13th International Public Relations Research Conference

“Ethical Issues for Public Relations Practice in a Multicultural World”

Holiday Inn University of Miami
Coral Gables, Florida

March 10 – March 13, 2010

Edited by:
Melissa D. Dodd
Koichi Yamamura
University of Miami
RESEARCH CONFERENCE STEERING COMMITTEE

Don W. Stacks, Ph.D., University of Miami, Conference Director
Shannon Bowen, Ph.D., Syracuse University
Marcia Watson DiStaso, Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University
Melissa D. Dodd, M.A., University of Miami
Jack W. Felton, Institute for Public Relations (Emeritus)
John Gilfeather, TNS
Bob Grupp, Institute for Public Relations
Michelle Hinson, Institute for Public Relations
Dean Kruckeberg, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, University of Northern Iowa
Fraser Likely, Likely Communication Strategies, Ltd.
Tina CarrollMcCorkindale, Ph.D., California State University at Pomona
Rita Linjuan Men, M.Phil., University of Miami
David Michaelson, Ph.D., Echo Research
Douglas A. Newsom, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, Texas Christian University
Frank Ovaitt, Makovsky + Company and CEO Emeritus, Institute for Public Relations
Katie D. Paine, KDPaine & Partners
Robert S. Pritchard, M.A., University of Oklahoma
Brad Rawlins, Ph.D., Brigham Young University
Judy VanSlyke Turk, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, Virginia Commonwealth University
Lou Williams, L.C. Williams & Associates
Donald K. Wright, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, Boston University
Koichi Yamamura, M.S, University of Miami
Lynn M. Zoch, Ph.D., Radford University

Educator Academy Liaison to Committee
Betsy Ann Plank, APR, Fellow PRSA

Past Conference Directors
Melvin Sharpe, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA

Special Thanks To:
Jennifer Moyer, Institute for Public Relations
We would like to thank the following for supporting socially beneficial public relations research that increases understanding, builds relationships, supports ethical socially responsible performance, and advances the development of an increasingly democratic global society:

Arthur W. Page Society
Brazilian Association for Business Communication
Brigham Young University Department of Communications
Echo Research
Edelman
FedEx
General Motors
IBM
Institute for Public Relations
ITT Corporation
Jackson Jackson & Wagner
Johnson & Johnson
Ketchum
Likely Communications Strategies
University of Miami
Peter Debreceny
The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations
Shell
Texas Tech University College of Mass Communications
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

(IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER BY FIRST AUTHOR’S LAST NAME)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al Qa’ida Messages to Americans: An Analysis of Ethical Strategies in Public Relations Campaigns</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Allen, University of Maryland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremist groups throughout the world rely on sophisticated public relations campaigns to attract members and undermine their opponents. This study applied multiple ethical perspectives, including non-Western approaches, to determine if al Qa’ida public relations campaigns were unethical, and if so, what standards could be used to judge the ethics of a public relations campaign.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do They Keep Their Promises?—Responsiveness Rates of Israeli Businesses and Nonprofit Associations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruthie Avidar, University of Haifa (Israel)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This study embraces the co-creational perspective from public relations theory. It is based on a field experiment among 1200 businesses and nonprofit associations. The study reveals a gap between the dialogic potential of the Internet and its actual utilization by organizations, and calls for a distinction between a declarative symmetrical communication and actual responsiveness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The state of environmental communication: A Survey of PRSA Members</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise S. Bortree, Pennsylvania State University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This study takes the first step toward exploring how organizations communicate about their environmental policies and practices and the degree to which this communication is transparent. Findings from 320 surveys completed by PRSA members suggest that organizations with more knowledgeable practitioners tend to be more transparent in their communication.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shannon Bowen, Syracuse University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By exploring the nature of good in public relations, this study seeks to help clarify what we really mean and understand when the Commission on Public Relations Education and scholars discuss a normative core of ethical principles to guide public relations across cultures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Intracampaign and intercandidate issue agenda-setting during the 2008 presidential campaign
Thomas P. Boyle, Millersville University

Building on previous framing and agenda-setting research in public relations, this study examines issue mentions in the speeches and political advertisements used by the Barack Obama and John McCain campaigns during the 2008 presidential election. Campaign speeches and political advertisements were content analyzed for issue and character mentions.

The Moral Exemplars of Public Relations: Who Are They?
Anesha Brown
Liliya Velbovets, Brigham Young University

The aim of this quantitative research is to identify which individual public relations professionals or scholars are considered to be the moral exemplars for the field. To answer these research questions, a convenience sample of public relations scholars and practitioners between the ages of 25-65 was selected and invited to complete a Web-based survey.

Public Relations in Ukraine: A Qualitative Profile of its Historical Development, Current State, and Emerging Trends
Iryna Bugayova
Alan R. Freitag, U of North Carolina at Charlotte

Public relations practice in non-Western countries remains an under-researched area. This study explores public relations practice in Ukraine. The study begins by reviewing the existing research on public relations practice in the Central and Eastern Europe and on Ukraine in particular. The paper then presents the results of in-depth interviews conducted with practitioners in Ukraine.

Mommy Bloggers and the FTC: Reactions to the Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials
Kelli S. Burns, University of South Florida

This study will content analyze the blogs of Nielsen’s Power Mom 50 to understand how mommy bloggers reacted to the FTC guidelines. The study result determined whether they posted a reaction to the FTC guidelines, whether they proclaimed support for or criticized these new policies, their understanding of the new guidelines, and the practices they use to indicate endorsement.
Interactive Roots: Analyzing Urban Agricultural Non-Profits’ Use of Social Media to Foster Engagement Through Stewardship
L. Simone Byrd, Alabama State University

This current qualitative research is focused on examining the stewardship model from the philosophy that it can be also used as a way to engage non-profit volunteers and community members, who donate their time and other resources, as opposed to solely focusing on those who make monetary contributions.

Exploring Key Messages as a Concept for Public Relations Evaluation: Case Studies of Nonprofit Organizations
Craig E. Carroll
Nell C.L. Huang
Brooke Weberling, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Building upon the literature in framing, attribute agenda setting, agenda building, and mathematical theory of communication, the authors introduce and define the concept of ‘message integrity’ as a way to evaluate the processes of attribute salience transfer. The concept is then examined in the context of 18 national non-profit organizations.

Choosing a Career in the Non-profit Sector: The Service Learning Connection
Caroline J. Chetelat, American Urological Association
Margaret Algren, Towson University
Kristen C. Eichhorn, State University of New York Oswego

This study provides concrete suggestions into how to design effective student experiences in non-profits to maximize the opportunity of attracting quality public relations students to careers in the non-profit sector. Results of the study showed that there was a significant difference between career choice and personal values.

The Kindle Crisis: Exploring Ways to Evaluate Online Crisis Communication
Timothy W. Coombs
Sherry J. Holladay, Eastern Illinois University

The Kindle Crisis presents a unique opportunity to study stakeholder responses to crisis communication. This study examined the online responses to Amazon CEO Bezo’s apology for insights into this case and for developing a method for systematically evaluating online responses to crisis response strategies.
Comparison of Perceived Journalism and Public Relations Ethics as Seen in Establishing Media Credentials for Bloggers and Citizen Journalism without Gatekeepers
Claudia Cuddy
Suzanne FitzGerald, Rowan University

With the onset of significant blogging and citizen journalism, Journalists and public relations practitioners are somewhat stymied by the lack of refereed information and credentials of new media outlets. This study investigates the ethical dilemmas of establishing appropriate media credentials as well as verifying the accuracy of citizen journalists as self-gatekeepers.

Using Relationship Management To Encourage Ethical Practice Among Cultural Strangers: A Survey of Millennial Generation Public Relations Agency Employees
Patricia A. Curtin
Tiffany Derville-Gallicano
Kelli Matthews, University of Oregon

This study reports data from a nationwide survey of Millennial Generation public relations agency employees that examined employer-organization relationships and factors affecting ethical decision making. This study extends relationship management theory, noting that it not only leads to good relationship outcomes with employers but also correlates with more ethical behavior on their part.

Who Really Cares about Ethics? Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Purchase Intention
Melissa D. Dodd, University of Miami

This study seeks to extend the existing body of literature related to CSR and financial performance with the inclusion of consumer’s perspectives. The current study concludes that a positive relationship exists between CSR and financial performance, or that consumers are more likely to purchase a product if they perceive the company that makes it as socially responsible.

The Influence of Cultures on SNS Usage: Comparing Mixi in Japan and Facebook in the U.S.
Xue Dou, Pennsylvania State University

This study analyzes the Japanese SNS Mixi by comparing it with Facebook in the U.S. in order to find what functions are available to users and how users communicate with each other on online community of SNS. Content analysis will be used to examine online communities of car brands in both Mixi and Facebook.
Social media engagement: How Fortune 100 companies use Twitter to build relationships
Daradirek G. Ekachai
Amanda Stageman, Marquette University

This study attempts to examine how selected Fortune 100 companies use Twitter to engage with their publics in order to build and/or maintain relationships with them. Using content analysis methodology, this study examines these corporations’ “tweets” to determine the extent to which they engaged with their “followers” to build trust, satisfaction and commitment.

U.S. and European Perspectives on Teaching Ethics to Public Relations Students
Elina Erzikova, Central Michigan University

To examine university teachers’ perceptions of ethics instruction in the PR curriculum, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 52 American and European educators. The study found that as PR practices reflect national specifics of the countries in which PR activities take place, PR educational philosophies reflect national PR practices and broader societal contexts.

The Licensed Ethical Conscience: A study of Public Relations Ethics in Brazil
Angela Fischer, Boston University

As the first country to license public relations, Brazil serves as a testing zone, where public relations practitioners can learn about the ethical effects of a licensed profession. This study expands the concept of public relations licensing addressed almost exclusively by Molleda and Athaydes (2003) to include ethical implications.

Marco Gambaro, Università degli Studi di Milano (Italy)
Riccardo Publisi, Università di Pavia (Italy)

This study analyzes the impact of advertising and public relation on media coverage, with a focus on listed companies. Newspaper coverage of 13 Italian companies listed on the stock market are analyzed. Newspapers appear to be reacting more strongly to company-specific newsworthy events, the larger the purchases of ads by that company.

Perception is truth: How elite U.S. newspapers framed the “Go Green” conflict between Beyond Petroleum (BP) and Greenpeace
Maria M. Garcia, University of Missouri-Columbia

The purpose of this study is to examine the dynamics of conflict between activist publics and transnational organizations by focusing on the media framing of the “Go Green” objective between BP and Greenpeace within the past 10 years. The investigation will focus on the conflict in the framework of the current environmental crisis.
**Whatchoo Talkin' ‘Bout, Jenny?: Analyzing Messages in Jenny Craig and the 50 Million Pound Challenge’s Online Weight-Loss Programs**
*Christal R. S. Johnson, Meta G. Carstarphen, University of Oklahoma*

Given the exponential growth of obesity in Black women and the use of the Internet as a health promotion medium, this study will examine the messages, visuals, and strategies used in two weight-loss websites, Jenny Craig and the 50 Million Pound Challenge, to investigate how the two online programs are targeting Black women.

**Blogs vs. Online Newspapers: Analyzing Different Emotions and Perceptions of Crisis Responsibility Displayed Online in the Samsung Oil Spill**
*Bokyung Kim, Joonghwa Lee, University of Missouri*

Little research has been conducted about “affected stakeholders.” This study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on the influence of stakeholders’ perceptions of a crisis on either journalists’ framing of news reports or an organization’s CRS and by comparing stakeholders’ and journalists’ anger, alertness, negative word-of-mouth, and perceptions of crisis responsibility exhibited online.

**Technology: All the Talk, BUT is it All the Use?**
*Eunseong Kim, Terri L. Johnson, Eastern Illinois University*

Through a survey of Indiana and Illinois practitioners conducted in February 2009, this study looks at exactly what parts of the new technology are becoming parts of the organization’s strategic plan and what parts are just hanging out there and what parts are used on a day-to-day basis to reach public relations goals and objectives.

**The Role of Emotional Response during an H1N1 Influenza Pandemic on a College Campus**
*Hye Kyung Kim, Jeff Niederdeppe, Cornell University*

This study aims to provide a refined understanding on the role of both positive and negative emotional responses to a crisis. To that end, we investigate the influence of discrete emotions on the interpretation of crisis responsibility, relational trust, and active communication behaviors toward a college health center in the context of an H1N1 outbreak on a college campus.
Students Explore Ethics and CSR: Analyzing A Priori Frameworks and De Facto Responses to Organizational Challenges
Rachel Kovacs, City University of New York College of Staten Island

This paper traces student engagement in ethics and corporate social responsibility issues in public relations and corporate communication courses at several institutions over more than a decade. Its focus is on how students interpreted and applied theoretical concepts and readings to real-world situations and standards for ethical practice and CSR.

Identifying Key Influencers of Chinese PR Practitioners’ Strategic Conflict Management Practice: A Survey on Contingent Variables in Chinese Context
Chunxiao Li, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics (China)
Fritz Cropp, University of Missouri-Columbia
Yan Jin, Virginia Commonwealth University

To apply the conflict management theoretical framework to Chinese PR practice modeling and advance the knowledge of key PR practice issues in a multicultural setting, this study focuses on testing the contingency theory on Chinese PR practitioners’ strategic conflict management decision-making processes. Survey method is used to obtain Chinese practitioners’ evaluations of key components of the contingency theory.

Roxana Maiorescu, Purdue University

This study aims at offering a global crisis response strategy that was developed from the rhetorical analysis of the crisis response strategies employed by T-Mobile Germany to respond to accusations of disclosure of confidential data of 17 million customers and of hiring a detective company to spy on the T-Mobile top management.

Revisiting the Continuum of Types of Organization-Public Relationships: From a Resource-based View
Rita Linjuan Men, University of Miami

This study is designed to explore different types of relationships existing in Mainland China and examine which types of relationships are perceived as strategic resources that can contribute to sustainable competitive advantage by companies in China. Fourteen participant companies were selected from the Fortune 500 list and Forbes’ China 100 top companies list.
How Top Business Communicators Measure the Return on Investment (ROI) of Organization's Internal Communication Efforts

Juan Meng, University of Dayton
Bruce K. Berger, University of Alabama

This paper addressed the findings from two research projects related to how top business communicators measure the ROI of their organization’s corporate communication efforts. The first part reported the results of an international survey of 265 experienced business communicators worldwide. The second, qualitative study used in-depth interviews with 16 diverse and experienced business communicators.

The message as the center of the relationship network in a Digital Communication World

Paulo Nassar
Mateus Furlanetto, University of São Paulo (Brazil)

A recent survey conducted among Brazil’s largest corporations (N=315) reveals the profiles and key challenges facing Brazilian Public Relations practitioners. The survey highlights the academic backgrounds, age, gender, years of experience and key areas of interest of today’s PR professionals and shows the key challenges and issues facing their organizations as they engage a wide range of stakeholders.

When Old Rules Don’t Apply and Standard Measures Fail – Defining New Ways to Measure Investor Relations

Katie D. Paine, KDPaine & Partners

To determine if any of the elements of activities provided by a corporate IR department, an analytical methodology was designed. The methodology broke down each report into three discrete elements: Analyst metadata, report metadata, and concept metadata. Individual company messages were also tracked for their prominence and further categorized as to their integrity.

Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management: Unearthing Factors that Influence Ethical Elocution in Crisis Communication

Augustine Pang, Nanyang Tech University
Yan Jin, Virginia Commonwealth University
Glen T. Cameron, U of Missouri-Columbia

This study, thus, aims to unearth a set of factors called ethical variables that influence the organization’s stance on the continuum—advocacy at one end, and at the other end, accommodation—as it interacts with its publics. To do so, this study draws on insights from conflict communication and corporate social responsibility literature.
Influence of Corporate Social Responsibility on Organization-Public Relationships, Attitudes, and Behavioral Intentions

Hyojung Park, University of Missouri
Bryan Reber, University of Georgia

Given the need for an integrated model of CSR for relationship management, the purpose of this study is to explore the role of CSR in promoting well-developed organization-public relationships and positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. An online survey will be used to collect data, and structural equation modeling will be performed to test causal relations among the variables.

Finding Publics within the Blogosphere: The Blogger Public Segmentation Model

Nohil Park, University of Missouri
JiYeon Jeong, University of Missouri
Jung Ho Han, Yonsei University (South Korea)

This study aims to suggest a new model for segmentation of blogger publics and identification of active bloggers swarm, addressing the limitations of Grunig’s situational theory in the blogosphere. Specifically, this study attempts to test the situational theory’s accountability using the method of Structural Equation Model, and constructs a new model for segmentation of blogger publics.

Doing Measurement Right: On the Road to R.O.I.

Mark Phillips, USO
Katie D. Paine, KDPaine & Partners

This case study will cover and include discussion of how the second year of USO’s comprehensive measurement program including a second year of survey/relationships data as well as a robust set of social media data. This study will show how this data has been used successfully to shape the USO entertainment, volunteer and media relations programs going forward.

The Community and Physician Relations Department at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital: A Case Study in Public Relations Management

Erika Powelson, Powelson Communications
Kenneth D. Plowman, Brigham Young University
Sara Shawcroft, Brigham Young University

This case study explored three theories relative to the management style of the CPRD: participative versus authoritative management, symmetrical versus asymmetrical communication, and the role of the dominant coalition. In order to analyze all of the information obtained, the pattern-matching technique was implemented.
Strategic CSR Communication: The Effect of Source and Valence of Message on Consumers’ Perceptions

*Mya Pronschinske*, University of Florida
*Mark Groza*, University of Massachusetts - Amherst
*Matthew Walker*, University of Florida

By utilizing a framework which describes consumers’ attributational judgments of a corporate social action as being values-driven, stakeholder-driven, and strategic-driven, this research sought to broaden this framework to better understand how consumers view the motives behind a company’s social action. The authors sought to investigate if characteristics of a CSR program affected individuals’ perceptions of organizational motives.

Crisis of Confidence: News Coverage of America’s Largest Banks During the 2008 Financial Crisis

*David Remund*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This study explored how the image restoration strategies used by the 10 largest banks in America during the 2008 financial crisis related to the tone of newspaper coverage and how newspapers, treated the role of banks in the financial crisis. The study examined 592 news releases distributed by these banks from July 1, 2008, through December 31, 2008.

When Volunteering is No Longer Voluntary: Assessing the Impact of Forced Volunteerism on Intentions to Volunteer

*Kate M. Sies*
*Isabel Botero*, Illinois State University

The current study focuses on understanding how students’ future intentions to volunteer with an NPO are influenced by requiring volunteerism for a class grade. It may be that when volunteering is forced, students may develop negative attitudes toward volunteering, which then will impact future intentions to volunteer.

Ethical Issues as an Important Factor within International Public Relations: Heuristic Remarks on a Systematical Analysis and a Comparative Case Study from Five European Countries

*Holger Sievert*, kommun. Passion GmbH
*Tbias Haeusser*, Universita Bocconi (Italy)

This manuscript will examine the contexts of Public Relations applications in four main categories: standard, structure, role and function contexts. Examples from international PR processes are cited to demonstrate the effectiveness and methodology of this categorisation. A resultant discussion and further categorisation will arise from these classifications, examining heuristically the extent to which these take on cultural dimensions.
Organic Integration: The Natural Process Underlying Communication Integration  
Brian G. Smith, University of Houston  

This research progresses integrated communication practice and scholarship through a case analysis of a successful integrated program. Through a case study of a major media company, this research demonstrates that integration is implemented organically—a process of encouraging cross-functional connections and knowledge-sharing through an open organizational structure whereby integration occurs naturally.

Corporate Performance Rhetoric: Essential Balance for Effective Internal Public Relations  
Peter Smudde, Illinois State University  

This paper reveals more about the discourse and practice of managing organizational performance and it analyzes how one performance measurement approach is both rhetorical and organizational in nature. Accordingly, this paper provides a foundation for improving the rhetorical and organizational dynamics for other performance management approaches.

Public Relations Online Then and Now: Stakeholder Relations by Corporations and Non-Profits  
Krishnamurty Sriramesh, Massey University (New Zealand)  
Milagros Rivera-Sanchez, National University of Singapore  

Only a few studies have explored the extent to which organizations are using a variety of social media in relation to their websites. This study compares the changes in the websites over two points in time, presents the changes in the use of web sites, and compares the web sites of for-profit corporations and non-profit organizations.

Ethics during Crisis: Applying Ethical Values, Best Practices, and the Symbolic Approach to a Coal Mine Disaster  
Bonnie Stewart  
Diana K. Martinelli, West Virginia University  

This study uses the symbolic approach as a lens through which to examine a company’s actual documents pertaining to a crisis, the 1968 Farmington, West Virginia, coal mine explosion. Through an investigative journalist’s recent work, confidential internal company documents were available for this study.
The First Look at Media Non-transparency Practices in the United States (abstract only)

*Katerina Tsetsura*, University of Oklahoma

The goal of this research was to explore whether indirect payments and influences on the media exist in the United States, according to communication professionals who are members of the five international professional associations. The findings of this study indicated that indirect payments and influences on media exist at different levels.

Ethicality of Media Opacity as a Predictor of Acceptance of Non-Transparent Media Practices among the Romanian Media Professionals (abstract only)

*Katerina Tsetsura*

*Anna Klyueva*, University of Oklahoma

This study continues the line of research on media transparency around the world. The data was collected from Romanian journalists and public relations professionals via online survey during the spring and summer of 2009 (N = 190). Findings showed that Romanian communication professionals consider acceptance of direct and indirect payments as a normal practice.

Applicability of the Generic Principles of Excellent Public Relations in a Different Cultural Context: The Case Study of Kyrgyzstan

*Elira Turdubaeva*, Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University (Kyrgyzstan)

Given that there are not even a handful of empirical studies of the public relations industry in Kyrgyzstan, this study is aimed to explore the public relations profession in Kyrgyzstan by using a framework that was based on multinational research. Data will be gathered through a self-administered survey, a series of qualitative interviews with public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan.

The Impact of Public Relationship Outcomes on the Reputation after an Organizational Change: A Case Study of a Public Hospital in Istanbul, Turkey

*Ebru Ural*

*Asli Erim*, Istanbul Commerce University (Turkey)

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the effects of public relations outcomes on the reputation of a hospital after the organizational change. Our goal is to measure the six components of the public relationship of this hospital and its existing reputation, additionally establish a relationship between these two variables.
Brandining a Nation on Youtube: The Ethical Implications of a Promotional Choice  
Chiara Valentini  
Irene Pollach, University of Aarhus (Denmark)

In this paper, we study the ethical implications of stealth marketing via social media for the purpose of nation branding, using the case of VisitDenmark. Our data comprises both online and print news articles published by the four major Danish newspapers as well as by international news media in September and October 2009.

Constructing European Public Relations in Transnational Research  
Dejan Vercic, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)  
Ansgar Zerfass, University of Leipzig (Germany)

European public relations is emerging on a world scene with its own identity that is emerging out of a decade long research endeavor in empirical transnational research in public relations. The paper reviews what has been learned about European public relations in the past decade and presents the results of the 2009 European Communication Monitor (ECM).

The Translucency Corollary: Why Full Transparency is not Always the Most Ethical Approach  
Robert Wakefield  
Susan B. Walton, Brigham Young University

This article argues that the term transparency as applied to public relations behaviors has weaknesses that need to be scrutinized and clarified. There are times when it is in the best legal and logistical interest of the organization to not disclose information, and in these times this is the most ethical stance for both the organization and its stakeholders.

The Senior Communicator of the Future – Competencies and Training Needs  
Tom Watson  
Chindu Sreedharan, Bournemouth University (United Kingdom)

The research to be reported in this paper analyses the responses of leading European and international senior-level communicators as to the knowledge, skills, relationships, 360-degree vision, and managerial abilities that senior communications professionals will need in five years’ time, and what it takes to prepare the next generation of leaders in globally integrated organizations.

The Role of Activists in the Ethical Debate about VNRs: Policy and Regulation  
Candace White, University of Tennessee Knoxville

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, it reviews the recent ethical arguments about video news releases (VNRs) and the current status of FCC policy. Second, it looks at the activist efforts of the Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) to change FCC policy, and examines the role of activism in the ethical debate.
Theoretical Perspectives in Social Media: Excellence Versus Simple Information Provision and Persuasion
Sean Williams, Communication AMMO, Inc
Julie O'Neil, Texas Christian University

This paper will explore current literature on social media use in public relations generally, and apply Excellence and other theories to attempt to explain social media’s potential impact on business communications through a content analysis. This is envisioned as a foundation for other research, informing the creation of a qualitative assessment to be conducted and eventually, a quantitative survey.

Alienating Publics; Activating Publics: A Case Study of Whole Foods Market and CEO John Mackey’s Editorial about Healthcare Reform
John Wirtz
Austin Sims, Texas Tech University

Using the editorial written by John Mackey, CEO of Whole Foods Market, and the reaction that followed for case study, the paper considers several questions about corporate communication in the public sphere. One example is, how should corporate executives balance their fiduciary responsibility to employees and stockholders, while maintaining an ethical communication position characterized by openness and honesty?

Building Ethical Customer Relations in Electronic Commerce Environment: Dialogical Communication and Making Customers’ Expectations Real
Ming-Yi Wu, Western Illinoi University

In order to explore consumers’ expected relationship building strategies from the on-line vendors, the researcher conducted 9 structured focus group interviews with 69 (31 male; 38 female) young consumers (mean age=20) in the United States. The results of this study extend the knowledge about customer relations in electronic commerce environments.

Assuring rationality and transparency in corporate communications: Theoretical foundations and empirical findings on communication controlling and communication performance management
Ansgar Zerfass, University of Leipzig (Germany)

During the last years, a lively debate on the concept of “communication controlling” has emerged in European public relations. The paper develops a definition of communication controlling, explaining the interplay of communication management, communication controlling, corporate communications and corporate strategy, and discusses the status of communication controlling in Europe based on an empirical survey in 34 countries.
Al Qa'ida Messages to Americans: An Analysis of Ethical Strategies in Public Relations Campaigns

Susan Allen
University of Maryland

Abstract
Extremist groups throughout the world rely on sophisticated public relations campaigns to attract members and undermine their opponents. In an article on outlaw discourse, Boyd and VanSlette (2009) argued that "the consequences of terrorism make understanding it and how it operates as public relations of paramount importance" (p. 337). Encounters with al Qa'ida messages stir debates over the ethical nature of public relations practices worldwide. Western publics often condemn al Qa'ida public relations campaigns as unethical because they use tactics such as threats of violence, distorted reasoning, and emotional appeals. This study applied multiple ethical perspectives, including non-Western approaches, to determine if al Qa'ida public relations campaigns were unethical, and if so, what standards could be used to judge the ethics of a public relations campaign.

Fourteen al Qa'ida messages produced between 1998 and 2006 were examined. These campaigns were directed toward the general population in the United States, as well as specific publics such as government officials and voters. The messages were analyzed within multiple ethical frameworks. In addition, the study examined how frequently al Qa'ida used values-based arguments as distinct from arguments based on threats and power. Generally, the al Qa'ida campaigns used extensive ethical argumentation, including appeals to reason and the moral autonomy of the publics. However, some publics were denied status as moral beings. This denial of humanity violates a standard for judging public relations campaigns as ethical.
Introduction

Extremist groups throughout the world rely on sophisticated public relations campaigns to attract members and undermine their opponents. Boyd and VanSlette (2009) have argued that "the consequences of terrorism make understanding it and how it operates as public relations of paramount importance" (p. 337). Craig (2006) has urged public relations scholars and practitioners to examine these messages as a type of communication practice. To date, however, few public relations studies have examined terrorist messages within the framework of ethical treatment of publics and stakeholders.

Al Qa'ida has been conducting a public relations campaign since 1995-1996 (Wright, 2006). Many Westerners dismiss al Qa'ida media efforts as raw propaganda aimed at recruiting financial supporters and suicide bombers from among poor and disgruntled Muslims in the Middle East (Richardson, 2006, pp. 219-220). As Americans, we often assume that al Qa'ida messages overflow with tactics based on fear or hatred, threats, distorted reasoning, and exhortations based on religious texts that advocate violence (Scheuer, 2006). These assumptions can block our understanding of how these messages motivate others to violence. As a communication discipline, we lack tools for analyzing public relations campaigns that seem to violate our Western ethical standards.

This study tested the accuracy of perceptions that al Qa'ida public relations campaigns use unethical tactics. It examined ethical argument appeals in the persuasive campaigns directed by al Qa'ida toward various American publics between 1998 and 2006. The research drew upon the rich field of ethical behavior and decision-making in public relations scholarship (Bowen, 2007a; Pearson, 1989). The overarching research question asked whether al Qa'ida conducted an ethically acceptable campaign directed toward its American publics. Three content questions guided the study: what public relations goals al Qa'ida has tried to achieve by reaching out to American publics; what ethical and moral arguments al Qa'ida has employed; and what type of modes of address, or appeals, were used in the campaign (Richards, 2004).

This study can be useful to scholars in the fields of public relations and media ethics, communication, and terrorism because it illuminates how al Qa'ida constructed public relations campaigns that mixed legitimate and suspect appeals to moral and ethical authority. The analysis of the al Qa'ida public relations campaigns revealed that these campaigns have addressed different American stakeholders and used ethically based appeals, but failed to treat their publics as rational beings. These findings can be used to develop standards for analyzing the ethical appeals in extremist public relations messages, or what Boyd and VanSlette (2009) have called outlaw discourse.

Al Qa'ida Public Relations Campaigns

Terrorism scholars and media analysts are unanimous in their judgment that al Qa'ida runs powerful and successful public relations campaigns that gain supporters, draw donations, and inspire terrorist acts (Gjelton, 2008). Hoffman (2006) and Richardson (2006) pointed to the sophistication and flexibility that al Qa'ida media campaigns employ to reach publics, while persistently underscoring the rationale for jihad and justifications of violence. Al Qa'ida disseminates its public relations messages through a variety of media outlets including cable television, radio, postings on Internet sites, digital video broadcasts on Web sites, and electronic book publishing (Scheuer, 2006; Sinan & Schemm, 2008). Because the United States and European governments have often failed at disrupting or countering al Qa'ida media campaigns (Lipton & Lichtblau, 2004), Western policy makers increasingly seek to understand the power of al Qa'ida to influence its target publics and
to develop counter public media campaigns that challenge this organization's extremist messages (Pincus, 2008).

**Publics in al Qa'ida Messages**

Public relations campaigns such as al Qa'ida's must be directed toward publics, defined as people who are important to any organization because "it has purposely or even inadvertently galvanized them" (Lattimore, Basking, Heiman, & Toth, 2007, p. 7). This study examined public relations messages directed toward American publics. Increasingly, the American stakeholders targeted by al Qa'ida are approached via Internet venues (Esposito, 2010). Moss and Mekhennet (2007) and Lipton and Lichtblau (2004) reported that at least one hundred English language sites distributed translated Arabic terrorist messages to American and European Muslims.

RQ1: What public relations goals can we infer that al Qa'ida has tried to achieve in its ethical messages to various American publics?

**Ethics in Public Relations Campaigns**

The themes in Al Qa'ida public relations campaigns are developed through arguments and appeals based upon religious and ethical standards. Because the al Qa'ida public relations messages cross cultural and national boundaries, the rules of conduct, values, and character traits vary within the publics addressed and cultural relativism may seem the only valid analytic approach. However, Masud (2002) pointed out that Islamic societies have historically blended cultures, much as Western democracies have done, and that all pluralistic societies must develop widely agreed upon ethical standards (p. 135). Consequently, public relations scholars must investigate what standards apply in these cross-cultural campaigns to determine if they are, in fact, ethical and whether they gain persuasive power from these ethical appeals.

Consequently, we need multiple perspectives to provide useful ethical standards in assessing public relations campaigns. Some Western standards are useful in ethical assessments because they require the autonomy of each individual in decision-making, the treatment of all persons with dignity and respect, evaluation of the consequences of actions, and the engagement in dialogue rather than asymmetrical communication (Bowen, 2007b). Often publics can engage in the same moral action, but they apply conflicting moral standards (DeGeorge, 2006, p. 89). Multiple perspectives allow us to perceived ethical contradictions when analyzing public relations messages.

RQ2: What ethical and moral perspectives has al Qa'ida used to explain the organization's activities and purposes to American publics?

**Values-based and Power-based Messages**

The final perspective that can influence standards in public relations campaigns is religious morality. Religious moral appeals in public relations messages can be viewed as either values-based or power-based. Richards (2004) distinguished two modes of address in public relations campaigns that influence ethics: values-based and power-based. Power-based communication is aimed at convincing various publics that the organization has superior strength (Richards, 2004, p. 173). On the other hand, a values-based mode in a campaign tries to convince publics that the organization adheres to certain values or standards. The demonstration of those values may be deceitful, but the assumption is that publics will judge the message based on their reason, not on emotional response (Richards, 2004, p. 173).

In the context of the al Qa'ida campaign, some power-based appeals can be drawn from Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheistic religions. The moral traditions within this triad of Western and Middle Eastern religions are based on theology and divine revelation. Within monotheistic religions, morality ultimately rests on God (Aslan, 2005, p. 100). According to the Koran, these
three religions share a single divine scripture. DeGeorge (2006) points out that strict theological morality precludes philosophical ethical theory because divine revelation determines which actions are right or wrong (p. 79). This assumption allows extremist groups to claim that their calls to action are buttressed by the authority of God.

As a counter to this foundation for morality in religious revelation, most societies acknowledge that moral principles must have more than theological support in order to gain acceptance by all human beings, not just religious believers. Consequently, many religions, including Islam, offer rational arguments to justify moral imperatives. Aslan (2005, pp. 262) points out that in Islam there can be no compulsion in religion and that pluralism within American democracy was built upon Judeo-Christian revelation, but extended with rational thought. Masud (2002) outlined several traditions of morality within Islam and asserted that Islam is NOT a monolithic moral religion. While one popular tradition called hadith does rely on theological interpretation, other systems such as akhlaq look to practical ethics and reason as moral guides and fiqh deals with legal ethics. Masud concluded that “Muslim societies have in practice accommodated ethical pluralism” (p. 140). The values-based perspective, then, can extend ethical appeals by combining faith with rational judgment.

RQ3: Has al Qa'ida primarily used values-based or power-based ethical appeals in its public relations campaigns directed at Americans?

Method

The data in this study included a selection of fourteen translated messages produced by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri between 1998 and 2006. Eight messages were selected for examination because they contained direct address to American publics or substantial sections analyzing American behavior. Another six messages were included, but not systematically examined, because they addressed publics in Europe or Western democracies in general; they were used as points of comparison.

The method focused on analysis as defined by Wolcott (1994)—an approach that guides the inferences we draw from the data (p. 26). Systematic document analysis was used and data were transformed by qualitative descriptive and pattern analysis. Identity and descriptive codes were assigned to allow specific information and meanings to be extracted from the documents. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined codes as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p. 56). The goal of coding was to isolate overall themes that would assist in answering the three research questions. Identity codes allowed elements of the messages to be classified. Descriptive codes related directly to the three research questions posed by the study.

Findings

Al Qa'ida leaders have recognized that they are fighting a media war with their enemies and this perception intensified after 2001. Bin Laden (2001) analyzed media effects in an interview with one Ummat correspondent on September 28, 2001:

The Western media is unleashing such a baseless propaganda, which make us surprise [sic] but it reflects what is in their hearts and gradually they themselves become captive of this propaganda. They become afraid of it and begin to cause harm to themselves. Terror is the most dreaded weapon in [the] modern age and the Western media is mercilessly using it against its own people. It can add fear and helplessness in the psyche of the people of Europe and the United States (¶ 4).

This analysis underscored the importance of reaching Americans through public relations campaigns because of the psychological effects and the negative emotions that intense
campaigns can create. Bin Laden's ironic sense that campaigns can turn against their producers provides a baseline for analyzing ethical features of the messages produced by al Qa'ida.

Al Qa'ida public relations campaigns directly address or mention a range of American publics and stakeholders. These include G.W. Bush and his administration (al-Zawahiri, 2004, February 24), other U.S. leaders, including Presidents Clinton and G.H.W. Bush, Sr. (Bin Laden, 2001, October 6), as well as the U.S. military and its allies (al-Zawahiri, 2005, December 7). These publics are generally categorized as enemies within the ethical framework of the campaign. More pertinently, al Qa'ida has addressed the general American public, sometimes in its role as voters. Bin Laden (2001, November 12) acknowledged, "Many in the West are polite and good people," and called upon them to consider the ethicality of their leaders' actions (p. 139-141).

Goals of al Qa'ida Public Relations Campaigns

RQ1 asked what public relations goals al Qa'ida has tried to achieve by reaching out to American publics. Descriptive coding revealed that al Qa'ida has addressed both active and passive publics (Grunig & Repper, 1992). Active publics include political and military leaders from the United States. The overall goal of these messages is to discredit the moral credibility of Western leaders who al Qa'ida claims have committed atrocities against Muslims, including children and women in Iraq victimized under embargos of food and medicine. Al Zawahiri (2006, September 21) called G. W. Bush "the butcher of Washington" and addressed the president directly: "Bush, you are not only a liar and defeated, but with God's help and might, you are a failed and disappointed person." The tactics of discrediting do not rest on careful moral reasoning--strategies used with other publics--but involve presenting facts as al Qa'ida defines them. In discussing the essential crimes of the U.S. government (i.e., occupation of the Holy Lands, massacres in Iraq, and support for Israel), bin Laden (2001, October 7) wrote, "There is no longer any debate about three well acknowledged and commonly agreed facts that require no further proof."

The passive public consists of the American people as an undefined group. The general framework for addressing the Americans becomes clear in three messages: an interview conducted by a Muslim journalist with bin Laden and al Zawahiri on November 1, 2001; a letter produced by bin Laden on October 6, 2002, sometimes entitled To the Americans (Lawrence, 2005, p. 160); and a videotape produced by bin Laden on October 29, 2004, sometimes entitled The Towers of Lebanon. In all three messages, al Qa'ida had specific goals: to impose ethical responsibility on the American citizens (bin Laden, 2001, November 10), to denounce American culture for its moral laxness and its failure to embrace the laws of God (bin Laden, 2002, October 6), and to encourage moral examination of the policies of the government the American people had elected (bin Laden, 2004, October 29).

Ethical and Moral Positions in al Qa'ida Public Relations Campaigns

RQ2 focused on what kind of arguments al Qa'ida has used to explain the organization’s activities and purposes to American publics. Ethical and moral positions within al Qa'ida public relations campaigns are often expressed in a form that is common in the Islamic jihadi tradition. Lawrence (2005) explained that in the Arab fatwa tradition "opinions are . . . couched as detailed responses to specific questions, broken down into sections and subsections in such a way as to emphasize the irrefutable logic of jihad" (p. 160). This reliance on logic and rational thinking connects the al Qa'ida campaigns to traditions of jurisprudence in Islamic culture and to some assumptions of Western ethical traditions--namely, that humans are rational creatures and must base moral decisions on reasoning.
Three issues form the core of ethical explorations in al Qa'ida campaigns: self-defense, defense of oppressed Muslims in Palestine, and freeing Islamic holy sanctuaries from occupiers (bin Laden, 2001, October 21, p. 107). Bin Laden acknowledged that al Qa'ida had encouraged Muslims to act in favor of these causes, and contended that "if inciting for these reasons is terrorism, and if killing those that kill our sons is terrorism, then let history witness that we are terrorists" (p. 107). These issues are transformed into specific ethical quandaries when directed at an American audience: the killing of innocent people; whether non-believers can be treated morally; and individual responsibility in ethical issues.

Ethical Argument: Self Defense and the Death of Innocents

Several ethical questions have been posed and answered by al Qa'ida campaigns that relate to self-defense: can innocent people in foreign countries be killed to achieve self-defense and what kind of self-defense is permitted? Al Qa'ida has affirmed the principle of self-defense for people living in Muslim countries. This ethical argument takes two forms: defense against direct foreign attacks on Muslims and resistance to the oppression of Muslim groups. Direct attacks are defined both as sanctions and blockades imposed on Muslim countries and military operations that kill and injure Muslim citizens in their home countries (bin Laden, 2001, October 7; bin Laden, 2002, October 6).

This issue of killing of innocent people in the United States and within Muslim countries represents the main ethical talking point within al Qa'ida campaigns. Insisting that he has studied shariah evidence and exercised "acceptable reasoning," bin Laden (2002, April 24) asserted that al Qa'ida was "never careless about human lives, especially Muslim lives." In a November 1, 2001 interview, a Muslim journalist asked bin Laden and al Zawahiri, "Do you consider the killing of innocent people in line with Islamic injunctions?" Bin Laden answered, "This is an important issue for Islamic jurisprudence" and began a detailed analysis of the justification for killing innocents, exploring circumstances that make killing acceptable. The first argument directly sanctions killing of innocents when combating an enemy invading Muslim lands that uses "common people as human shields" (bin Laden, 2001, November 1). Very quickly, however, the concept of self-defense turned into the justification for retaliation: "The United States and its allies are killing us [Muslims] in Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir and Iraq. Therefore, Muslims have a right to launch retaliatory attacks on the United States." Within the message, the logic of self-defense broke down and the right to retaliation was simply asserted.

Ethical Argument: Immoral People Are Exempt from Ethical Treatment

When considering ethical responsibilities toward Americans, Al Qa'ida positions its ethical and moral beliefs in the context of respect for religious belief. The organization has drawn not only on duties and obligation imposed by revelation on Islamic believers, but the broader compulsion of all people to follow Islamic moral guidelines. Shortly after the September 11 attacks, bin Laden claimed "that these events have split the entire world into two camps: one of faith with no hypocrites, and one of unbelief--may God protect us from it." Curiously, one of the goals of these campaigns aimed at American publics is conversion--or, at least, the moral obligation to offer conversion as an alternative to an immoral and spiritually barren Western life. "I am an honest advisor to you," bin Laden (2002, October 6) spoke in an audio message to the American people. "I urge you to seek the joy of life and the afterlife and to rid yourself of your dry, miserable, and spiritless material life."

