concept” coined by Kotler & Keller (2006: 22):

“The societal marketing concept holds that the organization’s task is to determine the needs, wants, and interests of target markets and to deliver the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors in a way that preserves or enhances the consumer’s and the society’s well-being”.

This concept indicates the importance of ethics in marketing in the organisation. South African companies face a specific dilemma against the background of this concept of marketing. They are increasingly perceived as being unethical, while clearly not wishing to be unethical. They are, on the one hand, guided by legislation and regulation in minimum ethical standards, while on the other hand developing and executing strategies designed to deliver profit. In doing so, they must balance the interests of all of their stakeholders – including customers – in such a way that they do not earn a bad reputation and consequently lose sales.

In order to become more ethical, organisations – at least, until recently – have relied on legislation and regulation to guide them in decision-making, hoping that such legally sound and regulatory compliant decisions will be enough to guarantee safe conduct in and uncertain world. However, as the examples cited so far indicate, companies have not always been successful in doing this. Briefly put, in the words of Porter & Kramer (2007: 91): “The focus must move away from an emphasis on image to an emphasis on substance”. Ethics and ethical conduct cannot be guaranteed solely by legislation or regulation, nor can it rely on codes of conduct, as the examples given earlier indicate. A number of companies found in breach of ethical conduct claim to have codes of conduct governing their decisions. Ethics therefore should be more than compliance with minimum requirements of laws and regulations - it should be the result of a concerted effort by the organisation as a whole. Hill & Jones (2004: 396) emphasise that:

“To foster awareness that strategic decisions have an ethical dimension, a company must establish an organizational climate that emphasizes the importance of ethics.”
The creation of a climate conducive to ethics seems to be of primary importance in an ethical company. However, fostering such a climate is difficult when it is not even clear what “ethics” means. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2006: 644-645), for example, it is not easy for organisations to discover what ethics is: “The best thing to do is often unclear”.

Marketing may have failed in its application of the societal marketing concept by assisting the organisation in cutting corners through questionable marketing practices, or by hiding the truth from shareholders. In most cases, marketing communication tools – including public relations – have been used in cynical attempts to manipulate public opinion to drum up support for the morally questionable actions of organisations pandering solely to the financial bottom line. This has led to the perception that organisations are unethical, thereby eroding brand trust. Building trust, being seen to be ethical, therefore starts with the organisation’s reputation among all stakeholders who deal with it. And reputation, as was already seen, is the domain of the public relations practitioner.

“Corporate image is the net result of the interaction of all experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings, and knowledge people have about a company” is how Skinner et al. (2004: 8) describe the image or reputation of an organisation. If an organisation has a positive corporate image, it will become a competitive advantage for that organisation. Pirsch, Gupta, & Grau (2007: 125) identify the corporate social responsibility programme as one of the organisation’s sources of competitive advantage.

Sagar, Singh, and Agrawal (2006: 72) argue that consumers today expect marketing managers to make ethically acceptable decisions. They further argue that trust, an essential element of the exchange of value, is embodied in a brand, which in turn is seen as a valuable asset. They make the distinction between ethically correct products and brands, stating that the product may be ethically correct, while a brand may not. They further state that “[a] brand position is ethical if it is sensitive to various concerns, such as consumer satisfaction, environment protection or even … price sensitivity” (Sagar et al., 2006: 73). Davies et al. (2003: 79) are of the view that “[i]ndeed a brand is often preferred to an unbranded item due to its implied warranty of consistent quality” (italics in original text). This assertion on the value of branding – consumer preference – to the organisation contains two key elements. The first element is that of the warranty (implied or directly stated). This implied warranty is communicated to customers by using the promotion element of the marketing mix. In the words of Klopper, Berndt, Chipp, Ismail, Roberts-Lombard, Subramani, Wakeham, Petzer, Hern, Saunders & Myers-Smith (2006: 288) marketing communication “is the voice of the brand”.

That public relations can indeed play a role in helping to forge and communicate brand identity is not under dispute. In fact, it is one of the areas in which marketers and public relations practitioners seem to be in agreement. While Skinner et al. (2004: 50) endeavour to explain the role of public relations vis-à-vis that of marketing by pointing to the role public relations can play in “positioning” the product in the minds of consumers, they are actually talking about branding.

More direct reference to the branding role of public relations is found in Heath & Coombs (2006: 370 – 374), who describe the contribution public relations can make to forging
brand equity for the organisation and brand loyalty to the product/service. Rensburg & Cant (2003: 173 – 203) discuss in detail the role of internal branding and public relations. Balgin & Fulgitini (2005: 156) agree with Ries and Ries that branding should increasingly be the responsibility of public relations. The major findings of the literature review may be summarised in table format as follows:

**TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS**

| Re-alignment of public relations | Role of public relations in the organisation. | Public relations is unsure of its role in the organisation, and there is no clear guidance on where to position this function. This is compounded by the fact that public relations practitioners are acting either as technicians or strategists. |
| Relationship to marketing. | The relationship to marketing is tenuous, and needs to be clarified. While there is a link between the two functions, no clear guideline exists to separate/connect the two. |
| Renaming public relations. | While a strong movement is afoot to rename public relations to something such as corporate communication, the renaming itself is only treating the symptoms of the bad name public relations has developed. |

| Public relations education | Body of knowledge. | The body of knowledge is itself confused about what should be taught to public relations practitioners. Very little attention is given to the role of public relations as a strategic partner in the business. |
| Structure of curriculum | The curriculum is itself, in a number of institutions, focused on communication and “technician” skills. |

| Ethics | Organisational ethics in the 21st Century | Organisations in South Africa are guilty on a number of ethical transgressions. This behaviour is found worldwide. |
| Marketing and ethics | Marketing, as well as public relations, can and should make a contribution to the organisation’s ethics. While ethics is left largely to self-regulation, organisations are still grappling with ways in which to improve their ethics. |
| Benefits of ethical behaviour | It pays to be ethical, and one of the benefits of ethical behaviour is a good reputation for the organisation. Good organisational reputation is a core function of public relations. |

Porter (2004: 33) explains that the organisation’s competitive advantage “stems from the many discrete activities a firm performs in designing, producing, marketing, delivering, and supporting its product.” He advocates that the organisation examines all of its activities by looking at their contribution to customer value (profit), and distinguishes between what he calls primary and secondary activities. Tellingly, marketing and sales are seen as primary activities, while public relations receives no mention. While Porter’s value chain has been embraced by many as a planning tool, public relations practitioners may be forgiven for being less than
enthusiastic about it, for being left “in the cold” by a concept that so fully excludes a function that sees itself as strategically significant.

It may, however, be possible that the role of public relations be investigated using the value chain as a point of departure, and to add to the work already done by Porter and others to understand how to “work closely with managers of other functions to develop a system of functional plans under which the different departments can work together to accomplish the company’s overall strategic objectives” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006: 43).

It is hypothesised that, with a re-investigation into the role of public relations in the organisation, and with training (or at least re-training) of public relations practitioners, this function can fulfil a more useful role in contributing to marketing – and therefore organisational – ethics.

The problem statement that serves as the basis for the research question addressed in this paper is:

Public relations needs to realign its role in the organisation and address its educational curriculum in order to enable it to fully contribute to more ethical marketing and management of organisations.

In what ways can the value chain be used to assist public relations in overcoming its current crisis?

Firstly, it is suggested that public relations be firmly placed in the organisation’s value chain as a support activity alongside those of human resources, firm infrastructure, and technology development. The reason for this is simple: in every facet of the value chain (and even the extended supply chain), relationships are of importance to the organisation. A number of authors indicate that the competitive advantage of the organisation is at least in part built on the quality of relationships in its chain of activities designed to deliver value to the customer. Given the importance attached to the ability of public relations to build relationships, it seems natural for a function such as this to act as a support activity to the primary activities identified by Porter.

However, the willingness of public relations practitioners to accept such a situation needs to be tested empirically.

Secondly, it is suggested that the placement of public relations as a support function in the value chain is a good argument for the allocation to public relations of its rightful place in the organisation’s formal chain of command. To this end, public relations should re-examine its tendency to operate outside the organisation as an outsourced function. This might draw ire and resistance from public relations consultancies, but it will certainly benefit the way public relations is seen and practiced in the organisation.

Again, the willingness of public relations practitioners to consider “in-sourcing” rather than outsourcing public relations needs to be tested empirically.

Thirdly, given acceptance that public relations is a support function not only to marketing and sales, but also to inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, and service, it becomes necessary to revise the educational curriculum of public relations students. Fundamentally, this implies that the public relations curriculum be structured in such a way that
students are given at least a basic introduction to these functions and are provided with a good understanding of their contribution to the organisation’s operation.

Naturally, the likelihood of this happening also has to be tested empirically, an empirical study that forms the backbone of a work in progress, of which this paper provides some evidence. This empirical study is conducted in the spirit of post-modern critique as espoused by Holtzhausen (2002: 36):

“A postmodern perspective would argue for bringing as many different perspectives to the field as possible. It should also not only be to the benefit of the practitioner. Public relations is much more than [sic] the technical role of an organisational player. It is a major societal force and should be studied as such.”

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Local Leaders: Without Legitimacy, Power or Urgency
To measure the effectiveness of a citizen-participation program brought forth by a local government based on the Stakeholder theory
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Jennie Peña

Organizations, similar to the public sphere, represent a space that contain different perspectives, viewpoints and feelings that are much based on social differences as they are on culture. For this reason, organizations must take into consideration the input of various interest-groups (stakeholders) such as unions, citizens' groups and social organizations, amongst others. (Lucas & García, 2002).

Today, more than ever, the relationship and interaction between these groups and organizations cannot be limited simply to the access and generation of information. The interaction also implies communication processes owing to the diversification within the public sphere by the inclusion and involvement of new social players and differing world cultures.

The mechanisms of social participation in Colombia have not achieved sufficient maturity to allow for the alleviation and synchronized administration of regional issues. All of this in spite of advances achieved in cities like Medellín, with its mayor Sergio Fajardo, who [retook the constant evaluation] of the administration of Enrique Peñalosa, of Bogotá, in synch with the scheme “Cómo Vamos” which channeled part of its efforts in the strengthening of community networks which were charged with the generation of employment programs, income and sustainable employee productivity. These networks also encouraged citizen participation in processes, provide support to the – Local Administrative Councils [Juntas Administradoras Locales], planning and budgeting, land utilization, education, social networks, and citizen-meetings amongst others.

The case of Medellín is a clear example of how important it is for organizations to design plans of social projection and face the true needs and interests of local communities. The challenge that faces governmental organizations or institutions interested in creating processes for social intervention through programs designed to improve living conditions and democratic, and social, participation such as the Colombia constitution of 1991, is the important justification for the demand of new methodologies for reestablishing the role of local leaders, whether members of the public or intermediary stakeholders between these governmental institutions and local communities.

To measure the effectiveness of the processes of citizenship participation based on stakeholder-theory, we've taken the case study of – Local Administrative Councils [los Consejos Administrativos Barriales] brought forth by the mayor's office of Barranquilla during Guillermo Hoenigsberg's administration between 2004 – 2007.

The Local Administrative Councils – Consejos Administrativos Barriales (CABS) – were a citizen-participation strategy created by Barranquilla's city hall. Amongst its main objectives was deciding which projects would be instituted within the community and facilitate direct communication between local communities and the administrative district. Furthermore they
were forums of citizen participation, corporate and rotatory in nature, created to build a culture of respect for civic rights and the mitigation of conflicts. The intention was to decentralize the responsibility of the mayoral district and provide incentive for participation amongst the citizens and the different areas of the city, without exclusion, in the political and socio-economical reality of the district of Barranquilla.

Our first approach to this study allows us to present the hypothesis, which to now has not been done, and that is the possibility to characterize the leaders of processes of community participation within the stakeholder-theory, particularly within the public sector. To realize this characterization will allow the verification of the importance of segmenting, or dissecting, public audiences and to design messages in an effect manner in accordance with the knowledge and information an organization has about its stakeholders (for example: special-interest groups which affect, and are affected by, decisions made by an organization).

It is necessary for public institutions to facilitate agreements with citizens however it is more important that these spaces are generated by previous planning by individuals involved and the type of communication the organizations establish with their citizens. To keep in mind these two elements is the responsibility of the area of organizational communications or public relations which indicates the effectiveness of institutional communication framed around focal point or strategic direction.

The characterization of the stakeholders in the mechanisms of community participation permits governmental institutions to design communication strategies based on the realities or perceptions of its citizens of its local leaders, aspects that contribute to the construction of communication programs that reflect social problems. This implies knowledge of the public sphere and knowledge of ones place within it. To resolve the restlessness that is generated by different members of society that involve one another, this affects the conglomerate of socialized groups.

From this problem comes the question, how does the characterization of the community leaders within the context of stakeholder theory contribute to the improvement of the mechanisms of community participation impelled by an organization?

**Stakeholders as a mechanism for a strategic relationship**

Before we can begin to develop the different conceptual views of stakeholders, it is important to first determine the significance of the public, referring to the different audiences that an institution or private or governmental organization.

Capriotti (1999: 36) indicates that one of the fundamental stages in the study of organizational audiences, was the conceptual change from ‘the public’ to the ‘[the publics]’. To be clear, this modification, although small, was not simply a change from the singular to the plural form of the word, but rather a complete conceptual shift of the subject of ‘the receiver’. With this change, gone was the idea of receptors (those who were capable of receiving information) to the idea of destinations (those to whom a message is directed and possess specific characteristics). Now the focus is on some rather than all.

The author recognizes that individuals within different publics have different characteristics and diverse interests and, therefore are able to interpret the same information in different manners.
Certain authors (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Capriotti, 1992, 1994; Moffitt, 1992; Grunig and Repper, 1992) have shown that the study of ‘the publics’ should focus on a different perspective: analyzing the organization-individual relationships, in order to better understand the fundamental bond that exists between both and to understand that each public has its own interests in its relationship with the organization.

Capriotti (1999: 37) indicates that the publics are established are a result of the consequences of the actions of an organization toward individuals, within, and outside of the organization. He suggests, therefore, a linkage (or bond) which is a relationship between individuals and the organization based on said consequences.

Nevertheless, this author, before utilizing the term ‘stakeholder’, pinpointed the concept of ‘the public’ by referring to a group of individuals which can have a relationship with an organization, not restricted purely and exclusively to the consumer, but rather to all individuals who have any type of relationship with the corporation or its image.

The concept of the stakeholder arose in 1960 amongst academics at the [Institute of Investigation] at Stanford University, who proposed that instead of exclusively focusing on shareholders, a business should also be responsible to a variety of stakeholders without whom the organization would collapse. The term, put forth by Freeman (1984), expanded on the concept and included in the definition of stakeholder “any group or individual that may affect, or is affected by, the goals and objectives of an organization”.

In the same order, Bryson and Alston (1996: 48) define a stakeholder as an organization or individual, in compliance with its objectives, can be seen to be affected by the actions of a business.

Arellano Gault (2004: 83) signaled the importance of the study of stakeholders as players charged with making the reality that organizations face more dynamic, building systems and rules of order. The strategist incorporates the “other” as a living and vital part of this reality: he/she should understand their way of thinking, their rationalization, their mission and their values. He/she shows the importance of analyzing how they condition organizational management: their perspective, their position within the organization, their forms of pressure and their attitude.

Additionally, Van Riel (2005: 198) affirmed that Edgard Freeman is part of “the necessity to replace the business Management Model with another that places the focus on employees, shareholders and consumers. According to this proposal, the changes within the environment in which companies operate have experiences turbulent and relevant changes in order to achieve its objectives. And that entrepreneurs need to develop ways to understand the dynamic of different groups so that they may first understand their equally changing necessities and expectations.

By the same order, the manual for the practice of Relationships with Interest-Groups, prepared by Naciones Unidas y Telefonica, cited by Alfred Chadler (1962), indicates that the evolution of the concept of stakeholder runs parallel to the evolution of the concept of business strategy. Citing Jonson & Acholes (2001) the manual defines the strategy as “the direction and long-term goal of an organization, at the same times, allows certain advantages for an organization through the utilization of resources in a changing environment, in order to face the necessities of the market and satisfy stakeholders’ expectations.
It is pertinent at this point to express the following uncertainties about stakeholders and their relationships with organizations:

- Who are the key stakeholders for an organization?
- What effects may stakeholders’ actions have over an organization?
- What actions should an organization undertake to establish bonds with stakeholders?
- With whom should an organization establish relationships?
- How far should commitments go with stakeholders?

Falcao and Rubens (1999: 10), citing Michell, Agle and Wood, indicate three basic attributes that stakeholders should possess: **Power, Legitimacy and Urgency**. Participants who do not display these three attributes (do not affect and/or are not affected by the results), are not stakeholders.

For the purposes of this investigation we will measure the legitimacy, power and urgency of the members of local councils, as players that affect the results of local development processes and community participation designed by local governments.