Al Qa'ida campaigns mirror earlier jihadist proponents--such as Hasan al-Banna (Zimmerman, 2005) and Sayid Qutb (n.d.)--in their condemnation of American materialism, but emphasized the ethical failings of Americans who allegedly ignored the moral issues confronting
them in a time of war. Al Zawahiri (2006, April 13) stated on the anniversary of the American attack in Tora Bora, "I had not imagined they [Americans] fear the word 'why' so much. . . . They do not want anybody to ask why their policies have brought them all these disasters, why the Muslims defend their faith with all this courage, and why they make all these sacrifices." This failure of Americans to question their social values and the causes and effects of their government's policies place them in the group of moral pariahs--a classification of individuals who are unethical because they will not confront moral dilemmas. Al Zawahiri (2006, April 13) expressed moral impatience with Western people who lack the ethical imagination to empathize with Muslims: "Who on this earth would accept to see his land occupied, his wealth stolen, and criminal thieves imposed on him?"

Al Zawahiri's accusation that Americans fail to engage moral questions has resonance among Muslims who denounce the occupation of holy lands by Western invaders (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). Al Qa'ida campaigns urge Americans to acknowledge the moral obligation this offense imposes on Muslims, to withdraw troops from Saudi Arabia and other Muslim lands, and to free Jerusalem from Israeli occupation (bin Laden, 2002, April 24). Once a religious obligation like this is made clear--especially one that accords with generally accepted international standards of freedom from foreign occupation--only immoral people would resist compliance.

These ethical arguments explored in al Qa'ida campaigns against general citizens in the United States raise serious questions of what duty and obligations Muslims should honor in their dealings with Americans. One goal of these campaigns is undoubtedly to undermine the moral authority of Americans and even to create doubt in Americans about their government's intentions in the Middle East and South Asia.

**Ethical Argument Three: Appeals to Individual Responsibility**

Al Qa'ida public relations campaigns stress individual responsibility with both Muslim and non-Muslim publics. The ethical argument rests on the hypothesis that governments and political entities engage in betrayal of their people and commit atrocities (bin Laden, 2001, March 3). Consequently, individuals must act under the dictates of their own conscience and, moreover, take responsibility for the actions of their governments. This specific ethical principle of individual responsibility and ethical autonomy is stated in the Koran and quoted by al-Zawahiri (2005, January 30): "Thou art held responsible only for thyself."

In its campaigns directed at the general public in the United States, al Qa'ida raised challenging questions about the ethical responsibilities of citizens in representative democracies. The American people must "remember that they are paying taxes to their government and had voted for their President [G. W. Bush]. . . . The US Congress is endorsing the steps of the government, which proves that entire America is responsible for the atrocities being perpetrated against Muslims, as Congress is the representative body of the people." This collective responsibility to stop American weapons manufacture and military aggression must be accepted by individual voters. Bin Laden asked "the American people to check the anti-Muslim policies of their government" and "play the same role now that they played during the Vietnam War." In other words, American voters should remove anti-Muslim officials as an ethical duty. Otherwise, American citizens can be classified as enemies indistinguishable from their government, stripped of autonomous moral status, and targeted for terrorist attacks.

Essentially, al Qa'ida has used a religious moral framework to explain its actions and to achieve its public relations goals with the American public. In many instances, however, the organization has drawn on deontological appeals to reason and moral autonomy. The messages
provoke questions about what ethical principles al Qa'ida must uphold in its self-defense activities. Bin Laden and al Zawahiri directly indict American immorality and refusal to confront ethical questions; to their supporters, this indictment justifies attacks on American citizens.

**Values-based and Power-based Messages**

RQ3 focused on ethical modes of address (Richards, 2004) to discover whether al Qa'ida primarily used values-based arguments or arguments based on threats. The producers of al Qa'ida campaigns have used a mixture of values-based and power-based modes of address in messages directed toward Americans. In a typical statement, bin Laden or al Zawahiri would list the violations of human values and human rights committed by the American government, outline the ethical responsibilities of the American people, and then follow up with a quid pro quo offer or a threat—a power-based mode of address that strips Americans of individual moral autonomy.

Three documents that directly address American audiences illustrate this pattern. In his October 6, 2002 letter, bin Laden posed two essential questions that allowed him to explore the injustices the American government—and by proxy the American people—have committed against Muslims. These include attacks on Muslims in Palestine for over 80 years, support for corrupt Middle Eastern governments that oppress Muslim people, and invasion and occupation of Muslim majority countries (Bin Laden, 2002, October 6). Then, using the pronoun you to directly address Americans, bin Laden argued that Americans who elect their officials and pay taxes are not innocent of these crimes against Muslims. Next, Americans were chastised for a series of moral failings including usury, separating church and state, and "permitting acts of immorality, and you consider these acts to be pillars of personal freedom" (bin Laden, 2002, October 6, p. 167).

Bin Laden's values arguments extend into a lengthy list of numbered items and subcategories detailing American injustices, including worldwide violations of human rights. Finally, the letter makes seven requests of American citizens that include a plea to "deal with us [Muslims] and interact with us on the basis of mutual interests and benefits, rather than the policies of subjugation, theft, occupation" (bin Laden, 2002, October 6, p. 171). The letter ended with a threat, or power-based, mode of address predicting that Americans will end up destroyed by the Islamic Nation that draws upon the power of God.

**Discussion**

The over-arching question of this research study asked whether al Qa’ida acted ethically in its public relations campaigns involving American publics. The findings point to ethical arguments based primarily on religious morality and on the assertion that Islam holds the only valid revelation from God. Bin Laden (2002, October 6) wrote in his letter to Americans, "It [Islam] is the religion whose book—the Qur'an—will remain preserved and unchanged, after the other Divine books and messages have been changed" (p. 166). Al Qa'ida offered a single solution to bring Americans into the ethical fold: conversion. DeGeorge (2006) examined objections to religious revelations as the sole tests of morality. These revelations are not universally accepted, and, consequently, must be combined with ethical arguments based on rational standards so that a broad base of people can accept the moral principles. Al Qa'ida failed to meet the rational standards ethical test because its public relations messages excluded American publics from participation in ethicality simply by virtue of their categorization as non-believers.

Further, al Qa'ida did not meet the other requirements of inclusiveness that mark ethical public relations campaigns. When bin Laden (2002, April 24) explained how al Qa'ida determined exceptions to *sharia* law, the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number
was only applied to Muslims, not to the entire world population. Moreover, al Qa'ida violated the universality standard that would also have assured respect of the American citizens as ends in themselves, not simply as voters who can achieve al Qa'ida's goals (Sullivan, 1994).

Finally, al Qa'ida showed little respect for the autonomy of Americans as rational beings capable of moral reasoning (DeGeorge, 2006). Al Qa'ida directed ethical challenges to American citizens during its public relations campaigns. The most important posited the individual responsibility of American voters for their democratically elected government's policies toward Muslims in the Middle East and other regions. This moral issue was raised in the context of self-defense--a behavior that could easily be defended on deontological grounds as universally ethical. The logical flaw in al Qa'ida's perspective is that retaliation is an act of self-defense, but those being retaliated against are denied moral status simply because they have not converted to Islam. While Americans may apply reason in their ethically suspect secular system, their reasoning powers have failed to bring them to the revelation of Islam. Consequently, self-defense seems reserved for one group--Muslims--who are constructed as the only victims of massacre and killing (bin Laden, 2001, November 1). No right of self-defense is accorded to American citizens. This argument results in an asymmetrical position that violates the universal applicability rule.

In summary, the goals of al Qa'ida public relations campaigns directed toward American publics between 1998 and 2006 included denigrating the ethicality of American political leaders; challenging the ethical values of Americans; asserting the ethical responsibility of American publics, even when they failed to explore moral questions; and implicitly using American publics to achieve jihadist objectives in the Middle East. The organization's campaigns used value-based modes of address, with limited power-based threats employed after argumentation (Richards, 2004). Ultimately, the public relations campaigns were unethical, not because of extreme language use and threats, but because they failed to treat American publics as autonomous, rational beings who deserve participation in moral dialogue. Moreover, al Qa'ida messages to American reveal contradictions involving profound ethical questions such as the right to self-defense and the slaughter of innocent people.

Results from this study support the need for objective standards that can be used to judge the ethics of public relations campaigns (Tilley, 2005). Even well intentioned campaigns to combat extremism can produce a paradoxical effect when their creators ignore objective ethical standards. To return to bin Laden's insight in 2001, intense public relations campaigns can turn supportive publics against organizations and create fear and demoralization instead of the bolstering their determination to confront an injustice. Pincus (2008, April 28) has suggested that currently the justifications of violence have backfired on al Qa'ida and turned some of its Muslim publics against the organization. This study offered insights into ethical standards related to the status accorded to individuals that can help us more accurately evaluate extreme public relations campaigns.
References


L. Toth & D. Waymer (Eds.), *Rhetorical and critical approaches to public relations II* (pp. 328-342). New York: Routledge.


Do they keep their promises? Responsiveness rates of Israeli businesses and nonprofit associations

Ruth Avidar
University of Haifa, Israel
avidarru@netvision.net.il

Abstract

This study wishes to explore a gap between the dialogic potential of the Internet and its actual utilization by Israeli businesses and nonprofit associations. It embraces the co-creational perspective from public relations theory since it emphasizes the importance of dialogue and two-way communication to organization–public relationship building (Botan & Taylor, 2004). In this study we suggest that the inclusion of interactive features in an organizational Web site is like a promise that creates expectations among individuals that their communication will receive a quick and relevant response; therefore, sites that offer interactivity but do not support it, in addition to not behaving ethically, arouse resentment for failing to honor the implied communication contract (Leichty & Esrock, 2001).

This study is based on a field experiment that explored the actual responsiveness rates of 1200 businesses and nonprofit associations to an online request for information sent to them by an individual member of a public. The study relies on the findings of a previous study (Avidar, 2009) that content analyzed the Web sites of the same 1200 businesses and nonprofit associations, while the current study asks whether organizations that insert more dialogic elements into their Web sites are also more responsive to external queries. The findings reveal that nonprofit associations are more responsive than businesses, and that the response time is distributed in a heavy-tailed distribution. In addition, businesses and nonprofit associations that score higher on dialogic elements are also more responsive than others, and nonprofit associations that insert Web 2.0 elements into their Web sites are more responsive than nonprofit associations that do not insert such elements into their Web sites.
Introduction

This study embraces the co-creational perspective from public relations theory (Botan & Taylor, 2004) since it emphasizes the importance of dialogue and two-way communication to organization–public relationship building. It also tries to reveal a gap between the dialogic potential of the Internet and its actual utilization by businesses and nonprofit associations.

The author of this study places the burden of relationship building on organizations. Since research suggests that individual-to-firm relationships are perceived as distant, with the parties hardly knowing each other, and as one-time transactional encounters (Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1996), we contend that it is up to organizations to enhance individuals’ perceptions of their mutual relationships and to move to closer interpersonal and symmetric relationships.

The initiative for conducting this study is rooted in the existing, awkward situation: although increasingly sophisticated online technology enables organizations to communicate with various publics easily and directly, many organizations fail to utilize the interactive and dialogic potential of the Internet and stay unresponsive or non-interactive. It seems that organizations, in their neglect, forget that “. . . every interaction leaves an impression in the mind of your customer—the interaction either enhances the relationship, or it erodes the relationship” (eGain Communications Corp., 2001).

Theoretical background

The co-creational approach

The co-creational approach that emerged during the last two decades of the 20th century put organizational–public relationships at the center of public relations research (Botan & Taylor, 2004). The co-creational perspective emphasizes the important role of communication in enabling publics to become co-creators of meanings. This perspective uses research in order to advance understanding between groups and organizations while it uses communication as a means of helping to negotiate changes in these relationships.

One of the co-creational theories is the dialogic communication approach that added to the organization–public relationship building the notion of dialogue and “dialogic communication” as the theoretical frame guiding the relationship-building between organizations and publics (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). The term “dialogue” appeared in public relations literature over four decades ago (Sullivan, 1965), but Pearson (1989) was the first to present dialogue as a theoretical approach to public relations. He considered dialogue to be the most ethical form to conduct public relations, arguing that public relations should be seen as a tool for conducting an interpersonal dialectic, and that the important thing was to have a dialogic system rather than a monologist policy: “Dialogue is a precondition for any legitimate corporate conduct that affects a public of that organization” (Pearson, 1989, p. 128).

Botan (1997) explained that traditional approaches to public relations saw the public as a secondary actor that had to meet the organization’s policy and marketing needs, whereas a dialogue lifted the public up to the status of a communication equal.

The dialogic communication approach suggests that in order to create effective organization–communication channels, organizations must be willing to communicate with publics in honest and ethical ways (Taylor et al., 2001). Unlike the symmetrical approach (Grunig, 1989), the dialogic communication approach does not focus on conflict-solving; rather, it encourages participants to speak their voices, air different opinions, and exchange ideas. Dialogic communication looks at the presentation of differences, with struggle and conflict being perceived as natural states (Deetz, 2001). Therefore, the aim of dialogic communication is to reveal existing problems, conflicts, and disagreements and to address them without the
compulsion to reach an agreement. According to Kent & Taylor (1998), two principles guide
dialogic communication: the importance of reaching for mutually satisfying positions rather than
agreeing with the other’s opinion; and the primacy of inter-subjectivity instead of objective truth
or subjectivity. They also argued that whereas two-way symmetrical communication can be seen
as a process, dialogue is a product, and dialogic communication is a particular relational
interaction in which a relationship already exists (Kent & Taylor, 1998). In recent years, as the
relational approach has gained popularity, it seems that the concept of “dialogue” has been
joining and even replacing the concept of symmetry as an organizing principle in public relations
theory (Taylor et al., 2001). Kent, Taylor and McAllister-Spooner (2008) suggested that the
development of dialogic public relations theory and practice would continue to grow in the next
decade.

Responsiveness

Stromer-Galley (2004) described responsiveness as “when the receiver takes on the role
of the sender and replies in some way to the original message source” (p. 117). According to
Davis (1982), responsiveness may be thought of as the probability to which each partner
responds to the other, the proportion of relevant responses, and responses that match the demand
for appropriate elaboration that the speaker intended to elicit. She argued that four factors affect
responsiveness in an interaction: attention to the other partner, accuracy of understanding of one
another’s communication, possession of adequate response repertoires, and motivation to be
responsive. The first three factors contribute to one’s capacity for responsiveness, while
motivation is a choice that is affected by the rewards of being responsive (Davis, 1982).

Various studies point to the importance of responsiveness for the continuation of an
interaction. Davis and Holtgraves (1984) argued that as an independent variable, responsiveness
has a variety of consequences, both to the process and outcome of interaction. As a process,
responsiveness affects the maintenance of the interaction and the focus on particular topics,
communication efficiency, and accuracy; as an outcome, it affects the degree to which goals are
achieved. Joyce and Kraut (2006) showed that receiving a response to an initial post in a
newsgroup increases the likelihood that the poster will post again; hence, responsiveness
encourages the continuation of an interaction and reinforces commitment.

A gap between the promise of responsiveness and its actual utilization

In order to have responsiveness, there must be at least two participants that actually
engage in two-way communication; otherwise, there is a breakdown in the process of
communication. When an organization includes interactive features in its Web site, it creates
expectations among individuals that their communication will receive a quick and relevant
response (Leichty & Esrock, 2001). Nevertheless, studies on responsiveness point to the fact that
businesses and nonprofit associations fail to respond to external e-mails (Customer-Respect-
Group, 2004; eGain Communications Corp., 2004; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Hirsh, 2002; Kent,
Taylor, & White, 2003; Matzler, Pechlaner, Abfalter, & Wolf, 2005; Newhagen, Cordes, &
Levy, 1996; Taylor et al., 2001; Voss, 2000; ZDNet India, 2005). In many cases, the failure to
respond means a lack of responsiveness; in other cases, the response is not given in time or is
only partial or unhelpful.

Research concerning organizational Web sites and their dialogic potential and
implementation reveals several important findings (Customer Respect Group, 2004; eGain
Communications Corp., 2001, 2004; Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Ha & James, 1998; Ha & Pratt,
2006; Kent et al., 2003; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Marken, 1995; Matzler et al., 2005; Naude et al.,
2004; Taylor et al., 2001; White & Raman, 1999; ZDNet India, 2005). Although public relations practitioners generally express positive attitudes toward the organizational Web site, they underutilize it as an interactive/dialogic tool for two-way direct communication with their publics. In addition, organizational Web sites sometimes lack sufficient dialogic/interactive elements that can enable two-way, direct communication between representatives and publics, while the interactive/dialogic elements that already exist in organizational Web sites remain underutilized.

Attempts to explain these gaps include such explanations as a lack of organizational resources and especially of time, staff, or budget (Kent & Taylor, 2002; White & Raman, 1999); the need to train members of the organization to respond to electronic communication and to make sure that someone is available to do this is viewed as prohibitive. Other potential explanations include public relations practitioners’ loaded schedules, low organizational priority given to the Web site, lack of technical and conceptual training (Ha & Pratt, 2000; Hill & White, 1999; Kent et al., 2003; Ryan, 2003; White & Raman, 1999), organizational “red tape” that slows down response time to external messages, threat-rigidity, and the “freezing” of organizations whenever they received a message from an unknown external source (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

The gap between the interactive potential of an organizational Web site and its actual utilization damages the organization’s image and its ability to build relationships with publics (eGain Communications Corp., 2001; Hirsh, 2002). It also makes it harder for the organization to acknowledge the opinions and state of mind of its publics (Cooley, 1999) and, hence, to solve problems and potential issues before they develop into critical issues and crises (Botan & Taylor, 2004).

**Research questions**

As previously explained, “responsiveness” does not have a formal operational definition. Thus, referring to Rafaeli’s interactivity model (Rafaeli, 1988), online responsiveness is defined in this study as “a message sent online by participant B to participant A as a reaction to its previous message(s).”

Since the literature review points to a worldwide failure of businesses and nonprofit associations to respond to online queries sent to them by individuals, the aim of this study is to reveal responsiveness rates among Israeli businesses and nonprofit associations.

Two research questions are asked:

RQ1: Is there a difference between responsiveness rates of businesses and nonprofit associations?

RQ2: Are businesses and nonprofit associations with more dialogic Web sites also more responsive than are businesses and nonprofit associations with less dialogic Web sites?

Since previous studies pointed to a failure of both businesses and nonprofit associations to respond to online queries, and a recent study noted that “regardless of type, organizations do not seem to be fully utilizing the interactive potential of the Internet to build and maintain organization–public relationships” (McAllister-Spooner, 2009, p. 321), hypothesis 1 suggests that:

H1: No significant difference will be found among the responsiveness rates of businesses and nonprofit associations to a request for information sent to them by an individual member of a public.

As for the relations between the insertion of dialogic elements into a Web site and the level of responsiveness, a study that analyzed the relations between the number of dialogic
elements in college Web sites and their actual responsiveness found that the more dialogically oriented an organization appeared, the more likely an organization was to actually respond to its stakeholders (McAllister-Spooner, 2005). An additional study found that charities that responded to online information requests also provided more dialogic features in their Web sites compared to non-responsive charities (Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009). Taylor, Kent, and White (2001) suggested that organizations that were found to be more dialogic turned out to be more responsive, although these findings were not relevant for ease of interface and the dialogic loop (Kent et al., 2003). Hence, hypothesis 2 suggests that:

H2(1): Businesses and nonprofit associations with more dialogic Web sites will be more responsive than businesses and nonprofit associations with less dialogic Web sites.

Similarly, it is suggested that businesses and nonprofit associations that insert “special” dialogic elements into their Web sites requiring extra organizational resources (such as Web 2.0 dialogic elements) will be more responsive than businesses and nonprofit associations that do not insert Web 2.0 dialogic elements into their Web sites. Hence:

H2(2): Businesses and nonprofit associations whose Web sites offer Web 2.0 dialogic elements will be more responsive than businesses and nonprofit associations whose Web sites do not offer Web 2.0 dialogic elements.

Method

This study is based on a field experiment that explored the actual responsiveness rates of 1200 businesses and nonprofit associations to an online request for information sent to them by an individual member of a public. Two sampling frames of 32,348 businesses and 6,049 nonprofit associations were constructed from various online sources such as the Israeli Yellow Pages (www.d.co.il). The next step was to draw a simple random sample of 600 businesses and 600 nonprofit associations that had at least one dialogic element that enabled two-way online communication and were public oriented (not wholesalers).

A request for information was sent by e-mail or by a contact form to the 1200 businesses and nonprofit associations in order to explore their responsiveness rates. The request had a subject line titled "a question" and it was in Hebrew. Its translation is as follows: "Shalom, my name is X (the researcher's name), I saw your e-mail address on the Internet and I would like to know about you more. How can I receive additional information? Thanks, X (the researcher's name and surname)." The request for information was sent during a period of two weeks to all the sampled businesses and nonprofit associations, from the researcher's personal home computer. The testing days were regular Israeli working days (Sunday–Wednesday) within regular working hours (9:00–16:00), and there were no holidays or special national events on those days. On each day, approximately 150 messages were sent to both businesses and nonprofit associations.

One hundred twenty e-mail boxes with 120 different e-mail addresses were especially created for the field experiment, while every 10 businesses/nonprofit associations were directed to one e-mail address. This was done in order to track potential junk-mail senders among the businesses and nonprofit associations. In addition, a separate cell phone number was assigned to the field experiment with a voice-mail recording of the researcher asking the caller to leave a message. This was done in order to detect businesses and nonprofit associations that preferred to respond by phone. Indeed, in another study, unresponsive businesses claimed that they tried to reach the sender by phone (Shani, 2006).

Approximately two months after sending the first request for information, the same request for information was sent again to all the businesses and nonprofit associations that had
not responded to the first request or had e-mail messages that bounced back. This was done to reduce the odds that a business or a nonprofit association did not respond because it did not receive the first message. The responses were collected approximately three months after sending the first message and a month after sending the second message. The reason for waiting this period of time was that businesses and nonprofit associations continued to call and send messages till the 93rd day of the test.

**Results**

**Responsiveness rates**

The combined responsiveness rate of businesses and nonprofit associations was 66.6% (n=799), categorized as follows: 57% (n=684) responded after the first attempt; 9.6% (n=115) responded after the second attempt; 6.7% (n=80) of the messages bounced back; and 26.8% (n=321) did not respond at all.

A cross tabulation and a Chi-square test revealed that nonprofit associations were significantly (p<0.001) more responsive than businesses: A higher number of nonprofit associations responded to the message after the first attempt as well as the second attempt, and a lower rate of nonprofit associations than businesses did not respond at all. Nevertheless, more messages that were sent to nonprofit associations bounced back compared to businesses (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Responded first attempt (%)</th>
<th>Responded second attempt (%)</th>
<th>Bounced back (%)</th>
<th>Did not respond (%)</th>
<th>Chi-sq</th>
<th>df=3</th>
<th>(p&lt;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Businesses</strong></td>
<td>53.2% (319)</td>
<td>9.0% (54)</td>
<td>4.2% (25)</td>
<td>33.7% (202)</td>
<td>36.23</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonprofits</strong></td>
<td>60.8% (365)</td>
<td>10.2% (61)</td>
<td>9.2% (55)</td>
<td>19.8% (119)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Response time**

Twelve hundred online requests for information were sent to businesses and nonprofit associations. Those that did not respond to the first request or had their messages bounce back received the same message again approximately two months after the first message was sent.

When exploring the response time of the 799 responses that were received, the findings reveal that 32.79% (n=262) of the responses were received within the first hour (0–60 minutes); 43.17% (n=345) were received before the end of the second hour (0–120 minutes); and 49.93% (n=399) of the responses were received before the end of the third hour (0–180 minutes). Hence, within 3 hours almost half of the responses were received. In addition, 80.35% (642) of the responses were received within 24 hours (0–1440 minutes); 86.60% (n=692) were received within 48 hours (0–2880 minutes); and 93.99% (n=751) of the responses were received within one week (0–10,080 minutes). The remaining 6.01% (n=48) of responses arrived within 8–62 days (11,520+ minutes).

The large gap found between the mean (2,414.35 minutes) and the median (185.00 minutes) indicates that the distribution of the time of response is not a normal distribution, but rather a heavy-tailed distribution (Barabasi, 2005). Therefore, a non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) was conducted in order to detect differences in the response time of organizations (both businesses and nonprofit association) to the first attempt and to the second attempt (while
the response time to the second attempt was measured from the time the second message was sent).

The non-parametric test revealed that organizations that responded to the second attempt responded significantly more slowly than organizations that responded to the first attempt (Z = 2.75, p < 0.01) (Table 2).

**Table 2: Response time of businesses and nonprofit associations to the first and the second attempts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive statistics</th>
<th>Businesses and nonprofits that responded to the first attempt</th>
<th>Businesses and nonprofits that responded to the second attempt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>N=684</td>
<td>N=115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean (minutes)</strong></td>
<td><strong>2266.77</strong></td>
<td><strong>3292.08</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median</strong></td>
<td><strong>164.50</strong></td>
<td><strong>316.00</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sd</strong></td>
<td><strong>8119.51</strong></td>
<td><strong>7524.19</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=799

When only the businesses were explored and a non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) was conducted in order to compare the businesses’ time of response to the first and the second attempt, no significant differences were found (Z = 1.14, p > 0.05).

When the same non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) was conducted among the nonprofit associations, a significant difference was found between the response time of nonprofit associations that responded to the first attempt and those that responded to the second attempt. Nonprofit associations that responded to the second attempt had a significantly longer response time than nonprofit associations that responded to the first attempt (Z = 2.70, p < 0.01).

An additional non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) that compared the response time of businesses to the response time of nonprofit associations in both attempts did not reveal any significant differences (Z = 0.88, p > 0.05) (Table 3).

**Table 3: Response time of businesses and nonprofit associations (to both attempts)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive statistics</th>
<th>Businesses</th>
<th>Nonprofits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean (minutes)</strong></td>
<td><strong>1724.47</strong></td>
<td><strong>3018.39</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median</strong></td>
<td><strong>172.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>193.50</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sd</strong></td>
<td><strong>5405.83</strong></td>
<td><strong>9747.55</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=799

Hence, an interaction was found among all the nonprofit associations between nonprofits that responded to the first or the second attempt and the time of response. In other words, the differences that were detected between the response time to the first and the second attempt were not a result of differences among businesses and nonprofit associations but rather among the nonprofit associations themselves.

Time periods

A non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) was conducted in order to compare the response time of businesses and nonprofit associations to the first attempt. The test did not reveal any significant
differences among the two (Z=0.37, p>0.05). An additional non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) that compared the response time of businesses and nonprofit associations to the second attempt also did not reveal any significant differences (Z=1.36, p>0.05). Although no significant differences were found among the response time of businesses and nonprofit associations, the findings indicated that a large gap existed between the average response time of businesses (M=2266.77) and the average response time of nonprofit associations (M=3292.08). In order to detect the source of these differences, we divided the response time into four separate time periods: responses that arrived within 0–1 hours, 1–3 hours, 3–24 hours, and more than 24 hours (Table 4).

Table 4: Responsiveness time periods of businesses and nonprofit associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period (In minutes)</th>
<th>Businesses</th>
<th>Nonprofits</th>
<th>Chi-sq</th>
<th>(p&lt;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–60 (within1 hour)</td>
<td>31.4% (n=117)</td>
<td>34.0% (n=145)</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61–180 (1–3 hours)</td>
<td>19.6% (n=73)</td>
<td>15.0% (n=64)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181–1,440 (3–24 hours)</td>
<td>31.6% (n=118)</td>
<td>29.3% (n=125)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,441+ (more than 24 hours)</td>
<td>17.4% (n=65)</td>
<td>21.6% (n=92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=799

The time period divisions reveal that although the differences between the number of businesses and nonprofit associations that responded within the different time periods is not significant, more nonprofit associations than businesses responded within the first and the fourth time periods. In other words, more nonprofit associations than businesses were very fast or very slow to respond. Furthermore, when analyzing only the responses that arrived after one week (N=48), the findings indicate that most of those responses (72.9%, n=35) were from nonprofit associations located on the “tail” of the distribution.

Number of responses
The vast majority of businesses and nonprofit associations (87.5%, n=699) sent only one e-mail message as a response to the online request for information. Only 12.5% (n=100) of the businesses and nonprofit associations sent 2–18 messages. (overall mean=1.30 messages; median=1.00 messages; mode=1 message; SD=1.34).

A Chi-square test reveals no significant differences among the average number of responses sent by a business or a nonprofit association ($\chi^2 (1) = 1.26$, p>0.05).

Phone calls
One hundred twenty-one phone calls were received during the period of the field experiment. Sixty-seven phone calls were received after sending the first request for information, and 54 were received after sending the second request for information. Since the calls were intentionally not answered, we do not know exactly which businesses or nonprofit associations called and how many times. It seems that several organizations left a message on the cell phone, but the messages could not be detected, probably because of the long period that passed from the beginning of the field experiment until the analysis of the results (approximately three months).
Hypothesis and research questions

A cross tabulation and a Chi-square test revealed that nonprofit associations were significantly (p<0.001) more responsive than businesses. H1 was rejected.

In addition, a non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) did not reveal a significant difference (p>0.05) among the time of response of businesses and nonprofit associations, although an interaction was detected among the nonprofit associations themselves: nonprofit associations that responded to the second attempt responded significantly (p<0.01) more slowly than nonprofit associations that responded to the first attempt. The findings also revealed that most businesses and nonprofit associations responded by sending only one e-mail message.

Number of dialogic elements and responsiveness rates

Research question 2 (RQ2) asked whether businesses and nonprofit associations with more dialogic Web sites were also more responsive than businesses and nonprofit associations with less dialogic Web sites. In order to answer this question, the findings of a previous study (Avidar, 2009) were used. The study content analyzed the dialogic elements (elements that enable two-way communication) in the Web sites of the same 1200 businesses and nonprofit associations that were explored in the current study. The content analysis was based on a codebook that contained 13 dialogic elements, divided to Web 1.0 elements (elements that did not allow the user to add content to the Web page) and Web 2.0 dialogic elements (elements that enabled the user to add content to the Web page). The Web 1.0 dialogic elements included: e-mail and/or contact form, giving donations, volunteering, mailing list and/or customer/membership club, a toll free telephone number, online purchase mechanism, surveys and/or voting; and the Web 2.0 dialogic elements included: user-generated text, blog, social network, user generated podcast and/or vidcast and/or photo sharing, wiki and/or micro blogging, forum and/or chat room (Avidar, 2009).

Two independent samples t-tests were conducted. The first t-test that included only the businesses revealed that there was a significant difference between the amount of dialogic elements found in the Web sites of businesses that responded to the request for information and businesses that did not respond to the request for information (t (502) = 3.16, p<0.01).

A second independent samples t-test was conducted for nonprofit associations. The t-test revealed that there was a significant difference between the number of dialogic elements found in the Web sites of nonprofit associations that responded to the request for information and nonprofit associations that did not respond to the request (t (243) = 4.69, p<0.001).

When exploring response times, two non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney) were conducted in order to reveal whether the response time of businesses and nonprofit associations with more dialogic Web sites was faster than the response time of businesses and nonprofit associations with less dialogic Web sites.

The dialogic elements were divided into two groups: Web sites with 1-2 elements (68% of the cases) and Web sites with 3-8 elements (32% of the cases).

The first non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) did not reveal any significant difference among the response time of businesses with more or less dialogic Web sites (Z=1.09, p>0.05). Similarly, the second non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) did not reveal any significant difference among the response time of nonprofit associations (n=426) with more or less dialogic Web sites (Z=0.26, p>0.05).
Hypothesis and research question 2(1)

Two independent samples t-test revealed that businesses and nonprofit associations with more dialogic Web sites were significantly more responsive than businesses and nonprofit associations with less dialogic Web sites. H2(1) was supported.

In addition, no significant difference (p>0.05) was found among the time of response of businesses and nonprofit associations with more or less dialogic Web sites. The inclusion of Web 2.0 dialogic elements and responsiveness rates

Two Chi-square tests were conducted in order to find out whether businesses and nonprofit associations that included Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites were more responsive than businesses and nonprofit associations that did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites.

The first Chi-square test did not reveal any significant difference among the responsiveness rates of businesses that included or did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites (χ² (1) = 3.08, p>0.05).

A second Chi-square test did reveal a significant difference among the responsiveness rates of nonprofit associations that included or did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites. Nonprofit associations that included Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites were significantly more responsive than nonprofit associations that did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites (χ² (1) = 5.57, p<0.05).

As for response times, two non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney) were conducted in order to reveal whether businesses and nonprofit associations that included Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites responded faster than businesses and nonprofit associations that did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites.

The first non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) did not reveal a significant difference among the response times of businesses that included or did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites (Z=0.24, p>0.05). A second non-parametric test (Mann-Whitney) also did not reveal a significant difference among the response times of nonprofit associations that included or did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites (Z=0.39, p>0.05).

Hypothesis and research question 2(2)

A Chi-square test did not reveal a significant difference among the responsiveness rates of businesses that included or did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites. A second Chi-square test did reveal a significant (p<0.05) difference among the responsiveness rates of nonprofit associations that included or did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites, while nonprofit associations that included Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites were significantly (p<0.05) more responsive than nonprofit associations that did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites. H2(2) was partially supported.

In addition, no significant difference was found among the response times of businesses and nonprofit associations that included or did not include Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites.

Discussion

This study was based on a field experiment among 1,200 businesses and nonprofit associations. Its aim was to reveal whether businesses and nonprofit associations were actually responding to an online query sent to them by an individual member of a public.

Responsiveness rates

Two-thirds (66.6%, n=799) of all the requests for information received responses. Nonprofit associations performed better than businesses and demonstrated higher rates of
responsiveness. These findings suggest that a request for information is a “summons” that invites an “answer” in order to complete a “summons-answer” pair (Schegloff, 1968). Indeed, compared to other studies previously mentioned, Israeli businesses and nonprofit associations demonstrated rates of responsiveness that were equal to or higher than those of organizations worldwide. This is true especially for nonprofit associations that were reported in various studies to have low responsiveness rates (Taylor et al., 2001; Kent et al., 2003), and in this study they demonstrated a responsiveness rate of 71.0%. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that while in the other studies only one request for information was sent, in the current study, two requests were sent, and only 57.0% (n=684) of the businesses and nonprofit associations responded to the first request. Hence, an individual member of a public who sends only one e-mail message to an organization has almost an equal chance of receiving or not receiving a response.

Although two-thirds of the requests received responses, we cannot ignore the fact that one-third of the organizations did not respond or the messages sent to them bounced back. Since these businesses and nonprofit associations do not know the sender and had no previous contact with her, they could not know whether she was a potential investor, donor, volunteer, customer, or a member of any of their strategic publics. Nevertheless, they simply ignored her request.

According to Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987), relationships evolve through five phases identified as awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment, and dissolution. By not responding to an individual member of a public who tries to approach them, businesses and nonprofit associations prevent the occurrence of the second phase of relationship building, which is “exploration.” Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987) argue that in this stage there is a search and trial phase in relational exchange, while a trial purchase may take place, and it may be a very brief phase or include an extended period of testing and evaluation. This stage is “very fragile in the sense that minimal investment and interdependence make for simple termination” (p. 16). The exchange outcomes from the exploratory phase influence the parties’ motivation to maintain the relationship. Since population ecology theory and institutional theory (Hatch, 1997) suggest that organizations compete for publics from the same resource pool, and that in that environment choices are made about which organizations will succeed and which will fail (Mazzini, 2004), businesses and nonprofit associations that do not respond to a request for information simply play to the hands of their competitors. Hirsh (2002) stated that “countless online sales have been lost because a company did not respond in a timely manner to customer concerns that arose in the middle of the transaction process” (para. 2).

While referring to Grunig’s typology of active, aware, latent, and non-publics (Grunig, 1975, 1978), Hallahan (2004) suggested making a distinction among publics according to their level of involvement and knowledge regarding an organization; hence, there are aware publics, active publics, aroused publics, inactive publics, and non-publics. Inactive publics were defined as “stakeholder groups that demonstrate low levels of knowledge and involvement in the organization or its products, services, candidates or causes, but are important to an organization” (Hallahan, 2000, p. 499). Hallahan (2000) suggested that organizations not ignore inactive publics since they can become aware or aroused publics if the situation changes. This is especially true in the era of the Internet when individuals have a lot of power and can use Web 2.0 and social media elements in order to “tell the world” about a bad experience with a product, service, or an attitude of an organization. Similarly, “individual-to-firm” communication (Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1996) has also changed. Social media enable individual stakeholders to be informed online about organizational actions, to communicate with other stakeholders, and to
quickly spread rumors about an organization and its products or services (Krime, 2001). Hence, organizations should not ignore individual members of any public who try to approach them.

Since inactive publics are unlikely to initiate contact with organizations other than to satisfy routine personal needs (Hallahan, 2000), they place the burden of relationship building on organizations. The organizations have to initiate and establish communication with individual members of a public and therefore should not ignore their attempts to contact them online. Indeed, the relational approach to public relations argues that “a positive relational outcome is dependent on an organization’s effort to cultivate and maintain positive relationships” (Ki & Hon, 2007, p. 4).

Since this two-way communication is basically asymmetrical as a result of the asymmetry in resources, information, and motivation between organizations and inactive publics, organizations may wish to undertake a relationship that at least appears symmetrical with these groups (Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1996). Referring to the symmetrical/excellence theory (Grunig, 1989, 1992) and the four models of public relations management (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) this study presents the argument that although the existing public relations literature generally acknowledges the importance of two-way communication (especially two-way symmetrical communication) to organization-public relationship building, it insufficiently emphasizes a basic condition for two-way communication, which is responsiveness. Researchers pay much attention to the advantages and disadvantages of different organizational communication strategies, while taking for granted their implementation. However, this study shows that although various organizations intend to (or pretend to) engage in two-way, symmetrical communication with their publics by inserting various dialogic elements into their Web sites, they fail to respond to external applications. As a result, instead of an interactive process, there is no interaction at all. Hence, when referring to two-way communication and especially to symmetrical communication, there is a need to explore whether responsiveness actually exists, or whether it is just a declarative symmetrical communication. Similarly, Kent, Taylor and McAllister-Spooner (2008) suggested the need to differentiate between “feedback” and “relationship.” They argued that dialogue and symmetrical communication differ since the symmetrical model is a procedure aimed at building relationships while promoting listening and soliciting feedback, but it does not involve responding to stakeholders as equals.

Response time

Seven hundred ninety-nine businesses and nonprofit associations responded to an online query sent to them by an individual member of a public. The response time was distributed in a heavy-tailed distribution (Barabasi, 2005) while most responses occurred quickly within a few hours and days, and only a minority of responses took place later. These findings correlate with other studies (Kalman, Ravid, Raban & Rafaeli, 2006; Leichty & Esrock, 2001), suggesting that organizations either provide quick responses to inquiries or they do not respond at all, while delayed responses are rare. Indeed, a quick response has the signaling power of immediacy, care, and presence, and therefore there is a preference for quick replies (Kalman et al., 2006; Kalman & Rafaeli, 2010). No significant differences were found among the response times of businesses and nonprofit associations although more nonprofit associations than businesses were very fast or very slow to respond.

Number of responses

The vast majority of businesses and nonprofit associations (87.5%) sent only one e-mail message as a response to the query. Since every 10 organizations received a separate e-mail address in order to detect spam, these findings suggest that most organizations did not use the
request for information as an opportunity to send spam. Since spam is a worldwide problem and the Israeli parliament (Knesset) even approved a law to fight spam (Paragraph 30(A) to the communications law (Bezek and broadcasts) [Hebrew], 1982), these findings are very encouraging because they suggest that most Israeli businesses and nonprofit associations do not exploit their contact lists in order to promote themselves without permission.

Dialogic elements and responsiveness rates

Similar to previous studies (Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009; McAllister-Spooner, 2005), the findings of this study reveal that businesses and nonprofit associations that insert more dialogic elements into their Web sites are significantly more responsive than businesses and nonprofit associations that insert fewer dialogic elements into their Web sites. It seems that the insertion of additional dialogic elements into a Web site demonstrates a real willingness by the businesses and the nonprofit association to engage in a two-way communication with their publics. Similarly, nonprofit associations that offer Web 2.0 dialogic elements in their Web sites are more responsive than nonprofit associations that do not offer these elements.

Summary

This study reveals that nonprofit associations are more responsive than businesses and more willing to actually engage in a dialogue with individual members of a public. Similarly, the findings indicate that organizations that insert additional dialogic elements into their Web sites are more responsive than other organizations and that Israeli businesses and nonprofit associations perform equally and even better than similar organizations worldwide regarding responsiveness rates.

Nevertheless, one-third of the businesses and nonprofit associations that ignored the request for information provided additional evidence, in the Israeli context, that a gap exists between the dialogic potential of the Internet and its actual utilization by organizations. Furthermore, this finding has a theoretical implication suggesting that the measurement of symmetrical two-way communication should differentiate between a declarative symmetry and an actual symmetry.
References


The state of environmental communication: A survey of PRSA members

Denise Sevick Bortree
Penn State University

Abstract

Using data collected in a national survey of the professional group Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), this study examines the way that organizations are communicating about the environment. This baseline study reports on the most common environmental topics that corporations and government entities communicate about, the most common channels of communication used to deliver messages about the environment, the publics most often targeted with environmental messages, the level of transparency in organizations’ environmental communication, and the level of environmental knowledge and attitude among public relations practitioners. The findings suggest a broad range of topics and channels being used for environmental communication. A strong link emerged between public relations practitioners’ environmental knowledge, environmental attitudes, and the volume of communication being disseminated from their organizations. Too, as predicted by the study, organizations that were more environmentally transparent tended to engage in more environmental communication. Implications of the findings are discussed.
Introduction

Communication about environmental policies and practices continues to be a critical area of focus for corporations. Organizations’ actions toward the environment have consequences for areas of business that include sales (Sass, 2008) and reputation (Livesey & Kearins, 2002). Organizations that are perceived as more environmentally responsible are less likely to experience negative consequences from key stakeholders such as activists, governmental agencies and the media (Bansal & Clelland, 2004).