**Power:** It deals with the existence or possibility of obtaining, by a social actor – or any other parts of the social game, by the use of coercive nomenclature (physical force, weapons), utilitarian resources (technology, money, knowledge, logistics, raw materials) and symbolic resources (prestige, esteem, charisma) to impose their will upon others in a relationship (social game). This definition was adapted by Mitchell, who based it on Etzioni's (1964) concept.

The level of power actors possess can be classified according to a scale of availability of the resource, which evaluates the power resources held by the actors. This scale is an indicator: the sensitivity multiplied by the availability.

**Legitimacy:** It is the presumption or generalized perception that the actions of a social participant (individual, organization, brand, symbol, etc.) are desirable or appropriate within certain social systems based on norms, values, beliefs and definitions. It is evident that this concept of legitimacy, like social desirability, originated with Suchman (1995), who recognized that social players do not always clearly possess what may be considered desirable in certain circumstances.

Legitimacy can be measured according to the desirability of the actions of those involved, as much for the organization (microsocial level of legitimacy) as well as for the society as a whole (macrosocial level of legitimacy).

**Urgency:** Consists of the immediate outcry clamor for attention based on different degrees: a) temporary sensitivity of non-acceptance of a delay, b) criticism, equal in importance to outcry, from the perspective of possible damage to property, feelings, expectations and [exhibition].

Urgency is certainly a factor that [confers major dynamic] to this methodology. All of the analysis here will occur within a specific timeframe. Eventual changes in context over time will probably require a reconfiguration of these analyses.

The evaluation scale for urgency considers temporary sensitivity, defined by the acceptance, or not, of a delay, of criticism, referring to possible damage to property, sentiments, expectations and [exhibition]. Urgency is manifested, for example, in the interests of citizens, in fact the clients of a governmental organization, who produce the greatest possible quantity of [collection]. Additionally, urgencies can represent any major social deficiencies that require immediate
attention without which may damage overall well-being of citizens (mortality, illiteracy or unemployment, etc.).

**Stakeholders within government institutions**

In this research case study, we will clarify primary stakeholders as City Hall and the participants within the Local Councils, as social participants responsible for collectively identifying, along with members of the community, the most important needs and issues currently facing City Hall.

The role of public administration requires extreme attention paid to the narrowing vision referred to by Selznick. In the first place, because management and public organizations based their theories on orthodox views, which are based on the dominant perspective of stakeholders defined as those relating to the State (principally politicians and bureaucrats). Secondly, because numerous alternatives of orthodox visions are converted into dangerous antitheses in the measurement in which they prescribe the adoption of the orthodox business management models (focused on the client or the public agent, for example, entrepreneur).

This vision inspired the beginning of what is often called the “management revolution” in public administration, and despite having evolved in different directions (in the sense of visualizing greater rational fields in public management), these orthodox approaches still hold great attraction.

Arellano Gault (2004:84), referring to government's external stakeholders, indicates how fundamental actors may be found bound to the organizational effects or affect the institution. These actors “bet” part of their values and performance objectives (or sometimes the destruction) of the organization.

The author, citing Byron & Alson (1996), also proposes the [figure] that may help to identify key external stakeholders of a business.

---

**Figure:**

- Citizens
- Federal, State and Local Government
- Competitors
- Unions
- International Organizations
- Public-Sector Organization
- Suppliers
- Employees
- Political Parties
- Interest Groups
- Foreign Governments
Arellano Gault formulated an example that serves to help in illustrating the relationship and the interests that are present between a governmental institution and citizens.

**Stakeholders:** Citizens.

**Mission and General Strategy:** Demand better services.

**Organization service that may affect each stakeholder:** poor quality in the services the organization offers, which are related to insecurity, tardiness, corruption, etc.

**Reaction of stakeholders to the services:** skepticism in governmental actions, greater demand of private services, etc.

**What do stakeholders do and how they affect the organization?** Apply pressure through power groups, reduction of the demand (depending on the service).

**What effects do they have in the organization in technological, economic, administrative, social and political scopes?** privatization of the services, fewer amount assignation of resources to the organization, insurrections, votes against the present party, among others.

**The communication in processes of communitarian participation: From information to co-responsibility**

As Jaramillo mentions (2004:7) the concept of public communication updates, in synthesis, the struggle of the individuals to take part in the collective life and happening of political processes concerning the coexistence with "the other" and to participate in the public sphere, conceived this one as the place of convergence of the different present voices in the society. In this sense, public communication denotes the intricate network of informational, expressive and helpful transactions that happen in the public sphere or the public space of any society (McQuail, 1998).

In its extended modern meaning, this space mainly designates the channels and massive communication networks, and the time and the space reserved in the media to look after the topics of general public interest.

The concept of public communication is relatively new and has not advanced much, let alone from the organizational communication point of view. Within the model constructed by Bernardine Jose Toro and his team we can find the "macro-intentional Model of communication" which was designed and implemented in the mid 80s.

Jaramillo (2003), develops a model that indicates certain skills at each citizen participation level, where an effective communication is fulfilled only when each one of the levels indicated in the graph is fulfilled.
Jaramillo develops each of the mentioned levels, as mechanisms that allow true participation from the social actors:

Information: capacity to receive and produce information. At the base of participation is information. A person, who has information about something that affects or involves him/her, is by default included in that it involves and affects him/her, simply by having knowledge of that information. The author points out; however, that simply having the information isn’t enough. It’s necessary to learn how to interpret, handle and utilize it, otherwise it will transform into a dead commodity.

Consultation: Capacity to consult and the disposition to be consulted through the use of tools such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, roundtables, or opinion tracking. It also involves getting advice from others, knowing their point of view, and including it in our decision.

Deliberation: Capacity to deliberate and disposition to acknowledge the views of others, in forums, conversational, panels, public debates or group discussions.

Agreement (Concertación): To capacity to agree and the disposition to negotiate one’s own interests at the negotiation table. Collective interests are usually the result of complex negotiation in which something is given up in order to benefit from the final decision. That’s how the concept of public is created: In a clear negotiation in which you give up something to take something.

Co-responsibility: capacity to assume commitments in a co-responsible way, through collective or participatory management. Whoever is responsible for making decisions assumes, in this fundamental act of democracy, the commitment to share his/her responsibility, but whoever participates of the decisions must be willing to accept that his/her own commitment assumes great duty.
METHODOLOGY

This research is exploratory in nature, due to the lack of sufficient background research in Barranquilla regarding public-sector communication strategies in citizen participation processes, in this case, the Local Administrative Councils (Consejos Administrativos Barriales - CABS) promoted by City Hall, and the lack of studies that identify the stakeholders of the city’s public-sector and specifically those of the CABS.

Likewise, given that a characterization of image, publics and citizen participation was carried out, this research is also descriptive in nature. This allowed us to put together an inventory of messages, actors and attributes of CABS’ communication initiatives.

In order to evaluate the communication strategies and mechanisms used by CABS, we conducted semi-structured interviews with members of CABS and community members that had attended meetings and had knowledge of this process. This tool allowed us to analyze the communications devices used by CABS in terms of: information, consultation, deliberation, consensus, and co-responsibility, mentioned in Jaramillo’s model (2003).

The perception of image that the citizens had of the CABS was measured using Joan Costa's “constellation of image attributes” (2004:128). Although this method is divided in four steps, it’s not always necessary to apply them all. The first step is to define which are, or must be, the attributes or values that configure the image structure of the company. The second step is to register the idea association, positive or negative, that prompt those attributes in the public’s mind. The third step is the evaluation, in a scale system, of the attributes mentioned. The final step is the quantification of the value of each attribute. The attributes were defined based on the stakeholder’s theory, along the lines of power, legitimacy, and urgency.

In order to evaluate the work done by members of the Local Councils, we conducted structured interviews on a random sample of 63 leaders of the CABS, and 370 people from 20 different neighborhoods in Barranquilla, with an approval rating of 95%. The sample was selected based on their knowledge about the CABS and the term of the CAB member at the time of the interview.

RESULTS

The city of Barranquilla implemented Local Councils, as a space to encourage citizen participation and interaction amongst different urban areas. Despite that, only 25% of the people interviewed in 20 neighborhoods where CABS operates appear to slightly know the purpose and benefits of the local councils.

It is important to mention that this participation model was put forward by City Hall to identify, along with the community and the local administration, projects that could help resolve community problems.

Although the main purpose of CABS is to foster citizen participation, the great majority of citizens don’t know the how this model works, and even those who claim to know, have not properly used the processes. Proof of that is that only 16, out of that 25%, claimed to know members of the CABS.

According to CABS’ brochure, produced by City Hall, their purpose is to “encourage participation amongst the residents of Barranquilla in the political, social and economic reality of
their community and the city in general, through the use a participation mechanisms and social and economical organization."

Based on the latter, one can conclude that the goals set by local administration were not met, given that most of the residents are not familiar with this participation model, and those who know it, did not participate or were part of the city’s decisions.

**CABS’ tasks**

Through the Local Councils, like consultation organs of corporative and rotating character, the local administration tried to:

- To define plans and budgets with the consensus and approval of the community.
- To inventory the infrastructure for the city’s urban plan.
- To make security diagnoses for the “Plan de Convivencia”.
- To stimulate the formation of citizen watchdog groups.
- To receive projects for the improvement of the quality of life of the sector.
- To foment a sense of property in the district.
- To stimulate the participation of the community.

Taking these tasks in consideration, the present research studied the perceptions of the different actors and participants from the CABS, in which each one of them has his/her own view.

In order to deepen in the perceptions on the CABS’ process (based on their objectives and tasks) the community and the members of the CABS were surveyed about CABS’ duties. A questionnaire that contained questions of affirmative character in Likert Scale was applied, in an attempt to look at the perceptions of these two audiences.

Once the percentage results of the two surveyed audiences were obtained, a procedure of averaging the answers was made that allowed to have a rank on the activities from 1 to 5. This procedure helps to see the perception that each one of the two surveyed audiences has on the development of the CABS tasks, model proposed by Joan Coast, which allows measuring the public perceptions. In this particular case, on the actions that City Hall put forward through the CABS.

While the leaders or members of the CABS have the perception, on a one scale to five, that the tasks proposed by City Hall were fulfilled in 3.6, the community perceived that these tasks were fulfilled only in 2.9.

This way, while the local administration presented a series of projects that considered important for the community, the perception in the neighborhoods or amongst surveyed audiences is that the plans debated in the CABS did not meet their expectations nor took care of their necessities. While the leaders considered that the proposed plans have 3.2 of acceptance, the community only gives it a 2.8. Therefore they consider that this initiative did not exceed the levels of management of City Hall.

With regards to inventorying the infrastructure for the city’s urban plan, the perception between leaders and community also vary. The first group considers that the task was fulfilled with a score of 3.4 and the community considers that it was only a 2.6 fulfillment. Similar patterns are obtained when analyzing each one of the CABS’ functions. The most critical point
is reached when studying the task related to the reception of projects studies meant to improve the quality of life of the residents of the area.

It is important to emphasize here that, although the exercise was made by members of the CABS, the interviewees argued that it was a one-way process, meaning that the community never obtained answers from City Hall.

The following two graphs show the results obtained when measuring the perceptions of CABS’ members and the community. The results are presented in the constellation of attributes proposed by Joan Costa.

**Perception of CABS members on the made activities:**

1. To define plans and budgets with the consensus and approval of the community.
2. To inventory the infrastructure for the city’s urban plan.
3. To make security diagnoses for the “Plan de Convivencia”.
4. To stimulate the formation of citizen watchdogs.
5. To receive projects for the improvement of the quality of life of the sector.
6. To foment the sense of property in the district.
Perception of the community on the activities developed by CABS:

The following graph shows the results obtained from the community when measuring the attribute of legitimacy, understood as the level of trust citizens have on their leaders, the leader’s ability to assemble and their knowledge of local problems.

GRAPH 2

1. To define plans and budgets with the consensus and approval of the community.
2. To inventory the infrastructure for the city’s urban plan.
3. To make security diagnoses for the “Plan de Convivencia”.
4. To stimulate the formation of citizen watchdogs.
5. To receive projects for the improvement of the quality of life of the sector.
6. To foment the sense of property in the district.

GRAPH 3
Looking at the legitimacy variable from the stakeholder theory, Mitchell, Agle & Wood (1997) - understood as the generalized presumption that the actions of a social actor are desired or appropriate within certain socially constructed systems of norms, values and definitions – it is interesting to see the CABS, and particularly the perception the residents have of their local leaders or members of the CABS, having 47% declared to "disagree" and "strongly disagree" about the level of legitimacy their leaders represent to them. When averaging these results we found a qualification of 2.7, score that allows to see the trust level that the community has on its local representatives against other local authorities.

It is interesting to find such low score, considering that the leaders, through their local organizations or committees, must be permanently in sync with local problems.

It is important to see then that the level of legitimacy that a stakeholder generates from its role as communal leader does not provide any recognition if his/her actions are not related to concrete results to the solution of community problems. Given that the time dedicated to community issues is not sufficient, but rather, the level of management that allows to materialize projects of community interest.

When looking at the legitimacy, from the community’s perception, regarding the level of knowledge the CABS members have of local problems, the study found that 77% of the people surveyed “strongly agree” and "agree" to the statement that local leaders have knowledge of the economic, social and political reality of the district. When turning this result to the mathematical average that allows us to know the attributes related to the level information local stakeholders have regarding the reality of their neighborhoods, we get 3.7 score.

Unlike the low results obtained in the item that measured the trust level generated by the leaders against other authorities, 77% of the surveyed people considered that CABS members had a real knowledge of the local problems.

Results of the Urgency variable:

![Graph 4](image-url)
The urgency variable, from the stakeholder theory and applied to CABS members was analyzed as the ability of these leaders to identify the most relevant and needed projects for their communities that could be presented to and put forward by City Hall.

When looking at the results regarding the relevance of the projects that managed to be approved because of the CABS, the study found that of the 96 people that claimed to know the CABS, 54% indicated to “agree” and "strongly agree" that the projects presented by CABS were of high-priority to the community.

Comparing these results with the ones obtained in question 9 and 10, which meant to find out the areas residents expected their community leaders to concentrate on versus the areas where they work, the study found that there was not match between the areas wished by the community and the ones the CABS worked on.

Moreover, when looking at the urgency attribute, based on the level of response community leaders obtained in City Hall, in relation to the projects they presented, 57.3% of the community “disagrees” and "strongly disagrees" with the statement that these social actors can have immediate response to local issues. When turning these results to a scale from 1 to 5, the study found that people perceive this level of response as a 2.5. This result is understandable considering the low level of response or interaction that community leaders manage to have at City Hall.

**Results of the Power variable:**

![Graph](image)

The third attribute related to the stakeholder theory applied to the members of the CABS was to review the possible incidences of coercive type that they have been able to exert during
their processes, understood like the ability to affect decisions and local processes that responded to goals set by the Local Administration.

When looking at the attribute of power, Matus (1993) indicates that a stakeholder can exert power between the parts of the social game using coercive resources (physical force, weapons), utilitarian resources (technology, money, knowledge, logistic, raw materials), and finally, symbolic resources (prestige, charisma) to impose his/her own will on others in a relationship (social game). This definition was adapted of Mitchell, based on the concept of Etzioni (1964).

In the CABS case, the power variable can be seen with an incidence or imposition of will of symbolic type. Since the relationship or interests that City Hall wanted to promote through the CABS, was an open and pro-positive interaction that encourage community organization and participation on high-priority projects for the areas. One of the criteria that City Hall established when choosing the people who would be part of the CABS, were for them to be residents who belonged to some community organization or that had certain recognition in the area, because this would guarantee or help the CAB member reach his/her objectives.

When researching the perception of the people who knew the CABS regarding the incidence of these leaders to have the community approve the projects presented by them, the results showed that 44.8% considered that the Councils succeed at having residents approve their initiatives. It’s important to note that the perception of the participants was that this success was a right acquired by these leaders as results of many years of work in favor of the community.

On the other hand, 38.5% of participants indicated that the members of the CABS did not manage to gain neighborhood support for their proposals, and 15.6% did not show any type judgment regarding the management or work of the CABS.

When turning these results to a mathematical average, we get a score of 3.0, which places the management of the CABS as acceptable. This result does not vary much from the one found in the legitimacy attribute of CABS members: leaders who have low recognition, esteem and charisma, all of which are characteristics that a social actor or an organization must possess to be considered a stakeholder with power.

Following the same order, the study analyzed the perception the surveyed residents had with regards to the response level of the projects presented by CABS. The result was 2.9 out 5. Residents continue to think or perceive little incidence or response in the local administration.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Firstly, the study focuses on the composition of the stakeholders according to the three studied attributes. In that regard, the stakeholders are identified in the category of latent: social actors who the community recognizes with the ability to identify the more urgent and important problems of the area. However, these leaders do not have power or legitimacy. They are leaders without any recognition or prestige, since they do not have the managerial power that allows them to interact before the Local Government in order to obtain successful results to solve community problems.