In recent years organizations have been actively engaged in environmental marketing. A number of companies have launched “green” products or campaigns in an attempt to promote their environmental responsibility. However, offering environmentally-friendly products or services is not enough for an organization to be considered environmentally responsible. Organizations must have sound policies and practices toward the environment and they must communicate those practices in a credible way (Hunter & Bansal, 2007).

This study takes the first step toward understanding how organizations communicate about their environmental policies and practices and how public relations practitioners perceive the environmental responsibility of their organizations. Recently, much attention has been given to environmental behaviors of organizations and the ways corporate processes impact the environment (Bansal et al., 2008). Public relations departments often are asked to take the lead on communication about organizations’ environmental performance and related improvements that the organization is making in this area. Environmental communication is critical to organizations because it can influence the behaviors of publics (Signitzer & Prexl, 2008; Davis, 1995) and build the level of admiration and legitimacy of an organization (Bortree, 2009).

Very little research has focused on the content of environmental communication, the ways organizations are delivering their environmental messages, and no research has examined the role of public relations practitioners in this practice. What is needed is a broad baseline understanding of environmental communication, including content and delivery of communication and the characteristics of the communicators. This study examines environmental communication through a survey of public relations practitioners who have their fingers on the pulse of organizations’ communication. It asks practitioners to report on their organization’s amount, topics, and channels of communication, as well as identify key audiences for the communication. In addition, the study explores characteristics of communicators and examines whether they are related to the attributes of environmental communication.

Results provide insight into the kinds of topics and channels organizations are using to communicate about environmental topics. It identifies potential problems with current practices and offers some suggestions for future communication development.

Literature

The amount of environmental communication in the media has increased rapidly over the last four decades (Cox, 2010; Adler, 1995). Research suggests that information subsidies (Griffin & Dunwoody, 1995) and message framing from organizations (Davis, 1995; Reber & Berger, 2005) play a key role in the quantity and nature of coverage of environmental issues. Studies have found that communication about corporate environmental initiatives has many benefits for the organization, including greater legitimacy and admiration of the organization (Bortree, 2009; Sethi, 1979). Perceived environmental responsibility of an organization affects consumers’ interests in purchasing its products (David et al., 2005), loyalty to the organization, and even greater interest in employment with the organization (Behrend, Baker & Thompson, 2009). As
organizations disclose more information about their environmental initiatives, they can garner more respect from their audiences, leading to a stronger relationship (Villiersa & Staden, 2006; Bortree, 2009). The focus of an organizations’ dialogue about environmental and sustainability issues not only impacts perception of the organization, but it also creates a public space for engagement on environmental issues (Signtitzer & Prexl, 2008), and this too is a way for organizations to make a contribution to society though their environmental communication.

The term environmental communication covers a broad area of public and private dialogue on environmental issues (Cox, 2010); however, the study presented here focuses on communication of environmental responsibility by corporations and government entities, as these organizations are experiencing increased pressure to demonstrate their responsibility toward the environment. Organizations have begun to adopt strategies for communicating about key issues including: lowering greenhouse gas emissions, reduction of fuel consumption, recycling, reducing product packaging, reducing waste, conserving water, improving energy efficiency, and offsetting energy usage. The more thoroughly an organization is able to address and discuss its performance in these areas, the more likely it will be effective in persuading audiences that it is working to address its environmental impacts (Bansal & Clelland, 2004; Hunter & Bansal, 2007; Bortree, 2009). To explore the degree to which organizations are communicating about a variety of topics, the following research question is asked.

RQ1: Which environmental topics are organizations communicating about most often?

The second goal of this study was to explore channels for environmental communication. Organizations use many channels to disseminate messages to their key publics. Studies of corporate social responsibility have found that organizations commonly use their websites (Ferguson & Popescu, 2007), corporate social responsibility reports (Golob & Bartlett, 2007) and advertising (Chan, 2000) to communicate environmental messages. However, internal documents are also probable channels for environmental messages. What is not known is the most common channels used to communicate about the environment. The following research question is posed.

RQ2: Which channels of communication are organizations using most to communicate about environmental issues?

The third goal of this study was to identify key target audiences of environmental communication. Environmental communication literature has explored the impact of framing environmental issues on consumers (Davis, 1995), but no research has explored the intended audiences of environmental communication. It is possible that organizations do not craft environmental communication primarily to encourage more purchases and/or use of their products and services. Signitzer and Prexl (2008), writing in the Journal of Public Relations Research, suggest that organizations first communicate with internal audiences “so that, slowly, employees get sensitized to the issue and a bottom-up process within the company is able to develop” (p. 8). The authors suggest, in addition, that employees may become key communicators about the organizations’ environmental vision to the public. To explore the audiences most often targeted with environmental communication, the following research question is asked.
RQ3: Which publics are most commonly key audiences of environmental communication?

**Transparency**

Organizations that engage in more ethical communication are perceived more positively by key audiences (Freeman, 2006; Gower, 2006). However, research suggests that most organizations are not necessarily engaging transparently in their environmental dealings (Hunter & Bansal, 2007). One way organizations can improve their environmental reputation is through transparent communication about environmental initiatives, impacts, and products. According to Rawlins (2006; 2008) transparent communication consists of four dimensions: participation, substantial information, accountability, and lack of secrecy. Participation is the act of engaging with publics through dialogue and feedback loops; substantial information includes providing enough information for publics to make a judgment about an organization; accountability is acting responsibly and answering for decisions made by the organization; and lack of secrecy is disclosing information and fostering an open atmosphere for communication. In employee-employer relationships, transparency leads to increased trust in the organization (Rawlins, 2008) which is an important measure in the organization-public relationship. To identify the level of environmental transparency among organizations in this study, the following question is asked.

RQ4: To what degree are organizations communicating transparently about environmental issues?

Most likely, a more transparent organization would engage in more communication about the environment, though quantity would not be the sole measure for transparency; however, it would be one indicator of a commitment to engage with key publics about environmental topics. To test the notion that more environmentally transparent organizations engage in more environmental communication the following hypothesis is offered.

H1: There will be a strong positive relationship between an organization’s level of environmental transparency and its level of environmental communication.

**Practitioner knowledge**

Organizations that include public relations professionals in their dominant coalition or C-suite benefit from the disciplines’ knowledge of strategic communication, ethics, and crisis management. Prior research has found that a lack of knowledge and skill among practitioners can prevent communication managers from obtaining a coveted seat at the highest level of the organization structure (Moss, Warnaby, & Newman, 2000; Gregory, 2008). It found that to be invited into the dominant coalition, public relations professionals must be knowledgeable about business process and issues of important to the organization. CEOs have expressed a desire for high-level communication professionals to be prepared to function as key decision makers by being knowledgeable about business models and operating environments in which the organizations function (Murray & White, 2005). One of these key areas of knowledge is environmental issues. To assess public relations professionals’ current level of knowledge about environmental issues and their sources of knowledge, the following research questions are posed.
RQ5: What is the level of knowledge about environmental issues among public relations practitioners?

RQ6: From what sources do public relations practitioners learn about environmental subjects?

To further explore whether public relations practitioners’ knowledge is related to the amount of communication about environmental issues, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2: Practitioners with more environmental knowledge will work for organizations that communicate more about environmental issues.

Practitioner attitude

Public relations practitioners act as advocates, attempting to guide management decisions to reflect the highest ethical standard of behaviors toward publics. Practitioners who have stronger convictions about the need for their organization to address environmental issues may be more likely to raise issues about environmental behaviors and communication leading for more organizational communication about environmental issues.

The theory of hierarchy of effects (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Palda, 1964; Barry, 1987), the theory of reasoned action, and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) note the role of attitude on behavior, but the impact of knowledge and attitude of professional communicators has not been studied. It is likely that a high level of knowledge about a subject and a positive attitude about it would lead to more communication and more enthusiastic communication about the subject. To examine the degree to which participants feel positively about their organization addressing environmental issues, the following research question is asked.

RQ7: How strongly do public relations practitioners feel that their organization should make a priority of environmental issues?

To explore whether there is a relationship between practitioner attitude and environmental communication, the following hypothesis was developed.

H3: Practitioners with a more positive attitude about environmental issues will work for organizations that communicate more about environmental issues.

And, finally, to determine whether practitioner attitude is related to knowledge, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4: Practitioners with more knowledge about environmental issues will have a more positive attitude about the issues.

Method

Data for this survey were collected through a national survey of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members. A random list of 4000 members was generated from those who indicated employment with a for-profit organization or the government. In addition 83
members of the environmental section of PRSA were added to the sample. A pretest was conducted with 6 members of the organization. Only minor changes were made to wording of the questionnaire in response to the pretest. Of the 4083 emails sent to PRSA members, only 3573 had working email address, and 320 of those subjects completed the survey. This resulted in a 9% response rate.1

Variables measured in this study were environmental topic, amount of communication, communication channel, public type, transparency, practitioner knowledge, and practitioner attitude.

The environmental topics used in this study were collected through a content analysis of two constructed weeks of press releases issued through PR Newswire between July 2007 and June 2008. The nine topics of environmental responsibility that emerged from the study were: lowering greenhouse gas emissions; reduction of fuel consumption; recycling; reducing product packaging; offering environmentally-responsible products or services; reducing waste; conserving water; improving energy efficiency; and offsetting energy usage. Participants in the current study were asked to assess the amount of communication that their organizations engaged in around these nine topics. Responses ranged from 1 (very little) to 9 (a lot). The reliability of this variable was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha (α = .93), and was judged to be high. To create the variable “amount of environmental communication” a mean score of all environmental topics was created. This provided a score that reflected the overall amount of communication on these environmental topics.

The degree to which organizations use channels of communication to disseminate information about environmental issues was measured by asking practitioners to indicate on a nine-point scale how much their organizations use 11 channels for environmental communication. Channels included press releases, company website, company intranet, customer newsletter, employee newsletter, annual report, company blog, company wiki, company social networking presence (Facebook, MySpace), company Twitter site, and company podcast. An open-ended question was also asked to capture an additional channels used for environmental communication. Reliability of channel of communication was high (α = .91).

To evaluate the degree to which organizations target specific publics with their environmental communication, participants were asked to indicate the amount of communication on a 9-point scale to five publics: customers, employees, activists, shareholders, and government. Reliability for this variable was moderate (α = .78).

Transparency of an organization’s environmental communication was measured using a modified version of Rawlins (2008) transparency measures. Four measures were used, “My company wants to understand how its decisions about environmental issues affect key publics,” “My company provides useful information about its environmental behaviors to key publics for making informed decisions,” “My company wants to be accountable to key publics for organizational actions toward the environment,” and “My company wants key publics to know

---

1Participants were recruited in two waves – October 2008 and May 2009. The initial response rate in October was 6% which was judged by the author to be too low. October 2008 was a time of high turbulence on Wall Street, and it is possible that this interfered with participants’ likelihood to read and respond to a survey request. In addition, the tracking software used in this study was not able to determine the number of emails captured by spam filters. With the increased sophistication of spam filters, larger numbers of emails are identified as spam and do not make it to the inboxes of the intended receivers (Evans & Mathur, 2005).
what it is doing in regard to the environment and why it is doing it.” Responses were given on a nine-point scale. The reliability of transparency measures was high ($\alpha = .93$).

Practitioner knowledge was measured by asking participants to self-assess their knowledge of the nine environmental topics listed above. Reliability for this variable was judged to be good ($\alpha = .87$). In addition to knowledge level, participants were also asked to indicate the sources from which they had learned about environmental issues. On a nine-point scale, respondents indicated the degree to which they had learned from websites; reading or watching the news; in-house training or seminars; external training or seminars; reading books on environmental issues; class at a college or university; talking with colleagues; and talking with family or friends. This was followed by an open-ended question which asked for any additional sources that participants felt were important in building their knowledge about the environment.

To measures attitude of practitioners toward environmental responsibility, participants were asked to indicate the priority that they felt their organization should give to the nine environmental characteristics, the same topics assessed under knowledge. Reliability for practitioner attitude measures was strong ($\alpha = .93$).

Participants were asked to respond to a number of demographic and classification questions including employer industry, employer size (number of employees), individual job category, years of service to employer, years of employment in public relations, level of education, salary, gender and ethnicity.

**Results**

The respondent group was 71% female and 29% male. Most (88%) of respondents said that they were Caucasian with another five percent indicating African-American, two percent Asian, three percent Hispanic/Latino, one percent Middle Eastern, and one percent Native American. The average number of years employed in public relations was 15.7 (SD = 10.0) with an average of 7.8 years (SD = 7.6) at the current employer. Ninety-seven percent of respondents had at least a bachelor’s degree and 26% were APR certified. Sixty-eight percent of respondents were classified as manager, director, vice president, or chief financial officer. Approximately 30% were in jobs with titles including specialist, associate, assistant or coordinator. Two percent did not indicate title. Sixty-one percent of respondents worked for a for-profit entity, and 33% worked for government, municipalities, or military. Six percent did not indicate their industry classification.

The study explored the characteristics of environmental communication and the knowledge and attitude of public relations practitioners regarding environmental issues. The first research question explored the most popular topics of environmental communication among corporations and governmental organizations. To answer research question one about communication of environmental topics, participants were asked about the amount of communication in which the organization engages about the nine environmental issues. Practitioners scored their organizations near the middle of the scale (M = 5.4, SD = 2.9). Organizations communicated the most about improving energy efficiency (M = 6.1, SD = 2.9), recycling (M = 6.0, SD = 2.7), and environmentally-responsible products and services (M = 6.0, SD = 2.9). They were least likely to communicate about reducing product packaging (M = 4.2, SD = 2.8). See table 1.
Table 1. Environmental topics addressed by organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental characteristic</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Energy efficient</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycling</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products or services</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conserve water</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel consumption</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green house gasses</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offset usage</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall scores</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second research question asked about the channels of communication used to deliver information about environmental issues. To identify the channels most commonly used, the survey asked participants to rate the degree to which their organizations employ 11 channels of communication to deliver environmental messages. The most commonly used channels were intranet (M = 6.5, SD = 2.7), websites (M = 6.2, SD = 2.9), and employee newsletters (M = 6.2, SD = 2.9). Least used channels were Twitter (M = 1.8, SD = 2.1), wikis (M = 2.3, SD = 2.5), and podcasts (M = 2.5, SD = 2.6). See table 2.

Table 2. Channels of communication used to deliver environmental information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channels of communication</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intranet</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee newsletter</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News releases</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual report</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer newsletter</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weblog</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social networking presence</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcast</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiki</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall scores</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To capture other channels of communication being used by organizations for
environmental messages, an open question was used. Participants were asked if their organization used other means to communicate about the environment. Results indicate that organizations are using many additional channels for communicating about their environmental responsibility. These channels included speeches and presentations, special events and meetings, presentations, videos, TV & radio interviews, printed material, sponsorships, advocacy, and sustainability programs.

The third research question asked about audiences of environmental communication. To identify the most common public groups targeted with environmental communication messages, participants were asked to rate the amount of environmental communication aimed at five public groups. Results suggest that employees are the most common target audience for environmental communication (M = 6.9, SD = 2.4), and shareholders are the least common target (M = 4.2, SD = 3.6). See Table 3.

Table 3. Publics targeted with environmental messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publics</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shareholders</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fourth research question asked the degree to which organizations are communicating transparently about environmental issues. To answer this question, a mean score was calculated for the four measures of transparency used in this study (M = 6.6, SD = 2.3). The mean score fell above the mid-point indicating a positive assessment of organizations’ environmental transparency.

Table 4. Degree to which organizations are communicating transparently

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of transparency</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Want publics to know</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions affect publics</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountable to publics</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful information</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis one predicted a positive relationship between environmental transparency and environmental communication. To test this a Pearson’s bi-variate correlation was run, and the results suggest that there is a strong positive relationship between transparency and communication (r = .65, n = 297, p < .001).

The fifth research question asked about public relations practitioners’ level of knowledge about environmental issues. The mean scores of practitioners’ self-assessed level of knowledge of the nine environmental topics are listed in Table 5. Results indicated that practitioners rated their knowledge of environmental issues above the mid-point of a nine point scale (M = 6.9, SD = 2.0). They felt that they knew the most about recycling (M = 7.7, SD = 1.5), waste reduction (M = 7.3, SD = 1.7), and energy efficiency (M = 7.3, SD = 1.7) and the least about offsetting energy usage (M = 6.0, SD = 2.3) and green packaging (M = 6.1, SD = 2.5).
Table 5. Public relations practitioners’ knowledge of environmental topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental characteristic</th>
<th>Practitioner Knowledge</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recycling</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy efficient</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conserve water</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel consumption</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products or services</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green house gasses</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offset usage</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall scores</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sixth research question asked about the source of practitioners’ knowledge of environmental issues. Participants were asked to rate the sources from which they had learned about environmental issues. Results indicated that they felt that reading and watching the news (M = 7.0, SD = 1.9) was the most productive source along with websites (M = 6.8, SD = 1.8) and talking with colleagues (M = 6.8, SD = 2.3). The least likely to be used was classes at a college or university (M = 3.0, SD = 3.0). See table 6. To probe for other sources used by practitioners to educate themselves about these issues, the survey included an open-ended question asking for other sources. The most common responses were blogs, social media sites, local nonprofit alliances, meetings, magazines, newsletters and other sources of employee communication.

Table 6. Public relations practitioners’ sources for learning about environmental issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of learning</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading or watching the news</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with colleagues</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with family or friends</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading books on environmental issues</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house training or seminars</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External training or seminars</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes at a college or university</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between practitioner knowledge and amount of environmental communication at an organization. To test this, a Pearson’s bi-variate correlation was run. Results suggest a positive significant relationship (r = .38, n = 282, p
< .001) between the amount of knowledge a practitioner has about environmental issues and the amount of communication that person’s organization conducts about environmental issues.

To answer the seventh research question, participants were asked to what degree they felt their organization should make a priority of the nine environmental topics. Their attitude toward environmental issues was much higher than their knowledge with respondents indicating that they felt their organization should make a priority of all nine environmental characteristics. The mean score for their overall attitude fell toward the high end of the scale (M = 8.0, SD = 1.7). They felt the most strongly about recycling (M = 8.5, SD = 1.3), waste reduction (M = 8.4, SD = 1.3), and improving energy efficiency (M = 8.4, SD = 1.4), and the least strongly about lowering greenhouse gas emissions (M = 7.5, SD = 2.1) and offsetting energy usage (M = 7.5, SD = 2.2). However, it should be noted that on a nine-point scale, the lowest score of 7.5 was well above the mid-point. See table 7.

Table 7. Public relations practitioners’ attitudes toward environmental topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental characteristic</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recycling</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy efficient</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products or services</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conserve water</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel consumption</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green house gasses</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offset usage</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall scores</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between practitioner attitude and the amount of environmental communication at an organization. A Pearson’s correlation was run between the two variables, and a strong positive relationship (r = .39, n = 292, p < .001) emerged suggesting that the strength of a practitioner’s attitude toward environmental issues is in some way related to the amount of environmental communication the practitioner’s organization conducts.

The last hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between practitioner knowledge and attitude. Results of a Pearson’s correlation suggest that this is the case (r = .43, n = 282, p < .001). A practitioner’s level of knowledge about environmental issues and the person’s attitude toward the issues is strongly related.

Discussion

This study explored environmental communication of corporations and governmental organizations by surveying practitioners about their own knowledge and attitudes as well as their organizations’ communications practices. It found a moderate amount of environmental communication and a wide variety of channels being used to communicate about those topics with the most popular being internal communication channels and the least popular being social
media. Employees and customers are most often the target of environmental communication and activists and shareholders are much less often a target audience. Public relations practitioners in this study considered their organizations to be above average in their transparency on environmental issues, and they felt that they were above average in their knowledge of environmental issues. They have garnered most of this information through self-education, including websites, media consumption, and conversations with family and colleagues. Practitioners expressed a very strongly positive attitude toward environmental issues and felt that their organizations should be highly involved in ethical environmental practices. Correlations showed that practitioners’ environmental knowledge and attitude are both strongly related to the amount of communication an organization produces on environmental topics. Knowledge and attitude are also strongly correlated.

Corporations and governmental organizations are communicating about a wide variety of environmental issues, including energy efficiency, waste, recycling, and green products or services. These organizations are talking about the issues internally through the intranet and employee newsletters, and externally through websites, news releases, annual reports, and customer newsletters. This suggests that the most popular audiences for environmental messages would be employees, the media, shareholders, and customers. A subsequent question confirmed that employees and customers are very popular audiences for these messages, but shareholders are much less frequently targeted with environmental messages. This study did not ask about media as an audience, which was a weakness. Other channels of communication that were used but were rated substantially lower were weblogs, social media (Facebook, MySpace), podcasts, wikis, and Twitter/microblogging. This was surprising given that environmental advocacy groups have a strong presence in social media and are frequently engaging in dialogue with communities in this space. Organizations may want to reconsider their social media strategies and weigh the value of communicating about the environmental initiatives through these channels.

The practitioners in this study rated their organizations’ environmental transparency as above average, with the highest rated claim being “My company wants key publics to know what it is doing in regard to the environment and why it is doing it.” Clearly the organizations that were more committed to transparency and to disclosing information to publics engaged in more communication about environmental issues. This may suggest that a greater commitment to transparency will lead to more environmental communication, though that does not guarantee the communication itself will demonstrate accountability and be useful for publics who are making decision about the responsibility of the organization. Organizations need to consider all dimensions of transparency in their environmental communication.

Comparing the ranking of environmental topics for amount of communication, practitioner knowledge, and practitioner attitude, it becomes apparent that the order of environmental issues is surprisingly similar. This suggests not only does the mean score of knowledge, attitude, and amount of communication correlate, but possibly the levels of each for individual issues may be closely related. As practitioners become more knowledgeable about environmental issues, they may develop a stronger attitude about the need for the organization to address the issues and this may lead to more communication being disseminated from the organization. However, it is also possible that these three variables may work in another order, and that mediating variables may be present in the relationships. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that practitioners with greater knowledge and more positive attitudes tend to work for organizations that communicate more about the environment. This suggests that knowledge
about environmental issues may play a role in the amount of corporate and governmental communication about environmental issues and policies. More research needs to be done to explore the relationship between knowledge, attitude, and communication among communicators. Clearly, practitioners in this study have built their environmental knowledge from self-education, including news media consumption, visiting websites, reading books, and talking with others. However, some knowledge was gained through formal education as well, including training, seminars, and classes. It may be valuable for organizations to offer training sessions and seminars in environmental communication to public relations employees. At the least, this will improve employees’ understanding and attitude toward environmental issues as they relate to the organization, and it may improve communicators’ motivation to develop campaigns and other communication around environmental issues.

The quantity and the transparency of environmental communication is important for corporations and government organizations because they are judged by key stakeholders in part by their social responsibility including their commitment to eradicate any impact their processes or policies on the environment. Not only will greater environmental knowledge cause public relations professionals to produce a better communication product, but it may also allow them to lead the way to greater environmental performance within their organizations.

**Conclusion**

This study examined the characteristics of environmental communication from corporate and government organizations, and it tested for a relationship between practitioner environmental knowledge, environmental attitude, and an organization’s level of environmental communication.

There were a number of limitations to this study. First, the use of survey data provides challenges in the interpretation of causation. While the author would like to say that practitioner knowledge predicts practitioner attitude and organizational environmental communication; that cannot be established with this data. Second, the sample in this study presented two problems. It was not a random sample, and the response rate was low. Therefore, the generalizability of the data is questionable. Third, personal environmental beliefs of practitioners were not measured, and therefore, their impact on practitioners’ responses could not be determined.

Future studies should further explore environmental transparency to solidify the explication of this concept. Research also should explore how organizations are engaging with different publics around environmental issues. This would help deepen our understanding of the environmental communication.
References


The discovery of what is true and the practice of that which is good, are the two most important aims of philosophy. -Voltaire (Goodman, 1997)

Consider, for a brief moment, the ontological nature of good. Communication is among the concepts that we can call good, or morally worthy in the eyes of philosophers who closely examine the question. It creates bonds between humankind, it allows us to organize, share and record knowledge; communication makes it possible to thrive and produce rather than to simply exist. Communication can be said to be an inherent good because in its purest form, that of good intent as opposed to deceit or malice, it leads to the shared creation of knowledge and truth.

What is the good in public relations? Can it both build trust and persuade? These questions haunt the public relations industry and its practitioners, those who hire public relations agencies, and the scholars who study ethics in public relations. By exploring the nature of good in public relations, I seek to help clarify what we really mean when we say “public relations ethics.”

---

2 Acknowledgment is due to the profound work of philosopher W. David Ross on the moral nature of good and right actions. His book “The right and the good” (2002/1930) was a tremendous inspiration for this chapter.
Defining the Field

Examining some leading definitions allows the critical scholar to understand if the concept of ethics is included in public relations itself, if the authors assume public relations is ethical or unethical, if they use words implying duty or obligation versus public good to tell us what form of ethics they might prefer, or if an asymmetrical or symmetrical worldview underlies these definitions.

There are hundreds of definitions of public relations. As one, Heath and Coombs (2006) defined it in this manner:

Public relations is the management function that entails planning, research, publicity, promotion, and collaborative decision-making to help any organization’s ability to listen to, appreciate, and respond appropriately to those persons and groups whose mutually beneficial relationships the organization needs to foster as it strives to achieve its mission and vision. (p. 7)

Their definition is accurate and comprehensive, and does include an ethical vision for the role of public relations in building collaborative decisions and appreciating publics around the organization, akin to the duty of respect to which many ethicists obligate communicators. Heath and Coombs’ definition is normative in that it relies on relationships being mutually beneficial – an ideal state for relationships, but one not always possible to achieve. Class action lawsuits, boycotts, and other problems with mutually beneficial relationships are common in the relationships between organizations and publics. Still, the value of the definition offered by Heath and Coombs is that it includes the ethical concept of collaboration, meaning that publics have some control over the decisions that affect them. Also, the ethical concepts of listening and appreciating that are highly valued by modern philosophers in both rationalist and deontological traditions.

In offering an ethically rounded discussion of how to define public relations, Heath and Coombs emphasized a "smart" approach to public relations. "Smart" is an acronym the authors designed to remind public relations practitioners to think of these considerations:

- Societal value and meaning -- focusing on the consequences an action can have on society
- Mutually beneficial relationships -- fostering the interests of all involved parties
- Advantages through objectives -- to achieve certain goals based on motivating action and shared interests
- Rhetorical strategies -- strategic planning using certain messages and tactics to achieve desired objectives, and,
- Tactics -- strategy should drive which tools, such as news releases or publicity events, that practitioners use. (2006, p. 3)

Three of the five guidelines Heath and Coombs included in their “smart” acronym can be said to have originated with moral philosophy: societal value and meaning, a utilitarian construct for measuring the impact that certain decisions have on members of society; mutually beneficial relationships, fostering the interests of involved parties is said to be ethical because it is based on dialogue and understanding rather than only self-interest, and rhetorical strategies that are based on ancient rhetoric in which the person of character speaks on behalf of an idea in pursuit of truth.
Offering another definition, Cameron, Wilcox, Reber, Shin (2008) who wrote that public relations is “the management of competition and conflict on behalf of one’s organization, and when possible, also in the interests of the publics that impact the organization” (p. xv). This definition addresses the problem common in other definitions that relationships cannot always be mutually beneficial, but seeks to foster them ethically when possible. However, this definition also takes a decidedly competitive approach that leaves much of how to manage the competition and conflict up to the ethics of the individual; at times, a risky proposition.

A text by Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg (2004) defined public relations thus: "as a management function, public relations involves responsibility and responsiveness in policy and information to the best interests of the organization and its publics" (p. 2). This definition focuses on responsibility and responsiveness in public relations, therefore encouraging ethical behavior. The definition is normative because it obligates one to act in the best interest of both the organization and its publics, which could be impossible if those interests are diametrically opposed. The definition does not say to whom practitioners are to be responsible, leaving in question whether that responsibility is to the organization first and society second. However, this definition does hold that responsibility is to be considered an intrinsic good of public relations. It also specifies the responsiveness is a good, building upon the rhetorical paradigm of enhancing dialogue.

A classic definition of public relations from Grunig and Hunt (1984) offered that public relations is “the management of communication between an organization and its publics” (p. 4). Public relations scholars (Pasadeos, Renfro, & Hanily, 1999) found that the most cited definition is Grunig and Hunt’s, meaning that it has had significant impact on the field. Grunig and Hunt do not obligate public relations to be practiced in the interest of any particular party, nor to be mutually beneficial. By placing the field squarely in a management discipline, they allow the autonomy necessary for ethical decision-making but they do not specify a normative ethic to be ascribed.

This brief review of definitions suggests that a normative or aspirational ethic for public relations can be achieved. These scholars hold that public relations can contribute to the good of society by building discussion. Reviewing the ethical constructs within each definition, we can say that the ethical nature of the good (Ross, 2002/1930) in public relations exists within these concepts:

- collaborative decision-making
- listening and appreciating
- social value and meaning
- dialogue and responsiveness
- managing competition and conflict
- responsibility
- autonomy

These concepts define the nature of “good” in public relations, as seen in the definitions offered by leaders in the field. These definitions aspire to explain how public relations function should ideally be conducted. They abhor dishonesty, vociferous advocacy, spin, or manipulation among “the good” and valuable aspects of public relations within society, but we know that these activities happen every day. Researchers (Bowen et al., 2006; Parsons, 2004) found little ethics training in public relations except among managers at the higher levels of their organizations, who act as ethics counselors as part of their role in issues management. Further, a higher level of
moral reasoning is reported among public relations practitioners with more years of experience in the field (Baker & Martinson, 2002; Wright, 1985).

**Determining the Nature of Good in Public Relations**

By examining the concepts bulleted in the list above as inherently good in public relations and discussing them in the sense of what they mean in moral philosophy or ethics, this section offers understanding of the nature of good as a normative ethic for public relations. Three concepts from the literature of moral philosophy will be added to those already discussed, and a model illustrating their integration and use in an organization as reflective management will be offered later in this chapter (Figure 1). Reflective management builds upon the work of van Ruler and Vercic (2005). This model of management can be used by scholars to discuss and research topics related to ethics and as a guide to enhance the ability of practitioners to conduct ethical public relations.

**Collaborative or Integrative Decision-Making**

Collaborative decision-making is thought to be inherently ethical because it allows people to share in creating their own destiny rather than having that outcome decided arbitrarily by others. Creating integrative decisions, or agreements which integrate the interests of others, is a method of problem solving that has been shown over time to create more enduring and satisfying decisions than those made from a one-sided perspective (Lewicki, Litterer, Saunders, & Minton, 1993). From a moral philosophy perspective, collaborative decision-making is often defined as good because it respects the interests of other parties rather than basing a decision in one entity’s self-interest alone. Collaborative or integrative decisions are arrived at through using dialogue to discuss and align interests, creating ethics “in and through communication” (Jovanovic & Wood, 2006, p. 389). Although more will be said on dialogue in a few sections, collaborative decision-making constitutes an ethical good according to philosophers: Bakhtin (1993) saw it as communicative action in creating a world of life; and Buber (1970) saw it as an equalizing force between parties, demanding equal consideration and respect from each.

That collaborative decision-making processes is often termed symmetrical public relations. Symmetrical public relations should be interactive and built to maintain the interests of both parties. L. Grunig, J. Grunig, and Dozier (2002) explained that symmetrical relationships “balance the interests of the organizations with the interests of publics on which the organization has consequences and that have consequences on the organization” (p. 11). Kent and Taylor (2002) stressed the collaborative aspect of dialogue, noting that it is a conversation in which both sides have a viewpoint, but remain interested and open to the view of others.

**Listening and Appreciating**

Listening is inadequately studied in public relations scholarship. Listening scholar Andy Wolvin pointed out the inherently ethical nature of listening when he said that it respects the value of the view from another perspective (Personal Communication, Andrew Wolvin, April 17, 2005). Wolvin and Coakley (1996) reviewed several studies and found that “we spend more time listening than we spend in any other form of verbal communication” (p. 14), concluding that “listening plays a vital role in our lives (p. 15) and even “influences personal development” (p. 19). The inherently good nature of true, active listening is rooted in the moral philosophy of respect and value for the rational analysis, views, or being of “the other” (Levinas, 1990). The
Ethic of care discussed by the philosopher Seyla Benhabib (1992) and developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982) builds upon the concept of listening as an ethical act, as does the concept of empathetic dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Listening is a foundational part of the public relations process for idea formation, environmental scanning, understanding the values of publics, and co-creating meaning upon which to move forward in strategic management.

Appreciating is also a value that is rooted in the moral-philosophical conception of respect (Acton, 1970; Sullivan, 1989) for publics both internal and external to the organization and the decision maker. Appreciating requires ascribing inherent value to publics simply because they exist, upholding the value of equality. It implies appreciating the value of the relationship even though it might not be one of financial significance to the organization. Appreciating the divergence of ideas, of thought, of values and solutions to common problems can form the basis of a collaborative relationship between an organization and publics. Appreciating publics for the humanity they bring to an organization values internal publics whose human capital contributes to the output and efficacy of the organization, drives its mission, and contributes to its success or failure. Appreciation is deeply related to the Kantian conceptualization of respect; appreciation implies an outward manifestation of that respect, through an appreciative attitude, action, stance, or response.

Social Value and Meaning

Understanding the social value and meaning of public relations holds the inherent notion that the function does have a positive and useful role in society. Scholars (Heath, 2006; van Ruler & Vercic, 2005) would prefer that role to be a pro-social one, meaning that the function encompasses an important social function that allows publics to know, understand, and interact effectively with organizations. The consequences upon society of any organization’s (big or small, governmental, for profit, or non-profit) mission can therefore be communicated with publics, because it is these consequences that create issues for publics (J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992). As a social value of public relations, those publics can have some governing hand in the way that organizations operate, which is the moral good of collaborative decision-making.

Deeper moral analysis reveals that the public relations function does perform the role of information provider, news provider and liaison, and fosters an open exchange of information between organizations, governments, and publics in society (Spicer, 2000). Truthful and accurate information must flow in society in order for democracy to operate (Day, 1997). The implications of public relations functioning in this manner are greater personal involvement in the governing, priorities, values, norms, and operations of organizations within society. That involvement of individuals supports the ideal of an informed and fair democratic process (Heath, 2006), that we can say is a moral good. Removing the understanding necessary to be involved in informed decisions, or the power of liberty that such a system entails can be said to be unethical because it does not respect the rationality or dignity of the individual. In this sense, public relations can be defined as good because it enhances individual moral autonomy, informed rational decision-making, and the liberty of choice that is the backbone of a democratic society. Public relations itself does not guarantee moral autonomy and informed rational decision-making, but it must exist within each complex modern society as a necessary condition for the survival and thriving of those democratic ideals. In a system with one voice or government-controlled public relations, the diversity of ideas needed for an informed, rational decision are withheld from the public. Such denial of moral agency is unethical because it offers neither respect, dignity, nor recognition of the rational autonomy necessary in making an informed
choice. Given that restriction, this analysis can conclude that public relations is both a necessary and inherently good social process when it respects autonomy, rationality, and the liberty of informed decision-making and governance.

**Dialogue and Responsiveness**

Philosophers have long considered the concept of “dialogue” imbued with inherent goodness or moral worth. The repeated appearance of the term dialogue in both the definitions of public relations and within the body of knowledge shows that communication scholars value its inherent good. Definitions of public relations mention the term responsiveness as a core value of the function, and the mutuality of dialogue necessitates a responsive communication function as an inherent good. Responsiveness can also be thought of in the co-orientational sense of dialogue studied by Ron Pearson (1989a; 1989b), who described dialogue as an ethic to guide public relations.

Responsiveness can also be thought of as engagement (Heath, 2001). Richard Edelman (2009) defined public engagement as “reassessment of corporate policy and continuous communication” (p. 3). Engagement can take place with an idea, an issue of concern, or with a public. The ethical aspect of engagement affords value and importance within management to publics and their causes; it recognizes the initiative to seek information and the moral autonomy of publics. Conducting public relations in a manner of authentic engagement means that publics are respected for their moral autonomy rather than being viewed as simply uninformed people to be persuaded to the organization's point of view or as critics to be assuaged by accommodation. Therefore, responsiveness or engagement is an inherently ethical concept because respect and moral autonomy are maintained.

Deontological philosophers such as Immanuel Kant viewed the term dialogue as good because it maintains dignity and respect for others. Following Kant, Habermas (1987) argued that dialogue is good because it fulfills our moral obligation under deontology, because all people are obligated equally by rationality and thus equally worthy of dialogue. Buber argued that dialogue creates all real living as seen through what he called the I-Thou connection.

Buber’s I-Thou dialogue is characterized by, "mutuality, directness, intensity, and ineffability" (Friedman, 2002 p. 65). According to Friedman (2002), the culmination of Buber’s philosophy was to explain the “sphere of between” as a basic reality of the interdependence of human existence. Buber argued that “The participation of both partners is in principle indispensable to this sphere” that he called “the dialogical” (p. 98). For Buber, the ultimate good is created when dialogue is genuine and creates “authentic existence" (p. 100). Authentic existence is discussed in the public relations literature as authenticity, and as an inherent good in moral philosophy. For its creation of genuine dialogue, and thus authenticity, public relations can be said to be inherently good.

**Managing Competition and Conflict**

Public relations as the management of competition and conflict can be supported through the moral philosophy of justice, again with the caveat that the communicator must be honest. Philosophers since Plato have maintained that justice is a core component of a healthy society. Plato named justice as the most important cardinal virtue in “The Republic” along with the other cardinal virtues wisdom, courage, and temperance (Plaisance, 2009). Justice implies fairness, responsibility, and the participation of organizations and publics. Ross (2002) argued that a basic moral obligation of all humans is to bring about justice. Rawl’s (1971) well-known theory of
justice requires the ethical decision-maker to use what he called the “veil of ignorance” so that he or she would be stripped of social position, rank, and identity, blind to the consequences of a decision, yet potentially impacted by the decision. His theory of justice seeks to include the concepts of objectivity, impartiality, and reversibility in a less abstract and more useful, real-world model than found in prior philosophy. Benhabib (1992) and Gilligan (1982) each, separately, added perspectives of care for a generalized other to the concept of justice.

The real question in this analysis is: Do public relations practitioners consider justice when they manage competition and conflict, or do they consider only creating an advantage and achieving a self-interested win? Normatively, public relations practitioners would place themselves behind a veil of ignorance when considering their activities. The evidence (Bowen et al., 2006) suggests that only highest level decision-makers within the public relations profession actively consider concepts of justice in their decision-making, and that those at lower levels of responsibility most often consider creating advantage through persuasive advocacy.

A large part of the practice of public relations engages in managing conflict and leading change (Rawlins & Stoker, 2003). Normatively public relations professionals would consider their role in creating justice through the management of competition and conflict. In failing to create fairness or justice, practitioners do not meet the standard of inherent good. Those at higher levels of responsibility, approximately 29.8% of practitioners worldwide (Bowen et al., 2006), who report directly to CEO’s, are in a position to enhance justice, or level the playing field of competition and conflict. Normatively public relations can and should embrace that role as part of the inherent value creation and worth of the field.

Responsibility

Responsibility is a foundational principle within moral philosophy, as developed by Kant and numerous other scholars. Responsibility, in moral philosophy, is often discussed in conjunction with the term duty, and the two concepts are often used interchangeably (Sullivan, 1989). Kant explained that moral law obligates each rational decision-maker equally to do their duty to uphold moral principle. Kantian scholars (Baron, 1995; Bennett, 1966; Paton, 1927; Sullivan, 1989) discuss responsibility, accountability, attribution, and judgment as central concepts in understanding duty. Responsibility or duty is a commitment to taking the action that is right. Baron explained, “One governs one's conduct by a commitment to doing what is right and be(ing) prepared so to act even in the face of strong opposing desires” (p. 132). Duty provides the motive to act upon that which is encouraged by moral considerations. Acting from a basis of responsibility does not need to be the only consideration in a decision-making process for public relations practitioners, but it does need to be one of them. Baron elucidated that point: “we can value the motive of duty without placing special value on acting from duty as a primary motive” (p. 133). In public relations, it is a complex interplay between the duties required to employers, clients, publics, the media, and regulatory agencies or other governmental officials. Acting from responsibility or duty means that the public relations practitioner must consider the duties that exists on an equal footing, without preferential treatment or bias for selfish desires, motives of greed, or fear of retribution.

A duty to do that which is morally right means that each practitioner must rationally consider all of the viewpoints as equals and decide the correct course of action based upon ethical duties that go beyond capriciousness, selfishness or other biased concerns. In this sense, public relations has inherent goodness when practitioners consider the divided loyalties that
come with the field and regard their responsibility as doing that which is morally right. Preliminary research (Lieber, 2008) has “yielded tangible data that a duty to society rationale is, in fact, a part of everyday public relations” (p. 249), although we do not know how that reasoning occurs.

The nature of public relations is good only if and when practitioners ask, “Does my action have moral worth?” (Baron, 1995). That consideration does not mean that an action must be done against one's will, without regard for the self, and without regard for inclination. Self and inclination must be regarded equally along with other considerations. Baron argued that the “presence of inclination is consistent with the actions being done from duty, and thus having moral worth” (p. 152). If those in public relations consider it a duty or responsibility to do what is right in upholding moral law, not just right for a client or employer, then the field has moral worth. This weighty responsibility brings with it the obligation of veracity, or honesty and truthfulness in public relations.

**Autonomy**

Bivins (2006) noted the link between responsibility and autonomy and argued that the role of autonomous professional presumes objectivity “to use reason to determine action” (p. 27). Autonomy can be seen in Grunig and Hunt's (1984) definition of public relations as a management function. In that definition, management has the autonomy to determine what constitutes a morally good action, considering the interests of publics in addition to those of the organization, including profit margin. Philosophers argue that autonomy is necessary to base impartial judgment upon principle alone rather than upon selfish concerns.