- Another important issue is the lack of agreement between the projects the community expects from their leaders and the knowledge the leaders have about the projects they out
forward in benefit of the area. Although they are people who have spent many years working for the development of their neighborhoods, in the end, they do not know the true interests and needs of these residents.

- The study found a lack of commitment from City Hall with regards to the community participation process impelled by the institution. This can be proven when one looks at the perception of local leaders, who in essence are social actors in charged of synchronizing community interest with those of the government, through CABS. When consulted, they emphasized the little support they receive from the administration during the process.

- This research allows the reader to look at the stakeholder theory as a new way to manage processes of community participation impelled by private or public institution. The study gives useful tools for the identification and categorization of stakeholders, considering that they are the ones in charge to channel community initiatives that encourage interested organizations to foster processes of local development. In order to obtain this it is recommended:
  
  o To perform analysis that will allow the identification of weaknesses and strengths in the community leaders based on the stakeholder theory and the attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency, looking at the perception that the residents of a community may have about their leaders.
  o To design training plans in social projects management that may allow leaders to improve their intervention processes and the interaction between the community and the organizations.
Institutionalizing Public Relations:  
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Introduction

The world of sports today seems to be characterized by a constantly revolving cycle of change. Coaches and players join or leave teams in a never-ending quest for improvement—either to enhance personal stature and value within the given sport or to make individual teams more competitive. Each coach who comes through the rapidly swinging door carries his or her own philosophies and methodologies for the game and attempts to implement them as efficiently as possible without upsetting whatever good already may have existed with the team.

Underlying all of this movement, however, is the widespread belief that fundamentals still matter most. In basketball, for example, one coach may espouse an up-tempo, high-scoring offense, while another may prefer a smothering, trapping defense. But whatever the overriding philosophy, if the players cannot master the basics of dribbling, passing, shooting or defending, the chances for success diminish significantly anyway. These fundamentals are relatively universal; there are certain basic shooting motions and patterns, certain set ways to pass or not to pass that ensure the ball gets to a teammate, and so on with other fundamentals of the game. So, while change always carries with it certain promise for competitive advantage, the change is most successful when couched in enduring fundamentals.

In any type of organization, no matter what movement occurs towards greater competitive advantage or to enhancing services, entities acknowledge the need for fundamental values and practices that endure. Typically, these fundamentals are developed in any given industry through decades of practical trial and error, coupled with ongoing theory building from observation and testing of best and, in some cases, poorest practices. Many domains (accounting, business management, economics, law, the political sciences, etc.), have over time fashioned a body of knowledge that guides organizations or functions within the entities in their efforts to create the greatest effectiveness. These basic principles and practices are intended to endure despite whoever may be leading a given entity at any given time, precisely because they have been proven and re-proven to work well.

In organizational literature, the term that characterizes these enduring fundamentals in the midst of change is institutionalization. Institutionalization is defined as the process of infusing underlying, sustainable, “rule-like” values and procedures that guide the activities of an organization regardless of particular situations or individual personalities and philosophies of the entity’s main actors (Zucker, 1987). In institutionalizing their processes and patterns, organizations are able to establish legitimacy for themselves in the contexts in which they operate (Suchman, 1995). While some critics argue that institutionalization makes organizations too rigid and resistant to change, others counter that institutionalization need not preclude adaptability. Rather, the enduring fundamentals of institutionalization offer the very stability that
organizations need to persist despite the inevitable changes and adaptations they must deal with in their daily activities (Selznick, 1957; Scott, 1987).

So, with institutionalization being a debated yet vital aspect of organizational theory, what is the role, if any, of institutionalization in public relations? This question is relevant particularly because public relations is often seen as the function within entities that anticipates, identifies, and guides change. In fact, one of the theoretical foundations proposed for public relations is contingency theory, which recognizes that change is inevitable and that the most effective organizations are willing to be adaptable (J. Grunig & White, 1992). Contingency theorists also are among those who most often see institutionalization of organizations as rendering them inflexible and resistant to change (Oliver, 1992). Yet, other scholars recently have argued that far from being inflexible, institutionalization is the process that recognizes organizational relationships with its environment and accommodates changes necessitated by that environment (Yi, 2005). Also, without some form of institutionalization—if public relations people are completely free to interpret and implement the practice according to their own whims and preferences—how would it even be possible to defend public relations as a legitimate industry? Understanding this, scholars and veteran practitioners have been attempting to establish a body of knowledge about the fundamental principles needed to effectively practice public relations and to make it valuable to the organizations it serves.

In a recent reflection on the state of public relations, James Grunig (2006) said that “a major task remains … in institutionalizing strategic public relations as actual practice in most organizations” (p. 171). His assumption was that organizational public relations efforts too often depend not on established or enduring standards of effectiveness but on the presumptions of public relations executives and the senior managers who are in charge at any given time. Frequently, when one managerial regime leaves the entity and is replaced by another, whether it be senior managers of the public relations function or senior executives of the organization as a whole, within a short time the public relations program looks entirely different from before the change.

In his challenge to institutionalize strategic public relations, J. Grunig (2006) argued that most public relations practices today center around tactical support processes instead of strategic assessment and implementation of roles that genuinely assist the ongoing legitimacy of the organization within its environment. He cited research by Yi (2005), one of his graduate students at the University of Maryland, which indicated that any institutionalization of public relations that currently exists centers around buffering organizations against outside pressures, rather than the more essential bridging or linkage activities that, in the long run, make organizations more successful. As Grunig (2006) asserted, “Public relations as a bridging activity seems … equivalent to our theoretical edifice of public relations as a strategic management function” (p. 171).

This paper, then, represents a qualitative examination of just a few organizations where there was a turnover of senior public relations executives. The study is meant to determine whether the public relations programs remained intact or changed significantly after the turnover—and, if they changed, why the alterations occurred in these cases. It will offer observations as to whether any changes that took place were positive or harmful for the organizations, or made no difference. The paper also will assess whether these cases provide
insight for the field as a whole toward making strategic public relations more enduring in organizations regardless of who may be supervising the program. It must be emphasized here that the study is highly exploratory—it is a preliminary attempt toward needed examination of many organizations operating in different industries or social arenas, so as to eventually offer a much more definitive picture of the value of institutionalization in public relations. This is just the first step.

Theoretical Basis for Institutionalization

Institutionalization offers the perpetuation of basic values, norms, and processes that are widely accepted or prescribed within a given domain or societal context. According to Eisenstadt (1964), the processes of institutionalization are “oriented to the solution of certain problems inherent in a major area of social life” (p. 235). Yet, even though the solution to these problems implies a need for adaptation, the processes of institutionalization are seen as providing “relative permanence” to structures, boundaries, and philosophies (Zucker, 1977). Fleck (2007) noted that stable and enduring fundamentals are important not just for individual entities but for entire industries.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) proposed that institutionalization is the construct “by which social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action” (p. 341). Scott (1987), explained further that through institutionalization processes, “individuals come to accept a shared definition of social reality—a conception whose validity is seen as independent of the actor's own views or actions but … as defining the "way things are" and/or the "way things are to be done" (p. 496). Yi (2005) added: “Institutionalists argue that within an organizational field, there would be a dominant form or practices that are taken for granted” (p. 8).

Institutionalization is often seen as an ongoing process, infused into organizations or industries by decisions and activities that persist over an extended period. Selznick (1957), an early developer of institutional theory, viewed institutionalization as a “process … that happens to the organization over time” (p. 16). A United States Agency for International Development report referred to institutionalization as “an ongoing process in which a set of activities, structures, and values becomes an integral and sustainable part of an organization” (USAID, 2000, p. 1).

According to Fleck (2007), leadership plays an important role in the processes of institutionalization. “The key tasks of leaders,” she explained, “include the definition of institutional mission and role; the institutional embodiment of purpose; the defense of institutional integrity; and the ordering of internal conflict. It is up to leadership not only to create but to preserve values” within the industry, organization or functional unit (p. 68). This was exemplified to this author in an interview several years ago with Willard Nielsen, former public relations executive for Johnson & Johnson. When suggested to Nielsen that J&J must have had an exemplary crisis communication plan in place to effectively handle the Tylenol situation in 1982, Nielsen responded that the company did not act so much from a crisis plan as from the fundamental credo infused throughout the company from its founder Robert Wood Johnson in 1943, that the customer is always right. With that credo firmly entrenched, it was an easy decision to pull Tylenol products from store shelves until the source of the problem was
identified and corrected.

Organizations or industries that institutionalize within these widely accepted constructs help themselves generate success in the realm within which they operate. Scott (1987) explained that “organizations do not necessarily conform to a set of institutionalized beliefs because they ‘constitute reality’ or are taken for granted, but often because they are rewarded for doing so through increased legitimacy, resources, and survival capabilities (p. 498). Fleck (2007) noted the importance of industries in this institutionalization processes, because when an entire industry has legitimacy, it helps soften the environment of good will toward organizations within the industry.

Zucker (1977) proposed three variables for determining the extent to which institutionalization will take place in an organization or an industry. The first is the extent to which information about expected norms and behaviors is transmitted over time to a succession of actors within the institution. For example, an organizational mission statement is relatively meaningless if from time to time it is pulled out of a shelf and repeated casually in meetings; but when it is continually implanted into a variety of communication processes and reinforced by managers as vital to the entity, chances increase for the institutionalization of the norms and actions proposed in that mission statement. The second variable is to what degree these norms and behaviors are maintained in the organization once information about them is transmitted. Again, if there is widespread belief that the norms proposed in the mission statement will benefit the organization, and that belief is transmitted and exemplified over succeeding generations of organizational actors, institutionalization will more likely occur.

The final variable in Zucker’s (1977) assessment of institutionalization is the extent to which attempts to change these norms and behaviors are successfully resisted in the entity. Zucker explained, “Acts high on institutionalization will be resistant to attempts to change them through personal influence because they are seen as external facts, imposed on the setting and, at the same time, defining it” (p. 730). In fact, institutional persistence can be so great in an organization that any attempts by a specific actor to create change could result in redefining the actor instead of the entity. For example, if a new manager enters the organization with designs to change particular norms that are firmly entrenched in an organization or in one of its functions, it is likely that the attempt to create change will be met with resistance and his or her plans will be frustrated. It is equally likely that the particular change agent will not last long in the entity because of the residue of ill will that often is generated through the attempt to infuse change in the entity.

**Institutionalization versus Deinstitutionalization**

Largely because of Zucker’s third point (1977), institutionalization theory sometimes faces criticism. Many see the institutionalization process as bureaucratic, inflexible and resistant to changes that become necessary when competitive pressures or other environmental forces mandate the need for change. For example, Tushman and Romanelli (1985) observed that “institutionalization … is riven by conformity generating processes throughout the organization” (p. 193). Oliver (1992) added that entities possess “inertial qualities” (p. 566). “Although these institutionalized values and beliefs permit more predictability and stability in work settings,” she
explained, “they constrain fundamental design change” (p. 566) that keep the entity from necessary advancements.

Oliver (1992) outlined a more or less oppositional construct to institutionalization: the concept of deinstitutionalization. Although deinstitutionalization plays out as a theoretical polarization of institutionalization—the need for change instead of stability—the construct need not be seen as a negative reaction to the institutionalization processes. Rather, both constructs can be seen as simple evolutionary processes of organizations, industries, or societies. Entities or communities arise anew, gradually institutionalize, and then reassess, adapt, change, or even disappear (Fleck, 2007).

Oliver (1992) described several conditions that would render organizations and industries either vulnerable or amenable to reassessment or outright change. Just a few of these conditions are organizational crises, pressures from important internal or external constituents, loss of competitive advantage, and alterations in the social, political, or economic environment in which the entity operates. Organizational change can come suddenly and dramatically or through simple and prolonged atrophy.

Nevertheless, institutionalization itself need not been seen as inherent rigidity, or as something that works against the flexibility necessary to identify, understand and interact with a changing environment. Eisenstadt (1964) explained how institutionalization can be adaptive instead of rigid.

… The very attempt to institutionalize any such system creates in its wake the possibility for change. These are possibilities not only for general, unspecified change but for more specific changes, which develop not randomly but in relatively specific directions, to a large extent set by the very process of institutionalization (p. 236).

If the need for change amidst stability seems contradictory, scholars have explained how it can be possible. Even in early advocacy of institutional stability, Selznick (1957) perceived that organizations could be adaptive if they were institutionalized around values rather than technical processes. “In what is perhaps its most significant meaning,” he explained, “‘to institutionalize’ is to infuse with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand” (p. 17). Likewise, Scott (1987) said that the ability to adapt depends on whether the institution is value-based or a mechanistic imposition of structure and procedures. When technical processes are bureaucratized, adaptation becomes more difficult because it is imposed; but when stability comes from enduring values and culture, adaptation is possible because it comes from shared culture rather than entrenched and inflexible processes. As Scott explained:

Organizational structures may only be required to support and supplement those cultural systems that exercise a direct influence on participants. According to such an argument, the existence of strong institutional environments may, under some conditions, reduce rather than increase the amount or elaborateness of organizational structure. Cultural controls can substitute for structural controls. When beliefs are widely shared and categories and procedures are taken for granted, it is less essential that they be formally encoded in organizational structures (p. 507).
To this point, then, the paper has looked at institutionalization as a necessary requirement for enduring stability and legitimacy, coupled with an ability to adapt to needed changes through shared value systems. Institutionalization can be sustained in organizations, industries, and entire societies. Stability is not inherently a static phenomenon, however; various factors within and outside of the entity or industry can lead to necessary and even desired changes or deinstitutionalization. A critical decision point, then, for leaders in the institutionalization process is to wisely strike the proper balance between stability and change (Selznick, 1996). From here on, the paper will explore how these observations relate to the field of public relations.

**Institutionalization and Public Relations**

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly for a field that has existed for more than a century, several scholars and practitioners have relatively recently advocated the need to institutionalize public relations principles and practice. For example, in a speech honoring the progress of public relations, J. Grunig (2006) said, “I believe the practice of public relations is in dire need of conceptualization (of theoretical thinking) about what public relations is, what its value is to organizations and society, and what its core values should be (p. 1). More recently, he has advocated “institutionalizing strategic public relations as actual practice” (J. Grunig, 2006, p. 171).

Grunig is not alone in calling for institutionalized values for the field. Arnold (1995), Hutton (2001), and Macnamara (2006) are among the many additional scholars and practitioners who have issued similar challenges toward the institutionalization of public relations. In another recent landmark speech, Nielsen (2006) added: “The standing and reputation of our own profession could benefit from a coming together around a shared set of values that speak about what we believe our responsibilities are and what we hold as important about what we do” (p. 1). In an article specifically about institutionalization within the public relations field, one of the few articles on that topic in this domain, Yi (2005) also wrote:

Both public relations practitioners and scholars are interested in the institutionalization of best practices in public relations. Many public relations scholars have called for the institutionalization of programs such as stakeholder programs, social responsibility programs … and ethics programs … as well as the public relations profession itself. L. Grunig, J. Grunig, and Dozier (2002) suggested that “public relations could provide an institutionalized mechanism within organizations for empowering otherwise powerless publics and for incorporating considerations of ethics and social responsibility into management decision processes (p. 326).

It is instructive that institutionalization is sought for the public relations field as a whole along with the various functions in the industry. These distinctions carry more weight when related to the arguments above that institutionalization is important not just for organizations but for industries as well. As Scott (1987) said, a given industry is rewarded with greater legitimacy when it is institutionalized because people outside that industry can then clearly understand its core principles and functions as well as its inherent value to the greater society in which it operates.
Still, the field is not only short on legitimacy, but often it faces downright disparagement (Burger, 2007). Perhaps this comes in part because it is not institutionalized. Criticisms range from practitioners not being able to perform their jobs well to accusations of outright deception. With the former, after years of conversations with chief executives of major corporations Burson (2004) observed, “CEOs may just as readily turn to someone other than their chief public relations officer for the advice and good counsel that would normally fall within the public relations spectrum” (p. 10).

The latter depiction was starkly exemplified when CBS News legal analyst Andrew Cohen declared to a nationwide audience, “Show me a PR person who is ‘accurate’ and ‘truthful,’ and I’ll show you a PR person who is unemployed” (CBS News, 2008). While this characterization could easily be dismissed as political grandstanding, it is not so easy to ignore Burger’s (2007) observation: “The perception … that PR people exist to delay or obfuscate is, at times, accurate” (p. 21). J. Grunig (2006) also contended that sometimes “the effect of public relations usually is detrimental to society” (p. 171). Comments like these, from veteran public relations practitioners and scholars, hardly depict a field that has established legitimacy through any means.