The idea of autonomy stems from Immanuel Kant, who argued that moral agency rests with autonomy's basis in the ability for rational analysis which separates man from beast (Kant, 1785/1964). In explaining Kant's moral theory, Sullivan (1994) argued that each person “has the power of autonomy and therefore the right and the responsibility to be self-governing, in control of his or her own destiny in so far as that is possible” (pp. 22-23). By freeing ourselves from the constraints of only satisfying organizational goals, only creating mutually-beneficial goals, or only accommodating the needs of publics, being an autonomous and rational manager implies that public relations can do what is best based on a moral analysis alone.

Autonomy requires access to truthful and accurate information, and an honesty on behalf of the communicator. Public relations practitioners must be honest and truthful not only because deception damages an organization's reputation and diminishes relationships with publics and stakeholders, but also because honest communication is the only morally worthy way of communicating. Day (1997) wrote:

The notion of individual autonomy is based, in part, on freedom of choice… . First, a lack of integrity in human communications undermines the autonomy of the individual. As rational beings, we depend on truthful and accurate information to make informed judgments about a whole host of activities…. a lack of veracity among advertising and public relations practitioners would understandably create a climate of public distrust of the business community. (p. 74-75)

Public relations is uniquely suited to conduct an autonomous moral analysis within an organization because it maintains relationships with internal (employee) publics and external publics (outside its boundary). Those relationships allow it to know and understand the values of many varied publics around the organization, not just those limited to one organizational
function such as marketing understands consumers, or legal understands regulatory requirements. Therefore, it can include those interests in organizational decision-making on an equal basis with the interests of management and finance, in a rational, responsible, and thoroughly considered deliberation about what constitutes the morally worthy action—or, what is the right thing to do. Only a communication manager with the autonomy to stand up to the CEO or others in management and voice disagreement with a decision that may be unethical is truly contributing to the responsible and effective management of the organization.

New Factors of Ethical Public Relations

As a normative pursuit, the field brings value and meaning to society through fostering collaborative decision-making, listening and appreciating while respecting others, offering information within a democratic society, creating dialogue and responsiveness, managing competition, conflict and divided loyalties through duty and responsibility, and maintaining an independent or autonomous perspective to use in the analysis of organizational decisions. Each of those factors interacts within the “sphere” of an organization in its environment, with communication flowing symmetrically to create ethically-responsible organizations.

Before an ethic of reflective management can be firmly established as a normative guide for the field based on the inherent good it pursues, we must include concepts from moral philosophy that are thought to be inherently good in and of themselves. Thus, three considerations remain to be added to create a thorough understanding of the normative ethic of public relations practice: ethical leadership, authenticity, and consistency. Each is discussed below, and this new model (Figure 1) is provided to conceptualize how these factors interact within an organization to create ethical public relations.

(See Figure 1)

Ethical Leadership

A defining factor of an organization is its leadership, especially “the power holders of the organization” (J. E. Grunig, 1992, p. 24). A corporation is socially defined by all of its constituencies (Spicer, 1997), but top executives have a unique responsibility in directing the ethical decision making of the organization (Bowen, 2002; Sriramesh, Grunig, & Buffington, 1992; Waters, 1988) because the firm exists as an entity with the legal rights of an individual, but by permission of society. Many scholars (Berger & Reber, 2006; Bowen, 2009; Goodpaster, 2007; Seeger, 1997; Sims, 1991, 1994) argued that an ethical organizational culture must begin with the leaders at the top. A stream of scholarship on ethical leadership (Cavanaugh & Moberg, 1999; Paine, 1999; Parks, 1993) has identified one key component of a successful leader to be moral courage. Cavanaugh and Moberg (1999) wrote: "Courage is demanded within every organization in order to achieve honesty and integrity" (p. 3). As the Enron debacle illustrated, the courage, attitudes, intelligence, integrity, ethics, and moral character of executives have a critical impact on the goals and mission of an organization, its values, and communication about those standards (Bowen & Heath, 2005; Goodpaster, 2007; Sims & Brinkman, 2003) with stakeholders and publics.

The leaders of an organization envision and set the tone of the organization’s ethical values system (Morgan, 2006; Seeger, 1997). Yeager and Kram (1995) termed this concept the organization’s “ethical climate” (p. 46), although there is some dispute over whether that term
encompasses all necessary variables, such as the moral values of leaders and founders (Dickson, Smith, Grojean, & Ehrhart, 2001). Based on its ethical climate and the values of its leadership, a corporation develops its own code of ethics specifying the moral norms of the organization. A code of ethics is potentially a powerful tool of organizational leadership and strategic decision making (Murphy, 1998).

A useful code of ethics becomes a part of organizational culture, and the organizational culture reinforces the values specified in the code of ethics. For Morgan (1986), organizational culture is "a process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in distinctive ways" (p. 128). Using Morgan’s definition, organizational culture would have a tremendous impact on leadership values, ethical decision making, communicating those decisions, as well as what is codified in a code of ethics. Research on corporate leaders is diverse and considers many factors that link leadership with ethical decision making. Some of these are the personal characteristics of leaders (Howell & Avolio, 1992; Howell & Frost, 1989; Levine, 1949), the communicative dimensions of leader-subordinate relationships (Lee, 2001; Lee & Jabin, 1995), organizational structure variables (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Seeger, 1997; Shockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1994), transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns & Stalker, 1961; Lee & Jabin, 1995), management styles (Burns, 1978; McGregor, 1960), moral courage (Cavanaugh & Moberg, 1999; Kidder, 2005), and individual values versus group values (Ciulla, 1998; Smircich & Calas, 1987).

Moral courage and the leadership variables mentioned above point to the fact that resolving ethical dilemmas in a morally worthy way is important to the survival of an organization. Buchholz, Evans, and Wagley (1994) argued that the survival of an organization depends on how successfully it makes decisions in the complex arena of public issues. An organization’s ethics statement gives leaders valuable guidelines regarding how issues are to be approached and what core values are central in the decision.

Many executives might not be cognizant of the role ethics plays in decision making. Ethical values are often obscured by the phrase, “It feels right,” or “I know this is the right thing to do.” However, only decisions based on a rational analysis of communication options through the perspective of a philosophical paradigm achieve the necessary rigor to be deemed ethical. Decision making in ethics should go beyond an intuitive analysis (Baker & Martinson, 2002; Bivins, 1992, 2006; Gower, 2003; Parsons, 2004).

Authenticity

Authenticity means being the same on the inside as one appears to be outside of an organization, or even personally. Before one can be authentic, a manager of an organization must reflectively examine her own beliefs, values, and ethical decision-making paradigm, so that they can be represented authentically in discussions with others. Rawlins and Stoker (2006) agreed: “Being authentic requires a strong sense of self” (p. 426). The complex concept of authenticity is comprised of these three general concerns: transparency; truthfulness (veracity, honesty, or credibility); and genuineness, intention or a morally good will.

Transparency refers to being open with how business is conducted, meaning that operations are visible and understandable from outside the organization. Rawlins (2009) defined transparency as the opposite of secrecy. Transparency goes beyond the requirements of disclosure because it allows the organization not only to disclose but also to be knowable in its inner workings, its policies, its decision-making processes, its priorities, and its relations
with stakeholders and publics. Rawlins (2007) cited an industry study that found that the number one response among publics to the question “How can organizations rebuilt trust?” was “be open and honest in business practices” (agreement = 94%).

Honesty or truthfulness in public relations is vital to goodness. As the obverse of deception, truthfulness is morally worthy because it allows the freedom to make an individual choice, respecting moral autonomy, rationality, and dignity. To lie is morally unworthy because it erodes the fabric of society; if everyone lied, no one would expect truth. Only truthful communications can be generalized with equal respect for all people, making honesty morally worthy. Therefore, the principle of veracity holds that the truth must be told, even when ugly or not advantageous to an organization’s own desires.

Genuineness speaks to the heart of moral intention in that an organization is genuinely pursuing an ethical course of action, rather than using ethics as “window dressing” to keep itself out of trouble by appearing ethical. The organization wants to be ethical, and demonstrates that through its actions, rather than simply wanting to appear or seem good. L’Etang and Pieczka (1996) posed serious challenges to the genuineness of an organization by questioning how respectful and symmetrical communication can coexist between an organization and publics given the power differential that exists between the two. The only answer to that challenge is to question the motivation of the organization in its communication and decision-making with regard to publics. If the moral intention is less than simply “to do the right thing” philosophers such as Kant would deem the action unethical (Kant, 1785/1993). He held that a morally good will is the only thing that can exist as an incorruptible good, in and of itself (Kant, 1783/1977). A good intention or a morally good will is the highest standard of ethics in moral philosophy.

Authenticity is comprised of transparency, honesty, and genuineness or a morally good will. Philosophers regard these concepts as prima facie good, or morally worthy in-and-of themselves, placing authenticity as a core concern of any ethical organization. Authenticity is to “be” rather than “to seem.” Rawlins and Stoker (2006) included the concept of authenticity as vital in public relations, along with sincerity and autonomy. They explained, “An authentic person is not as concerned with how well the message is received as much as how well it represents his or her true thoughts” (p. 426).

The Arthur Page Society issued a study in 2007 named “The Authentic Enterprise.” In that report, CCOs averred: “in a word, authenticity will be the coin of the realm for successful corporations and for those who lead them” (p. 6). The Authentic Enterprise advised that “values, principles, beliefs, mission, purpose or value proposition – must dictate consistent behavior and actions” (pp. 5-6).

Consistency

Consistency is a deceptively simple concept. It is tempting to think of a definition of consistency that implies a rigid or even routine decision-making paradigm and little else. However, understanding consistency in terms of the moral-philosophical meaning of the word signifies relying on a rationally devised and thorough means of analysis before any decision is possible. The analytic approach to decision-making renders snap judgments useless, and decisions based on feeling or instinct not worthy of being termed ethical in the philosophical sense. A reliance on enlightenment, modern, and rationalist moral philosophy means that decisions can be made from an understandable and consistently applied framework. A rational-
economic model of decision making requires an enormous amount of research and information to arrive at an optimal decision; a bounded rationality model requires decision-makers to operate in an imperfect information environment in which all information or risks are not known (Sims, 1994). A bounded rationality approach, employed by morally autonomous decision-makers, results in the most enduring decisions in an imperfect information environment. By eliminating bias, capriciousness, selfishness, and other pre-influencing concerns from the decision-making process, publics can understand the decisions of management as both logical and defensible, even if they do not agree with the values or conclusions inherent in the decision.

In public relations, consistency raises the question of loyalty to an organization as an advocate versus loyalty to professional ideals as an advisor to the organization. Each perspective on the ideal, ethical role of public relations practitioners has merit, and each perspective has pros and cons. By maintaining a consistent decision-making process, moral philosophy engages public relations practitioners with the normative ideal of being autonomous, objective, rational decision-makers rather than simply advocating organizational positions. As difficult as the prospect may be to implement rational objectivity and autonomy in the real workplace, the mental exercise alone of attempting to remove bias, pressures, and other personal desires from the decision may allow practitioner to have a better view of the organization through the eyes of publics. Research of Baker and Martinson (2002) supported the argument for consistency of applying ethical paradigms, “There is a very real danger that public relations practitioners will too often play a dysfunctional societal role as professional persuasive communicators if they have not established ethical principles to guide their communication practices” (p. 18).

Establishing standards of ethical decision-making in public relations, and implementing that same standard consistently across issues and with varying publics produces a consistency that disavows capriciousness. Though complete objectivity is not possible in a human state, the philosophers who advocate this mental exercise realize that more thoroughly considered, respectful, and reversible decisions should ensue through the mental exercise of rational autonomy. When decisions consistently reflect thought on behalf of publics, in addition to the normal thought on behalf of an organization, they are consistently more respectful and inherently ethical than unobjective decisions.

Consistency allows organizations to build trusting relationships with publics. If a public knows what to expect of an organization because it has been consistently rational in the past, it tends to trust the organization to continue being rational and fair in the relationship.

**Reflective Management**

Combining all of these concerns of moral decision-making, as evidenced in the inherent good seen in the definitions of public relations as well is in a philosophical analysis of the field, helps define a normative ethic for the field. We can term the whole of these concepts reflective management and operationalize them in the model as seen in Figure 1. Reflective management builds on the positive social role established by van Ruler and Vercic (2005) while significantly expanding on the ethical role of public relations. This role is based in moral philosophy, the analytical means through which it achieves a normative ethical status, and it describes the normative role that public relations should play within both organizations and in society.
The Reflective Model of Ethical Public Relations Management in an Organization

Figure 1.
References


Kant, I. (1783/1977). *Prolegomena to any future metaphysics that will be able to come forward as science* (J. W. Ellington & P. Carus, Trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett. (Original work published 1783)


Intracampaign and intercandidate issue agenda-setting during the 2008 presidential campaign.

Thomas P. Boyle, Ph.D., APR
Associate Professor
Millersville University
P. O. Box 1002
Millersville, PA 17551

thomas.boyle@millersville.edu
717.871.5448

Abstract:
This study considered the political speeches and advertising messages of presidential candidates during the 2008 general election campaign. Content analysis was used to investigate intercandidate and intracampaign agenda-setting. Cross-lag comparisons supported the influence of early advertising messages to late speech mentions within each campaign. In addition, intercandidate agenda-setting was supported for the McCain speech and advertising messages promoting a similar issue focus by Obama in the final month of the campaign.
Introduction

The 2008 presidential election was historic not only in the change of political parities in the White House, but to public relations in a presidential election (e.g. Hendricks & Denton, 2010). Since the seminal agenda-setting study by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the influence of issue salience on the media, policymaker and public agendas has been explored by communication scholars extensively (e.g. Besova & Cooley, 2009). In a review of the agenda-setting research, Tai noted the ever-growing areas of scholarly development in this area (2009). One of the areas identified by Tai was the issue salience for presidential candidates (2009). The framing of individual issues by political candidates takes several forms and the application of it to public relations scholars has been noted by Hallahan (1999). Related to agenda-setting is framing. Entman defines a frame as “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (2004, p. 5) and this understanding has been the foundation for many discussions of media framing (e.g. McCombs, 2005, p. 546; Weaver, 2007, p. 143). The role of framing to agenda-setting, priming and other approaches has been noted often (Hardy & Jamieson, 2005; McCombs, 2005; Weaver, 2007). Furthermore, the role of frames produced by public relations professionals has become an area of greater focus for scholars (Murphee, Reber & Blevens, 2009; Reber & Berger, 2005).

In agenda-setting research, scholars have explored the relationships between various news media – called intermedia agenda-setting (Sweetser, Golan & Wanta, 2008; Boyle, 2001). Another area of focus has become the relationship between campaign public relations tools and messages (e.g. Kiousis & Shields, 2008). These campaign products are referred to as information subsidies by scholars (Zoch & Molleda, 2006; Kiousis & Shields, 2008; Gandy, 1982). Kiousis and Shields explored intercandidate agenda-setting a presidential election by using policy position, speech and news release messages (2008). The researchers found support for issue salience consistently by media type for the news releases of the major party candidates, but failed to find support for consistency among candidates in speeches and issue policy papers (Kiousis & Shields, 2008, pp. 327-328). Intercandidate agenda-setting from one media type (speeches) to another (news releases) was also supported (Kiousis & Shields, 2008, p. 328). Tedesco considered candidate news releases and support for intercandidate influences for Democratic presidential candidates in 2004 (2005).

A study on several statewide races considered the influence of news releases and advertisements on the news agenda and found support for the influence of the releases, but mixed support for the influence of the advertisements (Kiousis, Kim, McDevitt & Ostrowski, 2009). The researchers note the limitation of their results due to a lack of the consideration of time during the elections (Kiousis et al., 2009, p. 556). Dunn considered a statewide gubernatorial race using only news releases for intermedia and intercandidate analysis (2009). Support was found for intercandidate agenda-setting in only one two-month period during the ten-month study period studied using news releases and he suggested other researchers consider other forms of candidate communication as potential sources of influence (Dunn, 2009, p. 645). In a statewide race in 2002, Kiousis, Mitrook, Wu and Seltzer found support for the influence of issue salience in candidate news releases with media coverage, but mixed support for the influence of news release issues on the public agenda (2006, pp. 275-276). Political advertisements in another statewide race showed support for influencing issue salience with television news coverage (McCombs & Min, 2006). Considering a national election in Spain during 2004, Moreno, Kiousis, Humanes and Luisa did not find support for intercandidate influence with candidates

The study here adds to intercandidate and intracandidate (within a campaign) scholarship in considering the 2008 presidential election. Three elements are important to note: the study combines cross-lag and intercandidate agenda-setting for a U.S. general election, considers two different types of information subsidies through speeches and advertisements, and combines an examination of policy and personal issues.

**RQ1:** Was there consistency between the issues mentioned in the advertising messages and campaign speech messages for each candidate within each time period?

**RQ2:** Was there an influence of one campaign’s issue speech mentions early in the campaign on those in the later time period for the other campaign’s advertising messages?

**RQ3:** Was there an influence of one campaign’s issue advertising mentions early in the campaign to those in the later time period for the other campaign’s speech messages?

**Methods**

To answer the questions above, the study examined issue mentions in the speeches and political advertisements used by the Barack Obama and John McCain campaigns during the 2008 presidential election. Using issue categories revised from the codebooks for the National Election Studies data from the University of Michigan (Miller, Kinder, Rosenstone, & the National Election Studies, 1993), campaign speeches and political advertisements were content analyzed for issue and character mentions. The 46 categories consisted of issue keywords and phrases for three general areas: domestic issues, foreign policy issues and those focusing on personal character. The codebook has been used in previous elections (Boyle, 1998) and revised to include issues relevant to the 2008 campaign (e.g. “war on terror”). The campaign materials were divided into an early campaign season time period and late campaign season time period so intracandidate (within each campaign) and intercandidate (between campaigns) agenda-setting could be examined. Both campaign periods covered the traditional campaign season beginning officially after Labor Day. The early campaign period (time one) covered speeches and advertisements from September 3 to October 3, 2008. The later period (time two) covered October 4 through election day (November 4, 2008).

The advertisements were transcripts created from the narratives of the 2008 general election political advertisements by date (http://pcl.stanford.edu). Transcripts for the speeches were downloaded from the Lexis-Nexis database using the time period noted above and general descriptors (e.g. Obama) from Congressional Quarterly (CQ) transcripts. Since both major presidential candidates were sitting U.S. senators, speeches from their campaign events and U.S. Senate floor remarks were available. The total time one advertisements was 58 and an additional 41 in the later time period. The word total for the Obama ads was 4,795 (time one=2,646; time two=2,149) and McCain was 4,175 (time one=2,345; time two=1,830). Most of the political advertisements were 30-second spots so their totals were much less than those of the campaign speeches. There was a total of 53 time one speeches and 96 in time two. Word counts for the speeches were 192,215 (time one=64,763; time two=129,452) for McCain and 238,787
for Obama (time one=97,479; time two=141,308). Given the extensive nature of the content analyzed, Concordance software was used to search for the extensive keywords and key phrases listed in the codebook (see http://www.concordancesoftware.co.uk). Similar content analysis software was used in previous studies considering intercandidate agenda setting (e.g. Dunn, 2009, Tedesco, 2005). Communication researchers have considered the effectiveness of computer coding software and how it compares to traditional content analysis coding (e.g. Nacos, Shapiro, Young, Fan, Kjellstrand & McCaa, 2009). Computer software allows the analysis of data quickly, but has limitations of not being able to consider contextual factors (Nacos, et al., 2009, pp. 251-252). Krippendorff has noted the value of combining both kinds of analysis and calls this “computer-aided textual analysis, or CATA for short.” (2004, p. 261). The analysis conducted here used the Concordance software to identify the frequencies of keywords and related phrases with the researcher reviewing them in their context. Great care was taken to develop content categories that did not overlap. For example, the word “bridge” is too broad since it could relate to the category Infrastructure and also Leadership when a candidate indicated wanting to build a bridge to the future. After extensive revisions based on pilot study analyzes, the codebook was used to consider 46 (later reduced to 43) categories of issues. These methods led to high levels of face validity. A second coder used Concordance software to content analyze more than 20 percent of the data and intercoder reliability was nearly 100 percent.

After the category mentions were totaled for the speeches and advertisements, the data was entered into a statistical software data set. The results presented in the paper are shown descriptively through frequencies and inferentially through correlation coefficients. Along with considering traditional statistical significance for the Pearson product correlations, the analysis considers the influence across time. Tipton, Haney and Baseheart (1975) and many scholars have utilized the Rozelle-Campbell test for statistical significance.3 Weaver, Graber, McCombs, and Eyal (1981, p. 136) explain its function:

"The general procedure for calculating the baseline is to average the synchronous (same-time) correlations between the measures at each of the two points in time and to average the autocorrelations (over-time correlations) between the same measure over time. This provides a baseline estimate of the diagonal correlations that one should expect to observe if there was no causal relationship between one variable at Time 1 and changes in the other between Time 1 and Time 2."

The use of this statistical technique allows the study to better answer the research questions considering their cross-lag nature.

Results

Tables one through four begin to address the first research questions considering intra-campaign agenda setting. Considering table one, McCain’s speech issue priorities did show some

\[
\frac{X_1 Y_1 + X_2 Y_2}{2} - \sqrt{\frac{(X_1 X_2)^2 + (Y_1 Y_2)^2}{2}}
\]

3Each correlation was tested for statistical significance using the Rozelle-Campbell Baseline used in previous studies (Evatt & Bell, 1995; Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Tipton, Haney, & Baseheart, 1975; Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981). As Roberts and McCombs note: "The Rozelle-Campbell baseline statistic is computed from the other four coefficients present in the two-variable cross-lag situation." (1994, p. 257). The formula for the baseline is:
change between early and late in the campaign. The economy and taxes switched places on the
lists with taxes becoming more of a focus later in the campaign. In addition, healthcare becomes
a greater issue later in the campaign moving up from seventh in time one. Table two indicates
taxes were the top priority of the narratives of political advertisements for McCain 2008. His
leadership abilities were stressed in the advertisements more than in the speeches.

**Table 1: McCain Speech Mentions, Top Five**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Economy</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Campaign</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Taxes</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Employment</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=43. Unit of observations are public speeches and political advertisements. Including both
campaigns, total Time 1 speeches = 53; Time 2 speeches = 96; Time 1 advertisements = 58;

**Table 2: McCain Ad Mentions, Top Five**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Taxes</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Leadership</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Organized Labor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Leadership 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Employment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Campaign</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Experience 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=43. Unit of observations are public speeches and political advertisements. Including both
campaigns, total Time 1 speeches = 53; Time 2 speeches = 96; Time 1 advertisements = 58;

Tables three and four consider the focus of Obama’s campaign speeches and
advertisements in 2008. Like McCain, taxes were a major issue in his speeches and
advertisements. In his speeches, Obama focused on it more than any other issue both early –
unlike McCain – and late in the campaign. In time one of the speeches, Obama did not mention
the campaign but focused more on it as election day came closer and pushed education as a topic
from the top five. In his paid messages, the economy and taxes was of great focus with
leadership, employment and health remaining throughout both periods.

**Table 3: Obama Speech Mentions, Top Five**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Taxes</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Employment</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Leadership</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Economy</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Education</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Obama Ad Mentions, Top Five

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Economy</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1. Taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Taxes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2. Economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Health</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5. Leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=43. Unit of observations are public speeches and political advertisements. Including both campaigns, total Time 1 speeches = 53; Time 2 speeches = 96; Time 1 advertisements = 58; Time 2 advertisements = 41. Time 1= Sept. 3 – Oct. 3, 2008. Time 2 = Oct. 4 - Nov. 4, 2008.

All of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients described below were statistically significant at the \( p \leq .01 \) level. To further explore the cross-lag influence of messages in time one and two, the Rozelle-Campbell baseline statistic was computed. If there were influences from time one, the coefficient (thick arrow in figures) would be expected to be larger than the baseline and larger than the reverse relationship (thin arrow). Figures one and two focused on research question one which asked if the messages within the individual campaigns (intracampaign) were consistent. As indicated by the large and statistically significant coefficients there were moderate to strong relationships between advertising messages and campaign speeches. Campaign speeches provide more of an opportunity to test messages and issue positions on the public and, because of this ability, the cross-lagged comparisons considered if the speeches in time one led to advertising messages in time two. For the McCain campaign, the baseline and expected relationship was statistically the same -- .51 versus the baseline of .52. Given the high correlation of the candidate messages in time one (.85 and .81), partial correlation coefficients were computed holding constant the influence of the message in the earlier time period as appropriate for cross-lag analysis (e.g. Chang, 2007). In figure one, the expected relationship failed to reach statistical significance (\( p=.10 \)) while the reverse relationship produced a large partial coefficient (\( p=.00 \)). There is support for the influence of the McCain advertisement messages in time one on the McCain speech mentions in time two. In figure two, both of the partial correlations were statistically significant but the reverse relationship indicating the influence of the advertisement message on the later speech mentions was more than double the size of the expected relationship. Again, support exists for the influence of the advertising mentions in time one on the later speech mentions of both campaigns.

The correlation analysis found in figures three and four seek to answer research questions two and three by examining the intercandidate (between campaigns) agenda-setting. Of focus are messages found in advertisements and speeches for a campaign in time one on the other major candidate’s campaign messages in time two. In figure three, McCain’s speech mention expected correlation was substantively larger than the baseline statistic, but statistically the same as the reverse coefficient (.82 versus .81). Figure three indicates two significant, but equal relationships. McCain speech mentions at time one had the same influence as Obama’s speech mentions at time one on their opponent’s time two speech mentions. When controlling for within
campaign earlier time periods (.94 and .81), the partial coefficients are both significant. The .82 size of the one in the expected direction is larger than the .63 for the reverse relationship (both p=.00). There was greater support for the influence of McCain’s speech issue messages on Obama’s speech messages than the reverse.

Figure four considers the influence of McCain advertisement messages on Obama. The expected coefficient is substantively higher than the baseline statistic and the reverse coefficient. Furthermore, the partial coefficient for the expected relationship was .56 and significant (p=.00) while the reverse relationship produced a coefficient much smaller and not significant. These results support the belief that McCain’s earlier advertising messages had an influence on Obama’s advertising messages in the later time period.

In the last pair of figures, intercandidate messages are considered across media type -- advertisements versus speeches between the campaigns. Both the expected and reverse relationships are above the baseline statistic, but only marginally. Partial coefficients fail to reach statistical significant and are small. Figure six reflects a similar; both are slightly above the baseline and have similar

Figures 1-6: Cross-Lagged Comparisons (Pearson Coefficients)\(^4\)

Figure 1, Intra-Campaign: McCain Speech versus Advertisement Mentions
Rozelle-Campbell Baseline = .52

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>McCain Speech Mentions</th>
<th>McCain Speech Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time 1</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>McCain Ad Mentions</th>
<th>McCain Ad Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time 1</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^4\)Each line represents a Pearson coefficient. The lines in bold indicate the coefficient of primary interest and the other arrow line represents the area of interest if the reverse hypothesis was true. The Rozelle-Campbell statistic was computed for each model to determine the statistical significance of individual Pearson coefficients.
Figure 2, Intra-Campaign: Obama Speech versus Advertisement Mentions
Rozelle-Campbell Baseline = .79

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obama Speech Mentions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time 1</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obama Ad Mentions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time 1</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3, Intercandidate: McCain Speech versus Obama Speech
Rozelle-Campbell Baseline = .64

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>McCain Speech Mentions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time 1</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obama Speech Mentions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time 1</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis here addressed several suggestions from previous researchers. The cross-lag correlations considered allowed consideration of differences between time—a limitation identified (Kiousis, Kim, McDevitt & Ostrowski, 2009). It also adds to the agenda-setting.

**Conclusions**

Figure 5, Intercandidate: McCain Speech versus Obama Advertisements

Rozelle-Campbell Baseline = .75

!!!Figure 5!!!

McCain Speech Mentions
  Time 1 .81
  Time 2

McCain Speech Mentions
  Time 1 .81
  Time 2

Obama Ad Mentions
  Time 1 .92
  Time 2

in strength. Again, partial coefficients fail to reach statistical significant, are small, and provide no support for intercandidate agenda-setting across media type.
scholarship by considering more than just one campaign public relations tool. Some previous studies used only one information subsidy to indicate the messages produced by campaigns and researchers noted this was a limitation of their analyses (Dunn, 2009; Tedesco, 2005). The use of political advertisements and speeches provide greater range to the campaign messages analyzed in 2008.

Within each campaign the advertising messages used in September influenced speech issue mentions in October. Given the abundance of polling data available to modern presidential candidates, it is possible campaigns felt their messages were having some effect and they reinforced them during their campaign speeches. Candidates often believe it is important to have a consistent message. Since advertising messages are generally delivered in 30-second lengths, they need to be a basic repetition of the core campaign communication. In this way, the findings in 2008 support the belief that advertising messages are “a parsimonious surrogate for the campaign as a whole” (Roberts & McCombs, 1994, p. 258).

The findings for the 2008 data support intercandidate agenda-setting within a media (subsidy) type for speeches and advertisements. This is different than the findings of Kiousis and Shield which did not find any intercandidate agenda-setting for speeches or position papers, but only for news releases (2008). In 2008, it was McCain whose mentions in time one influenced Obama’s messages in time two. The news media typically provide election coverage focusing on the “horse race” of the election (Hollihan, 2009, p. 130). Given this focus, the candidate trailing in the race often receives greater focus. The media coverage might provide an explanation why McCain’s speech and advertising messages in the first time period led to a greater frequency of issue mentions in time two by the Obama campaign.

While the study of the 2008 presidential general election adds to the agenda-setting literature, the study is limited to the data analyzed. While campaign messages between candidates may have an influence on other politicians and pundits, future researchers should consider campaign messages and their relationship to the media agenda simultaneously with
intercandidate analysis. In addition, data should be collected to gauge public attitudes of which issues are important to the agenda of voters who ultimately interact with candidate messages.
Bibliography


The Moral Exemplars of Public Relations: Who Are They?

Anesha M. Brown & Liliya Velbovets
Master’s Students
Brigham Young University
**Introduction**

Who are the moral exemplars of public relations? Why is their existence not only significant to the universal standards that determine sound ethical practices performed personally, but also to those that are made professionally? Baker’s (2008) recent research, which examines those traits that embody the model of the “Principled Advocate,” suggests that a PR professional’s adherence to the virtues that frame this model will paint a clearer picture of their role in advocating sound ethical practices. Specifically, Baker (2008) called for further research in this area stating, “Journalists have moral heroes… But who are the moral heroes in public relations and advertising? Moral exemplars in these fields should be identified, and their virtues and principled practices should be identified, recognized, and lauded among professionals and students so they can serve as role model for others” (p. 248). To date, there has been no such research identifying moral exemplars in public relations.

As human beings we have always looked to others for points of reference or imitation. There has always been a handful of individuals that stand in a position to guide others by their everyday actions. For those of us that turn to these guides, our identity and place in this world is often shaped by our longing to become like them. Nevertheless, one must ask what makes a moral exemplar? What makes an individual stand above the rest and be deemed a hero or moral exemplar? What gives these individuals the innate ability to consistently perform good deeds no matter the circumstance they are faced with? Why are they so few in number? And why are there so few that dot the professional world? Or are they so few?

The present study seeks to find out who the moral exemplars of public relations are and attempt to establish the set of guidelines and criteria that address the make-up thereof. Since the PR professional functions in a role serving both their client and society, who they look to as a reference in their decision-making is significant. Additionally, this study will address if the moral reasoning of public relations practitioners is grounded in those individuals that they consider to be their moral exemplars.

**Literature Review**

*Who and what is a moral exemplar?*

Rugeley and Van Mart (2006) stated, “Moral exemplars are stereotypically portrayed as heroes or heroines who perform acts of great courage” (p. 381). Hart (1992) suggested that there are three critical criteria essential to identifying a moral exemplar, which are good or high character; consistent and intentional actions that are most often perfect; and the contributions made by them are of an important manner (as cited in Rugeley and Van Mart, 2006). Additionally, Rugeley and Van Mart (2006) stated,

All moral exemplars do their jobs with such extraordinary integrity and moral clarity that their strength of character is readily recognized. Some exemplars rebuild their agencies to serve a new mission, become more professional, and function with increased levels of transparency and citizen input. They achieve consensus in ways that appeal to the moral values of followers in an attempt to raise their consciousness about ethical issues and to mobilize their energy and resources to reform institutions. (p. 383)

This posits a fourth criterion in which the exemplar is engaged in self-evaluation. While the moral exemplar may possess a level of perfection that encompasses good character, flawless and intentional actions, and offers significant contributions, they are constantly looking to evolve or
improve. It is here that the moral exemplar’s actions determine and predict the ethical behaviors that not only they will perform but also determine the actions of those that follow. Pojman (2002) stated, “Moral agents who go beyond minimal morality are necessary for a society if it is to overcome evil and produce a high degree of flourishing” (p. 164). The livelihood of society depends on the good actions made by moral agents.

Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, and Damon (2001) discuss the actions of moral agents in their discourse on “good works,” defining good work as, “[the] work of expert quality that benefits the broader society…. work that is both excellent in quality and socially responsible – at a time of constant change” (p. xi). It is not only one’s good character that deems the makings of a moral exemplar, as earlier noted, but it is the actions performed that truly determine and identify the moral exemplar. However, to completely evolve to the full status of a moral exemplar one must recognize and take responsibility for how their actions, even if good, will affect society as a whole. Gardner et. al (2001) continued by stating, “When these conditions are present, we have a chance to experience work as “good” – that is, as something that allows the full expression of what is best in us” (p. 5). Thus, it is the design of good character, good actions/works, continued improvement, and recognition and responsibility to society that a moral exemplar is therefore created.

Gardner et. al, (2001) also suggested that “good works” are habit-formed (Baker, 2008) and require a consistent and repetitious effort. Beyond this aspect of a moral exemplar lies the hallmark of a true moral exemplar, which becomes the driving force of all other criteria, which is one’s disposition, genuine desire, and motivation. This underscores not only the passion that most exemplars display but also explains why common individuals are enamored, drawn to them, and seeks to imitate them.

While this blueprint provides the most basic criteria that define one as a moral exemplar, it does not completely explain the complex nature that encompasses why a moral exemplar is able to act in such a way that makes them more notable and distinguished above others in everyday life. Colby and Damon (1992) give three common premises that explains this nature, stating,

First, moral exemplars were found to possess a sense of certainty in their beliefs and actions. Second, even during the difficult periods, they continued to have a positive outlook. Third, the moral goals of exemplars were found to be united with their sense of self, and that the “relation of self and morality . . . provides the most central key to understanding the unwavering commitment shown by the moral exemplars. (p. 277, as cited in Matsuba and Walker, 2005)

When an individual can clearly identify those characteristics related to self and develop a standard of morality to reference, then the actions and choices that arise are predicated by one’s ability to be loyal and authentic to self. It is here that the focus is directed to the character of the moral agent and not so much on the actions performed. If an individual is of a good character then they will coherently act or perform in the same manner.

An individual’s good character is at the heart of virtue ethics. Pojman (2002) stated, “Virtue ethics is not only about action but about emotions, character, and moral habit…. It calls us to aspire to be an ideal person” (p. 160). Baker (2008) stated, “In virtue ethics, then, while it is important to do the right thing – it also is important to have the right dispositions, motivations, and emotions” (p. 237). One’s disposition, motivation, and emotion are at the foundation of their character. Cabot (2005) suggested that moral motivation involves the individual prioritizing moral values over others and taking responsibility for their own actions.
Hardy and Carlo (2005) further posited that there is a correlation between one’s moral identity and moral motivation, stating, “that individuals highly committed to moral causes seem to experience unity between their self and moral goals” (p. 252). Thus, most actions performed are congruent with the character of the person acting and uniformly morally motivated. Walker and Frimer (2007) stated, “moral exemplars in general tended to have stronger motivational themes of both agency and communion in their life narratives than ordinary individuals” (p. 857). These correlations underscore the premise of virtue ethics. Baker (2008) suggested that continually performing virtuous behaviors not only builds virtue but also results in virtuous habitual acts. Therefore, it is in the synthesis of good character and habituated good acts that the moral exemplar is created.

Another key element of a moral exemplar’s good character and action can be found in Kohlberg’s stages of moral development. The last stage of moral development, the postconventional stage, is considered the most advanced and the most difficult to achieve. It is in this stage that an individual becomes aware of the autonomous nature desired to sound ethical decision-making. It is here that the individual engages in principled moral reasoning. They often choose principles of action and then commit to them personally. Kohlberg (1971) states,

> At this level, there is a clear effort to define moral values and principles that have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups and persons holding these principles, and apart from the individual’s own identification with these groups. (p. 625, as cited by Kline and Woloschuk, 1983)

When an individual reaches this stage, they will have committed to certain universal principles or codes of ethics. Goree (2000) suggests that moral development allows one to look inwardly and address more difficult questions of ethical decision-making. It is here that the one begins to design a set of moral standards that is completely their own. As a person delves deeper inside to make sense of an ethical issue they are facing, they not only become aware and sensitive to the decision at hand but they naturally couple and connect their own personal standards with those being questioned. Goree (2000) further stated,

> Moral reasoning skills tend to mature from concrete to abstract, just as other reasoning abilities and cognitive skills do. In this light, moral development is not really about what you do, it is about why you do what you do, or more precisely, it is about how you think. (p. 102)

The assumptions postulated by moral development theory are foundational to the character of a moral exemplar, which leads to the actions performed. In many instances, the actions of a moral exemplar are predetermined by their character and standard of morality previously set and practiced. However, it should be equally noted that the ability to be deemed a moral exemplar is not an event but a process. A moral exemplar is renown for their countless acts of good that occur over time.

**Why does the individual look to moral exemplars?**

By the very nature and definition of a moral exemplar outlined here, the moral exemplar represents a very small number of individuals in our society, which perhaps accounts for their paucity and uniqueness amongst the masses. William James (1902) stated that one’s “common instinct for reality . . . has always held the world to be essentially a theatre for heroism” (as cited in Sullivan and Venter (2005), p. 101). Our society is one in which the existence of a hero or in this case a moral exemplar is necessary or quite vital to the world we live in. Their very existence gives one hope for a better future and hope that as individuals or collectively we can
build a better social system. This idea of the “hero” has been a point of reference (Schlenker B.R., Weigold, and Schlenker K.A., 2008) for most people since childhood. However, as one transitions into adulthood, heroes become more tangible, someone identified through religion, family, or a profession.

Another reason individuals look to moral exemplars lies in the need to create and nurture a social system of order and cohesiveness – a moral community. In research examining advertising practitioners and issues of ethical decision-making, Drumwright and Murphy (2004) posited that actions or choices made are more complex and far-reaching than at the individual level and are inclusive of those concepts that define and make up the social systems that surround us. When looking at the developing character of a moral exemplar, then the individual codes of morality one develops and adheres to affects and influences those universal standards set forth by society. Inherently, it is a combination of individuals’ personal set of codes that build social systems. Pojman (2006) said, “Morality is also closely related to law and some people equate the two practices” (p. 3). Each individual has a will that makes law for itself as if for everyone. Since humanity, together, legislate the moral law, we thus form a moral community, “A Kingdom of Ends” (Baker, 1999). Sullivan and Venter (2005) further suggested that individuals look to heroes or exemplars because “[t]hrough their deeds, they become exemplars for the model citizen; thereby promoting cohesiveness and social integration within the societal framework they represent” (p. 102).

Another crucial reason that the individual looks to the moral exemplar is in an effort to compare and check one’s own moral character. Sullivan and Venter (2005) pointed out that, “People regularly garner information about themselves and their abilities through comparisons with others” (p. 102). As an individual compares themselves to those they consider to be moral exemplars they are constantly measuring their own moral temperatures, seeking to equalize or balance theirs with their moral exemplars. This is moreover achieved through imitation and mirroring. Schlenker, Weigold, and Schlenker (2008) stated, “[Comparisons] can also serve as inspiration to motivate self-improvement, produce the glow of basking in their accomplishments, and even enhance self-evaluation through assimilation” (p. 326).

Moral exemplars in professional fields

In the professional world, many scholars have examined moral exemplars in various fields. They are determined to identify who these individuals may be and how they became frames of reference for professionals in the workplace. It has also been a goal to understand the moral functioning (Walker, 1999) of those individuals. In research on moral exemplars in the computing profession, Huff and Barnard (2009) posited that one’s moral career is determined based on those moral characteristics and values assumed by an individual, stating, “Each of the exemplars is attempting to achieve goods that are central to their conception of who they are as a computing professional” (p. 52).

The research about moral exemplars in the professional world is in its beginning stages. Further in-depth examination is needed to establish frames of reference for a moral exemplar, which will prove vital in professions that engage daily in actions that require sound moral reasoning to not only benefit the organization they serve but also to society as a whole.

For society to evolve to place in which the greater good can truly serve the greater whole it will take more than a few good men and women, but a profusion of followers, if you will, that have adopted a blueprint of sound moral principles that guide decisions made and actions performed. Moral exemplars are a necessity and crucial to the balance in personal and
professional ethics. Louis Pojman (2002) said, “The saints and moral heroes are the salt by which the world is preserved” (p. 164). As the prior research (Sullivan and Ventor, 2005) has posited, individuals look to moral exemplars not only as a measure of self and improvement thereof but there is a connected consistency that bonds society and those that desire to participate therein. This again speaks to the vital weight mankind has placed on the moral exemplar; therefore, an even more significant need for not only points of reference and imitation on one’s part but the production of more exemplars in our society.

*Moral reasoning and Public Relations practitioners*

For a long period of time, public relations was perceived as a middle ground between propaganda, advertising, marketing and journalism. Professionals who come to public relations from these fields brought rules, traditions and standards of ethical reasoning from those professions. Today, public relations has a number of definitions that keep changing with the appearance of social media and merging between communication professions. With so much uncertainty in the profession, defining moral exemplars could be a difficult task. One of the issues that the public relations professionals face, is defining their role among similar fields such as marketing and advertising. Fitzpatrick & Gauthier (2001) explained that “the field has done a poor job in defining what public relations professionals do in justifying their value and worth to society” (p. 195).

Despite the uncertainty in the profession, public relations has a professional code of ethics. Lieber (2008) discussed that the presence of the professional code of ethics and its enforcement are important elements when defining a profession. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) code of ethics serves as an example of moral reasoning in the United States and professional associations in other countries. The code states that “ethical practice is the most important obligation of a PRSA member” (PRSA, 2000). However, the challenge is in the absence of any form of enforcement of the code. Additionally, with the increasing globalization of public relations, there is a growing challenge in defining international ‘ethical’ standards (Lieber, 2008). These challenges combined, suggests the significant need for more defined ethical guidelines and decision-making processes (Lieber, 2008).

While there is a benefit in such regulation as a code of ethics, there is a question of whether there are people in public relations who serve as examples of keeping and improving this code of ethics. There are a number of ethical articles and blogs with recipes and “easy steps” for principled public relations practice. However, researchers have contended that there is a need to look deeply into “broader theories of moral philosophy” (Boyton, 2006) in order to develop better moral guiding principles. Cabot (2005) acknowledged that most of the ethical research has been done by the professionals in moral philosophy and moral psychology. These two disciplines created a basis for moral regulation of work ethics theory and practice. Other professions that have contributed to the construction of the moral and ethical research were dentistry, nursing, and accounting. In research by the Center for the Study of Ethical Development, public relations professionals were listed in the top ten professions that have to deal with the most ethical decision-making issues. Public relations professionals came only after journalists and dentists (Coleman and Wilkins, 2004).

Characterizing ethics in public relations, Boyton (2006) found that the most important values for public relations professionals are truth, honesty, respect, fairness and accountability which go along with six values of PRSA Code of Ethics: honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty and fairness. These values may be key components in identifying and framing moral
exemplars in public relations. Such high levels of the ethical and moral intelligence require appropriate professional preparation. However, the research shows that new graduates are more likely to receive such ethical training when entering public relations field. Boyton (2006) stated that public relations students “reason about moral situations at a level comparable to advertising professionals (and accountants, for the matter)” (p. 330). While the most important skill for entry-level public relations jobs is press release writing, it is possible that in their classes, students have disregarded the critical nature of ethical decision-making. In order to better prepare for their professional life and see the advantage of sound moral reasoning, there is a need for public acknowledgement of the moral exemplars in this profession.

Even though it might seem that those professionals who work in private business, agencies and corporations would have substantial differences in how they view ethics, Lieber (2008) argued that “moral development in public relations significantly differ based on job segment” (p.244). The research concluded that the only difference was found in the level of education. Additionally, it was concluded that there was a gap between corporate and agency practitioners in comparison to academic professionals.

Addressing the bad reputation public relations professionals have as “spin doctors,” Fitzpatrick & Gauthier (2001) stated that “public relations professionals continue to be plagued by charges of unethical conduct” (p. 195). The author compares the usage of public relations to the usage of guns. Like guns, public relations campaigns could be both used for ethical and unethical purposes. Baker (2001) stated that the public might have good reasons for such mistrust since “the public—with good reason- has come to recognize that too frequently the goal in persuasive communication centers around exploiting them” (p. 151).

And just like guns, public relations is often used in extremely negative and chaotic situations to protect, or in the case of ‘black PR,’ to hurt others. Fitzpatrick & Gauthier (2001) noted that because public relations professionals often work with highly intense and negative circumstances, the practice actually takes these negative attributes by association, stating,

When an institution is the subject of public criticism for perceived irresponsible behavior, the public relations representative shares the blame—regardless of his or her involvement in or knowledge of alleged bad acts. This “guilt by association” has become increasingly detrimental to the public relations industry as more and more organizations fail to meet public expectations (p. 195).

On the other hand, public relations is a known tool in bringing to reality the goals of charitable organizations by providing cheap tools for raising public awareness. Also, the profession serves as the strongest democratic tool in providing a dialog between nations and their governments, companies and their stakeholders. While some perceive the duty of public relations is to serve the public interests, others consider public relations professionals as the voice of corporations. Both of these opinions are correct and the profession acts under dual roles and perceptions. It is common for this duality to decrease trust in the profession and further clouds the process of identifying moral exemplars in this field.

Identifying moral exemplars is needed in order to increase the levels of trust. Edelman is one of the top public relations companies in the world. They base their services on education about how public relations professionals could increase company’s potential by increasing trust. The whole public relations activity according to Edelman is to find and act on what people trust the most. According to 2006 Edelman Trust Barometer, trust is the most important asset for the companies. The 2009 Edelman Trust Barometer study reported decline in trust across all the industries, specifically in banking, insurance, automotive and media. Identifying moral
exemplars would not only provide examples for individual practitioners to reference but would ultimately strengthen the trust people have towards the public relations profession.

**Research Questions**

The research strongly indicates the significant need for moral exemplars in our society. The criteria that determine who and what a moral exemplar is has proven to be of a complex nature, one that is far-reaching and critical not only to sound moral reasoning in one’s individual lives but to those that we are collectively responsible for in and outside the professional world. Moreover, identifying these exemplars in public relations would not only acknowledge those individuals that have lead the industry in sound moral reasoning but also provide a much-needed frame of reference for those entering and already practicing in the field. To date, there has been no research identifying moral exemplars in public relations. Therefore, the overall aim of this research is to identify which individuals public relations professionals consider to be moral exemplars in the field and if so, what are their characteristics. We propose the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the characteristics that make a person a moral exemplar?
- **RQ2:** Whom do practitioners identify as a moral exemplar in the public relations field?
- **RQ3:** What makes the person identified a moral exemplar in public relations?
- **RQ4:** Is there a person in the public relations field that is generally accepted as a moral exemplar in the practice?

**Methodology**

In order to answer these research questions, a convenience sample of public relations scholars and practitioners between the ages of 25-65 were randomly selected from PRSA and invited to complete a Web-based survey. An online survey was the research method used. The survey consisted of five demographic questions and four moral exemplar questions to define what a moral exemplar is; identify personal moral exemplars in public relation; identify those individuals generally accepted as moral exemplars in the field; and to identify attributes and characteristics of individual named. Participating professionals were emailed a link to an online survey developed using Qualtrics Survey Software. More than 1,000 public relations professionals were invited to participate in the study.

Using the constant comparative technique, a content analysis of the survey questions was conducted. After all data was collected, responses were assigned to individual units of analysis and placed into a set of conditional categories. Each new unit of analysis was examined and compared to previously assigned categories to see if inclusion in those categories were appropriate based on relevance and similarities between the units. If a unit did not fit into one of the previously assigned categories, a new category of classification was created. Researchers reviewed and compared all assigned categories to identify common attributes and characteristics among categories.
Results

Survey Response

Participating public relations professionals were emailed a link to an online survey developed using Qualtrics Survey Software. More than 1,000 professionals were invited to participate, and 65 responded.

Of the 65 valid survey responses, 30% were between the ages of 31 and 45 and the second largest age group, at 29%, between 46 and 59. Eight-three percent of the respondents were white, with 6% congruently reporting the race of African American and Hispanic. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents were female. The survey responses further reported that 80% of the respondents were practitioners, with 16% reporting the status of practitioner and scholar, and 4% reporting only to be a scholar. The majority of the respondents have worked in public relations six years or more, with 34% working 11 to 20 years, 20% working 6 to 10 years, and 25% working 21 years or more.

See Table 1

RQ1: What are the characteristics that make a person a moral exemplar?

The respondents listed several characteristics that make a person a moral exemplar. Over half of the respondents (63%) reported that honesty was a characteristic that makes a person a moral exemplar, 39% also reported that integrity was a characteristic, followed by 23% reporting that community-minded/concern for others was another characteristic of a moral exemplar. Additionally, ethical behavior (22%), accountability/responsibility (20%), and a strong moral compass (16%) were the other top characteristics to follow.

Using the constant comparative technique, a content analysis of the survey question, “Write down the characteristics, attributes, or traits that make a person a moral exemplar” was conducted. After all data was collected, 56 participants from the sample group answered the question and 204 responses were assigned to individual units of analysis and placed into a set of conditional categories. Each new unit of analysis was examined and compared to previously assigned categories to see if inclusion in those categories were appropriate based on relevance and similarities between the units. If a unit did not fit into one of the previously assigned categories, a new category of classification was created.

Researchers then reviewed and compared all assigned categories to identify common patterns and relationships among categories. Related categories were then combined and new categories created based on established characteristics of a moral exemplar. The respondents identified a total of 71 characteristics that make a person a moral exemplar. Many of the characteristics not identified in the top ten included, knowledge/intelligence, advocacy, following professional code of ethics, leadership, consistency, and passion.

See Table 2

RQ2: Whom do practitioners identify as a moral exemplar in the public relations field?

Respondents were asked to identify a moral exemplar in the public relations field. Fifty-two participants answered this question, with 77% of the respondents identifying 40 individuals as a moral exemplar in the field. Of those responses, participants identified 50% of these
individuals as a boss, fellow-practitioner, or professor. Twenty-three percent of respondents could not identify a moral exemplar in public relations.

The respondents were also asked why they identified specific individuals as a moral exemplar in the public relations field. All of the answers were congruent with the characteristics of a moral exemplar that the respondents had previously listed. One respondent said of a fellow practitioner, “[S]he exemplifies everything I just mentioned previously. One characteristic she also possesses is that of integrity. She has this unwavering sense of integrity that no crisis or problem can rattle.” Additionally, many of the responses included specific illustrations of the conduct of the individual identified. A respondent said of former PR professor,

“He has forgone jobs based on his moral convictions. He does the right thing. He stands up for others. He is kind and considerate and yet intelligent, a leader, and a person students can relate to. He demonstrates the importance of relationships, public, and moral decision.”

RQ3: What makes the person identified a moral exemplar in public relations?

The respondents were asked to name the characteristics of moral exemplars they have chosen in the previous question “what is it about this person that makes them your moral exemplar?” After analyzing the answers of 49 respondents, the characteristics they named were organized into four general categories: personal character, relationships with coworkers, relationships with clients, skills and relationships with public.

See Table 3

Personal character features were the most important to the respondents in their descriptions of a moral exemplar. The greatest responses were honesty, doing the right thing, following moral and ethical standards, compassion towards others and hardworking. Other character qualities were doing what was promised or “walking the talk,” common sense, optimism and sense of humor. One of the professionals summarized these qualities of her PR moral exemplar by stating:

“She has more commonsense than any person I have ever met in my life. I believe she would never compromise her morals or ethics for anyone or any company – ever. She believes in doing the right thing and seems to have an innate ability to always know what the right thing is.”

Another category that the respondents gave great emphasis was the relationships with coworkers. According to responses, a moral exemplar should be a person who willingly shares her wisdom and teaches by example, who is friendly, knows how to communicate well with others in the organization, puts people first, and treats everyone like a family. Such a person should not have an ego and should be open to suggestions of others and act on them.

Skills were named as an important component of a moral exemplar; however, they were mentioned less frequently. This category included an ability to balance work and private life, sports activity, professionalism, strong professional knowledge, ability to make ethical decisions and ability to make a difference. In the category of relationships with clients a moral exemplar is seen as a person who would only work with the moral clients.
Additionally, the balance is not just important in the personal life but in managing relationships with public. Some of the most important qualities in this category were getting the truth to public and balancing between the interests of the public and interests of the company.

**RQ4: Is there a person in the public relations field that is generally accepted as a moral exemplar in the practice?**

After all data was collected, 41 participants from the sample group answered the question “is there a person or people in the public relations field that is generally accepted as a moral exemplar in the practice?” Sixteen participants (49%) responded that they did not know or could not think of anyone specific. A few respondents reported that public relations professionals who work in nonprofit organizations and military public relations professionals could be named as exemplars as well. One person mentioned that APR designated PRSA members who agreed to stand by the Code of Ethics are also great candidates for the position of moral exemplar. Some of the respondents reported that they considered the CEO’s of large public relations firm to be exemplars in public relations stating, “I think in general the legends are those whose names are on the doors of the best firms across the country.”

When looking at the background information of the people who were named moral exemplars, most of them were CEOs of small and large public relations agencies, many of which are named after them. A few work in governmental public relations and interestingly enough the current President of the United States was also mentioned among the moral exemplars identified.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This research sought to find who were the moral exemplars in PR. A survey of 65 professionals was taken. We found that as with other professions, moral exemplars do exist and have had a significant role in the public relations field. In citing the works of Gardner et al. (2001), Baker (2008) addresses this very concern of “the loss of powerful ‘heroic’ role models that inspire the young members of a profession…” (p. xi) and further suggests the need for such a role in the public relations profession. We also found that the PR professionals that were surveyed were able to identify key characteristics of a moral exemplar. Moreover, we found that while the majority of participants were able to identify a person as a moral exemplar or someone they look to that has those key characteristics of a moral exemplar, they were not able to identify an individual that was generally accepted as a moral exemplar in the public relations field.

When public relations professionals were asked to identify the characteristics or attributes that make a person a moral exemplar, the majority of respondents identified honesty (65%) as an important characteristic. The second largest response was integrity (39%). In prior research (Boyton, 2006), honesty was identified as one of the important values to have by public relations professionals. It is also one of the six core values listed under the PRSA Code of Ethics. These results are congruent with current research that suggests that integrity is one of the key criteria of a moral exemplar (Hart, 1992; Rugeley and Van Mart, 2006). Both characteristics engender the criteria necessary for one to be deemed a moral exemplar.

In response to the questions who and why specific individuals were identified as personal moral exemplars, the participants indicated that the presence and influence of a moral exemplar in one’s personal and professional life is vital to the existence of society. The respondents that identified a moral exemplar reported the close relationship they had with the moral exemplar and
could specifically account incidents in the moral exemplar’s life or work experience that exemplified a “heroic” act on their part.

The results of this research showed that the moral exemplars in public relations are people who are honest and stay dedicated to their moral standards no matter what. When describing the qualities of moral exemplar, the respondents were using their actions to describe why they deserve being a moral exemplar. To show the ability of a professional to balance their work and private life, one respondent described a successful businesswoman who had five children; other examples included the ability to multitask and participation in multiple activities such as political life or pursuing athletic goals. The ability to make good choices and do good works is what also determined a person as a moral exemplar.

As it was mentioned in the literature review, one of the largest problems for public relations is dealing with duality of its responsibility before their company and publics. The responses to the research question three in this survey showed that the ability to balance between company and public interests is what makes one an exceptional professional and a moral exemplar. As a result, the things that have created so much difficulty for the definition and practice of public relations may serve as a way to distinguish between the most moral of the practitioners in the industry.

Those personalities that were named as a moral exemplar were not selected because of one event in their life but rather as a result of life-long correct choices and striving for improving the lives of others. As Walker and Frimer (2007) suggested “moral exemplars in general tended to have stronger motivational themes of both agency and communion in their life narratives than ordinary individuals” (p.857).

While this exploratory research lends itself to support the definitive role of a moral exemplar and their necessity to society, this research is indicative of the significant role a moral exemplar may play in the public relations field. Moral exemplars identified in this study were personable to the respondents. They had already established a relationship with the exemplar. This was not a characteristic identified or emphasized by previous research. This may not only be evidence of one’s true connection with a moral exemplar but also explains the link that existence between an individual and their moral exemplar. This connection may also indicate the possible responsibility an individual may have to the moral exemplar; therefore, enacting a further desire to imitate their actions.

As the results have suggested, PR professionals have identified a frame of reference for a moral exemplar. A frame of reference that is congruent with the PRSA Code of Ethics and more importantly one that is congruent with their own personal codes of ethics. Nonetheless, due to the nature and role of a PR professional moral exemplars in the field are difficult to identify. They work in a function that requires a lot of behind the scene activity. As students of public relation, most of their education was based and referenced on specific cases of action that illustrate appropriate behavior and action in the field with little or no reference to specific individuals.

As the research has further suggested, which may be even more sobering and portentous, is the notion that there are professionals that cannot identify anyone individual as a moral exemplar. While only a small percentage of respondents were unable to identify an exemplar, their responses underline the need for more moral exemplars in the public relations field. One respondent stated, “I must be my own moral exemplar.” Another respondent said, “I don’t feel people look to professionals for their moral imperatives. Again, I think people’s interest in industry leaders is purely for their experience and advice.”
Even so, the research presented here is limited in scope and cannot expound further on why respondents were unable to identify a generally accepted moral exemplar in public relations. Future research may want to focus on the relationships established and fostered by professionals in the field. Moral exemplars identified in this research had developed a relationship with those that deemed them as such exemplars or heroes. While the makings or heart of a moral exemplar began or grow from an individual’s character, it may initially began in the relationships nurtured by those around us.

The research put forth here is exploratory in nature; however, identifying the moral exemplars in public relations will not only establish examples of individuals who practice sound moral reasoning but also will create frames of reference for those that follow. Even if those exemplars are identified outside of the public relations professions, as previously mentioned, when an individual references an exemplar they compare their own character and actions to that of the exemplar. This comparison can serve has a gauge to measure one’s own moral temperature as well as encourage self-improvement. This exercise of comparison and self-awareness is indicative to the highest stage of moral development when the individual applies their own standards of morality coupled with universal principles of moral reasoning. Louis Pojman (2006 may have said it best, “What is important is that we recognize that principles without character are impotent and that virtues enliven the principles and empower the moral life in general” (p. 176).

This research has further established the significance of a moral exemplar in the public relations field that would help to support and advance professional moral and ethical standards. We hope that it will help to spark a discussion in the field and further discover the attitudes towards the call for a general exemplar in the field as well as establish specific roles for the profession. While this research was able to address some important questions there are several other questions that are left for future research on moral exemplars in public relations. One, is there a need for moral exemplars of a general consensus? The public relations practice has proven to be most critical to the establishment and practice of most organizations and with such vast and varied placement it may be difficult to establish a generally accepted exemplar.

Second, what is the function and role of the moral exemplar in the public relations field and how can they contribute to the practice of sound ethical decision-making? Moral exemplars are a shorthand way of reference for ethical practices. With this additional position, the PR professional’s role may become more complex with accountability to their organization, client, and their peers. Nonetheless, this supplementary role may not only create a needed cohesiveness between all parties, but also further improve ethical soundness on all parts.

These same questions can be extended internationally. Who are the moral exemplars of public relations internationally? What are the characteristics identified as a moral exemplar and how do they compare on a global scale? This may further lead to questions concerning universal standards of moral exemplars and if they do or do not exist. Nonetheless, we believe that as continued research in this area unfolds, public relations practitioners will not only be able to establish moral exemplars as general points of reference but also create a culture where practitioners are striving to become a moral exemplars themselves.

Again, the criteria of a moral exemplar that has been established by prior research is consistent with the findings in this study. They should be consistent and harmonious with one’s personal and professional world. A true moral exemplar does not distinguish between the two and their actions outreach all in an effort to meet their ultimate goal, which is striving for the improvement of self that will benefit the greater whole of society. As Pojman (2002) stated,
“Moral agents who go beyond minimal morality are necessary for a society if it is to overcome evil and produce a high degree of flourishing. Shouldn’t we all be more altruistic than we are?” (p. 164).
References


Appendix

Tables

Table 1. Demographics and Professionals’ Characteristics – Participants (n = 65)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 or younger</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 45</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 – 59</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 or older</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner and Scholar</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years worked in PR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year or less</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 5 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 10 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 20 years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 years or more</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Content Analysis of Responses to the Question: What are the characteristics that make a person a moral exemplar?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Responses &amp; Percentage</th>
<th>Responses from Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>35 (63%)</td>
<td>“Most importantly, easy or not, the person does not misrepresent the truth.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>22 (39%)</td>
<td>“Someone who lives what he believes and doesn’t waiver. Someone with integrity which includes honesty.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-minded/Concern for others</td>
<td>13 (23%)</td>
<td>“The individual leads others to work within their communities and to proceed in business with the best interest of the community in mind.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Behavior</td>
<td>12 (22%)</td>
<td>“[Someone] who understands ethics and will not compromise those ethics no matter what the cost.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>11 (20%)</td>
<td>“A moral exemplar takes a little more [of] his or her share of the blame if something goes wrong…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong moral compass</td>
<td>9 (16%)</td>
<td>“Clear set of principles; sets high standards for integrity and practice of PR…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>6 (11%)</td>
<td>“The individual needs to be honest and open in his communications with others and he needs to follow through on offers or statements made to others.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair/Balanced</td>
<td>5 (9%)</td>
<td>“Someone who doesn’t let injustice pass.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Builds credibility by acknowledg[ing] all sides of an issue (no hyperbole).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charitable/Serve</td>
<td>5 (9%)</td>
<td>“Someone who takes their skills and time to serve the needs of others in the community.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
<td>5 (9%)</td>
<td>“To me, a moral exemplar is someone who doesn’t just look out for their own personal welfare, but they look after the welfare of those around them.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Content Analysis of Responses to the Question: What is it about this person that makes them your moral exemplar?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Responses from Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Character</td>
<td>Honesty, uncompromised morals and ethics, does right and fair thing, hardworking, companionate, and optimistic.</td>
<td>“She puts people first and cares about them as humans. She never worked on accounts that she didn’t fully believe in and she is honest and trustworthy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with coworkers</td>
<td>Shares wisdom (educates), a friend, good communicator, consistent and open, willing to accept the council, the absence of ego, puts people first</td>
<td>“He readily shares his wisdom”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Balancing work and life, active in sports, political life, professionalism, knowledge, ability to tell the story, ability to make a difference, ability to make ethical decisions.</td>
<td>“She balances work and life well – in addition to her job, she is also raising six wonderful children”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with clients</td>
<td>Not representing unethical clients, dedication, help them reach their goals.</td>
<td>“She gives her clients everything she’s got and helps them reach their goals”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Public</td>
<td>Telling them the truth, balancing between the interests of the company and interests of the public.</td>
<td>“A very balanced approach between the need to serve the interests of the company and interests of the public.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public Relations in Ukraine: A Qualitative Profile of its Historical Development, Current State, and Emerging Trends

Iryna Bugayova
Alan R. Freitag
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Introduction

As a formal occupation, public relations emerged, most scholars and practitioners agree, primarily in the United States in the 20th century. In recent decades, however, it has spread throughout much of the world and is practiced in various forms in more than 100 countries. This phenomenon correlates with historical developments in such areas as communication technology, market economies, democratic systems, and social interdependence (Tilson & Alozie, 2004). These social, political and economic conditions appear to be essential to the development and shaping of public relations globally, and they have an impact on the increasing importance of public opinion. Global communication has been driven as well by technology and speed and ease of travel between geographic regions; consequently, global public access to information has expanded. All these factors contribute to the development and empowerment of public opinion, a hallmark of democratic societies.

These constantly changing factors and their effect on public relations theory and practice feed the increasing need for international and cross-cultural research. Public relations scholars continue to investigate public relations practice in different parts of the world, and though there has been progress in international public relations scholarship during the last twenty years, even more research remains. For example, more countries need to be examined in terms of public relations practice, education and scholarship, and those already researched and reported on need to be re-examined, as the dynamic nature of our discipline and the forces that shape it render any assessment at risk of obsolescence just a few years after it’s completed. This paper investigates the state of public relations practice in a country that is just emerging as a significant global presence as it grapples with the challenges of a new social, political and economic environment: Ukraine.

Ukraine has started a difficult but long awaited transition to statehood, democracy, and a market economy. According to Freedom House Nations in Transit reports (2008a), in Ukraine “the trend toward pluralistic democracy, human rights, and media freedom is obvious, but the overall quality of these democratic transformations has been challenged by numerous obstacles.” Some obstacles include national and local systems of government, which are weak and lack transparency, a judiciary that struggles to maintain its independence from the government, and widespread corruption that impedes political and economic developments (Freedom House, 2008b). However, the progress is noticeable in such spheres as media and civil society in Ukraine. At the national level, media is gaining more freedom, but regional media still lacks real independence. There is no censorship in the media sector; however, the influence of political and economic groups remains strong. Ukrainian civil society continues to be an important actor in Ukraine. Although philanthropy and volunteerism are still weak, the civil society is developing and growing (Freedom House, 2008a).

Economic liberalization, democratization and developments in media and civil society have had a profound impact on public relations in Ukraine. Since 1991, Ukrainian public relations has experienced gradual development and movement toward professionalization. The numbers of public relations specialists, services, educational and training programs are growing, and the quality of public relations practice is improving. However, there is very limited research in any language available on Ukrainian PR in the academic literature. More empirical evidence is needed that can help us understand the unique characteristics of practice in Ukraine.
Literature Review

This paper draws upon research that enables us to contextualize results and present them in a manner that blends with and builds upon foregoing literature. Published research on international public relations has matured sufficiently to forego the boilerplate descriptions of well-established theories and models such as definitions of international public relations (see, for example, Wakefield, 2008; Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, and Agee, 2007; Culbertson and Chen, 1996), evolutionary models (Grunig and Hunt, 1984); public relations excellence (Vercic, Grunig, and Grunig, 1996), and Van Leuven’s 3-stage public relations development model (1996). These concepts have been and continue to be extremely useful in organizing thought, research and literature in this growing field, and they continue to inform research efforts such as this one.

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is more of a political and cultural concept than a geographical one (Ławniczak & Szondi, 2009). The region had been seen as a gray and homogenous area behind the Iron Curtain for many decades. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, about twenty-seven countries have emerged from the eight former communist countries in CEE. The newly emerged states have faced a challenging task – to re-establish their individual and national identities and to express them at home and internationally. Szondi (2005) notes, “The challenge has been enormous: to position the countries of the region onto the geographic and mental map of Europe and Europeans as democratic, politically stable countries with emerging and promising market economies” (p. 207).

Countries of the region are at different levels of economic and political development. Some states are already members of the European Union and NATO, while others still struggle to establish democracy and market economies. CEE countries present a variety of peoples and languages; however, Slavic nations and languages dominate the region (Ławniczak & Szondi, 2009). Although all CEE countries have their unique characteristics and notable differences in cultures, languages, socioeconomic and political situations, they have a common history of communist regimes, often marked by propaganda models, corruption, and an apathetic society as well as conditions in which people are not willing to voice their opinions and greatly distrust governments, businesses, and the media. According to the Trust Index of GfK Custom Research Worldwide, “only fourteen percent of CEE citizens trust their politicians, and thirty-seven percent found managers trustworthy” (Ławniczak & Szondi, 2009, p. 232).

Public relations is widely practiced in CEE but rarely under that name (van Ruler & Verčič, 2004). Senior managers, however, are beginning to understand the importance of public acceptance of and trust in their companies and the necessity to strategically manage their relationships. Nevertheless, organizations rarely use the term “public relations,” or they employ it as the Anglo-American term without translation. More often the term is replaced with “communication management,” “information management,” or “corporate communication” (van Ruler & Verčič, 2004).

In talking about public relations in CEE countries, it is important to discuss the term “transitional public relations” coined by Ławniczak (2001). He has used this term to describe public relations practice in CEE as a profession that helps organizations adapt to the change from a planned economy to capitalism and from socialism to democracy. The concept of transition includes two aspects: a political aspect, “defined as a transition from a single-partisan
authoritarian political system to a democratic and pluralistic civil society” (Ławniczak, 2005, p. 27); and an economic aspect, defined “as the transition from a centrally-planned economy based on state ownership of means of production to a market economy relying on private ownership and property rights” (Ławniczak, 2005, p. 27).

Ławniczak (2001) explains three main tasks for transitional public relations for the countries of Eastern Europe:

1. To reverse the fears of and prejudices toward capitalism instilled during the socialist era and to build “capitalism with a human face” (p. 15).

2. To create public awareness of market economy models and of a current struggle to “determine the final shape of the market economy by promoting value systems and lifestyles along with products and services” (p. 15).

3. To facilitate effective functioning of the market economy by promoting entrepreneurship and privatization, attracting foreign capital, and enabling local business participation in the economic process.

Ukraine gained its independence in 1991 with the dissolution of the USSR. After Russia, the Ukrainian republic was the most important economic component of the former Soviet Union. Following its independence, Ukraine experienced economic and political crisis as “the legacy of state control and endemic corruption stalled efforts at economic reform, privatization, and civil liberties” (World Factbook, 2009). As a result, by 1999, the output had fallen to less than 40 percent of the 1991 level.

Today, the country is “caught in the transition from a former Soviet country to a modern democracy” that is reflected in a very unstable political and economic situation (Justice, 2007; p. 30). Consequently, the country faces a very difficult situation on the financial, political and economic fronts that hinders the development of many spheres of Ukrainian life.

Public Relations

Ukraine’s transition toward democracy and market economy, together with the gradual development of media and the Web, create favorable conditions for the growth of contemporary public relations – a very young profession in this country. Contemporary public relations in Ukraine emerged in the beginning of the 1990s. First, foreign public relations agencies started their work in Ukraine in the early ‘90s. Local agencies emerging in the late ‘90s were involved mainly in political consulting services and later turned to corporate communication (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009). Some early agencies often focused on promoting products and services, but this was still called public relations at the time (Kulish, 2001). According to Freitag and Stokes (2009) the perception of public relations among the general public in Eastern Europe was and continues to be influenced by the legacy of communist “propaganda coupled with the low level of trust in governments, businesses, and the media” (p. 232). Many companies also considered public relations not as a separate industry but rather mainly as a subset of marketing or advertising (Sukhenko, 2007).

Today, the public relations field is experiencing growing interest and development. Some positive developments observed in the profession are: growing understanding and application among businesses of corporate social responsibility principles; increasing demand for consulting services in the field of strategic communications; growing professionalization of public relations
specialists; and growing utilization of new public relations tools such as the Internet (Sukhenko, 2007; Skotsik, 2006).

According to Korolko (2001), another positive development in the field of Ukrainian public relations is the recognition of public relations importance among businesses and government bodies. Today, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Ukraine’s parliament), the President’s Administration, and Cabinet of Ministers have departments that perform public relations functions. Such departments and units have also been created in different ministries, for instance the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as in commercial banks and other businesses. However, the main weakness of all these departments is that their primary function is to inform the general public or disseminate advertisements. These departments’ activity is usually sporadic and inconsistent, mainly focusing on short-term results. These departments usually react to events instead of foreseeing important issues and developing and implementing strategic long-term programs that can create and maintain the positive reputation of an organization (Korolko, 2001).

On the other hand, besides positive developments in public relations, there are still many challenges the profession needs to address. Some of the main problems are: the lack of understanding among clients of public relations’ roles, functions, and potential; the lack of clearly defined functions that public relations specialists perform in organizations; the lack of experienced practitioners; the lack of communication among PR agencies and associations and as a result, lack of high professional standards and exchange of experience; problems associated with evaluation of public relations practice effectiveness; and paid-for publicity (Sukhenko, 2007). For example, Tsutsura and Grynsk (2009) surveyed practitioners and journalists and found that “direct and indirect forms of media influence distort independent news coverage.” Their findings revealed that public relations practitioners appear to pressure editors to place publicity material in exchange for advertising; this clearly suggests both journalists and practitioners still misunderstand public relations’ contemporary roles and functions. To find solutions to these problems is one of the primary tasks of Ukrainian professional public relations organizations.

With this review, the study poses the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do Ukrainian public relations professionals describe contemporary public relations?

RQ 2: How do current practitioners view the historical development of public relations in Ukraine?

RQ 3: What do practitioners see as emerging trends in Ukrainian public relations?

Method

The interviews for this study have been conducted with the help of Skype, software that allows users to make telephone calls over the Internet. Interviews conducted with the help of a computer share many characteristics with telephone interviews. This approach was chosen as an alternative to face-to-face meetings because of the researchers’ inability to be physically present in Ukraine at the time of the study.

Participants
The study population is defined as public relations professionals who work in Ukraine. The main criteria for the sampling populations are: public relations practitioners with three or more years of experience; perform managerial responsibilities and work in sectors such as local agencies, nonprofits, global agencies, government, education, professional associations, or corporations (private, state, international).

Purposive, criteria-based sampling and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit study participants. The lead researcher contacted Ukrainian public relations professional organizations (UAPR, UPRL, and PR Alliance) via email for help in identifying representative public relations professionals. The researcher also posted information about the study and a call for participation on the LinkedIn Ukrainian PR Professionals Group.

Twelve practitioners were interviewed: six males and six females. The research was gender neutral, and gender difference was not intended as a primary research interest. The age of participants range from 24 to 65 with a mean age of 35. Seven interviewees have bachelor’s degrees including one participant who also has a Diploma from the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, two have master’s degrees, three have Ph.Ds. and one person is a doctoral candidate. Participants come from various educational backgrounds such as political science, journalism, business administration, physics, and translation/philology. All participants occupy mid- or high-level managerial positions. Four people work in local public relations agencies or consultancies. Three participants work in international agencies or consultancies. Two work in local offices of international NGOs, one in a private company, one in a professional association and one in government. The interview questionnaire consisted of ten open-ended, semi-structured questions and eleven demographic questions. The questionnaire was created in English, then translated to Ukrainian and Russian, back-translated and checked for accuracy. The lead researcher is a native Russian and Ukrainian speaker, and she conducted all the translations. The interviews were conducted in the language preferred by the participant, i.e. English, Ukrainian or Russian.

Data analysis

To analyze the data the lead researcher used qualitative content analysis. First, she carefully read the qualitative data multiple times, making notes and observations on topics discussed during the interviews. Then the data were coded line by line using open coding technique defined as initial, unrestricted coding of data that helps identify passages of text that suggest a category or theme (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). After building a code scheme, the researcher read data again to identify recurrent themes in the open-ended responses, helping to create categories.

In addition to data from the interviews, other sources were used to collect secondary data. The lead researcher examined secondary artifacts such as Ukrainian public relations blogs, Web sites of organizations and public relations professional associations, and electronic articles. Information from these artifacts permitted triangulation and validation of data emerging from the interviews.

Findings

Defining contemporary public relations

The first research question asked public relations professionals to describe contemporary public relations. A majority of participants (66%) described public relations as a communication function that helped establish cooperation with key publics; build, maintain and harmonize
relations with them; and manage reputation. Although most definitions had similar key terms, descriptions of public relations varied slightly. For example, three participants stressed the idea that public relations was a strategic management function within an organization. On the other hand, two respondents saw public relations’ main task as delivering relevant and accurate information to important publics primarily through media relations and special events. Some participants also stressed that the central goal of public relations activity was to persuade publics and change their attitudes and behaviors.

One respondent considered the question of defining public relations as rather problematic in the Ukrainian environment. He noted that there is no equivalent in the Ukrainian and Russian languages for the English term “public relations” (A. Belyakov, personal communication, March 10, 2009). The Ukrainian and Russian terms used in Ukraine as an equivalent for public relations are зв’язки з громадськістю (Ukr.) or связи с общественностью (Rus.), and their literal translation is “connections, relations with the public.” The respondent suggested the Ukrainian and Russian terms were rather narrow and did not reflect the meaning of the English term entirely. Consequently, the term “public relations” or simply PR is commonly used without translation.

This issue is very important and relevant not only in Ukraine but in Russia and other Central and Eastern European countries as well. For example, in Bulgaria the English term “public relations” is accepted among practitioners and scholars. It was “popularly rendered in Bulgaria as връзки с общността (literally, “relations with the public”) but it does not really cover the English term” (Zlateva, 2004, p.74). The similar situation can be seen in Russia where, “because of a lack of historic context… the Russian language often did not have good equivalents for some words, such as ‘publicity’ and ‘press release.’ Thus, traditional scholars began to accept loan translations [expressions introduced into one language by translating it from another language]” (Tsetsura, 2004, p.339).

Historical development of public relations

Research question two asked about the historical development of public relations in Ukraine. All respondents agreed that contemporary public relations started to develop in Ukraine after the dissolution of the Soviet Union when Ukraine gained its independence in 1991. The qualitative analysis of the interview responses identified several recurrent themes that can be categorized as factors influencing the development of public relations: 1) economic development; 2) politics; 3) media; and 4) Soviet heritage. The paragraphs that follow address each of these factors separately.

Economic development

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine started to transition from a centrally planned economy to a free-market economy. According to nearly all respondents, economic development was the primary factor that influenced the development of public relations in Ukraine. The participants noted that many new processes such as privatization, liberalization, reduction of governmental subsidies, and growing competition required new methods and approaches to deal with the changing economic environment. The changes in the economy and other spheres concurrently made the society more open to these new ideas. Entrepreneurs, motivated by promising business opportunities and profit, were eager to learn from their western counterparts. “The Ukrainian business infrastructure started to develop by copying American and Western European business models as well as functions, relations, and terms,” and public
relations was one of them, according to the head of the PR and Reputation Management Department at KWENDI group, Olga Vaganova (personal communication, March 12, 2009). The emerging businesses started to develop ties with the western world and became more interested in participating in the European and larger world economies. Myroslaw Kohut, a managing director of a public relations firm, Romyr Associates, who also serves at the International Institute of Business in Kyiv as academic chair of the post-university, professional, baccalaureate and master’s level accredited programs of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (UK), noted that this was not a smooth transition:

This interest in participating in the world economy ran into the problem of communicating with people who were representatives of international companies and had some idea of public relations (M. Kohut, personal communication, February 28, 2009).

Besides the necessity to communicate with foreign companies, there was also a need for Ukrainian businesses to position and distinguish themselves from competitors. With the emergence of competition, “companies had to interact more with the public, provide more information about themselves, their products or services,” states Alexander Belyakov (personal communication, March 10, 2009), an author of works on journalism, communication and environmental public relations issues and deputy head of the Foundation for Local Democracy and European Integration of Yuri Panejko. If during the Soviet Union era, there was a great demand for a limited choice of goods produced in the country, now each company had to explain to the audiences the benefits of its products and services. The emergence of external and internal publics required organizations to deal with them more effectively and to plan their communication activities.

Although the economic transition facilitated interest in and need for professional communications and public relations, “the early responses [to this need] were very naïve and very much tied to the old Soviet model – the propaganda model, or much influenced by it” (M. Kohut, personal communication, February 28, 2009). However, further development of the business sector and an increasing number of connections with international business representatives helped Ukrainian companies distance themselves from the Soviet model and “develop a more contemporary understanding of public relations” (M. Kohut, personal communication, February 28, 2009). According to the respondents, this process continues today. However, if the business sector is seeking to move away from the Soviet heritage, Ukrainian politics are still greatly influenced by it.

Politics

The second factor that influenced public relations development, according to Ukrainian practitioners, was the political situation. Several respondents suggested that the first public relations practitioners came from political and election campaigns and that political leaders were the first to employ public relations tools and strategies. However, according to most respondents, politics had mainly a negative influence on public relations in Ukraine. Many participants considered the political elite responsible for the misrepresentation of the term “public relations.” Yevhen Hlibovytsky, a managing partner of communications, marketing, and strategy consultancy, Pro.mova, said:

I believe the perverted definition of public relations as a high-end or very skillful way of manipulating someone’s opinion was brought by political players and mostly by political
strategists who were using manipulative techniques to get their clients into governmental offices (Y. Hlibovytsky, personal communication, March 14, 2009).

Since its independence, Ukraine has experienced constant political instability. Oleksandr Kharchenko, a consultant at Hill & Knowlton, mentioned that “because in Ukraine we have frequent elections plus constant problems with structure of power and parliament, politics, for most people, is like a toothache. It’s really a problem…, and the word politexnolog (political strategist) is a bad word, it has a negative connotation” (O. Kharchenko, personal communication, March 17, 2009). Political leaders learned early on that publicity was their “bread and butter” and used any possible way to achieve it. The mistrust of the government and its leaders that came from the Soviet era was further deepened due to the unfulfilled promises and misleading slogans of new leaders. One respondent reported:

It is a common practice for one politician to make claims in the media that his opponent is insincere and doesn’t really care about the people and the country and that all the talk about his good deeds are not true, “they are just PR.” The general public that hears such statements all the time develops a negative perception of public relations (O. Vaganova, personal communication, March 12, 2009).

Marina Starodubska, a general director and a managing partner at strategic communication consultancy, Mikhailov&Partners, Ukraine, and first deputy chair at the Ukrainian Association of Public Relations (UAPR), also stressed the negative influence of politics:

The entire negative connotation that PR has in our country came from politics. PR as a word is perceived as negative by non-expert audiences because it’s connected in their minds with politics, game playing, empty promises, and corruption. Political battles had negative influence on the understanding of PR (M. Starodubska, personal communication, March 17, 2009).

The political situation, with its constant battles for power and spheres of influence, resulted in another problem – the issue of “black PR.” Practitioners related the emergence of this practice to the political campaigns that involved deliberate dissemination of false information about a political opponent and “blackening” of his/her reputation. One participant stated:

Black PR is still an issue in Ukraine. It is beginning to fade, but I think it’s still very strong. It still exists in politics. It’s probably less prevalent than it was in business mainly because journalists, media owners, and editors of newspapers are a little bit more careful (M. Kohut, personal communication, February 28, 2009).

Nina Sorokopud, an acting country manager at international public relations agency, Action Global Communications, said that “in the conditions of very tight competition this phenomenon can still be observed in different sectors, but it’s not part of public relations or done by PR specialists” (N. Sorokopud, personal communication, March, 22, 2009). Most respondents shared the view that “black PR” was not part of public relations. Belyakov stressed:

It is incorrect to associate public relations with “black PR” because public relations does not include such activity as blackening an opponent or competitor. On the contrary, public relations is based on presenting your own positive and valuable aspects (A. Belyakov, personal communication, March 10, 2009).
Despite this shared view, some respondents reported that there were people who did “black PR” and still considered themselves PR specialists. Starodubska (personal communication, March 17, 2009) said: “Some PR agencies in Ukraine claim that they specialize in black PR. Some agencies believe that this is the most effective PR.”

This finding confirmed incidents of “black PR” reported in Ukrainian specialized media (Minko, 2004; Altus, 2007). It was also in line with research of public relations practice in Russia where this issue is “one of the most interesting and provocative discussions in modern public relations theory” (Tsetsura, 2004; p.342).