Several scholars in the field have reflected the general concept of institutionalization proposed earlier by Selznick (1957) and Scott (1987): that institutionalization is more legitimized and more adaptable to change when it is centered on overall values and cultures instead of technical processes. Macnamara (2006), for example, contended that if any institutionalization has occurred in the field, it has gone in the wrong direction, emphasizing the tactical over the strategic. He said, “… mainstream public relations [has] continued down its practical path, or straight ahead based on outdated assumptions about the effects of communication” (p. 6). He added that this practical path begins in university public relations curriculum, where students learn “how to write news releases, brochures, advertisements and scripts, work with producers and designers to arrange events – but with little or no understanding of what effects if any their work might produce within the groups that they target” (p. 9). Others, like J. Grunig (2006) and Falconi (2006) have agreed that the persistent focus on tactics and techniques instead of strategic principles robs the field of legitimacy and respect.

When the institutionalization of strategic values of environmental scanning, issues anticipation, relationship building and reputation management is encouraged, as opposed to technical functions like publicity or marketing support (J. Grunig, 2007; Macnamara, 2006), public relations can then accomplish what it was intended to do: help entities maintain enduring stability and legitimacy within their respective environments. But to enact these strategic processes, the industry itself must have its own enduring legitimacy. If the institutionalization of strategic values indeed leads to greater legitimacy for a field, then it seems it would be valuable to determine to what extent the field is institutionalized around fundamental values and strategic principles.

Exploration of Institutionalization in Public Relations

This paper was intended to embark on a preliminary exploration of the institutionalization of public relations in organizations. The idea was to determine whether and to what extent institutionalization is occurring; and, if so, whether it is at the strategic or tactical level. If the
study were to indicate that institutionalization of strategic public relations processes is occurring in organizations, then it could be possible that the field itself may be institutionalizing and thus gaining in legitimacy. If, however, the institutionalization is occurring at the tactical level, then Scott’s (1987) characterizations could hold true—that this would make the field unable to promote change in its organizations or to help the organizations respond to changes in their environment.

Because the study was exploratory, the questions ranged broadly in order to determine what might be happening in the field instead of attempting to find causations and correlations. Questions needing exploration included the following:

- To what extent is public relations becoming an institutionalized function in entities?
- What factors foster institutionalization or deinstitutionalization of public relations in a given entity?
- When institutionalization does seem to occur, is it around communication outputs or strategic outcomes? Buffering or bridging? What effects do these types of institutionalization create for entities served by public relations?
- If public relations practitioners can best serve as change agents in an entity, how does institutionalization of the function occur without losing the ability to foster change?
- If institutionalization of public relations is increasing in entities, does it stand to reason (or not) that the field is gaining legitimacy? Why would this be the case? Or why not?

For this preliminary study, only three entities were analyzed. Selection of these entities was purposeful, intended to examine organizations that were quite different in terms of size, structure, and industry or service served. Therefore, the study included a major Fortune 500 corporation headquartered in the Midwestern United States, which would likely contain a large number of public relations practitioners (Entity A); a mid-sized corporation (with annual turnover of slightly more than $1 billion per year) that operated in the consumer products industries (Entity B); and a small, private and not-for-profit educational institution (Entity C). Data for the study was gathered through personal telephone or face-to-face interviews, ranging from 40 minutes to one hour, with current and former heads of public relations or related functions in these three entities.

**Preliminary Observations**

**Entity A:** The interview with Entity A, the Fortune 500 firm took place with a senior public relations executive who has worked in this particular entity for several years. The executive has also worked for other firms in the industry. More than 400 employees work in areas of public relations or allied functions in this entity, with an overall communications budget that can approach $200 million.

About two years ago, the highest level public relations executive left the firm, thus necessitating a change in leadership. Yet, with the change, according to the interviewee, basic missions, strategies, and activities remained intact. The reporting system also did not change, but
was left with the senior executive reporting directly to the chief executive of the company. The change in the organization, therefore, had no major impact. “I believe institutionalization is built into our company because we are in an industry that mandates effective outreach to our stakeholders,” the interviewee reported. “In our company, we have a long history of communication it has always been given high priority, and it cannot be underestimated. It would be hard for someone to change it, because too much stake is put into it. A lot of people have a strong commitment to the traditions of our organization.” The interviewee described scenarios reflecting Zucker’s (1977) explanations that in highly institutionalized entities, it is difficult for outsiders to make changes. “We’ve had some of those employees come in from different companies and try to change things. They resist our procedures, fight it, but sooner or later they conform,” the respondent said.

Despite the earlier claim that the industry demands strategic, highly responsive public relations and that the executive’s own company responds to that demand, the respondent did acknowledge that other firms in the industry have not been so institutionalized in their procedures. One firm, for example, has had considerable volatility over the past two or three decades, including different ownership. Under yet another new chief executive, the company recently restructured its highest levels and replaced a vice president of communications with a lower level executive who would report to a human resources vice president.

But Entity A continues to operate its public relations in a manner consistent with Scott’s (1987) contention that organizations can adapt to their environment even when highly institutionalized, as long as the institutionalization has occurred at the strategic and cultural levels rather than at the tactical levels. For example, the organization has been among the first major companies to create and build a unit focused specifically on communicating and building relationships through social networking. “We spend a lot of money on social networking and on working with activists and non-governmental organizations,” said the respondent. “We identify major cities or areas, we even communicate with people who are highly critical of us, and we bring them to our headquarters and show them what is going on there in the company. We don’t give up on people very quickly; we feel there is nobody’s mind we cannot change if given the opportunity, or at least we can convert people to a mutually neutral situation.”

The respondent for Entity A expressed strong belief in the processes of institutionalization. The executive stated that public relations must show its value to the entity at the highest levels, assisting with corporate reputation through sound relationship building and through accurate and honest communication of the entity’s products and services. In addition, the respondent realized the important role of public relations in creating change, in “transforming the organization to new heights. Organizations should be dynamic and open to their stakeholders,” the respondent explained. “Communications can be the tail that leads the dog. In our company, we have resolved a lot of issues, and we are in a position to be very competitive.”

In summary of Entity A, then, it appeared that the company has institutionalized its public relations programs. Perhaps size and company history influenced this institutionalization, as well as the philosophies and vision of those who had led both the organization and the public relations units. The industry’s need for responsiveness to stakeholders was also described as a factor, but this was not supported by the mention of other companies in the industry that did not have records of institutionalization. Even with Entity A’s established traditions, it was apparent
as well that the company and its public relations unit actively support and are engaged in changes and improvements to become even more responsive to stakeholders as society changes.

Such institutionalization did not occur with either Entity B or Entity C. In fact, quite the opposite took place. Both entities experienced leadership changes, but the changes were at different levels. Nevertheless, in each case, changes in leadership drastically affected the public relations programs in the entity.

**Entity B:** The person interviewed in this case had been vice president of corporate communication for this mid-sized organization for about 10 years. When hired, he replaced another vice president who had been brought into the firm specifically to help resolve a nationwide public relations crisis. The first executive had convinced senior leadership that a long-term, strategic public relations approach was necessary not only to survive the crisis but also to ensure that such a situation would not occur again. The interview respondent had carried on most of the programs initiated by the first vice president, despite fairly regular pressures by some in senior management to reduce public relations efforts “now that the crisis is passed and we don’t need all of this anymore.”

For close to 13 years, the staff included a dozen employees dedicated to media and community relations, international communication, issues management, and other specific public relations functions. Another 30 to 40 employees, depending on the year, assisted these efforts with graphic design, photography, and visual productions. These activities all continued as the organization expanded its product lines and geographic reach around the world, became a public company, and slowly improved its reputation in its home state, nationally, and internationally. Both vice presidents guided these efforts with the veteran leadership that reflected their decades of experience in the field. Whenever one employee would leave, another would be hired who was known and trusted by these vice presidents, and the culture of the public relations unit was maintained as one of experience, strategic thinking, and teamwork.

Then, in 2004, the company suffered a prolonged sales slump and decided to reduce its employee work force. Several top managers, including the respondent to this study, were offered early retirement incentives. Along with the respondent, several other long-term public relations employees either accepted the retirement package or were simply laid off. As a result, the staff which had once numbered more than 50 was reduced to less than 20. Of those who remained, none had experience in or inclination toward long-term relationship building strategies. The leadership over the broad area of “public relations” was reduced to the media relations specialist, a former graphic design manager, and a person who had been the chief executive’s special projects manager.

So, why did the institutionalization process fall apart in this case? Most likely, the respondent surmised, it was because many in upper managerial positions outside of public relations never fully supported the department’s creation in the first place. They assumed that once the original crisis had passed, the entity no longer would need costly, strategic communication efforts. As the years went by and no other major crisis occurred, this confirmed the idea in their minds that public relations was no longer needed.

As the respondent explained, “At the beginning the concept and practice of building bridges with our stakeholders was not encouraged by upper division management, supposedly because of their lack of understanding of the responsibilities and value of corporate
communication experts. But the CEO realized the value of the function in helping a much-needed effort to improve the company’s reputation, so the function survived for many years. Ultimately, when the CEO kind of stepped away from daily management of the company, his influence over managerial decisions waned and other influential managers were finally able to get their way. And getting their way included getting rid of most of the public relations function.”

Entity C: The person interviewed in this case had also been in the entity for several years, serving mostly as a director over alumni relations. The respondent had seen the evolution of public relations from virtually nothing to a full-scale program that included a new identity movement; hosting of dignitaries and other special guests; media, community, government, and alumni relations; special events management, international outreach; creation, supervision, and production of print communication collateral materials, including a biennial magazine; and visual production of a variety of communication messages. These tasks were led by a vice president over development, a director of communications, and a director of alumni relations, with support from photographers, graphic designers and visual production supervisors—comprising a staff of up to 20 individuals. The staff had strong support from the entity’s president and most of the vice presidents. As the respondent said, “Particularly the past few years, we had great freedom to be innovative and to accomplish the tasks we felt were needed to improve our relationships and to build awareness and understanding among constituents.”

In 2007, after serving for more than 13 years, the president of the institution retired. He was replaced by a president brought in from another state by the board of directors. The new leader, according to the respondent to this study, possesses vastly differing managerial values than the long-standing organizational culture is accustomed to, and the leader also carries a mandate from the entity’s board to significantly streamline costs and personnel. This new approach apparently has sent shock waves throughout the organization, and changes continue to be made even as of this writing.

Among the changes is a wholesale reordering of the vice presidents of the institution. The vice president over development has retired and most of the remaining communication functions have been restructured under an executive who had served as the previous president’s administrative assistant. The respondent said that this person has no real communication background, but supervises a director who has had more than 30 years of experience in communication—mostly in broadcast production. Therefore, visual production remains in this unit, as well as graphic design—although this latter function has been drastically reduced (the full-color biennial magazine, for example, is no longer produced). The alumni relations director now reports to another vice president, thus creating a separation of many of the communications activities and messages that had been unified under one structural umbrella before the change.

The changes in this entity have occurred so recently that it is not possible to fully gauge their long-term effects. Without question, the changes in public relations were implemented by the new president despite strong support for the function by the previous administration—most of whom lost their influence in the organization when the new president arrived. The function which had evolved into a full-scale strategic unit is now separated into new reporting roles and relationships. Many employees in the previous public relations unit have left or are planning to leave the organization. The respondent did report that many of the broader organizational
alterations were necessary—the previous administration had become entrenched in traditional thinking and finances needed to be tightened—but the respondent was not sure if all the changes are going to prove effective, at least in the short term. “Obviously I have to be careful about what I say, because I want to support the new president and be positive,” the respondent said.

Conclusions

So, there is the preliminary study of three entities—one large, well resourced, and committed to strategic public relations; a second with good resources but little long-term commitment to public relations; and a third, small organization whose commitment to public relations was embodied in the entity’s senior leader. That commitment now seems precarious as a new president with new values initiates his new programs.

The observation of Entity A indicates that institutionalization can occur around a strategic mission and a commitment to open, honest relationship building. It also shows that institutionalization need not preclude the ability to adjust to changing needs and mandates of stakeholders. In fact, if the recent creation of the social media unit within Entity A serves as an indicator, institutionalized strategic public relations programs can actually adapt rapidly and be strong innovators in the communication arena.

By contrast, Entities B and C, as well as the industry competitor mentioned by the Entity A respondent, indicate that attempts to institutionalize public relations still seem to be subject to the whims, value systems and overall understanding of public relations by organizational leaders in too many organizations. Even many years of solid public relations programs can be overturned in a short period of time. With these reductions of staff or elimination of programs, organizations are again rendered vulnerable to future public relations problems and perhaps even major crises. Sadly, as has often been seen over the years, senior executives do not realize, or even care about, the potential liabilities created in their own organizations when their public relations programs are deinstitutionalized.

Of course, much more research needs to be conducted in this arena to fully understand the possibilities and effects of institutionalization of public relations. This study was just a preliminary glimpse into a few organizations, and it is therefore not possible to reach any definitive conclusions to this point. Many more entities should be observed, interviewed, or surveyed to begin to delve more deeply into this fairly untapped area of needed research in the field.

References


The Social Media Release and Its Implications for PR-Journalist Relations
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Abstract
As social media continue to gain inroads with information consumers, the public relations industry is reaching out to utilize the new sources and outlets and, some might opine, to find ways to exploit the technology involved. Public relations programs aimed at bloggers have been well documented. Less thoroughly discussed has been the rise of the Social Media Press Release, which is changing the PR-journalist relationship and raising serious ethical questions, as can be seen on technorati.com. First advocated in February, 2006, by Tom Foremski, a blogger at Silicon Valley Watcher, a template for the SMPR was developed by Shift Communications and debuted on the PR Squared blog May 23 of last year. The SMPR recognizes that reporters in downsized newsrooms do practically all of their work at their computer terminals and is designed to be user-friendly for that work environment. Boiler plate material is presented in an updated, attractive format, but also included are hyperlinks connecting desk-bound reporters to historical documents, market and competitive sources, and previous coverage, which provide context, links to photos, graphics, videos, MP3 files or podcasts, which satisfy the multi-media demands of journalists’ jobs. Also included are links to dissonant voices, which give PR persons considerable influence in selecting “the opposing side” that likely will be included in the final story. That is where the ethical struggle ensues. PR practitioners must balance using that influence in exploitive, manipulative ways against their larger, civic obligations to foster truly open discourse.

Introduction
Corporations, nonprofits, governmental entities, and public relations agencies all have one communications tool in common: the media news release. It has been around for more than 100 years and has been used to disseminate important strategic information to the mass media and public in a timely fashion. In the past, the news release - written in the form of a conventional news story which presented the point of view of the organization that disseminated it - was mass mailed to selected outlets. As technology advanced and processes have moved from snail mail to e-mail and more information and content is created and exchanged online, public relations professionals have begun to examine the history of the press release, its impact on the media, how organizations continue to use this ancient public relations tool, and how recent innovations may enhance its relevance.

Approximately 3,000 press releases cross the wires each business day, overwhelming editors who often discard these notices without ever glancing at their content (Public Relations Tactics, 2006). Additionally, many journalists say they are bombarded with information daily and never bother to read press releases from senders they have never met or heard of (Tactics, p. 22). Indeed, PR pros must craft releases from a user’s perspective and spend time thinking about what
recipients will want to know. As one journalist noted, PR professionals must ask themselves if they want to be considered a spammer or do they want to be known as providing useful information to the media. Thus, more and more, the relationship between the public relations expert and the journalist/editor is becoming crucial.

The inception date of the press release has been debated by historians. Some argue that it was invented in the late 1800s while others list the origin date as 1906 (Bates, 2002). Regardless of the time of its founding, its usefulness has never been contested. Newspaper editors and reporters often utilized information from news releases such as facts, quotes and other information to enhance their stories or to add to their accuracy and credibility. Prior to becoming the standard in corporations and large non-profit organizations, press releases were first used by large railroad companies (Tech PR Gems, 2006). At the beginning of the 20th century, entities such as Ohio Bell Telephone realized that if they released "canned" news in the form of a press release, newspaper reporters would stop attending telephone rate hearings, thus curtailing thorny inquiries about rates and other matters. Therefore, more and more, media releases were used to draw reporters to major press conferences or to prompt follow-up interviews or inquiries.

Originally, press releases were thought to be a form of advertising because of self-serving content and some media charged to print them during the early years. However, releases soon became accepted as a free source of news and information that could be used by newspapers and other media in their coverage as they saw fit, usually heavily edited and sometimes, as is. (Tech PR Gems, p. 7)

The First Press Release

The first news release was created by the founder of public relations, Ivy Lee, according to many historians. After a major accident at Pennsylvania Railroad, Lee convinced the company - one of his main clients - to distribute a press release to journalists before they received other versions of the story. Moreover, he invited reporters and photographers to the scene and provided a special train to get them there. In the weeks that followed, newspapers and elected officials heavily praised the railroad for its openness and concern for the safety of its passengers. (Tech PR Gems, p. 7)

Lee’s press release became more popular among his clients, if not among journalists. In the spring of 1906, coal operators hired him to represent them during a strike. However, when he sent out press releases, journalists became hostile, saying Lee was trying to manipulate news coverage through the use “ads” disguised as news stories. In response, Lee issued the revolutionary "Declaration of Principles" which elevated the field of public relations and expressed the value of openness and honest communication with the press and the public.

Lee stated in his Declaration: "This is not a secret press bureau. All our work is done in the open. We aim to supply news. This is not an advertising agency; if you think any of our matter ought properly to go to your business office, do not use it. Our matter is accurate. Further details on any subject treated will be supplied promptly, and any editor will be assisted most cheerfully in verifying directly any statement of fact. In brief, our plan is, frankly and openly, on behalf of business concerns and public institutions, to supply to the press and public of the United States prompt and accurate information concerning subjects which it is of value and interest to the public to know about." (Turney, 2000).
Although Lee created the press release, Edward Bernays, considered the father of modern public relations, mastered its use. Pioneering the PR industry’s use of psychology to design persuasive campaigns, Bernays used the press release as a primary tool in his media strategy to promote everything from bacon to cigarettes, soap and even World Wars. The successful use of the press release by Bernays prompted thousands of public relations professionals to rely on the press release to disseminate news. Though its origin dates back more than a century, the press release is still one of the most visible tools in public relations today, and it had not changed until recently.

Introduced a year ago, the newly designed release called a Social Media Press Release (SMPR) is a Microsoft Word-based format that includes a free download that mixes elements from traditional releases (pre-approved quotes, for example) with technological features which include company logos, video and links to blog posts and traditional media coverage on the product that the release is touting. The debate over whether these latest changes to the press release are beneficial for the public relations profession overall is ongoing.

**Literature Review**

Perhaps predictably, the bulk of literature and discussions regarding the SMPR, both among academics and practitioners, have been conducted largely on the Internet. Technorati, which is “currently tracking 112.8 million blogs and over 250 million pieces of tagged social media,” (Technorati.com, 2007) has documented an increase not only in the discussion of the SMPR but also in its use in the every day world of public relations. There seems to be no disputing that the debate on the SMPR, which runs the gamut from the technical properties it should include to the ethical considerations for how it should be used, is Web-orchestrated.

That print-based academic journals and book-length texts and cultural tomes have thus far had only tangential influence is, we believe, the result of the newness of the SMPR, having been first proposed in February 2006 (Foremski, 2006) and having made its first appearance via a suggested template three months later (Defren, 2006). Defren, who joined others in giving Foremski intellectual license for the idea, heralded the unveiling of the template by noting: “Love it or hate it, what is important is that the banal, unhelpful, cookie-cutter press releases of yore have outlived their pre-Internet usefulness…(W)e’re not so much hoping to impress, as to help. ‘Victory’ will be achieved if our peers in the PR sphere start to download the PDF and tack it to their walls for future reference.” (Defren, 2006).

Defren went on to report on his PR Squared blog (2006, May 23) that at least one prominent university communications school, Boston University, had made the SMPR the subject of classroom discussions and, more importantly for students, a topic to be included on final examinations. Foremski, who had been the target of some slings and arrows as a result of his proposal, rejoiced in a follow-up blog of his own, exclaiming “Die! Press Release Die! Die! Die!” and calling his opponents “reactionaries” (Silicon Valley Watcher, June, 2006).

**Waiting for Context**

With the discussion so fluid and, at times, volatile, it is understandable that a preponderance of academicians apparently have opted to wait until the passage of time provides context and possibly some definitiveness to the SMPR debate. At times, the SMPR appears to be
a subtext, a late-arrival, in the larger Web 2.0 debate, which, as an umbrella topic, has drawn more
2.0 is a concept that “doesn’t have a hard boundary, but, rather, a gravitational core … a set
of principles and practices that tie together a veritable solar system of sites that demonstrate some or
all of those principles, at a varying distance from that core.”

In other words, Web 2.0 is the name applied to what advocates call a second generation of
web-based communities and hosted services, such as social-networking sites, wikis, and
folksonomies “which aim to facilitate creativity, collaboration, and sharing between users”
(O’Reilly, 2006).

Doubtless, the ascendancy of Web 2.0 – more than 9.5 million citations appeared in
Google in 2005 alone – paved the way for the SMPR. Woyke (2006) called Web 2.0 “the
impetus…to encourage public relations professionals to use web tools to get the attention of
journalists and bloggers.” She drew a direct link from Web 2.0 to Foremski’s idea and Defren’s
work at SHIFT Communications of Boston and Silicon Valley, where he developed the initial
template. Knowles (2006) made a similar connection in her reporting on a BusinessWire-
sponsored panel discussion, where Matthew Bishop, business editor and New York Bureau Chief
of The Economist, said: “We’re about to announce (the traditional press release) is Old World
technology that relates to a different type of media. The world is filled with too much information,
and too much of it is wrong and irrelevant” (p. 7).

Critics of the SMPR appear to be holdovers from the original doubters of Web 2.0.
Keen and Laskoff (2007), for instance, wrote:
“…yes, we acknowledge, something called Web 2.0 has arrived, but its potential is so
overblown, its hype so out of control, marketing managers would do well to take a
collective deep breath while determining its real significance and value…You should think
of Web 2.0 as a collection of evolving tools – some valuable, but some of no more cultural
or social importance than the hula-hoop. Each needs to be evaluated critically” (p. 10).

Keen has become possibly the most articulate critic of the Internet, establishing his bono
fides with his bestselling book, The Cult of the Amateur (2007). In it, Keen rails against the blurring
between journalism and the blogosphere, which, as a result of the SMPR, has become practically
indistinguishable, injecting public relations practitioners into the mix.
“Old media is facing extinction… what will take its place? Apparently, it will be Silicon Valley’s
hot new search engines, social media ties, and video portals. Every new page on MySpace, every
new blog post, every new You Tube video adds up to another potential source of advertising
revenue lost to mainstream media” (p. 9)

Ethical Concerns

Although he does not refer specifically to the SMPR, he does decry what he feels is a
lack of an established code of ethics in “the anonymous world of the blogosphere” (p. 77) and the
lack of filters that exist between the information provider and the end consumer. This is a theme
that exists in the writing of scholars of journalism, who do voice specific concerns about the
encroachment of public relations into the realm of mainstream journalism. Certainly, the SMPR is
seen as such an encroachment.
Henry (2007) worries that “PR firms have become increasingly effective at churning out advertising that looks and sounds just like mainstream journalism,” (p. 180) and Knowlton, in Moral Reasoning for Journalists, reminds us that Bernays proved that public “consent could be engineered or manufactured” (1997, p. 111). Those concerns, as well as others raised by Steele (1997), Merritt (1998), Smith (1999) and Atkins (2002) contribute mightily to the crux of this paper, namely: The SMPR utilizes new technology that can facilitate and contribute to the work of journalists, serve the public’s needs and desires for information; but, unless handled with scruples, the SMPR can do a grave, ethical disservice to both those noble endeavors.

Methodology

The methodology used for collecting data for this research was primarily through online qualitative content analysis. Additionally, articles from business and trade publications such as Public Relations Tactics, PR Week, Brandweek, and Business Week were used. Books focusing on ethics around this topic were also utilized. The time period covered by this research is from 2001 to 2007. This time period was chosen because it covers the bursting of the dot-com bubble in the fall of 2001, which marked a turning point for the web. Today, in 2007, the debates surrounding the press release is still ongoing as can be seen on numerous websites, including Technorati. This study examined 25 articles and 30 websites relating to the topic as well as a dozen relevant books.

Discussion

Technology has brought to the newsrooms what it has brought to the rest of the marketplace, namely, a means of increasing production and productivity while reducing costs, or at least holding costs in check. When General Motors brought the first automated car plant on line in 1993, the rest of America took notice. Production doubled, while employment was cut in half. Could the rest of American industry, including the media industry, be far behind? Not likely. But, from the outset, technology was a two-edged sword professionally for the news industry; and it has become double-edged ethically, as well.

Technology presented new sources of information and entertainment for audiences, especially the younger, more coveted audiences. Since attention is a zero-sum game, traditional media saw readership, viewership, and listenership erode. They reacted by leaping into the new technology, modernizing current properties and adding new venues, creating websites, podcasts and vodcasts; and they balanced the heavy investments in technology with cost reductions in other areas, specifically personnel cuts in newsrooms. Newspapers, for example,

“...over the last two decades...have made sharp cutbacks in newsroom staffing and expenditures...The effect, all evidence suggests, is that newspapers have seen a net drop in the overall number of people and a squeeze on resources devoted to covering the news...(A)s of 2002, newspapers (overall) have about 2,200 fewer newsroom employees than in 1990.” (Journalism.org).

Technology-driven Changes

The hits keep coming, causing the Project for Excellence in Journalism to decry what it calls “a series of problematic trends in newsroom investment” (Journalism.org, 2004). In 2005,
the news media industry cut 9,453 jobs and in 2006 it slashed another 17,809 (United Press International). This year began with an announcement of 2000 planned cuts in January alone and the inevitable forecast that “the job pool will likely contract in the foreseeable future” (Reuters). And it is not only newspapers. “From 2002 to 2006, estimates are that total news division staffing dropped about 10%, with reductions in non-correspondent staff down at greater rates than that” (Journalism.org, 2007). Some of the job losses, such as the 110 announced by Detroit newspapers, obviously result from the overall economic downturn and geographic peculiarities (Editor & Publisher), but the general trend of cuts is linked inextricably to technology, which has changed what it means to be a reporter and, some would argue, is changing the meaning of news.

As audiences flee what increasingly is being called “old media” in favor of Silicon Valley’s new offerings, advertisers flee with them. Keen (2007) offers this:

“Old media is facing extinction…What will take its place? Apparently, it will be Silicon Valley’s hot new search engines, social media sites, and video portals. Every new page of MySpace, every new blog post, every new YouTube video adds up to another potential source of advertising revenue lost to mainstream media” (Keen, p. 9).

In adapting to the changing environment, by moving into new media, many news outlets have been able to catch up to the audiences and advertising revenues. That is the positive edge of the sword mentioned above; the negative edge, the edge that slashes inward, is this: Personnel cutbacks to balance the costs of added technology “have led to ethical lapses in journalism and among journalists. News media organizations appear more and more willing to facilitate their own degradation” (Henry, p. 27). For General Motors, the fully automated plant produced a better product, because removing much of the human labor out of the equation improved rather than detracted from the quality of the finished product. News does not operate in that tangible a sense. The human element, along with concepts such as trust, is crucial at every point of the process.

_**SMPR Recognizes the “New Reporter”**_

To be a reporter today is to be a jack-of-all-trades – writer, editor, blogger, videographer, and podcaster. Reporters have been forced to pick up the work done by the “non-correspondent” positions that have been downsized out of existence. Knowledge of technology often is ranked of greater importance than knowing the subject of the story being covered and how to cover it. Bettinger suggests “The general turmoil in the news business is contributing to the decrease in the number of journalists seeking prestigious fellowships” (Jennings, 2007). The Social Media Press Release, the SMPR, fills a very real need in newsrooms. First, it recognizes that reporters in growing numbers are doing their entire job from their computer terminals. No trips to the newspaper morgue for research; no lunches or appointments for in-depth interviews where the interviewee’s body language can be studied along with her or his comments and answers. Thus, the SMPR fits comfortably into the new world of the journalist. Sent over the Internet to a reporter’s desk, the SMPR, in addition a traditionally formatted release, can include bullet-pointed facts, selected quotes from principals, audio for the reporter’s podcast, still photos, and video footage. A hyperlink can even give the reporter what some public relations practitioners call “the other side of the story.” Since the reporter usually seeks a contrary voice, the sender of the SMPR can provide that, which means the practitioner dictates the spokesperson for the other side.
“Their (PR practitioners) aim is not to present news and information gathered under professional rules of ethics; instead, they intend to sell a product or a political message…Increasingly, it is difficult for the average citizen to tell the difference between what’s real news and what’s fake…Not coincidentally, the phenomenal growth of propaganda (the PR industry) has occurred while many news organizations are cutting back on staffing” (Henry, p.23).

Henry worries that “the degree of trust that existed between credible source and professional reporter, reporter and editor…has eroded significantly,” and he blames cost-cutting, which has allowed public relations practitioners to fill the holes in the process. Since they have vested interests in the story they are advocating, he notes, the practitioners cannot be trusted. Henry is not alone. “Understaffed newsrooms are more likely to rely on public relations people to help fill the news holes,” says Smith (1999, p. 274), who feels the reliance on PR representatives to fill news holes today is more corrupting to journalism than the old “promotional relationships,” which included gifts, free travel, and the like (p. 324).

Atkins (2002), on the other hand, argues that little has changed, citing newspapers that “run special sections on specific industries sponsored by the major actors of the industry …(T)he articles appearing in the special sections are written by the same journalists who normally cover the area” (p. 97). Also, Knowlton (1997) offers this insight of the past that can be applied to the present:

“Objectivity connotes neutrality and impartiality. The term came into being just after World War I as a possible cure for the problems then besetting journalism…First, as the nation hurtled into the modern age, life was becoming extremely complex. Second, growing mostly out of propaganda efforts of World War I, came a new profession, that of public relations, though press agentry dates at least to the 1870s and the circus master Phineas T. Barnum” (Knowlton, p. 65).

**The SMPR – A Modern Threat to Journalism?**

Knowlton notes that Lippmann and others believed press agentry, and public relations efforts in general, could threaten journalism, which raises the question whether the SMPR is the modern version of that decades old perceived threat. The debate over this method of PR communication to the news media comes amidst a debate over the basic roles of journalists. Steele (1997), in his book on journalistic ethics, raises the questions: “Should reporters be investigators of system failure or initiators of solutions? Should journalists be detached observers or activist participants?” (p. 162). Merritt (1998), too, talks about increased advocacy in journalism, saying “public judgment is the state of highly developed public opinion that exists once people have engaged an issue, considered it from all sides” (p. 73). As advocacy makes inroads into what once was a profession that strove for objectivity, one can expect more debate on the legitimacy of the SMPR and its contents, especially the inclusion of third party, even opposition, spokespeople of the PR person’s choosing.

Not surprisingly, public relations practitioners do not perceive a threat and, in fact, tend to believe the SMPR is merely another tool, an updated tool required by the times and one that is beneficial to both practitioners and journalists. In interviews, Mims (2007) said, “It’s reporter-centric, and anything that makes a reporter’s job easier is worth our trouble,” and McLendon
(2007) said the SMPR can be even more helpful to journalists if, instead of sending “the release and images as attachments to an email, include thumbnail sketches that link to high-resolution, downloadable images and links to background information from both your organization and third parties to simplify reporters’ information-gathering.”

Conclusion and Future Research

In other words, the SMPR is neutral, neither ethical nor unethical. There no doubt will be rumbles about banning the SMPR, just as 2006-2007 saw vocal protests against video news releases, following revelations that the government and a major public relations agency were using VNRs without identifying who produced them. But even in those cases, the ethics were in the people, not in the tool.

The SMPR will continue to be used, because “Understaffed newsrooms are more likely to rely on public relations people to help fill the news hole” (Smith, p. 274). Since it is still in its infancy, however, there are some conclusions to be drawn:

- Journalists need to be brought into the debate and even the development of any new communications tool employed by PR practitioners. Reporters’ inputs can only help the process and possibly instill trust in it;
- The adversarial relationship between journalists and public relations people needs to be revisited and reconfirmed. Adversaries differ from enemies – but they differ even more greatly from friends.
- Journalists need to realize that PR people are not responsible for the downsizing that has occurred in the newsrooms; and
- PR practitioners need to realize they have a vested interest in the credibility of the media. To take advantage of the downsized newsrooms is shortsighted, because the only credibility PR messages have when contained in the media – old or new – is the inherent credibility those media have. There is a self interest side to ethics.

Either through the Public Relations Society of America or a journalism foundation such as Knight – or, better, a joint effort – additional research should be done on the SMPR to determine whether it is, as most practitioners believe, merely an updated version of the age-old press release or something akin to a pernicious assault on the media.