**Media**

Media was another factor that influenced public relations in Ukraine and that was closely connected with the discussions of economic and political situations. On one hand, respondents reported positive influence of media on the development of public relations. Under the Soviet Union, there was no private media, only state owned and state governed. With Ukraine’s independence this situation started to change. Anastasia Grynko, a public relations manager at International Renaissance Foundation, noted:

> After the Orange revolution in Ukraine, our media became more independent (but still not completely independent), less censored by the government and thus, more open for other newsmakers (A. Grynko, personal communication, March 5, 2009).

Volodymyr Dehtyaryov, an account director at Nords PR Ukraine and a UAPR board member, suggested that “the increasing number of media available, growing professionalism of journalists and editors, and in general, availability of information” facilitated public relations development (V. Dehtyaryov, personal communication, February 17, 2009). Internet development was also an important factor for public relations in Ukraine as it presented more communication opportunities for practitioners and increased the need for openness and transparency in all spheres of Ukrainian society.

On the other hand, respondents indentified many problems associated with the media landscape that greatly hindered public relations development in Ukraine. One of the problems related to the close ties between the media and the government and business sectors. Maria Voloshina, a public relations manager at the Ukrainian Association of Public Relations, said:

> If before and after the Orange Revolution, media was developing and becoming more independent, nowadays it seems to move in the opposite direction. Most media is very dependent on its owners (M. Voloshina, personal communication, March 23, 2009).

Practitioners, in fact, found the matter of media ownership very problematic. Tatyana Gurieva, a public relations consultant in Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, reported:

> Instead of being “the fourth estate,” mass media in Ukraine plays the role of a yes-man for political leaders. There are numerous examples of this. A certain person controls each TV channel, and how this channel presents information and what information is covered will depend on this person’s political views. The same situation is observed in the print media (T. Gurieva, personal communication, March, 19, 2009).

According to the respondents, media owners were rich businessmen who either had strong connections with the government or even occupied some influential governmental position. As a result, media was used to serve business and political interests often with the help
of questionable methods and techniques. The interview participants considered Ukrainian media very biased with the tendency to politicize even those events that had nothing to do with politics. Such media practices happen so often, they report, that it would be hard to find media that was trusted by the general public. One respondent reported:

There is no truly independent media in Ukraine. Quantitatively there is a lot of media in Ukraine, something around 400, but in reality, the media that are read, trusted, respected and more or less spread comprise maybe one fourth of the total number of media. There are journalists to whom you address your press-releases, your invitations and media events, but you know, if you are serving a specific client, the questions journalists are going to ask because you know who owns them. And this is how the media works (M. Starodubska, personal communication, March 17, 2009).

Other significant issues reported by the participants were such media practices as the paid-for materials and money for coverage. The respondents reported that paid-for materials often appeared in the media without being identified as such. Belyakov said:

There are cases when media publishes paid-for materials as news stories and doesn’t indicate that this information is, in fact, advertising, that it is paid for. And this is violation of the law (A. Belyakov, personal communication, March 10, 2009).

Although there are national laws that prohibit such practices and regulate how paid-for information has to be presented in the media, often these rules are not followed by the journalists and not really enforced by the government.

Interview participants stated that advertising was the main source of income for media. In a free-market economy, where there is a lot of media but not enough money, many media outlets try to earn a profit in any way possible, often unethically. Such media expect to be paid for any coverage about an organization or a person:

It is a great problem for companies and businesses when they create a newsworthy event and media doesn’t want to cover it for free. Media has set prices that businesses have to pay to get into the news. And it is impossible to appear on certain TV channels without paying (A. Belyakov, personal communication, March 10, 2009).

According to interviewees, public relations practitioners had to account for such media practices and sometimes even allocate money for such expenses if they wanted to get coverage for their clients. One respondent reported that some public relations firms advertise “their special relations with media that allow them to guarantee publishing of a particular story or getting the story on the TV screen” (Y. Hlibovytsky, personal communication, March 14, 2009). Some of the practitioners stated that such unethical and illegal practices take place all the time, but they did not say if they ever participated in such activities or used these practices in their work. Some practitioners emphasized that they were not practicing such activities because it conflicted with their professional ethical values.

These findings confirm the recent study on media non-transparency in Ukraine that found evidence of non-transparent practices in Ukrainian media relations. Recall that these practices were described as direct and indirect influences on media and journalists such as hidden advertising and cash payments, as well as publicity in exchange for advertising (Tsetsura & Grynko, 2009).

Soviet heritage
Talking about the historical development of public relations in Ukraine, respondents emphasized the significant impact of the Soviet legacy. Many years of communist rule significantly affected not only socio-economic and political spheres of life but also people’s mindsets, values and beliefs. Today, almost twenty years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, remnants of its legacy can still be observed on different levels of Ukrainian society. According to the respondents, one of the main effects of Soviet rule was reluctance on the part of government and business to become open and transparent. Hlibovytsky said:

Business and the public in general don’t really see the advantages of transparency. This is something that was not needed for decades and was discouraged under Soviet rule. There is no demand for publicity, especially concerning crisis situations (Y. Hlibovytsky, personal communication, March 14, 2009).

Many companies prefer to maintain a low profile and do not share much information with the public because during the Soviet era any privately owned business was considered suspicious and was subject to higher taxes. According to the respondents, many small and medium businesses were not interested in communication efforts and promotion activities as they felt rather comfortable in their economic sector with low competition. Having become used to the norm that any goods produced in the country were readily sold, such companies did not see the need to become more proactive and establish relations with important audiences. However, this situation is changing rapidly, especially in the conditions of economic recession.

Last but not the least reported effect of the Soviet legacy was the association of public relations with propaganda. This problem related to the common belief influenced by the Soviet regime that mass media lied. Another factor was the public’s mistrust of the Soviet leaders who were associated with power abuse, corruption, and nepotism. Such political ills did not disappear with the collapse of the Soviet Union but continued to be practiced by the new political elite. Media was also actively used to influence public opinion. Reflecting on the role of communist legacy in PR development, one respondent stated:

Soviet heritage has influenced public relations greatly. The public at large associates public relations with politics and elections. I think such a perception is influenced by old Soviet-style propaganda (V. Dehtyaryov, personal communication, February 17, 2009).

These findings were in line with numerous citations referring to the impact the communist regime had on the development of Central and Eastern European countries and their adaptation to new conditions (Gross, 2005; Ławniczak, 2004).

Current state of the profession

Question three asked about the current state of the profession. According to the practitioners the current state of public relations could be characterized by the following: public perception of public relations; public relations’ role in organizations and businesses; the public relations community; and public relations education. Economy, politics, media landscape and the legacy of the former Soviet Union continue to influence public relations practice, shape its characteristics and further progress.

Public’s perception of public relations

According to the participants, a few years ago public relations was mainly associated with politics, “black PR,” manipulation, and dirty political games. This trend still remains strong today, especially with the beginning of new presidential election campaigns and the economic
recession. Many participants said that a lot of people do not know what public relations stands for and cannot explain the meaning of the term, but because of political influence, this term in the public’s eyes has very negative connotation:

PR is a bad thing in the minds of most people. Not many people can actually articulate what it is. They say: “PR is bad, but I cannot tell you the definition” (M. Starodubska, personal communication, March 17, 2009).

Some respondents said that some recent trends included use of the Ukrainian or Russian phonetic transcription of the word “PR,” spelled “piar,” and use of the word “PR” as a verb. According to the respondents, both versions of this word were used with some negative connotation. PR as a verb was commonly used in the media with the suggestion of overstating something about an organization or person. One respondent explained: “In other cultures, in other societies, people say: ‘Stop advertising yourself.’ In Ukraine, it’s ‘Perestan’ piaryty sebe” [literally, stop PR-ing yourself]” (M. Kohut, personal communication, February 28, 2009).

Besides negative associations with public relations, respondents suggested some positive changes in the public’s perceptions. One practitioner said people have started to understand that public relations is an important communication function. People have positive perceptions of public relations that supports social programs, charities, and sometimes corporations. Kharchenko (personal communication, March 17, 2009) pointed out: “Corporate PR is perceived as a more positive thing. Everybody wants to know about the companies, to have some information about businesses. People are interested in businesses in Ukraine.”

Public relations' role in organizations and business

Study participants reported that only a few Ukrainian organizations and companies realize the importance of public relations. These are mainly large industrial companies as well as companies that try to attract foreign investors and enter international markets. Other organizations that actively use public relations include international companies, their affiliates, and local offices of international NGOs. Respondents said that many of those Ukrainian organizations that have public relations specialists on staff hired them mainly because it was a trend or they had some extra money, not because they felt the need for it.

Another problem associated with the public relations position in organizations was a lack of understanding of the broad spectrum of PR practice. Respondents pointed out public relations was often limited to media relations, and PR specialists were perceived as people who wrote news releases and organized news conferences. Many participants recognized that public relations specialists in many companies are not part of top-management. Most often they fulfill the role of executors implementing whatever strategy they were given:

Most public relations specialists in Ukraine do not report to top management, they do not participate in the board meetings, and don’t usually have access to the top leaders they are supposed to work with. PR professionals do not have all the rights in an organization they need to have, if we view public relations as a management function (M. Voloshina, personal communication, March 23, 2009).

According to the respondents, public relations was often viewed as a sub-function of marketing by company leaders. Some of the study participants shared this view suggesting that public relations was mainly needed to support the marketing function. One respondent said: “Marketing is a much broader term. It is one of the business functions and presents all the
communication of a particular brand including advertising and public relations” (O. Vaganova, personal communication, March 12, 2009).

According to the participants, there were two main reasons why marketing and advertising departments often had more power and respect in organizations. One reason was that organizational leaders and managers often did not know and understand the benefits of public relations for their companies. Starodubska explained:

People are used to paying for direct expenses such as hall renting, catering, printing, but they were not ready to pay for advice. And that is what the market is now learning to do (M. Starodubska, personal communication, March 17, 2009).

Also, executives did not know what to demand and what results to expect from public relations professionals. Respondents emphasized that there were no nationally accepted professional standards for public relations that could help employers assess the quality of services and the level of practitioners’ professionalism.

The second reason reported by the respondents related to the problem of evaluating the results of public relations practice. Many practitioners mentioned that marketing and advertising had more power in organizations because their results were more predictable, easier to formalize and calculate, and easier to present in monetary terms, while public relations effectiveness was less obvious to top managers. Voloshina points out executives do not see the value of public relations:

Today, public relations is mainly considered as a function that saves money and accumulates intangible assets which, unfortunately, are not really appreciated in our country (M. Voloshina, personal communication, March 23, 2009).

To overcome such challenges, respondents suggested PR practitioners have to learn how to speak business language and be able to explain the value of their services and expertise and prove their effectiveness:

Especially in the conditions of economic crisis, it is very important for PR specialists to understand what additional value public relations can give to the organization, how this value can be assessed, and how to convince executives that they need this additional value (O. Vaganova, personal communication, March 12, 2009).

Public relations community

The respondents reported other positive developments in the public relations field such as growth and activity of public relations professional associations (UAPR and PR-League). According to practitioners, these associations are rival organizations that are making independent efforts to develop and promote the public relations profession. Although these organizations implement useful activities and projects, some respondents think that they duplicate their efforts. Furthermore, practitioners thought it was rather ironic that a third public relations organization had recently emerged as well:

In Ukraine you can find three different professional PR organizations where different people work on something. These are competing organizations. This is too much for small Ukraine, for a small market. It shouldn’t be hard to discuss everything among PR professionals, to establish some rules, but as of today it’s impossible, and I don’t know why (O. Kharchenko, personal communication, March 17, 2009).
Some respondents mentioned that many public relations specialists were not interested in participating in professional associations or becoming members. Many participants emphasized the need to consolidate efforts of the associations and individual professionals in order to promote the profession itself as well as establish unified professional and ethical standards. Starodubska explained:

There is a lack of consolidated effort on behalf of the PR community to promote and adapt international standards. There are two PR groups in Ukraine, each doing its thing, trying to promote best standards, but many PR professionals don’t pay enough attention to this (M. Starodubska, personal communication, March 17, 2009).

According to the respondents, lack of professional and ethical standards was the major obstacle for the development of public relations in Ukraine:

Absence of unified ethical norms and professional standards greatly hinders development. There are agencies, members of the association [UAPR], who refuse to serve those clients who view PR in terms of placement of paid-for materials in the media. However, during the current economic crisis, such PR agencies are limited in number (M. Voloshina, personal communication, March 23, 2009).

Some practitioners pointed out that not only the public relations community but government as well should address this obstacle by, for example, introducing laws concerning public relations and enforcing existing laws more strictly.

**Public relations education**

According to the respondents, the situation with PR education has been improving. However, some practitioners said the general state of public relations education was even worse than the state of the industry. Overall, study participants emphasized the lack of good quality education as another main characteristic of the current state of the profession.

The respondents reported that public relations education in Ukraine included college education in public relations, pro-bono PR courses, specialized courses in business schools, and various training programs and seminars. The practitioners pointed out that there were no strong Public Relations Departments at the universities. They considered PR college education rather weak and far removed from reality because people who teach public relations were not practitioners.

Pro-bono PR programs offered by some public relations agencies provide good practical knowledge, but they are limited in number and conducted mainly in the capital of Ukraine. Most respondents named the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) as the best option for public relations education. According to the respondents, CIPR offers high quality post-graduate education in public relations, but it is designed for people who already have experience in the field and the financial ability to pay. One practitioner explained:

CIPR is a well-recognized institution offering certificate and diploma PR programs. And this is the only program in the country. It has rather stringent enrollment and admission criteria, which means you cannot enter it just because you want to. You need to possess a specific level of experience and specific skills (M. Starodubska, personal communication, March 17, 2009).
If people lack necessary skills and experience they can either go to various training programs and seminars or engage in self-education. The respondents reported that many such programs are either not very professional or too narrowly designed for experienced practitioners or a specific sector of public relations practice. The study participants emphasized that there were no criteria or standards against which short- and long-term PR programs could be evaluated. “The educational system is not centralized or standardized, and there are not enough good quality options” (M. Starodubska, personal communication, March 147 2009).

Recently, public relations was recognized as a profession on the governmental level in Ukraine. However, according to some respondents, public relations is rarely taught as a separate major. More often it is public relations courses offered at different departments and designed for specific majors, for example, public administration, art, culture or mass communications. Explaining drawbacks of this situation, Belyakov said:

There is no classic educational establishment that would offer classic education in public relations. PR educational programs in different colleges and universities may have completely different curricula. This can be dangerous because there is no guarantee that students will learn the basis of the PR profession. But even if they will, there is no guarantee that these foundation courses will be the same or similar in each university (A. Belyakov, personal communication, March 10, 2009).

Another issue related to public relations education was the availability of educational materials and their quality. Respondents said there were a considerable number of low quality materials and text books presenting public relations as manipulation and spin. Other educational materials included translations of U.S. and Western European text books and case studies that were not always suitable for Ukrainian conditions. The study participants suggested that though such translated books were very useful, they should be used in combination with local examples and case studies. The respondents said there was an obvious need to adapt such textbooks to the economic, political, and cultural conditions of Ukraine as well as develop local academic literature.

Emerging trends

The last question asked about emerging trends in Ukrainian public relations. The respondents identified the following trends in the public relations field: growth of professionalism and decrease in unethical practices influenced by the economic recession; further specialization of the industry; better understanding of the public relations role in different sectors of the society; growing interest in social media; and development of public relations education.

Some respondents saw the current economic crisis as an opportunity for the public relations profession to grow and become more sophisticated:

Basically the crisis is good because clients are not ready to pay for process anymore; they are paying only for results. Those who cannot bring clients to a particular goal are not part of the business (Y. Hlibovytzky, personal communication, March 14, 2009).

The study participants expect to see more need for public relations in companies as the tension and competition grows, influenced by hard economic conditions. Starodubska (personal communication, March 17, 2009) said: “When the market starts pushing companies to compete on all possible levels, they will inevitably turn to every tool they can to win the competitive
battle.” There is also an expectation the economic recession will reduce the amount of unprofessional and unethical practices. Hlibovytsky (personal communication, March 14, 2009) suggested: “My expectation is that the crisis will heal quite a few ‘cancer-organizations’ that are trying to run the market with the help of bribery and manipulation. These organizations are the ones who suffered first.”

Another trend reported by the respondents is further specialization of the public relations discipline. Many participants pointed out Ukrainian public relations already presented a rather high level of specialization. However, with the further development of the field, practitioners expected to see the development of new directions of public relations practice such as investor relations, financial relations, digital public relations, and social public relations. One respondent stated: “I think so far PR agencies have been working in any type of industry, but now some will be moving to, for example, IT, some to fashion and design industries, some to digital” (V. Dehtyaryov, personal communication, February 17, 2009). Another practitioner emphasized the growing importance of social public relations:

We have conducted campaigns for private sector clients on combating counterfeit production, supporting breast feeding as a cornerstone for infant nutrition, and a tender is in process for a large communications component of a European Union financed project on gender equity and children’s rights. These are examples of social PR. As Ukraine develops its state and democratic institutions and integrates more closely with Europe, such issues and projects will become increasingly important in the society. And PR is one of the mechanisms to deal with them (M. Kohut, personal communication, February 28, 2009).

According to the respondents, understanding of the public relations’ role will increase in several sectors of the society. Some practitioners suggest that there were already indications of this process:

For example, in government, there is already evidence that there are some people who understand it. The examples can be the two major parties of Ukraine – the Party of Regions and the Bloc of Yuliya Timoshenko that retained international public relations consultancies to assist with their campaigns (M. Kohut, personal communication, February 28, 2009).

Another example can be the efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to improve the image of Ukraine. Although these efforts haven’t been very successful, they indicate that “there is an understanding that reputation matters, and doing something about the image of Ukraine in the international community is important” (M. Kohut, personal communication, February 28, 2009).

With the growing understanding of PR’s role, the participants expect to see more Ukrainian organizations hiring in-house public relations specialists and creating PR departments. According to the respondents, the public relations industry is mainly represented by public relations agencies and consultancies. However, as organizations and companies start to realize the importance of constant communication with their main audiences, the trend for in-house public relations function will likely develop more rapidly.

Most respondents recognize the increasing role of the Internet for public relations practice. More practitioners became attracted to this medium as a cheap and effective way to
communicate with key audiences directly. According to respondents, interest in social media is growing as well. However, understanding social media, its development and use for public relations purposes is still in its beginning stages. Kohut explained:

I think it is early days yet in Ukraine to seriously get involved in social networking as a PR function principally because I think the number of users is relatively small – about 15+ per cent of the population, on the order of seven million users, and the main portion of them are users of only email services, not of social networking. So it’s not a very mature audience. Social networking still remains rather novel and not very sophisticated in its application, apart from the subcategory of Op-Ed articles on Internet news sites with corresponding reader reactions that are now quite common on major news sites in Ukraine (M. Kohut, personal communication, February 28, 2009).

Although public relations education was one of the biggest challenges reported by the practitioners, they expect to see more efforts on the part of educators and practitioners to provide better formal education and professional training in public relations. According to the respondents, there are very few professionals who received formal education in public relations. The rest of the practitioners come from backgrounds such as journalism, political science, linguistics, and education, and had to learn on the job, attend different seminars and training programs, and pursue self-education. However, respondents suggested that many practitioners understand the importance of formal training in public relations and seek such opportunities.

Some positive changes have started to take place already. Respondents mentioned current developments in the sphere of education such as the growing number of professional and educational forums, and conferences and seminars such as the European PR Congress. Another example was the initiative, Growth in PR, launched by the international youth organization, AIESEC, together with UAPR and leading PR agency Hoshva PR. Having started few years ago, this educational initiative has been attracting more public relations students and entry-level practitioners each year. With development of similar educational initiatives and programs, respondents expect to see better understanding of public relations functions among public relations students and practitioners.

**Discussion**

**Defining the public relations field**

There are several possible reasons for the differences in the practitioners’ definitions. Most public relations practitioners in Ukraine did not receive formal training in public relations. Their understanding of the profession is influenced mainly by practical experience they acquired on the job. Consequently, their definitions may reflect how public relations is practiced at a particular organization and what role PR specialists perform there. Those respondents who view public relations as a strategic management function may reflect to some extent the real situation in the Ukrainian public relations industry where a few organizations understand public relations’ management role and practice it as a management function. At the same time, describing PR as a management function can reflect the idea that this is how it should be understood and practiced in an organizational setting, but it’s not necessarily the case at the present time. The Anglo-American term “public relations” has been widely accepted without translation in Ukraine and many other Eastern European countries to describe the emerging profession.
Besides the issue of defining the public relations field, respondents reported the tendency to use such terms as “communication” or “information” instead of “public relations.” The practitioners explain this phenomenon as the way to distance themselves and their practice from politics and political public relations, which are usually perceived very negatively by the public. Study participants state that many international NGOs also try to avoid the term “public relations” in their professional titles. This confirms results of Van Ruler and Verčič’s (2004) Delphi study reporting that in Europe, “the term ‘public relations’ (if ever used) gets more and more replaced by such terms as ‘communication management’ and ‘corporate communication.’” What is unclear is whether Ukrainian organizations and practitioners use the term “communication” solely to avoid negative perceptions or to better describe their roles and duties in an organization.

**Historical development of public relations**

As one respondent suggests, the public relations profession is too young – only 15-17 years old – and this time period is too small to analyze from the historical point of view (A. Belyakov, personal communication, March 10, 2009). Although the profession is very young, it is not the age of the profession but the lack of attention to it that has resulted in scarce research on the topic.

According to the respondents, the main factors that influenced public relations in Ukraine are the political landscape, economic development, the media, and the Soviet legacy. It is interesting that the practitioners have different opinions about what factor has played the primary role in the development of public relations. Although most practitioners view economic and business growth as the main factor, some respondents think the political situation was more pivotal in creating the need for some type of public relations activities. It is interesting to observe such disagreement in the opinions of experienced practitioners.

**Current state of public relations**

Transitional public relations is an appropriate framework for this discussion. Ławnièczak (2005) emphasizes that public relations practitioners in transitional countries not only help with the transition but they also facilitate changes in society as well as assist the general public in dealing with the negative consequences of such changes. The term “transitional public relations” suits very well the current situation in Ukraine and precisely describes the transformational processes and challenges facing Ukrainian people and public relations practitioners in particular. However, based on the interview responses, it seems Ukrainian PR specialists are hardly playing a proactive role in these conditions. Although they certainly participate in one way or another in the transition of the country, they are not the people who plan and manage this transition. Based on the available literature about Ukraine, it is clear that many changes as well as programs for their implementation have been mainly imposed on the Ukrainian people instead of involving them in communication and the decision making process. In addition, at the time of many economic and political changes, public relations specialists had little or no access to such programs, no authority to use different approaches and lack knowledge and practical experience necessary to make transitional efforts more effective.

As we can see, public relations in Ukraine as in some other transitional countries still has a long way to go to fulfill the role of transitional public relations. In Ukraine, the profession still does not have proper status and respect; it is often associated with dirty political games and dissemination of false information. The lack of well established professional and ethical
standards coupled with weak public relations education, a fragmented professional community, and non-transparent media relations greatly hinder the development of the practice. However, transitional processes in Ukraine create great opportunities for the public relations field to become an influential force in the country by using its expertise for effective transformation and adaptation to changes.

**Emerging trends**

The understanding of the importance and need to practice PR in a professional, ethical way is growing. The current economic crisis means shrinking budgets and less work available for PR agencies, requiring PR specialists to find ways to be more effective and useful for organizations in order to prove their own effectiveness. Hard economic conditions influenced by the global economic recession also make some media representatives realize the need for fair and objective news coverage and more transparent relations with news sources. Some Ukrainian media are beginning to recognize that their long-term success depends on their readers’ trust and respect that cannot be bought but must be earned through professional and ethical work. Other trends such as specialization, growing interest in new media technologies, and increasing understanding of the public relations role and value in an organization, show the profession is developing and moving closer to sophisticated public relations practice.

Development of public relations education is another important trend in the Ukrainian PR field. The state of PR education is one of the hot topics of public relations discussion in the country. PR education is usually strongly criticized for weak and impractical educational programs, lack of a systematic approach to the discipline, as well as of educators experienced in public relations. Public relations educators and professionals are starting to address these challenges by further developing public relations curricula and professional training programs, initiating communication with the Ministry of Education to establish single educational standards for the discipline, and promoting international standards of public relations.

The current state of public relations is characterized by such challenges as negative perceptions by the general public, lack of understanding of public relations’ role in organizations and businesses, lack of consolidated public relations community, and weak public relations education. Public relations professionals will need to exert considerable effort into overcoming these challenges and improving public relations practice in Ukraine, a nation already experiencing many positive developments in the field.

**Limitations and Future Research**

The results from twelve interviews cannot be generalized to the entire Ukrainian PR field. Moreover, the sample of the participants included PR practitioners working primarily in Kiev with only one specialist from a different city. There is an obvious need to expand the study sample. The analysis of findings shows that respondents had different opinions on some topics and significantly different understanding of some concepts and practices. The scope of this study did not allow for further research of these differences. One important limitation is the researchers’ inability to be physically present in Ukraine at the time of research.

A useful direction for research is further investigation of how the concept “public relations” and “public relations practice” is defined and understood among PR specialists, business representatives, governmental officials, and the general public in Ukraine.
As the study shows, political, economic, and media factors are considered to have the most impact on the public relations field in Ukraine. Future research might examine these factors more specifically to see how these factors affect PR practice and how the profession deals with these effects. Also, it would be useful to study the cultural aspect in more detail, investigating the cultural characteristics of Ukraine and what effect, if any, they have on PR practice.
References


Mommy Bloggers and the FTC: Reactions to the Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials

Kelli S. Burns, Ph.D.
University of South Florida

Abstract

This study analyzed the 15 “Mom Approved” blogs of Nielsen’s Power Mom 50 to understand how mommy bloggers reacted to the FTC guidelines. The study results determined whether they posted a reaction to the revised FTC guidelines, whether they supported or criticized these new policies, and the practices they use to indicate endorsement. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the bloggers to gain more insights about their practices and reactions.
Introduction

In October 2009, the Federal Trade Commission approved guidelines that address the practice of blogging about products and services. The revised “Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising” set out to delineate blogger endorsement, which is speech that is considered sponsored based on the context of the relationship between the blogger and the marketer or public relations practitioner. To determine endorsement, one must examine the compensation provided (including free products), the length of the relationship, the previous receipt and likelihood of future receipt of products or services, and the value of the products or services. Statements about a product or service by a blogger who has readers of a particular demographic group that are in a marketer’s target audience and has an ongoing relationship with that marketer are likely to be considered endorsements. When an endorsement has been made, the blogger must disclose the relationship with the marketer. The FTC guidelines were followed by a move by the Direct Marketing Association in January 2010 to revise its ethics guidelines, requiring those who use testimonials or endorsements in social media to “clearly and conspicuously disclose any material connections between the endorser and marketer, which the consumer would not expect” (Davis, 2010).

These guidelines have ethical implications for the practice of blogging as well as how marketers and public relations practitioners interact with bloggers. Public relations practitioners now have a roadmap that helps them counsel clients and advise bloggers. The guidelines also educate bloggers on the importance of transparency and disclosure for maintaining positive relationships with readers.

The FTC’s policy has not been without its detractors. Some of the controversy surrounding the new rules centers on the distinctions between social and traditional media as well as regular bloggers and celebrities. Although disclosure must be made in social media, the guidelines do not address the practice of accepting free products for review by mainstream journalists (Davis, 2010). Furthermore, although the guidelines require that celebrities disclose the receipt of free products, an FTC official later indicated that celebrities may not have to reveal such a relationship based on the assumption that consumers often understand that celebrities receive freebies (Davis, 2010). Furthermore, other forms of communication that occur within social media, such as YouTube videos, Twitter tweets, or Facebook wall posts, are not specifically addressed.

Growth of blogging

The growth of blogging may have occurred in part because of the lack of trust in institutions and a preference for a personal network of individuals who can be trusted (Edelman/Technorati, 2006). The most effective bloggers are experts in their own fields and proficient in building relationships with peers who contribute to the conversation (Edelman/Technorati, 2006). However, many A-list bloggers emerged from the ranks of average people and offered a flair for portraying everyday experiences to which their audiences can relate.

The Edelman/Technorati Blogger PR Survey found that 22% of bloggers write about a product, company, or a company’s employees about once a week and about 16% write on one of these topics more than once a week (Edelman/Technorati, 2006). Over 70% of bloggers would like to receive product samples from companies in order to evaluate the products and then blog.
about them. Of these respondents, many have either never been contacted by public relations representatives (48%) or received a contact less than once a week (31%). However, almost 10% are contacted about once a week, almost 6% are contacted more than once a week, and over 5% are contacted daily (Edelman/Technorati, 2006).

One group of bloggers that wields considerable power among both marketers and influence over consumers are “mommy bloggers,” also called “mom-fluentials” by marketers. Mommy blogs can be traced back to the mid-1990s when blogs served as a place to connect with other moms or relay stories of raising children (Sotonoff, 2007). As the Web population expanded, mommy bloggers got more sophisticated, attracting book deals, free merchandise, all-expenses-paid trips to factories, and advertising dollars (Sotonoff, 2007).

*Industry response*

As Smudde described, “Successful and effective public relations is ethical and dialogic, creating candid, open, simple, and clear messages to manage perceptions of an organization and seek feedback from the environment” (2005, p. 38). Blogs provide a way for an organization to have a dialogic relationship with consumers by fostering discussion and feedback, a relationship that can be compromised by unethical behavior. Several highly-publicized missteps have been made as public relations firms and marketers learned how to effectively use blogs. In an effort to protect the industry, organizations like the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) are educating public relations firms and marketers about appropriate behavior in social media.

During the past several years, public relations firms have started creating blogger relations programs as a way to build relationships with key bloggers. The benefits of blogger relations include an opportunity to prompt conversations among consumers, higher rankings on search engines, and relatively free publicity (Hart, 2006). Blogs are also capable of fostering two-way communication, the goal of many public relations efforts (Baker & Green, 2005). Microsoft, Nokia, and General Electric are three examples of companies that have worked with bloggers to build support and awareness for a product or service. Microsoft contacted bloggers prior to the release of the Xbox game system (Barbaro, 2006). General Electric met with key environmental bloggers before investing in energy-efficient technology (Barbaro, 2006). To promote its N-series smartphone, which was released in the fall of 2005, Nokia sent 50 phones to tech-savvy bloggers who frequently post on mobile phones (Hart, 2006).

Blogger relations programs are employed not only in the tech industry, but also for many consumer products. When Procter & Gamble realized that Web users were talking in blogs and chat rooms about Mr. Clean AutoDry, a product that had not even been launched, the company sent AutoDry kits to bloggers and asked for feedback. The reviews were overwhelmingly positive, with 80% of bloggers recommending the product. When the product was launched, product awareness was already 25% among consumers and 45% among car lovers (Oser, 2004). Even the entertainment industry has embraced bloggers. Movie studios will often provide bloggers with deleted scenes or gossip in exchange for promotion of a movie or DVD release (Hart, 2006).

*Reaching consumers through social media*

A Razorfish study of 1,000 consumers found that although 62% said they do not actively seek brand opinions using social media, 71% have shared product or service recommendations
on social media sites at least once every few months (Razorfish, 2009). The study also found that those in the consideration stage of a purchase decision were more likely than those in the awareness or action phase to be persuaded by the “social influencers” who are active in social media platforms.

Social networking users are also receptive to product information. Research has demonstrated that users welcome opportunities to view advertiser profiles on social networking sites, with particular interest among 18- to 26-year-old users (37%) followed by 27- to 40-year-old users (31%) (Li, 2007). Daily users tend to be the more interested than weekly or monthly visitors in seeing advertiser profiles with almost half of all adult daily users and a little more than a third of youth daily users expressing interest (Li, 2007). Furthermore, social networking members tend to tell friends about products (50% of adult users and 67% of youth users), while an even higher percentage of those interested in advertiser profiles are likely to tell friends about products (61% of adult users and 77% of youth users) (Li, 2007).

**Study overview**

This research study content analyzed the 15 “Mom Approved” blogs of Nielsen’s Power Mom 50 to understand how mommy bloggers reacted to the revised FTC guidelines. The analysis determined whether they posted a reaction to the FTC guidelines, whether they proclaimed support for or criticized these new policies, and the practices they use to indicate endorsement. In addition, interviews with mommy bloggers were conducted to explore why and how they have responded to the FTC rulings and to see if themes of trust, transparency, and credibility are prevalent in their answers.

The FTC guidelines could lead to a backlash for marketers and public relations practitioners, as some bloggers may completely reject free products and services in an effort to appear objective and retain reader trust. Other bloggers may create special sections for reviews and sponsored posts, thereby separating commercial content from editorial. An exploration of the consequences of these new guidelines is necessary so that marketers and public relations practitioners can continue having mutually beneficial relationships with bloggers.
In recent years, public relations research and practice has acknowledged the importance of relationship management. As Wilson (2001) explained, “corporate success in the 21st century will be based on the quality of the relationships built.” As relationship theory has emerged as a legitimate paradigm, much attention has been paid to trust, which has been identified through research as a key component of the relationship between a public and an organization. Hon and Grunig defined trust as “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (1999, p. 19). Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997) examined properties of communication that defined organization-public relationships, such as trust and openness, and predicted relational outcomes. Ledingham and Bruning (2000) discussed trust in the context of their relational approach. Hon and Grunig (1999) included trust as a dimension in the measurement of relationships. Kelleher and Miller (2006) found that communicated relational commitment—a concept derived from demonstrated committed to the relationship, a communicated desire to build a relationship, and an implied future of the relationship, among other factors—positively and significantly correlated with trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality. Although research has identified the components of favorable relationships, less emphasis has been placed on the actual practice of relationship management (Chia, 2005). This study will attempt to explore the practice of relationship management between bloggers and their readers as well as between bloggers and marketers or public relations practitioners.

In a joint report by Edelman and Technorati, Richard Edelman described trust in major institutions as being on the wane. As Edelman wrote, “This steady wearing down, a result of the deluge of scandals in the traditional power centers, touches every facet of society, including business, government, and the media” (Edelman/Technorati, 2006). The 2010 Edelman Trust Barometer found that a “person like yourself” ranked fourth behind an academic or expert, a financial or industry analyst, and an NGO representative in terms being a reputable source of information about a company (Edelman, 2010). A “person like yourself” ranked higher than a CEO, government official, and regular employee. Ratings for a “person like yourself” had been on the rise, more than tripling from 20% of respondents in 2003 to its peak of 68% in 2006 when “person like yourself” received the highest percentage of “extremely credible” and “very credible” responses (Huba, 2006). A similar question from the 2010 report found that 37% of respondents found conversations with peers to be extremely or very credible sources, ranking fifth behind analyst reports, business magazines, conversations with employees, and radio news coverage (Edelman, 2010). Corporate communications, TV news, newspaper articles, and advertising were some of the sources viewed as less credible than conversations with peers. Some of these regular people—people who did not traditionally have a voice—are becoming the new influencers through the use of blogs.

The reason many bloggers can successfully plug products and services may be the high level of trust they have engendered among their readers. A 2006 study by Burson-Marsteller found that 92% of mom-fluentials believe they influence the purchase decisions of their family, friends, and coworkers as compared to 62% of regular moms. Also significant was the difference between the percentage of mom-fluentials who perceive they try new products before their peers (89%) and regular moms (59%) (Burson-Marsteller, 2006).

Another industry study, Liberty Mutual’s Responsibility Project which focused on blogger responsibility and blogger reactions to the then-proposed FTC guidelines, found that 98% of influential bloggers surveyed at the 2009 BlogHer convention found it acceptable to
receive a free product from a marketer (Anonymous, 2009). Transparency, disclosure, and honesty were mentioned as considerations when writing a post about a sponsored product. The survey also found that 84% of respondents cited honesty as an important quality for a blogger, followed by transparency (66%) and reliable sources (56%) (Anonymous, 2009).

Research has demonstrated that credibility of the source is an important factor in the effectiveness of persuasive messages (Austin & Pinkleton, 2006). Credibility is defined as the extent to which the source is perceived to have relevant expertise and can be trusted as having an objective opinion (i.e., trustworthiness) (Ohanian, 1990, 1991). Attractiveness is a third dimension of source credibility. Of the three qualities, Ohanian found that only source expertise significantly impacted purchase intention with a celebrity endorser. In the case of bloggers, as the information is transferred from an organization to a blogger, the blogger then becomes the source.

Other studies have looked more specifically at relational trust in the realm of blogging. Blogger credibility has been linked to relational trust, a concept that has been found to be an antecedent of a favorable organizational relationship (Yang, 2007). Relational trust has been conceptualized as having three dimensions: competence, dependability, and integrity (Ki & Hon, 2007; Yang, 2007). Competence is defined as the ability of someone to complete his or her tasks and obligations (Huang, 2001). Dependability refers to a person’s likelihood to perform in a predictable and consistent manner, and integrity is defined as a person’s unwillingness to ignore his or her ethical standards to achieve an objective (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Transparency, defined as perception of the willingness to share ideas and information freely and honestly, has also been added as a dimension of relational trust (Yang & Lim, 2009). Jahoonzi (2006) argued that public relations gain a deeper understanding of transparency.

Most studies of the applicability of blogs to the field of public relations have examined corporate blogs. For example, Sweetser and Metzgar (2007) examined the use of corporate blogs during organizational crises. Kelleher and Miller (2006) studied the human voice in organizational blogs. The present study is unique in that it examines external bloggers who are the target of blogger relations programs.

Bloggers bear not only a legal, but also an ethical responsibility to their readers by being transparent about relationships with companies and honest in their reviews. In turn, public relations practitioners and marketers have an ethical responsibility to allow bloggers to operate in this manner. As Smudde noted, “Ethics and public relations, then, are bound together as organizations make choices about what and how to communicate with their environments. Blogging, like any public relations tactic, must be part of a broader plan for effective communications and, most important, pursue and uphold ethical standards” (2005, p. 38). When considering bloggers who review products for companies, the practice of relationship building between consumers and public relations practitioners is both complicated and enhanced by the presence of a blogger as an intermediary. While public relations practitioners may lose some control over the message, they also benefit from the credibility of bloggers whose readers might describe them as “people like myself.” Public relations practitioners must manage the relationships between themselves and bloggers just as bloggers must manage the relationships between themselves and their readers.

The present study explored reactions to the FTC guidelines, changes to the practice of blogging, and the ethical responsibility of both bloggers and public relations practitioners. The following questions were addressed in this research:
RQ1: How did mommy bloggers respond via their blogs to the FTC guidelines?

RQ2: How and why do mommy bloggers engender trust and credibility among their readers and maintain transparency?

RQ3: What recommendations can be provided to the public relations industry to maintain positive relationships with bloggers?

Methodology

To address the research questions, the 15 “Mom Approved” blogs of Nielsen’s Power Mom 50 were analyzed to determine how they specifically addressed the FTC guidelines on their blogs. The Power Mom 50, compiled in 2009 by Nielsen Online, is described as “a collection of leading voices in the mom blogosphere based on a blend of blog posts, comments, and link love developed through ongoing monitoring of more than 10,000 mom and parenting blogs as tracked by Nielsen Buzzmetrics” (Nielsen Online, 2009). Furthermore, “in addition to site engagement, number of Twitter followers, ratings, and other metrics were included in the calibration to provide a comprehensive sphere of authority and influence.” The 15 “Mom Approved” bloggers are described as “mom bloggers who trial, sample, and review product (often brand-sponsored).” These bloggers were selected as the focus of this study based on their level of expertise in the area of product reviews and the potential impact of the FTC rules on their blogging practices. The 15 blogs are listed below:

Barefoot Mommies
Cutie Booty Cakes
Design Mom
From Dates to Diapers
Go Graham Go
Jolly Mom
Look What Mom Found
Mayhem & Moxie (formerly Three Bay B Chicks)
Mom Start
Mommy Mandy
My Sentiment Exact Lee
Robyn’s Online World
Our Ordinary Life
The Dirty Shirt
Two of a Kind Working on a Full House
This second part of this study involved structured interviews with mom bloggers. All 15 “Mom Approved” bloggers were contacted via e-mail in early 2010 and asked to answer 14 questions focusing on ethical responsibility, reaction to the FTC guidelines, and their relationship with marketers and public relations practitioners. The interview guide is included in Appendix 1. Of the 15 “Mom Approved” bloggers, interviews were conducted with seven bloggers including two who wished to remain anonymous (Anonymous A and B).

Analytic induction was employed to analyze the qualitative data. The process involved reviewing transcripts and blog posts for themes and categories, creating a schema from the initial interviews and posts, and then refining the themes and categories based on the final set of interviews and posts (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Results

Response to FTC guidelines

A total of five of the 15 “Mom Approved” Power Mom 50 bloggers specifically discussed the FTC guidelines on their blogs. These blogs included Mom Start, The Dirty Shirt, Robyn’s Online World, Jolly Mom, and From Dates to Diapers. When asked why they discussed the guidelines, answers ranged from it being a current topic to needing to express an opinion about the issue.

I did discuss it on my blog, so that I could vent. My blog is where I can express my voice and I just needed to get out my opinion so that I would feel better.—Louise Bishop, Mom Start, from interview

The following sections analyze and categorize the nature of discussion about the FTC guidelines on these five blogs as well as the responses to the interview questions. These sections discuss the general reactions by the blogging community, the opportunity to use the revised guidelines as an opportunity to educate readers, and several items creating confusion.

Reactions by blogging community. Although bloggers may have had some initial reservations, those who believe they were already blogging ethically are generally not expressing strong reactions to the FTC’s guidelines.

I have always tried to let my readers know when I received something in relation to my post, but the FTC just wants to make sure everyone is very clear about it. I have no problem with that at all since I have never tried to hide it to start with.—Robyn Wright, Robyn’s Online World, from blog

I was concerned at first, but after I read them I realized that while it affects me being a product and brand reviewer, I was already letting people know that I received free products.—Jennifer Leet, The Dirty Shirt, from interview

I was fine with it since I already disclosed all of my relationships.—Piera Jolly, Jolly Mom, from interview
Ethical bloggers perceive that disgruntled bloggers are the ones who have not been disclosing relationships and free products. Themes of free speech rights are also prevalent.