References


Priorities in public relations research: An international Delphi study
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Abstract
A Delphi study on the priorities for public relations research, conducted in 2007 amongst academics, practitioners and senior executives of professional and industry bodies in five continents, has ranked the ten most important topics for research and proposed the associated research questions. This is the first completed Delphi study into public relations research since Synnott and McKie (1997) which was itself a development of earlier studies of this type by McElreath (1980, 1989 and 1994). Some of the outcomes are comparable with the earlier studies; for instance, evaluation of public relations programmes ranks third in 2007 and was amongst the leaders in the Synnott and McKie (1997) study. After piloting, twenty six public relations topics were chosen. These were sent by email to the Delphi panel. After three rounds of intensive email debate, the Top Ten public relation research topics were in ranked order:

1) Public relations’ role in contributing to strategic decision-making, strategy development and realisation, and organisational functioning
2) The value that public relations creates for organisations through building social capital, managing key relationships and realising organisational advantage
3) The measurement and evaluation of public relations, both offline and online
4) Public relations as a fundamental management function
5) Professional skills in public relations; analysis of the industry’s need for education
6) Research into standards of performance among PR professionals; the licensing of practitioners
7) Management of corporate reputation; measurement of reputation
8) Ethics in public relations
9) Integration of public relations with other communication functions; the scope of public relations practice; discipline boundaries
10) Management of relationships

Introduction
It is more than ten years since Synnott and McKie (1997) reported their Delphi study on public relations research priorities with an emphasis on international issues. Before that study, McElreath had used this approach in 1980 and 1989 in his papers, Priority research questions for public relations in the 1980s and ... in the 1990s to advise North American academic and practitioners. Synnott and McKie acknowledged McElreath’s approach by basing their study on the results of his 1989 research. In the United Kingdom, White and Blamphin (1994) used a Delphi study to review the priorities for research into public relations practice there. It resulted in a list of sixteen topics. Since 1997, there has been an attempt to undertake a Delphi study into ‘the parameters of public relations in Europe’ (van Ruler et al., 2004) but it was not able to
develop a research agenda nor did it find a common body of public relations knowledge in Europe (Raupp and van Ruler, 2006). The Delphi study methodology, which is discussed below, was chosen in this study of public relations priorities in the ‘noughties’ for comparability and consistency.

Academic research needs closer alignment with the interests of practice and the author noted Broom’s comments about the need for more research and theory building in public relations:

Public relations is not so developed that we can draw a boundary around a body of knowledge and limit our enquiry to what is reported in public relations literature. Rather we are in the early stages of building theory that may some day provide a foundation for the emerging profession and its practice. (Broom 2006, p. 141)

### Delphi studies

The Delphi study approach was, as noted above, chosen for comparability but another aim was to seek consensus or judgement on these issues (Beretta, 1996, Green et al., 1999). It allows the grouping and subsequent analysis of the ideas of experts in order to gain a closer understanding of issues that would not be offered by other qualitative or quantitative studies. The reasons for conducting a study using the Delphi method have been summarised by Dawson and Brucker (2001) as (a) there is no other group communication process than can elicit the same data; (b) the researcher can identify and access the ‘experts’ to discuss this problem; and (c) the researcher can forecast the type of results that may be obtained from these experts through the Delphi method (after Linstone and Turoff, 1975, and Ziglio, 1996).

The Delphi method has been used widely in business (Kaynak et al., 1994, Addison, 2003), nursing and healthcare (Jenkins and Smith, 2004, McKenna, 1994), and communications education (Smith, 1997). In public relations research, as noted earlier, there have been several major national and international studies using this method (McElreath, 1980, McElreath, 1989, McElreath and Blamphin, 1994, White and Blamphin, 1994, Synnott and McKie, 1997, van Ruler et al., 2004, Boynton, 2006).

The popularity of this method arises because it can be conducted semi-anonymously amongst respondents who are geographically dispersed. For example, Synnott and McKie’s 1997 study covered 13 nations in Asia-Pacific and van Ruler et al (2004) included between 22 and 25 European countries. A Delphi study typically has two or three rounds of contact with the experts in which comments are first elicited, then summarised and returned for further discussion. Until recently, most Delphi studies have been conducted by post or some other paper-based method (Kendall, 1996) and, latterly, by email. The use of email or internet-based methods has speeded up the process. Boynton (2006) reports use of the internet-based Survey Monkey software for a Delphi study on ethical decision making in public relations had shortened the distribution and response times. However, her 36% response rate from an expert panel was no better (and possibly worse) than the previously conventional mail or paper-based methodology. For example, Synnott and McKie (1997) had a response of 48% to their initial approach to panels, as did White and Blamphin (1994). van Ruler et al. (2004) using email as their communication tool, however, had a higher initial response rate of 84% although this had dropped to 62% in the final
round. It appears that the selection of the panel and the initial approach may play an important role in gaining and maintaining high levels of continuing participation.

Methodology

The lessons from previous studies to be applied to this research were concerned with selecting, attracting and retaining the experts who would participate in the panel, and in constructing a study process that they saw offered value to them. Unlike some previous Delphi studies in public relations, this was aimed at a fully international audience. There was also another change, this time in the sample. Earlier studies had focused on academics and practitioners, but this study included the CEOs (or similar title) of public relations professional and industry bodies because of their overview of the whole sector and not just the issues that impinged on individual academic or professional respondents. The sample was also to be gender-balanced, reflecting the impact of women in public relations employment in developed nations. With these elements, triangulation was offered by employment, region and gender was in advance of earlier studies.

Following the lead of Synnott and McKie (1997), there were six stages in the study. Stage 1 was to pilot a set of 24 propositions on the Internet using the author’s personal blog (weblog); Stage 2 was to invite academics, practitioners and industry leaders to participate in the study; Stage 3 was to send Round 1 of the research topic propositions to those who had accepted invitations and prepare a report; Stage 4 was to send the Round 2 propositions and follow up with a report on Round 2’s responses and discussion; Stage 5 had the Round 3 propositions and report; Stage 6 was the distribution of the Final Report on the research topics and related research questions. This was distributed on July 30, 2007 to all those who had accepted the invitation to take part in the study. Slightly more than three months elapsed from the start of the study to its completion.

Stage 1 – Pre-testing of topics by blog posting

The Stage 1 pre-testing of proposition was posted on the author’s blog on April 18. The link to the site’s URL was sent to contacts in the public relations sector internationally, who were not to be invited to participate in the Delphi study, in order to stimulate responses. This approach was also undertaken to test the viability of blogs as research tools, a practice on which there is a lack of literature. Readers of the blog, including any who came upon it as part of their trawling of the Internet, were asked to rank the topics from 1 (top priority) to 10 (tenth priority). There were sixteen responses from Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States. Respondents were practitioners, academics and industry leaders, who were employed in consultancies, government, universities, industry, not-for-profits and suppliers. Their ten ranked topics were:

Topics ranked by priority in blog pre-test
1. The impact of technology on public relations practice and theory
2. The measurement and evaluation of public relations, both offline and online
3= Integration of public relations with other communication functions; the scope of public relations practice; discipline boundaries
3= Management of corporate reputation; measurement of reputation
5= Client understanding of public relations strategy and tactics
7= Research into standards of performance among public relations professionals; the licensing of practitioners
7= Professional skills in public relations; Analysis of the industry’s need for education; Theories of practice
10= Strategic planning of public relations programmes
10= Quality of public relations services
10= Crisis management and communication; issues management

There were also recommendations for additional topics, of which the best supported were: ‘Public relations’ role in contributing to strategic decision-making, strategy development and realisation, and organisational functioning’; and ‘The value that public relations creates for organisations through building social capital, managing key relationships and realising organisational advantage’. These were added to Round 1 of the formal Delphi study.

**Stage 2: Letter of invitation**

A letter of invitation (Synnott and McKie, 1997) was sent by email to 44 public relations academics, practitioners and industry leaders in six international regions (Europe, North America, Central and South America, Africa, Asia and Australasia) on April 10, 2007. They had been chosen for their prominence in research, practice and as leaders of major industry bodies. Some were known by the author but all were chosen on the basis of their position and expertise, thus qualifying them as experts (Dawson and Brucker, 2001). The letter introduced the aim of the study, the research methodology and the commitment sought. Anonymous reporting of comments was emphasised. All were offered a choice of communication methods (email, fax, written or online communication – blog or forum). Some thirty one accepted the invitation (70.45 per cent) and all chose email communication. There was no response from Central and South America at this or any other stage of the study.

**Stage 3: Round 1 topics and report**

For Round 1, those who had accepted the invitation to participate were emailed a letter introducing the aims of the study. They were asked to consider twenty six topics and choose up to ten of them in a ranked order as to their importance for future research. The participants were also invited to comment on the topics and to propose other topics or research questions (RQs) which could be added to the study. As the study was being sent to a wide range of countries and cultures, a ‘middle way’ between academic and professional practice language was taken to frame the topics. An offer to explain terminology was made, as was the receipt of responses by audio file for those for whom English was not a first or familiar language. In the event, neither offer was taken up. Accompanying the letter was the Round 1 document which introduced the study, listed the 26 topics and included a grid table on which they could rank the topics by the letter denoting them and add comments and/or research questions. There was also space to add additional topics. The letter and Round 1 document were emailed on April 23, 2007 with a request for response by May 8, 2007. The topics disseminated for Round 1 were:
Topics – Round 1

A. Public relations’ role in contributing to strategic decision-making, strategy development and realisation, and organisational functioning
B. Quality of public relations services
C. Research into standards of performance among PR professionals; the licensing of practitioners
D. Integration of public relations with other communication functions; the scope of public relations practice; discipline boundaries
E. The measurement and evaluation of public relations, both offline and online
F. Client understanding of public relations strategy and tactics
G. Professional skills in public relations; Analysis of the industry’s need for education; Theories of practice
H. Management of relationships
I. The definition of public relations
J. The impact of technology on public relations practice and theory
K. The culture of public relations
L. International issues in public relations; Intercultural public relations
M. Public relations’ position as a fundamental management function; public relations as a profession
N. The expectations of users of public relations; The client: consultancy/adviser interface
O. Public relations’ role in organisational change
P. The place of “word-of-mouth” and buzz marketing in public relations practice
Q. Ethics in public relations
R. Relations with the media
S. The history of public relations
T. Gender issues in public relations practice
U. The role of PR in community/social responsibility programmes
V. Management of corporate reputation; measurement of reputation
W. Crisis management and communication; issues management
X. Political communication and advocacy (lobbying)
Y. Social media and its role in public relations
Z. The value that public relations creates for organisations through building social capital, managing key relationships and realising organisational advantage

Responses were received from 27 of the 31 participants (87.1 percent) representing five of the six geographic regions with Europe producing most comments and Africa the least. There was a fairly even distribution between the three employment groups and genders.

Response – Round 1

Region
Europe & UK 40.7%
The topics were ranked by the mean of their valid scores. The best supported three topics were (in rank order) A, Z and E. A and Z focus on the role of public relations in its contribution to organisations in (A) strategic decision-making and organisational functioning and (Z) the creation of value. The third ranked topic E, ‘measurement and evaluation of public relations both offline and online’ is an expected highly ranked topic as it has historic precedents as a first or second ranked topic in previous Delphi studies on public relations. (McElreath, 1980, 1989, White and Blamphin, 1994, Synnott and McKie, 1997)

The fourth ranked topic M, ‘public relations’ position as a fundamental management function; public relations as a profession’, could also be linked to topics A and Z. There was also comment that the ‘public relations as a profession’, was a separate topic. Topic G, ‘professional skills in public relations; analysis of the industry’s need for education; and theories of practice’, was fifth ranked and also commented on as being linked with topic C (seventh ranked). These were linked in the Round 2 propositions.

### Round 1 - Topics ranked by means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>Mean priority (1 = top priority; 10 = lowest)</th>
<th>Number of respondents to topic /27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOP 10 PRIORITIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A) Public relations’ role in contributing to strategic decision-making, strategy development and realisation and organisational functioning</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z) The value that public relations creates for organisations through building social capital; managing key relationships and realising organisational advantage</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) The measurement and evaluation of public relations both offline and online</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M) Public relations’ position as a</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
fundamental management function; public relations as a profession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G) Professional skills in public relations; Analysis of the industry’s need for education; Theories of practice</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L) International issues in public relations; Intercultural public relations</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Research into standards of performance among PR professionals; the licensing of practitioners</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q) Ethics in public relations</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) Integration of public relations with other communication functions; the scope of public relations practice; discipline boundaries</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H) Management of relationships</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**11th to 20th Priorities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J) The impact of technology on public relations practice and theory</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V) Management of corporate reputation; measurement of reputation</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X) Political communication and advocacy (lobbying)</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) Client understanding of public relations strategy and tactics</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Quality of public relations services</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N) The expectations of users of public relations; The client: consultancy/adviser interface</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U) The role of PR in community/social responsibility programmes</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y) Social media and its role in public relations</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O) Public relations’ role in organisational change</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W) Crisis management and communication; issues management</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outliers including high-score, low response topics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I) The definition of public relations</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ranking the topics obtained gave clear priorities from first to eighth, but there was a tight cluster in ranking from ninth to seventeenth where those topics had a mean of between 6 and 6.9. It should be noted at this stage that topic J, ‘the impact of technology on public relations theory and practice’, which had topped the blog-based pre-test was only eleventh in the formal study. Some topics with high scores but few responses have been placed within an ‘outliers’ group. Only one topic, T ‘Gender issues in public relations’, elicited a nil response.

Stage 4: Round 2 propositions and report

Following Round 1’s ranking of priorities, discussion of the topics and potential RQs, the initial twenty six topics were reduced to fifteen. Any topics with a mean ranking of above seven, and the low-response ‘outlier’ group were eliminated. Three topics (B, F and N) were merged into a single topic because of the similarity of their content. All topics were re-lettered, except for topic A, in the ranking order from Round 1. In this round, proposals for RQs arising from the Round 1 were included in the document that was circulated to all 31 original participants. They were again asked to rank topics from 1 (top priority) to 10 (tenth priority) and could propose additional topics and make comments on the topics and RQs.

Round 2 - Revised Topics ranked 1st to 10th

A. Public relations role in contributing to strategic decision-making, strategy development and realisation, and organisational function
B. The value that public relations creates for organisations through building social capital; managing key relationships and realising organisational functioning
C. The measurement and evaluation of public relations both offline and online
D. Public relations’ position as a fundamental management function
E. Professional skills in public relations; Analysis of the industry’s need for education; Theories of practice
F. International issues in public relations; Intercultural public relations
G. Research into standards of performance among PR professionals; the licensing of practitioners
H. Ethics in public relations
I. Integration of public relations with other communication functions; the scope of public relations practice; discipline boundaries

J. Management of relationships

**Topics ranked 11th to 15th**

K. The impact of technology on public relations practice and theory

L. Management of corporate reputation; management of reputation

M. Political communication and advocacy (lobbying)

N. Client/employer understanding of public relations (Replacing Round 1 topics B, F and N)

O. The role of public relations in community/social responsibility programmes

**New Topics, proposed from Round 1**

- The personal/organisational influence model and its correlation with stakeholder relationship management
- The relationship between public diplomacy and public relations
- The role of public relations in society – what does it mean that “PR serves democracy” or that “public relations is an essential element in a democratic society”?
- Further development of theories of publics
- Proof of the two-way symmetrical model in operation

Round 2 was circulated by email on May 22 for response by June 5. There were responses from 24 experts (77.4 percent), compared with 27 in the first round. There were responses from five out of six geographic regions, with Europe again producing most comments and Africa the least. In terms of the work situation of respondents, there was a slightly strengthened response from practitioners by +4.7% with an almost matching –4.6% fall from executives leading professional bodies. The level of response from academics is unchanged, but the balance between genders changes to slightly favour females, the dominant group in industry employment.

**Response – Round 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
<th>Round 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australasia</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
<th>Round 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Body</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
<th>Round 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No topic had a nil response, unlike Round 1. There were clear priorities from first to eleventh with a statistically insignificant step of 0.03% between tenth and eleventh rank. Broadly, the ranking of topics set after Round 1 remained stable, although not without debate as to whether some topics can be merged. The strongest topics were A, ‘public relations’ role in contributing to strategic decision-making, strategy development and realisation, and organisational functioning’ and B, ‘the value that public relations creates for organisations through building social capital; managing key relationships and realising organisational advantage’. There was discussion as to whether these should be merged. The third ranked topic C, ‘measurement and evaluation of public relations both offline and online’ was an expectedly high ranked topic, as discussed in Round 1.

**Round 2 - Topics ranked by means (with Round 1 mean in brackets)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>Mean priority (1 = top priority; 10 = lowest)</th>
<th>Number of respondents to topic /23</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOP 10 PRIORITIES</td>
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<tr>
<td>A) Public relations’ role in contributing to strategic decision-making, strategy development and realisation and organisational functioning</td>
<td>2.43 (2.91)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) The value that public relations creates for organisations through building social capital; managing key relationships and realising organisational advantage</td>
<td>3.50 (3.94)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) The measurement and evaluation of public relations both offline and online</td>
<td>4.24 (4.05)</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>D) Public relations’ position as a fundamental management function</td>
<td>4.38 (4.65)</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>E) Professional skills in public relations; Analysis of the industry’s need for education; Theories of practice</td>
<td>4.67 (4.69)</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>G) Research into standards of performance among PR professionals; the licensing of practitioners</td>
<td>5.83 (5.69)</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>L) Management of corporate reputation; measurement of reputation</td>
<td>6.00 (6.31)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H) Ethics in public relations</td>
<td>6.19 (5.81)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I) Integration of public relations with other communication functions; the scope of public relations practice; discipline</td>
<td>6.19 (6.00)</td>
<td>16</td>
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### Boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J) Management of relationships</td>
<td>6.42 (6.22)</td>
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### 11th to 15th Priorities

<table>
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<tr>
<td>N) Client/employer understanding of public relations *</td>
<td>6.71 (6.43)</td>
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<tr>
<td>K) The impact of technology on public relations practice and theory</td>
<td>6.86 (6.25)</td>
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<tr>
<td>O) The role of PR in community/social responsibility programmes</td>
<td>7.00 (6.90)</td>
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<tr>
<td>F) International issues in public relations; Intercultural public relations</td>
<td>7.38 (5.63)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M) Political communication and advocacy (lobbying)</td>
<td>7.57 (6.4)</td>
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</table>

* This proposition was reformulated after Round 1. The mean comparison for Round 1 is based on the former topic F: “Client understanding of public relations strategy and tactics.”

The main change in the ranking of topics was that topic F ‘international issues in public relations; intercultural public relations’, fell from sixth to fourteenth, and thus out of the Top Ten. The main riser was topic L, ‘management of corporate reputation; measurement of reputation’, which rose from twelfth to seventh, although its mean ranking only changed from 6.31 to 6.00. In the eleventh to fifteenth rankings, topic N, ‘client/employer understanding of public relations’, which was reformulated after Round 1, rose from fourteenth to eleventh. It marginally missed the Top Ten by 0.03 per cent. As the sample of twenty four is small, this could be arguably considered as equal tenth. One of the unexpected aspects of the survey has been that the topic K, ‘the impact of technology on public relations practice and theory’, remained stubbornly just outside the Top Ten at eleventh in Round 1 and twelfth in Round 2, despite being topped ranked in the blog pilot and attracting widespread comment and discussion in practitioner media. There were fewer new topics added than in Round 1, and some of those sought greater clarity in existing topics or proposed new RQs within topics.

**Stage 5 – Round 3 propositions**

As the rankings from Round 1 to Round 2 were relatively stable and so indicated consensus, the participants were asked to comment on the RQs for Round 3, rather than again rank the propositions. A letter, the report on Round 2 and the Round 3 propositions were disseminated on June 21 for return by July 11. As there were minor changes to the RQs between Round 3 and the final report, these will be displayed under Stage 6 – Final Report. Some 16 participants (51.6 per cent of the original acceptances) commented on Round 3, some in considerable detail.

**Stage 6 – Final Report**
The outcome of this study was the ranked, prioritised research topics and the related research questions. They are presented in the ranking order of the topics from first to tenth. It is notable that measurement and evaluation, sometimes expressed as ‘proof’ or ‘value’, appears in several of them, as well as the dedicated topic C, ‘the measurement and evaluation of public relations both offline and online’.

A) Public relations’ contribution to strategic decision-making, strategy development and realisation, and efficient operation of organisations
- How does public relations demonstrate its contribution to the formation of organisational strategy?
- Can public relations improve the quality of organisational decision and performance by practitioners acting as the link between the organisations and its stakeholders (i.e. as facilitators)?
- How can public relations leaders influence business decisions via timely involvement?
- Why do public relations practitioners get a seat at the “top table” in some organisations and not at others? Is there a gender or sector bias?

B) The value that public relations creates for organisations through building social capital and managing key relationships
- What is “value” in public relations? Is there a universal rubric or is it situational?
- How can value be best demonstrated in non-financial terms? Can intangible value be translated into measurable “bottom-line” value?
- Can social capital be measured?
- Is there proof of the two-way symmetrical model in operation?

C) The measurement and evaluation of public relations both offline and online
- Following the CIPR’s statement on measurement and evaluation in 2005 [www.cipr.co.uk/research] and the range of papers published by the Institute for PR [www.instituteforpr.org/research], can an international policy on evaluation be developed to aid practitioner education and introduce best practice?
- How can the effect of public relations activity on attitude formation and behaviour be modelled and measured?
- What are the factors that affect or aid the widespread adoption of public relations measurement and evaluation methods?
- How can highly targeted communication to special, highly protected audiences (such as legislators) be monitored and measured?

D) Public relations as a fundamental management function
- How is public relations expressed as a management function? What is unique about it and what ‘fundamental’ contribution does it make?
- What is the theory and best practice in the structure and operation of public relations and communication operations?
- Management of the public relations function: What are the skills of senior PR managers? Are the working practices and long hours culture an excuse for poor management skills? Why are senior managers reluctant to undertake training?

E) Professional skills in public relations; analysis of the industry’s need for education;
Practitioner:
- The creation of an international curricula and competency framework in professional and managerial skills for practitioners.
- What is the PR industry’s commitment to the improvement of expertise?
- Should practitioner organisations and universities align educational qualifications to reduce confusion on competing qualifications or maintain separate educational routes for differing needs?
Undergraduate:
- What is the role of public relations education? Is it to prepare graduates for entry into the industry or to equip them to critique the industry and change it from within or both?
- What is the most appropriate model of academic: professional alignment in undergraduate courses to give students a broad academic and professional education that supports their entry into the industry as preferred employees?
- What is best practice in communicating the nature and content of public relations education to prospective employers?

G) Research into standards of performance among PR professionals; the licensing of practitioners
- What is the role of professional associations and governments in regulating practices and licensing practitioners? Are there benefits and disadvantages of licensing?
- Can standards of practice be developed in order to create a QA or management standard similar to the Consultancy Management Standard developed by the UK’s Public Relations Consultants Association?
- Could best practice standards be introduced for crisis management, internal communications, issues management, media relations and stakeholder engagement?

L) Management of corporate reputation; measurement of reputation
- Can reputation be managed? If it can, is this a “job” for PR or a whole-of-organisation task?
- How can ‘lost’ or ‘damaged’ reputation be repaired? Is there a ‘best practice’ model that can be applied?
- Why do some organisations with a ‘poor reputation’ continue to thrive?
- There is much ‘received wisdom’ in reputation management – how can the links between a high-profile individual (e.g. a “superstar CEO”) and the reputation of an organisation be proven?

H) Ethics in public relations
- Should a universal code of conduct for public relations practitioners be devised and implemented? How should the ethical behaviour of members be managed by professional bodies?
- How can ethics education of students be designed to aid their ethical practices when entering the workplace?
- How can public relations ethics change from an abstract concept to a daily habit? What are the barriers?
- How does public relations practice influence corporate governance? Or is it vice-versa?
- Ethics in online communication: What are the implications? Are new approaches needed?

I) Integration of public relations with other communication functions; the scope of public relations practice: discipline boundaries
- Is there a field of public relations and can it be defined? What is the unique purpose of public relations?
- Are the current boundaries untenable in the new communications environment?
- How does integrated communication work? Does it work (i.e. is it an effective strategic and tactical model)?
- How can public relations work with marketing for better results?
- How does public relations relate to human resources and change management?

J) Management of relationships
- Who is the ‘owner’ of the relationship: the PR professional or the business line? How can the “PR = relationship management” model be operationalised? Does current theory stand this test?
- How can the link between communication activity and intangibles such as relationship capital be measured?
- How can psychology and communication theory be integrated in implementing relationship management?
- What are the skills, competencies and attitudes needed to develop influence networks?

Discussion

With no comparable studies in the past decade, as the European Delphi study on public relations failed to find consensus (Raupp and van Ruler, 2006), the comparison of the 2007 study is with two reported ten and thirteen years earlier (White and Blamphin, 1994, Synnott and McKie, 1997). As one focused on the United Kingdom and the other on the Asia-Pacific region, there is an international range of views. The data from these studies on research priorities will be compared with this study in order to identify the continuing research issues as well as those which have entered the research agenda latterly and those which have departed.

White and Blamphin’s study was undertaken amongst academics and practitioners in the UK. Some seventy eight experts were approached with a 48.7 per cent response rate to the first round and 34.6 per cent response to the second round. It was after the first round that 16 subject groupings were circulated for ranking by the Delphi group.
Synnott and McKie’s research had a wider spread and drew thirty seven participants from thirteen countries in a deliberate effort to get a wider spread of cultural and economic development conditions. There were seven clusters of questions, of which one focused on ‘major research trends in the field of public relations during the next 10 years’ (Synnott and McKie, 1997, p. 270). It is from this data that comparisons are made. The benchmark for the comparison will be the final report ranking of topics from this study.

Only one topic is wholly new, as shown by this comparison. It is ‘the management of relationships’ (Topic J). Ranking of topics appearing in all three studies is widely varied, although the ‘measurement and evaluation of public relations’ (Topic C) is highly ranked by all three at third, first and first, whereas ‘the impact of technology on public relations practice and theory’ (Topic K) is much lower now than it was a decade ago when the potential for impact was looming, as opposed to the actuality of the present. Other topics in the Top Ten from all three studies are E, ‘professional skills in public relations; analysis of the industry’s need for education’, G, ‘research into standards of performance among PR professionals’, and I, ‘integration of public relations with other communication functions’; whilst Topic F, ‘international issues in public relations; intercultural public relations’ is at a similar lowly ranking to 1994 in the UK, although it was higher in Synnott and McKie’s international study.

The topics omitted since 1994 include:

White and Blamphín’s study
− The definition of public relations
− Strategic planning of public relations
− The image of public relations
− The impact of media content
− Gender issues in public relations practice
− Feature of the market for public relations practice

Synnott and McKie’s study
− The development of suitable models for PR research and suitable techniques such as news content analysis, consumer trend forecasting, issues monitoring and tracking techniques, benchmarking, continuous monitoring, frame analysis, public decision-making models, etc

It is notable that discussions over ‘what is public relations’, ‘the definition of public relations’ and ‘the image of public relations’ have departed from the current research agenda, although topic I, considers ‘the scope of public relations practice; discipline boundaries.’ In responses to this topic, there was little sign of defensiveness about the boundaries of public relations. Another change since 1994 has been that research no longer is engaged with media relations and its monitoring (e.g. ‘the impact of media content’ and ‘news content analysis’). Many of these issues have not been resolved, such as an international definition of public relations or gender issues in this discipline, but they are no longer either current or other issues have succeeded them.
Conclusions

By its nature, this research is intended as an outcome in itself by identifying the priorities for research into public relations. Over time, it can be repeated with similar methods and samples so that there is a rolling benchmark of the issues and topics. One of the drivers behind this research has been the increasingly demanding processes of bidding for funding of research that call for relevance and potential for implementation. By identifying these priorities, it is hoped that they will give legitimacy to bids from public relations researchers, who can demonstrate them as an international academic/practitioner benchmark in support of their proposals. Although this study used email as its communication tool, future research using a Delphi study or similar technique should again test the role of blogs and wikis as more dialogic methods of seeking answers to these research questions.

References


Triangular Communications: The Who, Why and How
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ABSTRACT
This study delineates a model of triangular communication wherein the communicator treats management as a public. This model posits that the communicator serves as one corner of a communication triangle, conducts formative research on management as well as publics, and treats management and publics as targets of program planning/communication.

It would be less than startling to hear that management involvement in a communication audit can be helpful to the ultimate success of a research project. What might be more interesting would be to learn that rather than a facilitating, moderating, approving/disapproving force in the communication process; management's integral involvement may actually determine the extent of success. Success here is defined as an audit that causes strategic and tactical changes to be made to an existing communication program. Essentially, a good communication audit will come out of a simple three-way communication process.

Review of the Literature
Perhaps the most influential theoretical influence for the present study was the Excellence Study, the three-nation study of CEOs, top communicators, and employees in 321 organizations in the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom (Dozier, L. A. Grunig, & J. E. Grunig, 1995; J. E. Grunig, L. A. Grunig, & Dozier, 2006; L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). In summarizing the 1,700 variables collected in each organization, the Excellence team described communication excellence in terms of three concentric spheres of organizational attributes. To be excellent, the central sphere of attributes is the knowledge core: the expertise within the communication or public relations department to enact the strategic manager role and the knowledge to engage in two-way communication. At an organizational level, establishing the communication loop requires knowledge of research methods to conduct focus groups, run surveys, do content analysis, and the like (Dozier, L. A. Grunig, & J. E. Grunig, 1995). The knowledge core consists of the specialized expertise to engage in advanced practices.

Shared Expectations
Most relevant to the present study is the second sphere, which the Excellence team labeled shared expectations (Dozier et al., 1995). Shared expectations was defined as a mutual understanding between public relations practitioners and top management regarding advanced practices. As Dozier, L. A. Grunig, and J. E. Grunig (1995) argued,
Knowledge of advanced practices is not enough, however. To put such expertise to use, communication departments need CEOs and dominant coalitions to understand such practices and expect them from their communication departments. Under such conditions, communication becomes essential to strategic management and the smooth operation of organizations. (p. 89).

The Excellence study focused primarily on public relations departments and communication units internal to organizations. However, the findings have broad implications for the public relations consultant.

**Practitioner as Mediator**

Research by Plowman (1995, 2004, 2005, 2006) emphasized the role of practitioners as mediators between organizations and their publics. In order to be effective as a mediator, the public relations consultant must interact with all relevant parties involved. The triangulation theory of communications is an articulation of this view of the consulting practitioner as a mediator that explicitly includes senior management as a key audience or public.

**Audits**

In their classic work, *Managing Public Relations*, J. E. Grunig (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) note that the term communication audit or public relations audit is used in an imprecise way to describe various aspects of the research process in public relations practices. J. E. Grunig and Hunt distinguished formative and summative research, as well as environmental monitoring, social auditing, public relations auditing, and communication auditing.

For the present study, audit is defined as the systematic process managed by the practitioner consultant to (1) identify the issues, problems, and/or opportunities that motivate the client to communicate with its publics, (2) collect relevant background information (media coverage, internal organizational documents, etc.) to inform the process, (3) conduct qualitative and quantitative research, and (4) suggest action and communication strategies to address the identified issues, problems, and/or opportunities. Note that the term practitioner consultant does not necessarily imply that the practitioner must work for a public relations firm or consultancy. Rather, this term reflects an orientation to the role of the practitioner as a consultant to senior management, whether employed internally or externally.

There are several processes and goals associated with conducting an audit. These include (1) assess effectiveness of overall communication process, (2) determine how to leverage communication in multiple divisions, (3) evaluate effectiveness of communication channels, (4) assess whether audiences have received/understood messages, (5) develop an ongoing measurement process, and (6) build a strategic communication plan. Although the practitioner consultant may hope to accomplish all six of these steps, the practitioner is constrained by conditions within the organization. Thus, all audits may not accomplish all six steps successfully. This variance in the auditing process across organizational settings generates the variance in triangular communications that permits the conduct of this study.

**The Triangular Communications Theory Summarized**
Based on the review of the literature and empirical generalizations drawn from the conduct of audits over several decades by the first author, the theory of triangular communications can be summarized as follows: Communication audits are more likely to be successful at changing the client organization’s philosophy and strategy if senior management is included as a distinct audience or public in the auditing process. As noted below, a successful audit is considered a necessary but not sufficient condition for the successful change or maintenance of relationships between organizations and publics.

Methods

The present study utilizes a rigorous qualitative research methodology that Yin (1989) described as a Type 4 multiple case study design. This methodological approach is often considered “more compelling” than a single case study (Yin, 1989, p. 52), because a single case may be idiosyncratic and dismissed by others as an exception to general patterns regarding the phenomena of interest. The Type 4 multiple case study design conceptualizes each case study the way a quantitative researcher might think about multiple experiments. Each experiment, according to the hypotheticodeductive logic of quantitative research, is a separate test of the theory under consideration, as operationalized in the research hypothesis.

Unit of Analysis

The logic of the Type 4 multiple case study design is similar to the logic of multiple quantitative experiments described above. In this study, an audit (conducted by the consulting firm of the first author) was the triggering event that qualified the organization as a unit of analysis for purposes of this study. The first author is the past owner of a medium-sized public relations firm in the American Midwest. Since each audit was conducted for a different organization, the unit of analysis is conceptualized as an organization for which an audit was conducted.

Data Collection

In the present study, the authors examined the results of 22 communication audits conducted for a variety of for profit and not-for-profit organizations. All were past or former clients of the first author. All of the organizations analyzed are large. Therefore, each organization is classified as complex, difficult to understand, and institutionally resistant to changes in communication course direction (i.e., heavy organizational “mass” subject to behavioral inertia).

Evaluating the Data

As a qualitative multiple case study, the key attributes of organizations were not quantified for statistical analysis. Rather, each audit was inspected to determine whether or not triangulation communication was achieved. Then, using specific qualitative criteria, the success or failure of the audit was determined for the 22 cases analyzed.

This method of data collection and evaluation depended on documentation (e.g., the audits themselves) to determine whether triangular communications was implemented effectively. That is, was senior management treated as a separate public and included in the information
gathering process? Did the practitioner consultant sit down and interview members of senior management as a separate public or audience? Did management seek to participate in a meaningful way in the audit process? In a quantitative experiment, this determination would be regarded as the independent variable, the causal influence that affects some outcome.