Some bloggers are complaining about free speech and the right to say what I want to say. I think those are the ones that are overreacting. And maybe also the ones that aren’t following the rules already. You have the right to say what you want to say. Consumers just want to know if you were influenced to say that.—Louise Bishop, Mom Start, from blog

Some bloggers consider the new guidelines as a positive change. As Christine Young of From Dates to Diapers explained on her blog, “The Federal Trade Commission sees us as real and positive influencers.”

Others had stronger reactions, thinking the guidelines were too extreme or that they singled out certain groups of bloggers.

I thought it was a bit much at first, and not clearly laid out, but now I just go with it.—Anonymous B, from interview

My initial reaction was anger, but then I realized I was already doing it. I sort of jumped on the bandwagon that most moms were on. They felt singled out, but the rules are for all blogs, and there are a lot of bloggers out there that go on trips, get free games and game consoles and never mention that in their review.—Louise Bishop, Mom Start, from interview

I think it’s a crock – there are lots of other “groups” that get things all the time and they don’t have the same type of rules.—Robyn Wright, Robyn’s Online World, from interview

*Educating readers.* The FTC guidelines have prompted some bloggers to educate readers about the freebies or compensation they receive as a blogger. Robyn Wright of Robyn’s Online World explained the practices of marketers to her readers:

Generally it means that a company has sent me a free product or coupon for a free product because they want me to review it for them. You see my reviews here on my blog and the types of items I review - we aren’t talking about things that cost thousands of dollars or anything - mostly just household stuff, food items, gadgets, games, etc. Sometimes there is a promotion that does not involve an actual product, but rather a service or something and for those sometimes I get small gift cards as thank-you’s or a small gift item.

Occasionally bloggers get a little something more - my example of this is when I went on my trip to San Francisco as a guest of EA & Maxis. They paid for our airfare, hotel, some meals, some goodies (some for me, some to give away), etc. I think I made it more than abundantly clear that they did this in my posts about it.
Sometimes you will see that notation but only because the company is giving me a prize to give to a reader. In these cases I am not even getting the product - but instead just sharing some goodies with my readers. —Robyn Wright, Robyn’s Online World, from blog

Issues creating confusion. Most bloggers acknowledge that the FTC guidelines work for certain straightforward situations. For example, if a blogger receives a free product and discusses it on her blog, she can easily add a disclosure statement that the product was provided free by the company. Other situations are not as straightforward. For example, Louise Bishop of the blog Mom Start describes a relationship with a company where compensation in the form of travel expenses were provided and then disclosed in a blog post. She continues by describing her lack of understanding of whether she should reiterate this compensation in subsequent mentions.

Also, let’s say I went on a blogging trip for a company like Sara Lee. They wanted me to fully disclose everything. I did, once, but I’m continuing to work with them without further compensation. I just really liked what I learned from them. Do I need to disclose every detail of that one trip (I’m not sure I even disclosed EVERY single detail of the trip the first time around), every time I write about Sara Lee, because what if you are a new reader and you didn’t read about my trip? The same thing goes for Marshalls and Sears. Does this mean that they bought me and own me now in the eyes of the FTC?—Louise Bishop, Mom Start, from blog

Some have noted that the guidelines do not apply to traditional media. One blogger explains why social media are held to a higher standard. Furthermore, other bloggers felt that the guidelines were specifically targeting mommy bloggers.

Our blogs and Twitter streams are where moms are looking for honest opinions on the best strollers on the market and whether or not kids really do like V8 V-Fusion. Why? Because we are real parents and are trusted voices.—Christine Young, From Dates to Diapers, from blog

While the new FTC guidelines do not bother me in the least bit – in fact I think it’s great to have a regulatory body and a set of standards – I do think there is a double standard. What about newspapers, magazines, movie ad placements, and so forth?—Piera Jolly, Jolly Mom, from blog

The only thing I am concerned about is that it seems bloggers are being treated a bit harsher than other forms of media. Especially “Mommy Bloggers.”—Anonymous B, from interview

Engendering trust and credibility through transparency

To address the second research question, blogs were reviewed to see how they disclose relationships with marketers, and bloggers were asked specific questions related to the process of
Ethical responsibility. When asked about their ethical responsibility to readers (the first question of the survey), three participants explained how they disclose relationships with marketers, one described blogging honestly about products, and two spoke more generally about how being honest leads to having loyal readers. Words like honesty and transparency were prevalent in the responses.

It is the bloggers responsibility to inform their readers that they received a product for free. I have always felt that telling my readers “I received this product” was telling them that I received it for free.—Louise Bishop, Mom Start, from interview

My personal guidelines and my ethical responsibility to my readers is to be as honest and as transparent as possible. I discuss the pros and cons of products as I or members of my family sees them and require a hands on approach to testing a product out. I don’t just say something is good or something works without actually knowing if it is or does.—Jennifer Leet, The Dirty Shirt, from interview

I feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility! I am a person who stands behind my word and would like to be considered an honest person. I believe that I have loyal readers because of this.—Anonymous B, from interview

I believe that my readers come first. Without them, my blog has no value. As a result, I am always honest with them about all of my relationships.—Pie ra Jolly, Jolly Mom

Disclosure practices. Three words of advice are provided by Piera Jolly of Jolly Mom on her blog: “Transparency. Disclosure. Honesty.” She continued by making a case for disclosure:

This (disclosure) is important for several reasons. One, your readers. They need to know how you acquired the product, if you have a relationship with the company, and so on for there to be a trusting relationship. Trust and mutual respect is paramount in every relationship—including the one that you have with your readers. You lose your readers’ trust—you lose your readers. —Piera Jolly, Jolly Mom, from blog

Some bloggers were already following the guidelines of the FTC and no changes were necessary. Some are displaying new practices that emerged as a result of the guidelines. Many bloggers are adopting a blanket disclaimer to address the practice of accepting free products or services. This disclaimer is often available on a tab of the blog or in the sidebar. Additionally, bloggers will also mention in a blog post that a product was provided free or a review was posted for remuneration. From Dates to Diapers is an example of a blog that uses this tactic. Piera Jolly of Jolly Mom encouraged other bloggers to copy her Terms of Use, only asking that the personal information be changed and that credit be given to the two people who
helped her write the Terms of Use. A total of eight “Mom Approved” bloggers contain a blanket disclaimer. Three discussed their policies in a post, which may be problematic as that post is pushed down by more recent posts. Four bloggers do not have a standard disclosure statement. See Table 1 for a summary.

A brief statement of disclosure is also sometimes attached to blog posts. Jennifer Leet of The Dirty Shirt created logos to indicate in a post when a product was provided free (“Product Provided” logo) and when she was compensated for the post (“Compensated” logo). Another ends each post with the message “This is a sponsored/compensated post”. A final recommendation is to disclose the relationship in the text of the blog post itself and to place a standard disclaimer at the end of the post.

I provide disclosure statements at the end of any sponsored blog post (and even sometimes when they are not just so there are no questions). I also have a Terms of Use page that lays everything out. On top of that, I provide all of my information on how I stand on product reviews on the sponsor/advertiser page.—Anonymous B, from interview

Although they used many different methods, all but one of the 15 “Mom Approved” blogs included a disclosure statement in the blog post for sponsored posts or free products (see Table 1 for a summary of techniques.) Only on the blog Mayhem & Moxie was it difficult to determine whether free products had been provided for reviews. The two bloggers who write Mayhem & Moxie did, however, disclose products provided free for contest giveaways.

Some bloggers organize blog content with a separate tab for reviews. Nine blogs use a separate tab, while six do not (see Table 1).

Table 1: Blog disclosure techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blog Name</th>
<th>Statement of Disclosure</th>
<th>Sponsorship Indication</th>
<th>Review Tab</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From Dates to Diapers</td>
<td>Disclosure statement in “Pages” section and in a post; mentions sponsors in the “About Us” section</td>
<td>States in posts when she is given a product to review</td>
<td>Reviews NOT in a separate tab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jolly Mom</td>
<td>Terms of use regarding blog content, Mentions she frequently receives compensation for opinions</td>
<td>Standard statement of sponsorship in review posts</td>
<td>Reviews and giveaways are separate tabs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom Start</td>
<td>Under “Policies” in the sidebar, she explains that she does get paid for posts, but not for reviews</td>
<td>States in posts when she is given a product to review</td>
<td>Reviews, contests and personal tabs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dirty Shirt</td>
<td>Disclosure tab explaining authorship and that she is sometimes compensated</td>
<td>A “Product Provided” or “Compensated” button appears</td>
<td>Reviews, giveaways, odd &amp; ends, and journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blog Name</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disclosure Information</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reviews Location</strong></td>
<td><strong>Notes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robyn’s Online World</td>
<td>Disclosure in a post (October 6, 2009)</td>
<td>“This is a compensated/sponsored post”</td>
<td>Reviews NOT in a separate tab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutie Booty Cakes</td>
<td>Disclosure statement on main page and “About Me” section</td>
<td>Disclosure of items and sponsors in post</td>
<td>Reviews tab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Mom</td>
<td>No blanket disclosure statement</td>
<td>Mentions in post when sponsored</td>
<td>No tabs on her blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go Graham Go</td>
<td>“Terms of Use” tab</td>
<td>Mentions in post when sponsored</td>
<td>Reviews NOT in a separate tab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look What Mom Found</td>
<td>Disclosure under “PR Friendly,” then “Privacy Policy”</td>
<td>“Sponsors” page and mentions in post when something is sponsored</td>
<td>Reviews, Giveaways and Shopping are separate tabs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two of a Kind Working A Full House</td>
<td>No blanket disclosure statement</td>
<td>Mentions in post when sponsored</td>
<td>Product Reviews tab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barefoot Mommies</td>
<td>Disclosure/Disclaimer in post (January 24, 2010)</td>
<td>Mentions disclosure or disclaimer in post</td>
<td>Reviews, giveaways and sponsors tab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mommy Mandy</td>
<td>“Terms &amp; Conditions, Privacy Policy, and Disclosure” tab</td>
<td>“Mommy Mandy complies with FTC” in each post</td>
<td>Product reviews and giveaways tab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Ordinary Life</td>
<td>Disclosure Policy in post (December 20, 2006)</td>
<td>Mentions in post when sponsored</td>
<td>Reviews NOT in a separate tab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayhem &amp; Moxie</td>
<td>No blanket disclosure statement</td>
<td>Mentions products provided for contests</td>
<td>Reviews NOT in a separate tab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Sentiment Exact Lee</td>
<td>No blanket disclosure statement</td>
<td>Mentions in post when sponsored</td>
<td>Reviews, giveaways and sponsor tab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reviews of free products/services.** Bloggers have a number of options when confronted with the situation where they do not like a product or service they have been asked to review. One approach is to avoid posting a review if it would be a negative one. Piera Jolly of Jolly Mom described how she contacts the company to describe her concerns and provide suggestions. She offers to send the product back and explains that she will not be blogging about it. She explains her reasoning:

Some people criticize bloggers who don’t publish negative reviews, but I honestly don’t see the problem. I consider what I do as product recommendations. If I see value in something, then I tell my readers about it. If I hate it, then I skip it. Magazines do this all the time.—Piera Jolly, Jolly Mom, from blog
Others also avoid posting negative reviews.

Here at From Dates to Diapers, we only write about products that work well for us (our family), or make family life fun. I have yet to waste the time, space, and energy writing about products that do not resonate well with us or may not benefit my friends (aka readers). This is not to say that you will not find me talking about what may not be so great about an almost perfect product, but I will not focus on the negative, nor will I advertise products we do not use or like. My readers know this about me.—Christine Young, From Dates to Diapers, from blog

I don’t post about it and I let the company know my reasons why so that they can have the feedback.—Anonymous B, from interview

Some bloggers inform the company about the possibility of posting a negative review, allowing corporate representatives the opportunity to decide whether the post will be published.

In the past I have directly contacted the company to let them know what I did not like and some will pull the review and others have said to go ahead and post. I give them that right because I am here to review not tear down a company, unless of course it was a life or death situation which has never happened.—Jennifer Leet, The Dirty Shirt, from interview

I write the company and give them options. I can write a negative review, I can post an advertorial for them which includes no personal opinions, or I can just scratch the review and not post anything at all.—Anonymous A, from interview

Another approach is to post a completely honest review, describing the positive and negative aspects of the product or service. Piera Jolly of Jolly Mom discussed how it might be appropriate to offer constructive criticism or suggestions for improvement. Describing how the product might be appropriate for one group, but not another, is another tactic she employs. Many bloggers describe an honest approach to reviews.

And I want to stress that I am honest in my reviews and compensation does not change that.—Jennifer Leet, The Dirty Shirt, from blog

In all these cases I never endorse, recommend, or otherwise promote anything that I am not personally comfortable with. Regardless of how I am compensated I am honest with you all. If you have read enough of my reviews you know that I have both negative and positive things to say about things. If you met me in real life you would see I am the same way – I’ve almost always got an opinion and I am willing to share it! —Robyn Wright, Robyn’s Online World, from blog

The point is to never, ever tell your readers that you like something when you don’t.—Piera Jolly, Jolly Mom, from blog

If it is something really bad, I let the company know my thoughts first and give them a chance to respond. In the past I have offered them for me not to post a
review, but now I will post regardless. —Robyn, Robyn’s Online World, from interview

Some bloggers may present the product or service in the most positive light, highlighting the good points and avoiding discussion of the bad points.

I am an honest person, but even when I don’t like something it comes across as it’s still a good product. My opinion is a half glass full.—Louise Bishop, Mom Start, from blog

Christine Young of From Dates to Diapers offered suggestions for making an accurate assessment of a product and discussed the extent of claims that can be made.

If you received an item for review, test it out for a significant period of time, have your kids test it out – and only after you’ve actually used the product – offer your thoughts. Parents want to hear the real opinions of parents…Do not tout a product as being a cure-all, or make promises that a certain item will produce certain results. Only write about products from your perspective – “XYZ worked for me,” or “I noticed that XYZ benefited me and my family in such-and-such a way.” —Christine, From Dates to Diapers, from blog

Another recommendation is for bloggers to decline to do reviews of products or services that they do not believe their readers will like. Although it is sometimes hard to know before a test-drive, bloggers are encouraged to research the product before accepting it or asking if the product can be previewed before the blogger commits to the review.

Yes, it does mean that you will have to say NO to a lot of pitches that pr reps and companies send you. That’s ok. I say no to more than 50-60% of the pitches that I receive. I am comfortable with the words No, thank you and you should be too. Companies and pr reps are not going to stop working with you because you say no. Thank them (the company or pr rep) for the opportunity, but let them know that you will have to pass this time. Reassure them that you would like to work with them on future campaigns that are a better fit for your blog. It’s as easy as that.—Piera Jolly, Jolly Mom, from blog

Recommendations for the public relations industry

The central recommendation for the public relations industry centers on the relationship between the blogger and the public relations practitioner or marketer. Others also suggested allowing the blogger the autonomy to conduct business on her blog in her own manner. Finally, mom bloggers have noticed that product samples are less likely to be provided for review since the revised FTC guidelines were approved.

Relationship between bloggers and marketers/PR practitioners. The success of a blogger relations program relies on the relationship between the public relations practitioner and the blogger. Much of this relationship occurs within the context of negotiating a review in exchange
for free samples or the trial of a product or service. Bloggers will also incorporate posts that are sponsored by a company. This relationship may be compromised if the marketer or PR practitioner does not want the blogger to reveal that they paid for the post.

I do get paid for posts, I don’t always mention it in the post. Some of the companies that I work for do not want a blatant statement that they paid for this post. So, I just wanted you to know that I do accept money.—Louise Bishop, Mom Start, from blog

Another recommendation for PR practitioners is that they should not allow a bad review to destroy a relationship.

One thing that I want to stress is to not be afraid to tell a company or pr rep that you dislike the product. Some bloggers fear that the company or pr rep will stop working with them or take them off their “list”. Yes, a few may get upset, but the truth is that most companies or pr reps will really appreciate your honesty.—Piera Jolly, Jolly Mom, from blog

When asked in the interviews for recommendations for marketers or public relations practitioners, all respondents emphasized the importance of building a relationship with the blogger.

My advice would be to know the blogger before you approach them. You don’t have to be best friends but approach us how you would want to be approached. By name, maybe tell us a little something about us, make your pitch and see where it goes. I personally am tired of the “Post this on your blog now” and the “Hello Ms.…”—Jennifer Leet, The Dirty Shirt, from interview

Please be clear in what you want. Have a request, and don’t just send me a PR release. Build a relationship with me first.—Louise Bishop, Mom Start, from interview

Be very clear about what you want us to do for you up front, don’t beat around the bush. Also, don’t rely on blanket emails to insert names because you often have it wrong. Take a moment to read our blogs, or at least our PR page before contacting us.—Robyn Wright, Robyn’s Online World, from interview

Keep in mind working with bloggers is different than working with other types of companies. We need you to treat us as a business but also as a customer. We consider our blogs businesses, but we have to review you as a company. It makes it tricky.—Anonymous A, from interview

**Blogger autonomy.** One blogger expressed dissatisfaction with the involvement of PR practitioners in how she conducts business on her blog. Another blogger considers the review of low-cost products to be too much effort.
They need to cover their butts so they are a little bit overboard about the rules and the wording of what they want me to say on my blog.—Louise Bishop, Mom Start, from interview

It made me rethink what items I will accept. I won’t do as many low cost items because it is much more work for much smaller payoff.—Anonymous A, from interview

Providing free products. A noticeable shift in the relationship between PR practitioners and bloggers is that some companies are less likely to send free products for review. Additionally, some have been more insistent about disclosure regarding the free products that are provided.

Not too much, I have had a few companies back off from sending samples, but my regular brands have stuck with me.—Jennifer Leet, The Dirty Shirt, from interview

They seem less likely to initially offer items – now they just send a press release and you need to ask them directly for samples.—Robyn Wright, Robyn’s Online World, from interview

The only difference is that they generally always make sure to remind me to disclose.—Anonymous B, from interview

Discussion

Only one-third of the 15 “Mom Approved” blogs on Nielsen’s Power Mom 50 list specifically addressed the revised FTC guidelines on their blogs. Most expressed support for the guidelines, believing that they had always followed these general rules. Some were prompted by the new guidelines to educate their readers or to discuss items of concern.

The bloggers in this study are committed to building trust and credibility among readers, and see transparency as a way to maintain a good relationship with readers. The bloggers feel an ethical responsibility to readers. Although they have different approaches to disclosure and conducting reviews of free products, the bloggers see themselves as acting ethically.

Finally, participants emphasized the importance of the relationship between a blogger and a public relations practitioner. Similar to media relations recommendations, the PR practitioner should build a relationship by learning about the blog and the blogger before making a pitch. Company representatives should allow bloggers to write in their own voice and not be as wary about providing free products, given the commitment of bloggers to transparency and honesty.

This study examined 15 bloggers that were recognized by Nielsen Online as being the leading product reviewers among mom bloggers. The primary limitation of this study was the lack of blogs in the sample of 15 that discussed the FTC guidelines and the low response rate to the interview request. Further research could expand the pool to bloggers who do not attract or conduct as many product reviews, but are still approached by marketers or public relations practitioners. These bloggers may have a different understanding of the FTC rules or a different approach to interpreting them.
With a blogger relations program, PR practitioners move the burden of building a relationship with consumers to the blogger. Future research could explore how the relationship between bloggers and consumers impacts the relationship between consumers and the sponsor. To do so, the focus of the research would be the blog reader, rather than the blogger.
Appendix

Interview questions

1. How would you describe your personal guidelines or ethical responsibility to your readers in terms of discussing products and services on your blog?

2. How do you assure your readers that you blog in an ethical manner?

3. What do you do when you are provided a free product or service that you don’t particularly like?

In October 2009, the Federal Trade Commission approved guidelines that address the practice of blogging about products and services.

4. Were you aware of these guidelines?

If you were aware of the FTC guidelines, please answer the following questions:

5. Describe your understanding of when these guidelines apply.

6. What was your initial reaction to the guidelines?

7. Did you discuss the guidelines on your blog? If yes, why did you do this?

8. Did the ruling change the way you blog or any content on your blog? If so, how?

9. Do you see any potential problems with the guidelines? If so, what?

10. How have these guidelines changed your relationship with marketers?

11. Do you think the guidelines will create a backlash toward marketers or bloggers? If yes, please describe why this might occur.

12. If you could provide some advice to marketers or PR practitioners to guide them in working with bloggers, what would it be?

13. Have you noticed a change in practices by marketers or PR practitioners since the FTC guidelines were approved? Do you still see some behavior you could consider to be questionable? Please describe.

14. Do you have anything else you would like to add?
References


Interactive Roots: Analyzing Urban Agricultural Non-Profits’ Use of Social Media to Foster Community Stewardship

L. Simone Byrd
Alabama State University
Introduction

In March 2009, numerous media outlets descended on the White House to cover a group of visiting 5th grade students from Bancroft Elementary School in Washington, D.C. The students were present in order to assist First Lady, Michelle Obama, in cultivating an organic, vegetable garden on the White House grounds, which notably, is the first garden of its kind to be cultivated there since Eleanor Roosevelt’s tenure as First Lady during the 1940s (Burros, 2009).

Although this initiative has garnered a great deal of media attention and has refocused the spotlight on the practice of urban farming as a way to incorporate sustainable living practices, the activity of urban agriculture is not necessarily a new one. However, it is significant to detail what urban agriculture—which includes urban farming and community gardening practices—is. Simply, urban agriculture is defined as, “the growing, processing and distribution of food and other products through intensive plant cultivation in and around cities” (Community Food Security Coalition’s North American Urban Agriculture Committee, 2003). Community gardens, which are similar, but also emphasize the communal perspective, are defined by the American Community Gardening Association’s website (ACGA) as, “any piece of land gardened by a group of people” (2009).

There are a number of reasons that urban farms have become increasingly popular as of late. First, these establishments have stimulated interest as a result of heightened awareness and interest among consumers in understanding how food is cultivated and produced. Furthermore, consumers increasingly want to incorporate activities and overall lifestyles that will contribute to individual health and well-being. Reynolds (2009), appropriately adds that residents often, “practice urban farming and gardening for recreation, health and nutrition, community empowerment and urban greening”; the latter being a concept which the author clarifies as “the planning and establishment of vegetative landscapes in urban settings” (p. 1). Considering these factors, along with the emergence of these non-profit organizations, coincide with a general increase in awareness of environmental practices through many well-publicized “green” campaigns and business initiatives.

Second, these developments are promising, but there remains a large segment of the population that are—due to their socio-economic status—disproportionately affected by adverse health conditions. Bernheim, Ross, Krumbolz and Bradley (2008), indicated that socio-economic status affects a human being’s access to quality health care services, particularly those services that are deemed as ‘preventative’, and that this impediment to quality health care also occurs among individuals who carry full health insurance.

Additionally, with the alarming prevalence of ailments such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity—National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey researchers found that, from 2007 to 2008, among children ages 2 to 19, “32 percent were at risk for being overweight or obese” (Ostrow, 2010). This premise underscored Mrs. Obama’s reasoning, aside from providing healthy meals for the first family, that these initiatives should “educate children about healthful, locally grown fruit and vegetables at a time when obesity and diabetes have become a national concern” (Burros, 2009).

Moreover, there are some communities in which people do not have access to consistent quality food retailers and other services in order to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Several factors may have created this situation, but most glaring is that many of these communities are situated in areas where upscale grocery store chains are non-existent, which increases the need for quality transportation.
Thus, if the lack of transportation becomes a dilemma, then the ability to maintain a healthy diet may present greater challenges, as opposed to those in communities which offer a variety of food options. A recent study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, suggested that there were strong correlations between diet and socio-economic status, which indicated, “higher quality diets are associated with greater affluence, energy-dense diets that are nutrient-poor are preferentially consumed by persons of lower socio-economic status” (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008, p. 1107).

Finally, many communities view the importance of the urban farm and community garden movement from a social context—particularly as a means to bring together residents of a specific neighborhood. For instance, the 11th St. Bridge community in Wilmington, Delaware, currently uses their urban farm to not only grow and sell produce at a local farmer’s market, but residents have indicated that since the farm’s establishment, it has helped to both unify the neighborhood, by helping “neighbors get to know each other” (Zewe, 2009).

**Purpose of the Study**

Incorporating a textual analysis, the purpose of this exploratory research was to examine the Facebook profiles or “fan” pages of 13 urban agricultural, non-profit organizations (NPO) based in the U.S. to determine what elements of the stewardship model—reciprocity, responsibility, reporting and relationship nurturing—as proposed by Kelly (2001), are present in the online external communications conducted by the organization with their stakeholders, which on Facebook, are referred to as ‘fans’.

The overall aim of this study was to conduct an exploratory investigation to establish an understanding of: (1) what components of the stewardship model are present on the Facebook profile page through communicative patterns and themes from the organizational leadership to fans, and (2): what comments/posts by the organization’s personnel (who act as ‘admins’ of the social networking site to communicate with stakeholders) and fans indicate components of the stewardship model.

Building upon the previous research, (Waters, et al., 2009; Waters, 2009) this qualitative-based study focused on an examination of the stewardship model from the perspective that it can be also used as a way to engage non-profit volunteers and community members, who donate their time and other resources, as opposed to solely focusing on those who make monetary contributions.

Overall, this work contributes to the existing body of public relations research in two, primary ways. First, it extends the discussion of how social networking, when incorporated and used both ethically and in a creative manner, can yield significantly positive results for non-profit organizations that want to engage with current and potential online stakeholders. Second, it suggests that examinations of the stewardship model can, and should focus in the long-term, or go beyond those simply focused on financial returns, but also take into consideration those who give of their time and expertise, on a voluntary basis.

**Literature Review & Theoretical Framework**

*Stewardship*

Kelly (2001) reviewed the various strategic communication models used in public relations education and practice, and suggested that there had not been a detailed effort to understand, nor incorporate the necessary steps that should be taken by an organization to maintain relationships once they’d been established. As result, the component of stewardship
was conceptualized and adapted for public relations practice—primarily from a fundraising perspective. In particular, the stewardship model includes four stages—reciprocity, responsibility, reporting and relationship nurturing.

However, to fully understand the concept of stewardship, literature on donor relations was also reviewed. Hedrick (2008) conducted research among a group of board of directors, she found that they identified stewardship as, “honoring donor intent, prudent investment of gifts, and the effective and efficient use of funds to further the mission of the organization” (p. 180). When asked to elaborate on those responses, the research participants could not provide any further details on the concept, promptly to which the author quickly indicated that, all too often, organizations forget to include the importance of reporting in developing the stewardship process.

Unlike Kelly’s (2001) outlining of the components of stewardship, Hedrick’s (2008) assessment does not include a category on relationship nurturing. Perhaps this is because much of what the donor relations was traditionally thought to be, did not include an attempt to actually report how the financial contributions were used. For example, when asked to extend their thinking as to what should occur after the donation had been made and the appropriate thanks extended, most members of several board of directors that participated in the exercise appeared to have forgotten that reporting is a critical factor in the stewardship process.

Social Engagement & Non-Profit Organization’s Use of Social Media

When stakeholders participate in online communication, the most basic element that is being nurtured and cultivated is that of the relationship. As one of the leading studies on relationships, Ledingham and Bruning (2001), suggested that the community is where strategic communication is perhaps most significant and critical to organizational success. In this work, they also discussed the emergence of community relations activities that appeared in the late 1800s and early 1900s, because of the advances in industrialization that fueled America’s economic rise. While some would believe that public apathy towards businesses is only a recent phenomenon, this is something that was becoming problematic even during those early years.

However, business literature is keenly aware of the importance that community involvement plays in a corporation’s success. While the public relations literature is limited, scholars such as Coombs (2000, as cited in Ledingham & Bruning, 2001) have included an examination of the role of community relations during crises, and asserts that a “mutually beneficial approach to organization-public relationships can minimize the impact of crises when they occur” (p. 529).

Previous research that examined social networking sites and stewardship was conducted by Waters et al. (2009), in which the researchers applied a quantitative approach to examine the process by which nonprofit stakeholders were engaged when the use of social networking—specifically Facebook—was incorporated into the overall fundraising strategy. This same year, Waters (2009) also examined the stewardship model strictly for fundraising and general relationship-building purposes in a second, quantitative-based study. These studies are critical to our understanding of how stewardship can be facilitated through online, social networking. In addition, these investigations have led the way, particularly in public relations research examining social networking sites such as Facebook, thus legitimizing the exploration of this social network as a viable public relations tool.
Research Questions

**RQ1:** How do urban agricultural-based, non-profit organizations (NPOs) use their Facebook profile page to engage active publics who have become a fan of their organization on a social networking site, such as Facebook?

**RQ2:** What components of the Stewardship Model are present through communicative patterns and themes present on the NPOs Facebook profile page?

**RQ3:** What specific comments/posts by admins who represent the NPO and/or fans on their Facebook profiles suggests the presence of components of the stewardship model?

Methodology

The study incorporated the use of qualitative methods, particularly a textual analysis to review both the organization’s traditional website and supplementary sites for social networking—specifically focusing on the Facebook profile pages for 13 non-profits focused on contemporary urban agriculture in the U.S.

Because engagement through social media was at the core of this study, it was imperative to include organizations that referred to themselves as “urban farms” and “community gardens” in the overall investigation—regardless of whether the reasons for the existence of the NPOs were to cultivate locally grown food for social, economic or health reasons. To determine which organizations would be used for analysis, a list of 20 urban agricultural, non-profit organizations were outlined based on results from a traditional internet (i.e., Google) search.

Next, after compiling the list, visits were made to each organization’s website, to determine and confirm that: (a) the organization was a 501 3(c) designated non-profit organization, and (b) there was a link or some other indicator offered on the traditional website to any social networking sites—specifically Facebook. If there was a link to a Facebook presence, it was identified as an icon with a blue background and white lowercase “f”.

If there were no apparent links or indicators present on the traditional website, two other methods were employed. First, the general search function on the Facebook website was used to determine if that organization had an active Facebook profile, and/or, a Google search would likely indicate a Facebook profile. Surprisingly, it is important to note that some of the organizations did not have an existing link from their traditional website to their social networking site, although they did have a Facebook profile, the NPOs social networking site was only discovered after exhausting the first two search options, and conducting a Google search.

In terms of each site, there was no particular person(s) of interest, but rather, the study sought to solely explore the discussion text—mainly from the perspective of the NPO, directed to their external stakeholders who were fans of their Facebook profile. To conduct the actual analysis portion of the study, the main discussion feature on Facebook (referred to as the ‘Wall’) was reviewed and any words or phrases that indicated a relationship to one or more of the steps within the stewardship model, were examined more closely. Simple wording that are considered to be universally agreed upon, such as whether or not the organization posted a comment that included ‘thank you’ or ‘appreciation’ which would demonstrate reciprocity, were identified as well as more complex wording that was not as obvious, but still indicated that one or more of the stewardship model were present in the text.
Although this study does incorporate the stewardship model—which has its traditional foundation focusing on fundraising matters and maintaining relationships with donors—it intends to examine the model in such a slightly different way. Specifically, the conversational text was examined for words or phrases that would be consistent with the general ideology that undergirds stewardship, but also adapts those concepts for the urban agricultural NPO. These organizations, while similar to other non-profits in the fact that they rely on and need financial support—from donors and grant-funding agencies—differ because they also equally (if not more) rely on volunteer support for the intensive labor that is involved in the creation and maintenance of farming. Therefore, this study makes some modifications to the traditional stewardship model, which are discussed in more detail in the results section.

Results

Of the organizational Facebook profiles that were examined, a considerable number seemed to be able to engage vital stakeholders through their social networking presence. Not only did they list events that were both sponsored by their own organizations, but some went as far to post articles that either featured their organization, or information on various campaigns and/or pending legislation that would influence their organizational mission.

For instance, the Jones Valley Urban Farm (JVUF) nonprofit organization, based in Birmingham, Alabama, was featured on the independent website, Civil Eats, and in a recent issue of *Elle Décor* magazine, within a general feature story highlighting the city. While some urban agricultural NPOs had as few as 250 fans, there were some organizations that boasted over 2,000 fans that participated with their organization’s social network. Furthermore, some organizations appeared to be more consistent with their external communication strategies, by communicating nearly on a daily basis, while other organizational profiles had not been updated with new content in several months.

Reciprocity

Although, at its core, reciprocity is about exhibiting gratitude towards stakeholders that have been supportive of specific initiatives and programs of an organization, it is useful to explore how the concept could be adapted to an urban agricultural NPO. For instance, “an effective and simple form of recognition is to personalize, whenever possible all future communications to supportive publics, thereby recognizing their special status to the organization” (Kelly, 2001, p. 284). Similarly, Waters (2009) described the first component of stewardship—reciprocity—as, “the acknowledgement of the publics and a sincere expression of appreciation on behalf of the organization” (p. 114).

Applied to urban agricultural NPOs, reciprocity need not explicitly be related to extending gratitude to target stakeholders for their donations. As suggested in an earlier section of this study, a mention was made that reciprocity could simply be thanking volunteers for their support of the organization’s mission and operating procedures. In December 2009, for example, the Gateway Greening NPO in St. Louis, Missouri, acknowledged a monetary donation, by posting the following message, “Many thanks to the SLU [St. Louis University] Dietetics Intern Class of 2010 for your donation” (Gateway Greening, 2010). Similarly, demonstrated is gratitude for growing interest in their programs, with the JVUF admin writing a comment to inform stakeholders that, “we are getting tons of requests for CSA [Community Supported Agriculture] memberships (thanks, y’all)! See our notes tab for complete details” (Jones Valley Urban Farm, 2010).
**Responsibility & Reporting**

With over 250 Facebook fans and based in Detroit, Michigan, the profile page for the Earthworks Urban Farm clearly demonstrates its efforts to engage in reporting with its stakeholders, with a full-time volunteer posting the following message to the profile, asking Facebook fans to:

> Join us as we come together to rally behind the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act!
> Learn about how we can advocate for $1 more per student school lunch, farm to school programs and more! Let’s work together for some CHANGE (Earthworks Urban Farm, 2009).

The keywords and/or phrases that indicate that this is an effort that is most closely related to reporting are “advocate”, “rally behind”, and “work together” for change. This is because, not only is reporting about being transparent with donors to ensure that the intent of their donation was fulfilled, but also because, as Kelly (2001) writes, “organizations are required to keep publics informed about developments related to the opportunity or problem for which support was sought” (p. 285).

Thus, it could be argued that rallying behind legislation that ultimately supports the mission and goals of the organization, and asking that supporters be involved in potentially facilitating the legislation passes, would qualify as an example of the responsibility function of stewardship as well.

Also, with urban agricultural NPOs, there may be some considerable overlap with one or more of the components that consists within the traditional stewardship model. For instance, there might have been a comment posted by the admin which included key words or phrases that encompassed and could be applied to two or more of the stewardship model’s four steps. The previous text from the Earthworks Urban Farm alerting stakeholders to the Childhood Reauthorization Act could also be used as an example of responsibility, because as Waters (2009) indicated that there is an implicit understanding that organizations maintain their core principles through their behavior and actions.

Finally, one could argue that a component of reporting could be informing the organization’s social networking fans about certain procedures that—if incorporated into the farming process—might be helpful as spring planting season is nearing. For instance, St. Louis, Missouri’s Gateway Greening organization recommends that:

> The new Farm to School (FTS) Tips, Tools & Guidelines for Food Distribution & Food Safety manual is intended to provide information, insight and useful tools for farmers and school service directors interested in FTS program participation, distribution and food safety. (Gateway Greening, 2010).

In the previous quotation, terms such as “safety manual”, indicate that this is reporting, because the organization is taking an active interest in disseminating information related to safety issues, not to mention, taking an honest approach to being transparent with stakeholders about the potential hazards that might come with the planting process.

**Relationship Nurturing**

As with other components of the model, urban agricultural NPOs tend to facilitate their relationship nurturing strategies mostly through encouraging stakeholders to attend various events or participate in purchasing items cultivated by the organization. After an organization has incorporated practices that are consistent with reciprocity, responsibility and reporting, they must then determine how they want to cultivate the relationship with target stakeholders to
cultivate the relationship. Kelly (2001), also discussed this component of the stewardship model, by indicating that “the most effective means of nurturing relationships are quite simple: accept the importance of supportive publics and keep them at the forefront of the organization’s consciousness” (p. 286).

Another example of relationship nurturing is from the Facebook profile of the Urban Farm at Stapleton, which focuses on improving the lives of inner-city, low-income neighborhoods in Denver, Colorado, which hosted a fundraising event, Arts for the Animals, in September 2009. In their reminder to Facebook fans on August 28th, the admin posted the following comment:

Art for the Animals (AFTA) is an annual event and is just one way that the farm raises funds. Proceeds from AFTA are used specifically to feed the animals. Tickets are sold for the vent which entitles two guests to attend and enjoy light fare and wine. Each ticket also determines the order in which guests will choose from one of a kind art including framed photographs, jewelry, portraits and figurines donated by local artists and galleries. Last year there were over 100 attendees with this year’s event promising to be even bigger (The Urban Farm, 2009).

As a result of the promotion of this event, there were two fan comments, with one fan commenting that “I participated last year and it was a stellar evening. And I came home with a beautiful piece of art work! Count me in for this year” (The Urban Farm, 2009).

Conclusion

Overall, the urban agricultural NPOs that participated in managing and updating their Facebook social networking profiles on a consistent basis—with at least two posts per week—were clearly able to encourage more activity and engagement from fans, on their profiles. However, what appeared to be the most fascinating aspect of the study was that, those organizations which appeared to recognize the value in taking advantage of this participatory aspect of media, were also the ones who most closely demonstrated the four components of the stewardship model.

Second, over half of the NPOs reviewed for this study, were overlooking a critical opportunity to engage with current and potential stakeholders through social media. Either these organizations didn’t possess any user-friendly information on their website which clearly suggested a social networking extension, or the identifiable social networking icons or links, were simply non-existent. When considering this statement, it is certainly plausible that one could argue that it is almost better not to incorporate a social network into the organization’s external communication efforts, as opposed to implementing it, but failing to publicize this increasingly popular feature.

Finally, the NPOs that demonstrate the strongest skill by engaging in and conveying their messages with important stakeholders, as well as placing a premium on promoting their participation in social networking, are not without the need for improvements. As has been stressed in many previous studies, the practice of public relations is significantly strengthened when communication between the organization and its stakeholders is tactically facilitated through two-way communication. Thus, these organizations could truly integrate more participatory components to their social networking sites in a variety of ways. For instance, the organization could pose a question, or directly ask fans for feedback. This might generate more “conversation” as opposed to some of the Facebook profiles resembling a simple high-tech form of one-way communication.
Limitations & Future Research

Foremost, the majority of the communication that was analyzed on Facebook, tended to lean toward one-way communication. As a result, future studies should examine the stewardship model not only in terms of the four components, but also take into account how the two-way practice of public relations might be a major factor in its success in engaging stakeholders through social networking.

Next, because of its exploratory nature, this study did not engage active fans of the NPOs in a rich, qualitative investigation. Neither the organizational representatives who acted as admins for the Facebook profiles, or their fans were contacted and asked to participate in a more, comprehensive study. Therefore, future investigations in this area should integrate a human subjects approach with particular emphasis on in-depth interviews and perhaps online focus groups.

Finally, the research did not explore urban agricultural NPOs based in global location. Although these organizations might also have a social networking presence on Facebook, the time frame for completing this research was limited. Furthermore, there might have been a language barrier present, which would require more time for analysis. The increase in urban farming is a not an activity that is limited to the U.S. Thus, to address the limitations of this study, it is imperative that future studies address the international practice of urban farming.
References


Exploring Key Messages as a Concept for Public Relations Evaluation: Case Studies of Nonprofit Organizations

Craig E. Carroll, Assistant Professor
Nell C.L. Huang, Ph.D. Student
Brooke Weberling, Ph.D. Student

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Campus Box 3365, Carroll Hall
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3365

E-mail: craig.carroll@unc.edu
Office Ph: ++1 919-962-0735
Office Fx: ++1 919-962-0620
Web: jomc.unc.edu/craigcarroll

Abstract

Using attribute agenda-building theory, this paper introduces the concept of key messages as a form of public relations evaluation. We conduct exploratory research on the concept using case studies of key messages taken from 18 national nonprofits. We identify five different types of key messages from their Web sites: information dissemination, raison d’être, categorical placement, resource management, and social relevance, which can be evaluated with full, partial or no key message integrity. We identify key messages from their Web sites, evaluate the transfer of message integrity and news coverage. Our in-depth interviews with eight communication professionals from these organizations confirm the viability of key messages as a concept for public relations evaluation.
**Introduction**

Scholars agree that public relations activities are paramount in influencing the media agenda (Curtin & Rhodenbaugh, 2001; Ohl, Pincus, Rimmer, & Harrison, 1995; Walters & Walters, 1992; Walters, Walters, & Gray, 1996). This public relations influence on the media agenda is referred to as agenda-building. The interaction between information sources and the news media is a complex, dynamic, and often cyclical process involving editors, marketing or public relations departments, and information providers (Ohl, et al., 1995; Walters, et al., 1996). Many have found this process of salience transfer through public relations efforts as key to influencing reputation and issues management (e.g., Bridges & Nelson, 2000; Kiousis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007). Consequently, there has been extensive research on the role public relations efforts play in the transfer of salience from the source to the news media.

Agenda-building research often focuses on what organizations, individuals, or issues are covered in the media. Less research has examined how an organization, an individual, or an issue covered by the media improves public relations performance, such as through feedback emanating from published media messages back into the creation of communication messages. Without a clear understanding of how, in addition to what, organizations, individuals, or issues are portrayed in the media, public relations practitioners cannot fully evaluate the extent of their communication efforts. This study introduces the concept of key messages as a way to evaluate public relations activity to address not only what messages transfer, but also how well. We use exploratory research to examine their viability as public relations evaluation concept and tool.