Next, a determination was made as to the success or failure of the auditing process, which constitutes the outcome measure. This is similar to the dependent variable in an experimental design. Although qualitative in nature, this determination was nevertheless rigorous. Obviously, if an audit successfully accomplishes the six steps discussed in the Audits section above, one could consider the audit successful. However, on a more realistic level, the practitioner consultant’s goals are much more simple. The first author utilized the four following criteria to determine this outcome indicator:

1. Did management accept/understand the results of the study?
2. Did management get involved in "solutions" to issues?
3. Did the audit have legs, i.e., did it create a lasting attention to making the changes that were recommended?
4. Were the changes that were made as a result of the audit strategic rather than only tactical?

Affirmative responses to these questions essentially mean that the organization approached the audit with an eye to philosophical, strategic changes, not just tactical or cosmetic changes. If an audit caused a publication to be published, but didn’t truly attempt to understand and deal with issues raised, then the audit was only partially successful. Note that in order to be successful, an audit must succeed in changing organizational behavior; a successful audit moves the needle within the organization. Changing the organization and moving the needle with senior management does not mean the organization was ultimately successful in changing or maintaining relationships with publics, which is the ultimate outcome measure of a successful communication program. The present study is concerned with the process that needs to take place for a communication program to ultimately succeed, a necessary but not sufficient condition.

Findings

Using the research design described above, the first author conducted the initial analysis. The second author, who was not a party to the audits, conducted a second review of the cases to confirm or disconfirm the patterns identified by the first author. Based on the analysis of the 22 cases, the following determinations were made:

- 13 of the audits were, on a qualitative basis, considered successful efforts
- 7 of the audits were, also on a qualitative basis, lacking in success
- 2 were not able to be judged for lack of follow-up information
- Of the 13 successful organizations, 11 projects included senior management interviews and 10 of those 11 had what we considered intimate senior management involvement in the process and determination of the results
- Of the 7 less than successful efforts, five had little or no senior management involvement
- Looking closer at the successful ventures, ALL of the most successful ventures had both senior management interviews AND deep senior management involvement
• On the other hand, each of the least successful audits had few or no interviews and involvement from management

Discussion

What does this all mean? It means that communicators must look at management as a separate and distinct audience. Management is, in fact, a separate audience that needs to be addressed with the same care and attention as the ultimate end audience.

Ten Lessons Learned

Looking even closer at the audits, there are 10 lessons to be gleaned from this multiple case study analysis:

1. Strategic change efforts came from efforts where management was most closely involved. Conversely, where management was little involved, tactical changes were most notable on recommendations that came from the study.
2. As a general rule, there seemed to be a higher rate of organizational acceptance of the results of a study when management was involved all the way along in a study.
3. Where management was involved as a distinct audience, there seemed to be a better chance of their "listening" and paying attention to the results of the audit.
4. Very often, biases that existed within the ranks of management could be seen emerging and, very often, dealt with in a straightforward manner. That is, deep held beliefs on the part of senior management, when surfaced, would be discussed with consensus on reality often a part of the end result.
5. Studies that included management as a separate audience seemed to help "cement" that group to the communication staff. On the other hand, when management was less involved, communication staff seemed to be ignored more frequently.
6. Senior managers, when included, were able of offer insights and knowledge that greatly informed the efforts of the study. This is especially true for those aspects of an organization that are cultural, rather than mechanical or technical.
7. The more deeply involved the managers were, the more they tended to be better informed about the "audience."
8. It was much more likely that if a study targeted senior management equally as an audience to be studied then the results of the study were likely to be meshed with the organization's objectives and strategies.
9. One small but important outcome of senior management involvement was that involvement allowed the communication staff to hear and "feel" language and emotions that informed the communicator's ultimate efforts.
10. Finally, senior management involvement seemed to help build consensus for the fact that solutions to certain issues were needed and helped bring about those solutions.

For all of these reasons, we believe it is a mistake to treat management as anything but a separate audience. Their views, beliefs, understanding, expectations and experiences rule their decision making. And they will make decisions about communication—either through neglect
or actively. If the audit pays attention to them, they are more likely to want to be part of the process and more likely to be a positive part of that process.

Management nearly always believes it has a well-developed "sense" of each of an organization's audiences. Thus, communicators need to have a finely tuned understanding of what that sense is, why and how that sense developed, how deep the beliefs go, and the level support for any potential project or program. Knowing the type and levels of support that may be (or not be) forthcoming, designing a communication program becomes much more real world.

Finally, each and every audience knowingly or unknowingly sends often separate signals to communicators and management. In the case of customers, management sees and studies sales figures (maybe even talks to a customer on occasion) while communicators may be dependent on editors of trade publications or interpretations by sales or marketing management. In the case of shares of stock movement over time, senior management may have occasional meetings with the Street. Communicators, on the other hand, are far more likely to be seeing letters from shareholders, or having telephone conversations with them. In employee initiatives, such as getting buy-in for a benefits program, management obtains most of its information from human resources or the legal staff or other managers. On the other hand, communicators are having hard, one-on-one conversations with employees—who will often tell them things they would never say to the big bosses.

Five Ways to Sell an Audit

Now, while all of this may make sense, the "doing" of involvement is much more complex. How does a communicator who wants to conduct a communication audit get management involved? Based on the case studies discussed earlier, here are some observations as to how the concept of an audit was “sold” to the client organization:

1. Build consensus for the need to know more about how communication dollars are being spent…and whether they are being spent well. That was by far the biggest motivator for management to say yes to the project, and to being involved.
2. Be sure to talk benchmarks; where that was done, audits were more likely to be approved.
3. Forgetting money for the moment, in many of the audits we studied, there was a simple desire to be sure that all of management was singing from the same song book when it came to communicating important messages. That is, consistency.
4. Appropriate message development was an obvious driver in many of the efforts. Most managers wanted to ensure that the right messages were devised and communicated.
5. Many of the approved audit requests came by appealing directly to the concept of alignment, making sure that communication goals were directly linked with business goals.

Eight Recommendations for Doing Successful Audits

The final point to be made from the audits studied was to look at the specific techniques used to involve management. Without fail it was the use of one-on-one, sit-down interviews: the researcher/communicator sitting in the office of the senior manager and asking questions.
This finding leads to an examination of guidelines discerned by setting up and conducting of these interviews. Here's what we learned:

1. The interviewer had to be the right person for the process to be approved. If the interviewer was perceived as not up to the task, turn downs were more likely.
2. In many cases, multiple interviewers were used, thus ensuring that no biases interfered with the "hearing" of information.
3. At least one hour, and often 1 ½ hours were dedicated to the discussions.
4. In almost every case, the interviewer used a prepared and approved questionnaire to get the approval, then was adept enough to explore concepts that arose along the way, or deemphasize areas that appeared to lose importance, for whatever reason.
5. The selection of the right management group was critical. In almost all cases the decisions were made based on whether the managers were seen as being members of senior management and, mostly, they were the dominant coalition.
6. Accuracy of quotes was promised, and anonymity was guaranteed. Only notepads were to be used. Audio or video recording were viewed as being inappropriate.
7. In most cases, a qualitative report was promised by the researchers…and presented to management as a separate presentation.
8. The interviews were promised to be a critical starting point in order to develop an inkling of what should be pursued as issues facing the organization. The premise was sold that while it was helpful to know how a particular manager felt about an organization's abilities to communicate with important audiences, it was even more important to understand managers' views on the important issues to be addressed in communications programming.

In the final analysis, the attention paid to senior managers as a separate audience can, and often will, determine the ability to conduct a communication audit. Doing so won't guarantee success, but our research would seem to indicate that it increases the chances.

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

As with all good science, the present study has several limitations. Several of these are inherent to case study methods. First, the 22 organizations studied were all clients of a single public relations firm that has a research specialty, mostly in the American Midwest or East Coast. Second, determining the degree to which triangular communications were used in the auditing process (independent variable) and whether the audit was successful or not involved the use of qualitative criteria that involved elements of subjectivity. Although the first and second authors reached consensus on these determinations, others looking that the same cases may have reached different conclusion.

Despite these limitations, this study embraces the Wheel of Science (Babbie, 2004, p. 26) and sees this research as contributing to a stream of research with considerable benefits to the body of knowledge. That is, the present study is primarily an inductive study based on the pattern recognition of the first author: successful audits involve triangular communication where senior management is treated as an identified audience or public during the auditing process. The present study systematically reviewed 22 cases where the pattern was confirmed. Thus, the theory of triangular communication is best regarded as an empirical generalization. Future
research could formalize this empirical generalization as a formal theory and test it using quantitative measures of the independent and dependent variables identified as relevant in the present study. The advantage of a quantitative study is that many more organizations could be included. Probability sampling would permit statistical generalizations to a large population of organizations, something not permitted by the multiple case study design used here. Further, determination of the independent and dependent variables could be accomplished through the use of Likert-type items that would permit the determination of reliability of measures.

References Cited
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Its Current and Future Status and Problems
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Introduction
Despite its prominent presence in the world economy, because of its unique culture and language, Japan still remains a mystery to many westerners. Today, over 60 years after the introduction of its modern concept by General Douglas McArthur, public relations practice in Japan still remains relatively unknown to the rest of the world. This study intends to identify public relations activities that are regarded as important in Japan today and in the near future. The study also tries to identify problems for public relations practice in Japan.

As public relations practice in Japan has a rather short history, the concept of public relations and its practice varies widely depending on the type of practitioner being observed. For instance, employment practices in subsidiaries of foreign companies in general differ from those of traditional Japanese companies, making a room for public relations specialists. In many cases, public relations firms are assigned only the task of media relations. Public relations in manufacturers of consumer product tend to lean toward marketing communication, sometimes blurring the boundary between advertising. In many corporations, even today, some of the key public relations functions such as community relations, government relations and issues management are carried out by other sections such as somu-bu (General Affairs) or kikaku-bu (Management Planning). Given such diversity in the type of public relations practices, Delphi method was chosen for this study as it allows to seek consensus or judgment among experts.

Literature Review
There is a dearth of articles on public relations practices in Japan. Inoue (2003) wrote an overview of public relations in Japan, including its history, underlying culture and media practice. Although some enterprises such as a Mitsui Gofukuten (the present Mitsukoshi Department Store) and South Manchurian Railroad started issuing newsletters and magazines in the late 1890s and early 1900s, it was not until General Douglas McArthur’s occupation in 1945 that modern concept of public relations was introduced in Japan. He also points out that Japan is a high context culture and people treasure harmony, resulting in a tendency among organizations not to reveal mistakes made and to be hesitant to openly take responsibility (Inoue, 2003).

Sriramesh, Kim, and Takasaki compared public relations in three Asian cultures, namely, India, Korea and Japan (2000). In Japan, surveys and in-depth interviews of practitioners were conducted and they found that although only 30% of the survey respondents agreed that they practiced the public information model, the analysis of the interviews revealed that most of those interviewed practiced the public information model. Japanese interviewees also openly expressed criticism of two-way communication, and they collect information about publics through journalists. Through analysis, the researchers found that J. E. Grunig’s original four models (press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical model, two-day symmetrical model)
describe only some of the public relations practices of the these three countries, and found that practitioners often use personal influence model to conduct their public relations activities. For instance, they found that in Japan, socializing with journalists is a primary media relations strategy for public relations practitioners (Sriramesh, Kim, & Takasaki, 2000).

Kelly, Masumoto, and Gibson studied how Japanese media operate and how it affects public relations practices (2002). They have found that the term “PR” in Japanese has generally been used in the context of marketing and is understood to mean advertising, whereas the Japanese translation koho has been used to mean public relations. When the importance of public relations was not recognized, many corporations placed the function in somu-bu (General Affairs). During the era of rapid economic growth, public relations departments were established as kobo-bu (Public Relations) in many corporations, but it was also common to have koho-senden-bu having both public relations and advertising together in one department. Some companies, understanding the significance of public relations, locate koho-shitu (public relations office) next the president’s or other top manager’s office. A survey by Japan Economic Public Relations Center (JEPRC) indicates that “gaining societal and stockholder understanding of the corporation through media is the most important activity for the koho division (JEPRC 1993, as cited in Kelly, et al. 2002, p. 271). Most corporations and governmental organizations considered “providing the society with an accurate understanding of corporate activities and to carry out one’s responsibility to inform the public” (Kelly et al. p. 271) than “using media public relations to create a better image of the corporation and to advertise merchandise” (p. 271), but in recent years, the importance of public relations has been widely recognized, changing the perception of the link between media and public relations dramatically. Although koho in Japan emphasizes long-term relations with media representatives to greater degrees than in the United States, the authors conclude that “there is no justification for considering the public relations world of Japan as alien or for viewing public relations in Japan as ‘backward’ due to the absence of a public relations tradition.”

Wrigley, Ota, and Kikuchi (2006) wrote a case study on Snow Brand food poisoning incidents. In it, they point out that Japanese businesses move future executives between divisions every 2-4 years to train them to be generalists. It is based on the premise of lifelong employment and this tradition makes it difficult to train specialists who can offer management professional advice.

In Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management, Grunig (1992) sourced attributes of excellence in management from four streams of literatures and one of them is books on Japanese management. Given the economic downturn Japan has gone through during the 1990s, Watson and Sallot (2001) tried to see if Japanese management style and, by extension, public relations have changed since the publication of the Excellence book. They conducted a survey of corporate public relations practitioners and found that 65% of the respondents identified the most-often performed activity as “[m]edia relations/publicity/news release dissemination” (Watson & Sallot, 2001, p. 394). They also asked which of the Grunig and Hunt’s (1984, as cited in Watson & Sallot) four types of public relations models they use. Although 62% responded that they use some combination of the four models, when asked to rank the four models in the order they use, the most popular choice was the public information/one-way symmetrical model (Watson & Sallot, 2001).
Delphi Method

Delphi method was “developed during the 1950s by workers at the RAND Corporation” (Rowe, Wright, & Bolger, 1991, p. 236). It is a procedure to “obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts” (Dalkey, & Helmer, as cited in Rowe, et al., p. 236). It is “a method of eliciting and refining group judgments….when the issue is one where exact knowledge is not available” (Dalkey, 1969, p. v). The method has three features: anonymous response, iteration and controlled feedback, and statistical group response (Dalkey). The Delphi method “can be used to used to study emerging trends in any field, social, economic, political and technological” (Jain, 1984, p. 125). It is widely used in corporate environmental scanning (Jain, 1984), technology forecast (Cuhls, & Kuwahara. 1994), and new product forecast (Kahn, 2006).

In public relations, Delphi method is used to identify priority research questions (McElreath, & Blamphin, 1994), what typifies European public relations practice and research agenda (Vercie, Butschi, & Flodin, 2004), key values in ethical decision-making (Boynton, 2006), international public relations programming (Wakefield, 1999) and research questions in international public relations (Synnott, & McKie, 1997).

Method

A questionnaire containing 23 public relations activity items and 12 problems were constructed (see table 1 & 2). These items were selected based upon the author’s own experience as a public relations practitioner for ten years in Japan. The respondents were asked to rank order 10 activities and five problems by their importance. They were also asked to provide any item not included in the list but they think was of importance to be included in the list.

The questionnaire was sent to nine public relations practitioners, with a request to introduce three other practitioners. These practitioners were recruited through the author’s personal contact, with a hope that snow-ball sampling would bring larger and wider variety of respondents. The questionnaire was also sent to 16 university professors who taught a course in public relations or corporate communication at universities in Japan. This number of professors may seem small, but as far as the author could identify through web search at the time of preparation for this research, they were the only ones to teach courses in public relations in Japan. The questionnaires were sent to 13 practitioners and nine professors by e-mail, and to six professors by postal mail as their e-mail addresses were not publicly available.

First round result

Of nine practitioners contacted, five responded, and of 16 professors contacted, three responded, resulting in eight responses. However, two respondents did not rank order items as requested, and of the remaining six, four did not rank order as many items as requested. Furthermore, one respondent clearly stated that he cannot spare time for cooperation in the next round. One of the practitioners gave names of two practitioners who were immediately contacted, but there were no response. At this point, a decision was made to terminate the study.
Conclusion

The failure of this study can be attributed to two factors, recruitment strategy and understanding of the Delphi method.

Delphi method

Delphi method asks participants to rank order items and it requires a careful evaluation of each item. Unlike academicians or academically trained practitioners, it may be difficult to evaluate the importance of activities. What is important for them to do may be what they have committed or what is demanded by their client but not necessarily be an important public relations activity. In order to make the evaluation process easier, public relations activities need to be grouped thus eliminating the number of activities to choose from and to rank order.

Participant recruitment

Public relations is said to be a 24/7 job. In addition, virtually all white color work in Japan demands such devotion, and practitioners, those who deserve to be asked opinions in particular, are working under enormous pressures. Under such conditions, participant needs a strong motivation to participate. As well known, Japan is a high context country where who knows who and who’s asking who make a lot of difference. It may be necessary to build initial relationship with participants and follow-up with over-the-phone or face-to-face contact.

Future research

In order to avoid the mistake the author has made, it is suggested that the questionnaire be revised and the research be conducted in collaboration with someone in Japan who has a strong relationship with public relations practitioners and scholars.

Reference