The paper begins by reviewing relevant agenda-building literature and then introduces the concept of key messages. Next, we apply the concept to a select series of case study organizations in the nonprofit industry to provide feedback on the concept. Finally, it discusses implications of the exploratory research for strategic communications research and evaluation.

**Literature Review**

**Agenda-building**

Agenda-building “refers to the sources’ interactions with gatekeepers, a give-and-take process in which sources seek to get their information published and the press seeks to get that information from independent sources” (Ohl, Pincus, Rimmer, & Harrison, 1995). Like agenda setting, agenda-building involves two levels of salience transfer (Kiousis, Mitrook, Wu, & Seltzer, 2006; Kiousis, et al., 2007). The first level of agenda-building focuses on the salience of objects, including public issues, public figures, and corporations. The term “object” can be simply defined as things an individual has an attitude or opinion about (McCombs, 2004).

The second level focuses on the salience of object’s attributes (Kiousis, et al., 2006). The definition of “attribute” can be found in Walter Lippmann’s (1922) work in which he defined agenda as descriptions of subjects, including personalities, motive, intention, feeling, public opinion, and policies (p. 343). Since Lippmann, “message” (Bowers, 1977; Miller, Andsager, & Riechert, 1998), “interest” (Shaw & Clemmer, 1977), and “activities” (Carroll & McCombs, 2003; Ohl, et al., 1995; Rindova, Petkova, & Kotha, 2007) have been used to describe the attribute agenda. In sum, attributes can be defined as characteristics and traits with which one can associate any matters or subjects.

While there lacks substantive research that delineates the process of attribute agenda-building, some researchers have taken first steps in examining the process. Dyer, Miller, and
Boone’s (1991) study on the wire services coverage of the Exxon Valdez crisis asks whether the news media responded to the crisis in ways Exxon and its public relations teams wanted them to respond. Their study found that there were discrepancies between Exxon’s claims about the crisis and the news media’s portrayal of the crisis. Similarly, Anderson’s (2001) study on the competition between two drug companies in the news media also found that while public relations subsidies can influence news coverage, they do not necessarily influence content. Specifically, even though the drug companies were successful in obtaining coverage of the story, the specific frames covered in the news media differed from the frames provided in the press releases.

Other studies have shown the importance of evaluating attribute salience transfer. Walters, Walters, and Starr (1994) examined educational and research-related press releases and the resulting placement of these releases in daily newspapers to see whether newspapers change the syntax of press releases they publish. The study found that newspapers often simplify the press release; those that are placed in the newspapers were drastically shortened from their original content. Walters et al.’s (1994) findings illustrate that even though public relations professionals would like the releases to be placed without any changes, this is often not the case.

Alterations of the press release by the journalists may change its meaning and hence, its impact and value for the originating organizations. Cameron (1994) observes that this editing process may increase the value of the third party endorsement from the media, but little research has examined what it means, practically speaking, for organizations.

Accuracy
A survey of 4,800 news sources reported that sources found errors in 61 percent of local news and feature stories (Maier, 2005). According to Maier (2005), there are two types of errors, factual errors, which include misquotes, spellings, names, ages, numbers, titles, locations, time, and dates, and subjective errors, which can be made by missing essential information, distorting quotes, misleading numbers, or simply misunderstanding the story. Maier’s (2005) results show that the most common type of error was misquotation, followed by inaccurate headlines and numbers. Inaccuracy is troublesome for practitioners and organizations because their messages cannot be conveyed as intended to the public. It is also worrisome for the news media because it contributes to the declining credibility of the news media.

Clearly, it is not sufficient to simply evaluate object salience transfer; the evaluation of attribute salience transfer is imperative for a full and clear understanding of the success of media relations efforts. This paper introduces the concept of key messages as a media relations evaluation tool for attribute salience transfer. The following section explicates the concept of key messages.

Key messages
A key message is any message that an organization repeats about itself concerning any of the basic news elements (who, what, when, where, or why) that is worth evaluating. Key messages are an example of frames (Entman, 1993). Using the McCombs and Ghanem (McCombs & Ghanem, 2003, p. 71) framing decision tree to delineate and show common ground between framing and attribute agenda-setting, key messages may be an attribute of presentation to the degree that the frame shapes the presentation of the news story. Key messages are also an attribute of object in the sense that they are the “property” or associated with some object. Using
other characteristics of frames, key messages help to interpret what is going on in a situation (Bateson, 1954). They select or call attention to a particular aspect of a described situation or issue. They include certain keywords or stock phrases, that thematically reinforce clusters of facts or judgments (Entman, 1993). Help to establish common frames of reference about a topic or issue of mutual concern (Hallahan, 1999). Furthermore, they are quotable (Culbertson & Stempel, 1984).

Key messages can be evaluated in terms of their prominence (frequency of mention) and a (within-story) dominance (Culbertson & Stempel, 1984). But, they can also be evaluated in terms of their message integrity. Key message integrity refers to the composition of an organization’s key message being whole, entire, undiminished, and unimpaired after going through the salience transfer process, such as through the news editorial process. Even though key message integrity involves the concept of factual accuracy, the two concepts differ because a message could be factually correct, but still miss the desired point of view that the organization is aiming for (e.g., Ohl, et al., 1995).

Key message integrity can be identified when a key message produced by the source, such as an organization, is used verbatim with little or no alternation to the meaning by the media or other intermediaries to the general public. The meaning of the key message is evaluated by whether alterations occur; if alteration does occur, it should not affect the information, meaning, or value of the message conveyed. If the meaning occurs the way the message source wishes it to appear, then the source has accomplished its message goal. Key message integrity can be evaluated from the perspective of the source, intermediary channels, and receiver. Intermediaries include third parties such as the news media, analysts, and scholars. Key message integrity has three components: a message object, its priority, and its evaluation status. The message object itself is an attribute of a larger object, such as a goal or objective for an organization, an issue that the organization is attempting to manage, or a claim that the organization wants to have associated with its image, identity, or reputation. The priority refers to where the key messages fit within the plethora of other communicated messages that may be associated with the organization. Finally, the evaluation status refers to how the key messages appear in communication products such as news media coverage, analyst reports, and other forms of communication with the larger public.

This paper explores how key messages may be critical to public relations practitioners and the organizations they represent. Key messages incorporate attributes, values, and goals communicated through the use of certain keywords or phrases that an organization wishes to be associated with. It is imperative for media relations research to advance toward building a framework for evaluating key message integrity. Taking an exploratory research approach, we explore how key messages are appropriated in the context of 18 nonprofit organizations.

We offer the following exploratory research questions:

RQ1: What are some of the types of key messages that nonprofit organizations create for news dissemination?

RQ2: How successful are nonprofit organizations in getting their key messages disseminated through the news media? Are some types of key message types more successful than others?
RQ3: What is the primary challenge nonprofit organizations face in communicating key messages to news media?

RQ4: What roles do the news media play in communicating nonprofit organizations’ key messages?

Method

Case Study Organizations

The organizations were chosen using purposive sampling of nonprofits receiving four-star ratings by Charity Navigator. Charity Navigator is one of the most utilized evaluators of charities using two criteria of financial health: how responsibly it functions day to day as well as how well positioned it is to sustain its programs over time. The nonprofits were selected to represent the different categories of nonprofits evaluated by Charity Navigator: Animals, arts/culture/humanities, education, environment, health, human services, international, and public benefit (Charity Navigator, n.d).

Identification of key messages

We reviewed the organizations’ Web sites for messages that could be considered key to the organizations. We reviewed the mission statements, press rooms, annual reports, and speeches by senior level officers that were posted on the Web sites. Reliability was achieved through verbal agreement among the coders.

Then, the identified key messages were compared to the news coverage of each respective organization. News coverage data were obtained using CustomScoop, a leading media monitoring service. The study examined the news coverage of sample nonprofit organizations on the Web sites of major publications between February 1, 2008 and February 29, 2008. The publications were searched in the CustomScoop database, using the organizations’ names as the keyword. A total of 1585 articles were identified for the 18 organizations. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the distribution of news coverage by various nonprofit categories.

See Table 1

The articles were coded for article type, prominence and dominance of the organization in the news coverage, tone, and the integrity of key messages. The integrity of key messages was coded as full, partial, or none. Full integrity occurs if a key message was communicated as originally intended by the source or organization, which means that the key words and phrases are retained completely. Partial integrity occurs if part of a key message was communicated but important keywords or phrases were left out. A key message is deemed to have no integrity if the published news report did not match the version from the Web site.

Interviews

Our key informants were nonprofit public relations practitioners or personnel having related positions, such as in marketing or communications, from the identified organizations. Informants from all 18 organizations were contacted; informants from eight organizations agreed
to participate in the study. While only about half of the organizations responded, those that did represent all of the categories in the larger sample except for the international category. Even though most participants agreed for their organizations to be identified by name, two requested anonymity. Therefore, subsequent discussions from the interview data refrain from using the names of the organizations so as to respect the wishes of the two organizations.

The interviews were conducted by telephone and recorded with participants’ consent. The informants reported on their respective organization’s key messages, their communication of the messages to the public, and the use and value of measuring and evaluating key messages communicated through the news media. Following the interviews, the researchers transcribed the recordings and analyzed the data. Transcriptions were analyzed using an interpretive, naturalistic perspective, with little emphasis on manipulating texts or empirically differentiating specific units of analysis (Owen, 1984; Putnam, 1983). Rather, the transcripts were examined for themes that emerged, both within and across interview texts.

Thematic analysis is a search for patterns that emerge as important in the description of phenomena (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). When patterns were recognized in the data, the themes became categories for further analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). More specifically, the researchers read and re-read transcripts, highlighting key words or phrases, and added notes. Information that appeared to be thematically related was compared and contrasted with other information in the same interview transcript, as well as with information in other interview transcripts (T. Anderson & Felsenfeld, 2003). Themes were recognized when there was significant recurrence and repetition within texts (Owen, 1984).

Findings

Key Message Categories.
RQ1 asked about some of the types of key messages that exist. We identified five general categories of key messages: information dissemination; raison d’être; categorical placement; resource management; and social relevance.

Our first key message type refers to information dissemination. Information dissemination referred to two general types, education (the what) and mobilization (the how). Educational key messages are those that involve issues that the public may not know about or may simply take for granted. The emphasis here is on teaching and learning new information that may ultimately change the public’s awareness, attitude, or behavior. Key educational messages include the National Multiple Sclerosis Society’s focus on the difficulties for those living with multiple sclerosis or Special Olympics’ aim to foster an understanding of intellectual disabilities. Key messages about mobilization were those having to do with how publics could get involved with the organization, usually dealing with logistical details, such as what, when, where, and how to get involved. Mobilization messages primarily concern events or information required for individuals to take some form of action. For example, the Disabled American Veterans provides details about volunteer opportunities for those wishing to help disabled veterans and the rehabilitation opportunities available for disabled veterans. For the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the focus was on specific exhibits, events, and other opportunities that it offers to the public. These mobilization messages are similar to Lemert’s (1981, 1984) concept of mobilizing information, which is often present in news coverage and enables individuals to act on existing motivations (Hoffman, 2006; Nicodemus, 2004).
Our second key message type, *raison d’être*, deals with the fundamental goals of the organization and how it works or carries out its core operations. This includes constructing a sense of organizational mission and identity, including “who we are” and “what we are about.” An example from the American Cancer Society (ACS) is “the organization works to prevent cancer, save lives, and diminish suffering of those with cancer.” From the Council of State Governments (CSG), an example was their facilitating “collaboration between state governments and their constituents.”

Our third key message type, *categorical placement*, helps an organization to establish itself in a cultural crowd, and then to uniquely distinguish itself within the crowd. Categorization had three different subtypes: boundary setting, positioning, and linking. Boundary setting referred to key message that set limits or parameters, such as helping to define an organization by defining what the it is not (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001), or by setting brackets that eliminate other options. For example, CSG describes how it maintains a “non-partisan” status in order to “encourage political participation from both parties.” Such a description eliminates “partisan” behavior or associations with any particular political party. Similarly, Junior Achievement describes itself as committed to “market-based economics” and entrepreneurship, juxtaposed to socialism for instance.

A second type of categorical placement refers to the positioning against competitors or other similar organizations. This is signified by words such as leading, first, best, largest, only, oldest, etc. For example, the ACS as the “largest source of private, nonprofit cancer research.” The American Symphony Orchestra claims to be the “leading nonprofit orchestra;” the Arthritis Foundation as the “most accurate source of information about arthritis.” A third type of categorical placement occurs when the firm mentions partners to show who they are like (coupling) or who they work with, or distancing (decoupling) to show who they are not like or who they are opposed to. In some cases, the partnering organizations are not named, but simply alluded to in order to demonstrate connectedness through partnerships and alliances.

Our fourth key message type refers to *resource management*. We identified two types of resource management messages, those having to do with organizational survival and how the firms make money and those having to do with organizational stewardship, such as how the firms spend the money coming in. With organizational survival as a key resource management message theme, firms can describe how they make money or get by; for nonprofits, this is primarily through donations and volunteers. Also related to resource management is the idea of organizational stewardship, making use of the key resources that the organization receives from the larger environment, including its various publics. For example, the Nature Conservancy describes how it uses contributions to achieve their goals worldwide. Susan G. Komen for the Cure describes how they provide scientists with funds for breast cancer research. The American Refugee Committee describes how it addresses the needs of refugees as efficiently as possible. These types of messages further confirm previous research, which states that stewardship is one of the most important concepts of the nonprofit public relations and fundraising process (Kelly, 1998, 2001; Waters, 2008, 2009).

Our last key message type refers to *social relevance* by demonstrating the service or value that the organization provides to the larger society. The ACS, for example, teaches that cancer affects everyone, despite age, race, gender, or location. Girls, Inc. desires for girls to live successful, independent, and fulfilling lives. Habitat for Humanity emphasizes that building
homes does more than put a roof over someone’s head. In each of these cases, organizations are able to connect to their publics by emphasizing some degree of social relevance by the organization being in existence or carrying out its work.

Key Message Integrity of News Coverage

RQ2 examined the variation in the values of key messages. Results from our exploratory study show that 60% ($n = 883$) of the coded articles had full key message integrity, 39% ($n = 573$) had partial message integrity, and 2% ($n = 28$) did not attain key message integrity. Table 2 shows a distribution of key message integrity by nonprofit categories.

---

See Table 2
---

Results summarized in Table 2 show that the key messages evaluated maintained either full or partial key message integrity more than none at all. It appears that the human services category compared to others fares better at achieving full key message integrity, while the animals category was the least successful in maintaining key message integrity. The results suggest that some nonprofits are more successful than others in maintaining their organizations’ key message integrity in the news media. The presence of key messages and the levels of variation in key message integrity thus demonstrate some usefulness in the concept as a form of public relations evaluation.

RQ2 also explored whether nonprofits are able to successfully disseminate certain types of key message more than others. Table 3 shows that the aforementioned five key message types are more successful in achieving full key message integrity than not, although to varying degrees.

---

See Table 3
---

Results summarized in Table 3 show that compared to the other key message types, social relevance achieved a higher level of full key message integrity, followed by information dissemination, raison d’être, with categorical placement and resource management trailing behind. It appears that all the key message types inevitably encounter occasions where message integrity was absent. The interview data provided further insight to the media content exploration.

Challenges

Our third research question asked about the primary challenge nonprofit organizations face in communicating key messages to various publics. The theme that emerged from the interview data was “clutter.” When asked about challenges in communicating their key messages, most key informants alluded to the “clutter” as the competition they have to cut through in order to be understood by the media. One nonprofit representative from an organization that seemed to have a very clear mission said its difficulty lies in communicating the seriousness of the disease the organization is trying to eradicate. This organization alluded to the competition for nonprofits, noting that the industry is “pretty cluttered so it’s hard to distinguish…unless someone has a passion for the cause because they're affected in some way,
or someone they love is, it's hard to break through the clutter” (personal communication, November 17, 2009).

Some organizations seem to have an easier time than others in cutting through the “clutter” to communicate the organization's mission and key messages to the public. The challenge seems to be dependent on the branding of the organization and the relative clarity of their mission and messages. For instance, one organization that has a name similar to another with a different mission called the confusion among publics and the misinformation in the media a “huge concern.” “So there's a lot of confusion about what we actually do…a lot of people have a lot of misconceptions about our competition.” She noted that this confusion sometimes causes donations to be misdirected to similar or competing organizations, “so that is a huge challenge for us to overcome” (personal communication, October 26, 2009).

Role of the Media

RQ4 explored how organizations perceive their relationship with the media and what role they think the media play in communicating the organization’s key messages. Regardless of the feeling toward the media, whether it is frustration, apathy, or satisfaction, informants agree that the media play an important role in facilitating organizations’ communication efforts. Regarding the importance of the media in communicating key messages, organizations seemed to have very different thoughts. Some blamed the media for incorrect or incomplete message transfer from organizations to publics, while others blamed the organizations for not communicating clearly enough. For example, one nonprofit communications professional who used to be a reporter stated: “You're not a clear communicator if you can't express your organization's goals and aims in a way that is coherent enough for somebody to follow them; you can't expect the media to do a good job” (personal communication, October 27, 2009).

Other nonprofits were not so sympathetic to the media. The organization that has problems with people confusing its name with competitors said that the media is very important in communicating their messages, but that “reporting quality has diminished,” which is “frustrating” (personal communication, October 26, 2009). Others noted that while it can be difficult to depend on media for clear and complete communication of their messages, misinformation is not uncommon and it cannot be controlled. Alluding to this lack of control, one communicator noted, “When we do get mentioned, everybody crosses their fingers and hopes it's going to be okay” (personal communication, November 5, 2009).

One key informant said that the news media sometimes get messages wrong, but that is simply part of the process: “Unless it's detrimental to the organization as a whole, I think it’s fine to just let it go. It's yesterday's news” (personal communication, November 3, 2009). Another underscored this sentiment. About the idea of key message integrity, he stated: “Every single media story is going to have some sort of distortion” (personal communication, November 20, 2009). He referred to these discrepancies, which seem to be a natural part of the agenda-building process as, "the nature of the beast." Responses such as these provide some insight into nonprofit communicators' thoughts on working with media to achieve key message integrity.

Regardless of their sentiment toward the media, informants almost uniformly agree that the media play an important role in the successful communication of key messages. One key informant described the media as an important agent in relaying the messages from the organization to the public and raising awareness. “They’re pretty much a third party endorsement of the organization, and I think that the public is, for the most part, influenced by the media”
This perspective is commensurate with the views of another, who emphasized that legitimacy can be reached by gaining media attention. Media coverage “gives us a legitimacy that we need...you can spend a million dollars on advertising, but it doesn’t mean anything really, when you’re featured in the media in a few respectable publications it gives a legitimacy, it gives something tangible” (personal communication, November 5, 2009). This need for organizational legitimacy strikes “at the heart of society’s rationalizations of itself and of organizations’ claim on societal resources” (Cheney, Christensen, Conrad, & Lair, 2004).

**Discussion**

While limited in scope to exploratory research on select nonprofit organizations, this study revealed some interesting findings related to the concept of key messages. First, we found five general types of key messages that can be evaluated through news coverage: information dissemination; raison d’être; categorical placement; resource management; and social relevance. These five types of key messages may reveal the parts of organizational identity that are most important or inherent to nonprofit organizations. For example, raison d’être messages generally reflect the mission of the organization, i.e., the reason it exists; what it does, and why it serves. Categorical placement messages reflect the organization's key publics, and where the organization sees itself within society and the nonprofit landscape. Information dissemination messages reflect the activities of the organization; these messages reveal how the organizations interact with donors, volunteers and other publics, without which nonprofits would not exist. Resource management messages reflect the all important financial responsibilities that allow nonprofits to maintain their tax-exempt status. Indeed, many of these messages seem to support previous research on organizational stewardship as vital to the nonprofit public relations and fundraising process (Kelly, 1998, 2001; Waters, 2008, 2009).

Nonprofit public relations practitioners should be encouraged by the findings relevant to the second research question, which showed that most of the key messages evaluated had full or partial message integrity. It is interesting that certain categories of nonprofits (e.g., human services) earned more or better message integrity than other categories (e.g., animals). This could be because of the categories or the type of work the organizations do, but it may also be due to the particular organizations included in this study and their reputations, key messages, and/or communications efforts. Future research should examine how different organizational forms vary in their use of key messages and the relative success that they achieve with the integrity of their key messages.

It is also interesting, yet not surprising, that social relevance, raison d’être and information dissemination were the types of key messages most likely to achieve full key message integrity in the news coverage. The fact that categorical placement messages did not as easily achieve full key message integrity seems to reflect much of what the nonprofit professionals said in interviews about cutting through "clutter" and confusion among publics regarding some nonprofits, especially those in the same category or with similar names or missions. Finally, the fact that resource management messages did not achieve full key message integrity as easily as other types may reflect nonprofit organizations' need to be more clear about the reporting component of the organizational stewardship process. Future research should investigate whether certain types of key messages have a higher success rate in news placement.
Moving beyond the message data, the interviews provided illuminating insights into nonprofit professionals' perceptions of the agenda-building process and their efforts to communicate key messages via the news media. Several practitioners referred to "clutter" and competition in the nonprofit industry, and the challenges they face in achieving key message integrity among media reports about various nonprofit organizations. Regardless of who is to blame for incorrect or unclear communication of key messages, practitioners recognize the importance of the media for providing legitimacy or third-party endorsement that many nonprofits need. The news media’s editing, vetting, and third-party verification may give the public more confidence in the information contained in news releases. Though many public relations practitioners dislike having their news releases edited by the media, ironically, as Cameron (1994) has noted, it is this very editing that increases the public’s trust. This sentiment further confirms the importance of the agenda-building process and provides legitimacy for the concept of key messages as a vital tool for media relations evaluation and public relations research.

Although this study provides interesting findings from exploratory research, it also has limitations. First, the study was limited to 18 organizations chosen to represent various categories of the nonprofit industry. Second, the news coverage data was limited to one month of coverage from multiple newspapers. Third, the interviews represent only eight of the 18 nonprofit organizations. Nonetheless, this study provides a basis for further exploration of the concept of key messages.

Future research should investigate the concept of key messages with communications professionals working for other industries and types of organizations. For instance, studies on for-profit corporations or government entities could reveal differences among the types of organizations related to key messages. Additionally, more quantitative content analysis of other types of media (television, for instance) and surveys, focus groups, or in-depth interviews with different types of media (as well as communications professionals from the various types of organizations) could yield additional data to help refine the concept of key messages as a useful tool for public relations practitioners and scholars alike.
References


Table 1
Distribution of News Articles by Nonprofit Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Culture, &amp; Humanities</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Services</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Benefit</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1585</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Culture, &amp; Humanities</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Full Message Integrity</td>
<td>Partial Message Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Relevance</td>
<td>38 (69%)</td>
<td>16 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Dissemination</td>
<td>15 (60%)</td>
<td>10 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raison D’être</td>
<td>110 (59%)</td>
<td>74 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categorical Placement</td>
<td>69 (58%)</td>
<td>48 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Management</td>
<td>44 (56%)</td>
<td>33 (42%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Total percentage for each type may not add up to exactly 100 due to rounding errors.
Choosing a Career in the Non-profit Sector: The Service Learning Connection

Caroline J. Chetelat*
American Urological Association (AUA)
Manager, Member Services - Recruitment & Retention 1000 Corporate Boulevard Linthicum,
MD 21090
(410) 689-3718 - work
(410) 218-3025 - cell
cwilliams@auanet.org

Margaret Algren
Department of Mass Communication and Communication Studies
Towson University
8000 York Road
Towson, MD 21252
malgren@towson.edu

Kristen Campbell Eichhorn
State University of New York at Oswego
Department of Communication Studies
18 Lanigan Hall
Oswego, NY 13126
Eichhorn@oswego.edu

* M.S. Student Submission
Literature Review

Nonprofit organizations in the U.S. are facing a management crisis. According to a recent survey, three out of four executive directors plan to leave their jobs within the next five years (Cornelius, Corvington and Ruesga, 2008) and that by 2016 the nonprofit sector will need 80,000 new senior managers each year, 40 percent more each year than is currently required (Cornelius, et al., 2008).

In 2002, a study, *Managing Public Relations in Nonprofit Organizations*, determined that more staff is needed to support the communication activities of nonprofits, and that “in the future, it is certain that the importance of public relations in nonprofits will continue to grow in the management of nonprofits” (Dyer, 2002, p. 17). With such heavy stakes riding on effective communications and strategy in a climate of public skepticism and opposing advocacies, public relations in nonprofit organizations and professional-trade associations are playing an increasingly important role in dealing with issues in the news that affect their members and publics. This is why, as the labor market matures, it is important to start understanding not only what the subsequent generations of public relations practitioners are looking for, but what they value as they begin their job searches, and if programs such as service learning courses affect their plans to pursue a nonprofit communication career.

*Definition:* Service learning, according Corbett and Kendall (1999), condensed from the National Community Service and Trust Act of 1993, and adopted by the American Association of Higher Education, is defined as: “Service learning means a method under which students learn and develop a thoughtfully organized service that: is conducted in, and meets the needs, of a community and is coordinated with an institution of higher education and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into, and enhances, the academic curriculum of the students enrolled; and includes structured time for the students to reflect on the service experience.” (p. 67). “Communication educators have recognized that service learning and communication coursework can be a good match, offering students a chance to put communication principles into practice” (Corbett, 1999, p. 66).

*Service learning and the communication discipline.* Many communication studies have pointed out the positive relationship between communication courses and service learning. In 2004, a follow-up study was conducted on the status of service learning in departments of communication. It was reported that “communication studies is a disciplinary leader in service learning because of its concern for conceptual understanding (Depew and Peters, 2001), for skill development (Soukup, 1999), for integrating theory and practice (Bachen, 1999), and for improving relationships among groups and individuals (Applegate and Morreale, 1999)” (Oster-Aaland, 2004, p. 349). Applegate and Morreale (1999) also pointed out that growth in a variety of communication skills has also been attributed to service learning. “These communication skills include interpersonal, small group, organizational, intercultural, written, public speaking, and mass communication competencies” (Oster-Aaland, 2004, p. 353).

*Communication specific projects within the nonprofit sector.* The nonprofit sector offers excellent communication projects for undergraduate students. One study by Daniel Panici and Kathryn Lasky (2002) on service learning in communication scholarship reported that:

A majority of those integrating service learning into curriculum do so by integrating service learning components into existing courses. The most common courses that integrate
Service learning include public relations courses (e.g. public relations principles, public relations cases and campaigns, public relations writing and management of public relations) and media production and design courses (e.g., television production, media style and structure, radio workshops, and television documentary). (p. 116).

Many public relations majors are required to fulfill the same curriculum prescribed by the Commission on Public Relations Education for a public relations program. Experiential learning in such communication courses offer students the opportunity to produce work that will develop their skills in ways that involve them in the community, as well as a professional environment. Therefore, specific job tasks focus on professional communication tasks such as writing, production and research, rather than administrative or clerical work, and can be displayed in student portfolios. Specific examples of tools that many nonprofits are in need of that students can provide include: backgrounders, position papers, web pages, memos, a crisis communication plan, press kit, press releases, public service announcements, pitch letters, newsletters, brochures, fliers and even a comprehensive communication plan. Grappling with real life issues such as accuracy, completeness, clarity of requirements, design usability, understandability, organization, maturity and appeal to target audiences with whom nonprofits are trying to communicate and/or service allows students to gain academic and professional insight.

If service learning projects are conducted as a group, this opportunity can also increase students’ interpersonal development. Teamwork in professional settings demands that situations be handled between individuals before approaching a supervisor. Service learning can also introduce students to professional communication work where they will need to listen to a manager’s needs, successfully work as a team, and produce professional communication materials. “A service learning project as an introductory experience to a career in communication can increase your confidence, interest, and initiative in becoming a communication professional and in using communication skills to improve society” (Melchior and Bailis, 2002, p. 201).

Service Learning and Career Plans

Included in the several studies that have documented the effects of participating in community service and service learning for college undergraduates is a career plan component. Research (e.g., Astin and Vogelgesang, 2000) has shown that in a large study of several thousand students at different colleges and universities across the U.S., service learning participation was a strong predictor of students’ preference to engage in a service-related career. The authors suggested “the students’ expression of a desire to be employed in a service-based career after graduation indicated a particularly strong finding because of the strong commitment to service that manifests” (Fenzel, 2003, p. 4). In addition, Astin and Sax (1998) found that involvement in service learning was related to increases in students’ commitment to serving the community and plans to participate in service in the future (p. 256). In Fenzel’s study (2003) on college alumni and service, 51% of the service learning alumni surveyed were employed in a service-related field (education, nonprofit, government, healthcare or social work). Fenzel’s (2003) results showed both general community service participation and service learning participation make independent contributions to the continued involvement of alumni in community service and to the
actual career choices made by alumni. For example, while alumni who, as undergraduates, participated in at least some general community service were more likely to have chosen a career in a service-related field, having participated in service learning exerted an additional effect on such a choice. (p. 10)

According to a study by Bush-Bacelis (1998), most students want to secure a job that earns more than minimum wage, and they also want to feel like they are contributing to the organization and to society. “Students who have completed a service learning project indicated that working with a nonprofit agency opened their eyes to what is really important in life” (Bush-Bacelis, 1998, p. 31). They often indicated that, while they will continue to seek a high-paying job, they might aim for a career in the nonprofit sector. Even when a student participates in a service learning activity for a minimal amount of time (8 – 10 hours), one study (Reed, 2005) found that students participating in the service learning rated themselves as more likely to choose a nonprofit service occupation at the end of the term than they had at the beginning.

The variation of the studies shows that there is not only interest in the area of service learning and that researchers and educators are discovering its importance, but also that there are deep connections between the communication discipline, service learning and nonprofits/service-related fields. General findings suggest that service learning does have an effect on career plans among various disciplines. Therefore, it is logical to investigate the likelihood that there would be a similar, if not greater effect on career plans for communication students, specifically to enter a career in nonprofits, because of the synergy that exist between the communication discipline and nonprofit organizations.

Values, Service Learning and Communication Programs: Service learning can also build a value foundation that enriches an individual’s existence. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) has a “Member Statement of Professional Values.” These values are espoused to be the fundamental beliefs that guide the behaviors of public relations practitioners and their decision-making, and are vital to the integrity of the profession as a whole. They include: advocacy, honesty, expertise, independence, loyalty and fairness. Professional standards and values demand that public relations practitioners tell the truth, that they are able to understand the problems and viewpoints of employees, co-workers, neighbors, etc. Practitioners need to take into consideration the impact of their work on internal and external publics.

According to the National Communication Association, “the service learning community affirms two cardinal values – personal responsibility for civic participation and institutional responsibility to participate with the community to improve society.” Much of the service learning research reinforces this, and focuses on the personal, social and intellectual development of young people, as well as preparing them to become involved and effective citizens. Service learning taps the public service roots of American higher education, and fulfills the need of both students and faculty to build lives of meaning and purpose.

Nevertheless, one researcher found the absence of a personal value system that places a high priority on serving others in the discussion of service learning approaches. In a paper on nonprofits and communication programs presented by Laurie Wilson of Brigham Young University at the 1997 Association for Education and Journalism in Mass
Communication conference, Wilson discussed how, “the word ‘values’ is avoided by the use of phrases such as ‘developing a sense of caring’ or ‘recognizing civic responsibility.’ [And that] we are afraid to affirm the instinctive sense of value of service in the overall quality of life” (p. 11). If education professionals are concerned with influencing students to develop a sense of civic responsibility and caring, then it is important to understand the theoretical work that examines developing, and changing, values and attitudes. Service learning is a legitimate experiential method of education that can concurrently build a value foundation.

Although values and attitudes are more easily shaped at an earlier age, service learning at the university level provides the opportunity to reinforce community service values and associate them as part of an overall quality approach to life. At this level individuals are making decisions about the directions their lives will take, and are likely to incorporate a service orientation as part of their life’s work if taught to do so through service learning opportunities and by the example of their mentors (Wilson, 1997).

Research Questions

It would seem logical that the students who have engaged in service learning and who are willing to volunteer would be more open to considering careers in nonprofit organizations. Therefore, the following research questions will be investigated:

RQ1: Does taking a service learning class have an impact on a student’s willingness to work for a nonprofit organization?
RQ2: Do students who have taken a service learning class have a more favorable opinion of career opportunities in a nonprofit organization?
RQ3: Do students who have taken a service learning class have different career values than students who have not?
RQ4: Do students who have taken a service learning class have different personal values than students who have not?
RQ5: Do students who have taken a service learning class have a different sense of giving back to society than students who did not?
RQ6: Does the quality of the service learning experience influence the likelihood of a student to consider a career in a nonprofit organization?

Methodology

Two groups of participants were used in this study: students taking public relations, communication, advertising or journalism related courses that did not offer a service learning component, and communication students taking public relations, communication, advertising or journalism related courses that did offer a service learning component. Both public and private colleges and universities in the major geographic regions of the United States were contacted to take part in the study.

Survey Development: The service learning student survey consisted of several multi-item dimensions. An amended multi-item dimensions was then developed for the non-service learning students. Statements were built using a 5-point Likert type scale. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they endorsed each statement (1=strongly disagree,
for all questions except the first question about the amount of volunteer experience they had, and any demographic information questions.

A review of the literature on service-learning resulted in the development of the following dimensions: 1) **Appreciation**: This dimension was included only on the service learning survey as it specifically asked students about their service learning experience. It measured the level of appreciation a student felt during their service learning experience. Examples include, “My supervisor thanked me for my work,” and “People at the organization treated me with respect”; 2) **Personal values**: Included on both surveys, students were asked to indicate the importance of “Helping others who are in difficulty,” or “Becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment.”; 3) **Career values**. Included on both surveys, this dimension was designed to determine what students value in a career, such as, “High income potential,” “Creativity and initiative,” or “Flexible work hours.”; 4) **Willingness to work for a nonprofit**. Included on both surveys, students were asked to indicate their agreement with statements such as, “I believe that I would find it rewarding to work for a nonprofit organization after graduation,” and for the service learning group specifically, “My service learning project has helped me consider working for a nonprofit organization as a career choice after graduation.”; 5) **Volunteerism and social responsibility**. This was included on both surveys. Statements included, “I believe individuals have a responsibility to give back to society,” and “people should donate time to nonprofit organizations that work to better society.”; 6) **Skills and learning**. Included only on the survey given to students engaged in service learning. These statements were meant to determine if students felt that their service learning experience reinforced what they learned in the classroom, while preparing for a career. Statements included, “The work I did at the nonprofit organization helped improve my career skills,” and “I improved my people skills during my service learning experience.”; 7) Service learning students were also asked two questions about their potential voluntary involvement in a future service learning class: “Knowing that service learning was a part of this class made the class more appealing to me,” and “If I had the opportunity, I would choose to take another class that had service learning in it.”

**Site Selections and Participants**

The National Communication Association (NCA) web site provided a list of colleges and universities that had communication majors and service learning programs called the “Guide to College and University Service Learning Programs.” After contacting institutions it was found that many schools were not appropriate for inclusion in the study. These reasons included: not currently offering service learning courses; programs and courses had been dropped permanently; service learning was defined differently, and therefore, conceptually the classroom experience was different from the study’s premise; refusal to participate in the survey; timing of the survey made it difficult to participate; and failure to respond to several attempts to contact. Eight schools from across the country were included in the final list, culled from the list of 384 on the NCA website some public and some private.

Chairpersons of communication-related departments were contacted at these schools and were asked to identify particular courses and instructors involved in service
learning. Only five of the eight schools were available to assist. A total of 86 hard copy surveys were mailed directly to the instructors at these four schools to administer to a total of five different class groups. Sixty-three surveys total were returned via the mail, however, two students opted out of the survey resulting in a total of 61 completed surveys. Timing of the survey, at the end of the semester, was important, so that students would be able to reflect on a complete service learning experience when completing the survey.

Faculty members at a university in the mid-Atlantic region were contacted and agreed to administer the non-service learning survey to students. A total of 98 surveys were passed out to six different class groups and 98 surveys were returned.

Analysis

Because the $t$ test statistic, which would be used to analyze the data, has been found to be robust when the number of participants in the first group is equal to the number of participants in the second group ($n_1 = n_2$) it was important to equalize the number of surveys in each group. In order to achieve this, surveys from the non-service learning group where the major was marked “undecided” were dropped, as were those who had previously taken a service learning course. A table of random numbers was used to bring the number of surveys in the non-service learning group down to 61, equaling that of the service learning group. Sixty-one undergraduate communication students were used in each group (for a total of 122).

Data Analysis

Correlations were run on each group of students. Additionally regressions and $t$ tests were used to analyze the data.

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of taking a service learning class on a student’s willingness to work for a nonprofit organization.

Statistical Analysis of Demographics: Service learning group. A total of 86 hard copy surveys were mailed, which resulted in a 73% response rate ($n = 63$). The respondent sample was predominantly female (88.5%) with 57.4% white/Caucasian and a proportional split of other racial/ethnic backgrounds; 95.1% of the respondents were senior level undergraduate students. Non-service learning group. Ninety-eight hard copy surveys were distributed to professors at Towson University to administer in their classes, which resulted in a 100% response rate ($n = 98$). After the surveys were returned, those surveys where the respondent had marked “undecided” as their major, or something other than a mass communication, public relations, advertising, journalism or another mass communication related major were excluded. Students in the non-service learning group who had previously taken a service learning course were also dropped. Because there were still an uneven number of surveys, a table of random numbers was used to bring the number of surveys between the two groups down to $n = 61$, equaling that of the service learning group. The respondent sample was predominantly female for the non-service learning group (88.5%) with 82% white/Caucasian; 39.9% of the respondents were senior level
undergraduate students, while 29.5% were both junior and sophomore level undergraduates. Complete respondent demographic information is provided in Appendix A. All majors were within the communication discipline (see Appendix B).

Findings by Research Question: “Does taking a service learning class have an impact on a student’s willingness to work for a nonprofit organization?”

$t$ tests were performed to see if the two groups differed on the scores of career choice. No significant differences were found as $t(120) = .84$, $p > .05$; mean = 2.95.

The second research question examined if students who have taken a service learning class have a more favorable opinion of career opportunities in a nonprofit organization than students who have not taken a service learning class. $t$ tests were performed to see if the two groups differed on these scores. No significant differences were found as $t(120) = .80$, $p > .05$; mean = 13.54.

Research question number three asked if students who have taken a service learning class have different career values than students who have not taken a service learning class. $t$ tests were performed to see if the two groups differed, and no significant differences were found as $t(120) = 1.07$, $p > .05$; mean = 36.80.

Research question number four investigated if students who have taken a service learning class have different personal values than students who have not taken a service learning class. $t$ tests were performed to see if the two groups differed on these scores, and a significant difference was found as $t(120) = 2.35$, $p < .020$. The service learning group scored higher (mean = 42.16).

Research question five asked if students who have taken a service learning class have a different sense of giving back to society than students who have not taken a service learning class. $t$ tests were performed to see if the two groups differed on these scores, and there was again a significant difference as $t(120) = 3.34$, $p < .001$. The service learning group scored higher (mean = 20.06).

The final research question examined if the quality of the service learning experience influenced the likelihood of a student to consider a career with a nonprofit organization. A regression was performed using the eight “appreciation” questions on the survey as the independent variables and the question about the impact of the service learning experience on their career plans after graduation. The regression was significant, $F(120) = 8.035$; $p < .01$; df = 60. (see Table 1). The ten appreciation items on the service learning survey were used to create an index of the quality of experience. This index was examined, and had a Cronbach’s alpha of .88 as shown in Table 2.
Table 1: Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting the Quality of Service Learning Experience on Career Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>8.253</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.253</td>
<td>8.035</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>60.599</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1.027</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68.852</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.345 (.057)</td>
<td>.581 (.020)</td>
<td>.346</td>
<td>2.315</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLexperience</td>
<td>.395 (.057)</td>
<td>.485 (.020)</td>
<td>.346</td>
<td>2.835</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05

Table 2: Reliability Stats on Predicting the Quality of Service Learning on Career Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.876</td>
<td>.883</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlations

In addition to the regression that was performed, correlations showed that if students felt appreciated during their service learning experience, they also felt that the service learning experience helped them improve their career skills ($r = .59^{**}, p < .01$) and people skills ($r = .48^{**}, p < .01$), and would consider taking a service learning class again ($r = .39^{**}, p < .01$). See Appendix C.

And while the primary research questions were answered above, other information was gleaned through the analysis of correlations that were performed separately on both the service learning and non-service learning group. The following tables illustrate some of the results that were produced. In the service learning group, areas such as leadership, and skills and learning, were correlated with many of the major dimensions.

Appendix D shows that in the service learning group, there is a strong correlation between several main areas: (1) interest in working for a nonprofit organization, (2) student’s having positive feelings about social responsibility, (3) student’s feelings about whether their service learning experience helped improve their skills and learning, (4) the student’s willingness to take another service learning class, and (5) two specific career values (leadership and flexible work hours). These correlations not only show support for the $t$ tests that show service learning
students place a high importance on social responsibility (research question five), but what this indicates is that although these students would not plan to go in to a career at a nonprofit after graduation, they find leadership potential and things like flexible work hours to be important. They also think that nonprofit organizations are important, serve an important purpose in society and should be supported. In addition, these correlations also indicate that if the students had a positive service learning experience that helped them improve their career skills, people skills, and class work, they would be more likely to sign up for another service learning class. This reinforces the previously mentioned correlations regarding appreciation during the service learning experience.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer potential ways to enhance teaching and learning through service learning, as well as to understand how the combined activities that are part of service learning can reinforce the principles taught in communication and public relations classes, while growing a socially responsible public relations workforce.

Service Learning and Career Plans

Research question one asked if taking a service learning class has an impact on a student’s willingness to work for a nonprofit organization. The correlations discussed as part of research question two will show that while there was no significant finding that supported the question about career plans specifically, there is a connection that exists between a positive service learning experience and a student’s openness to a career in a nonprofit organization, as well as their opinions of working for a nonprofit. As part of other research questions, additional correlations will be discussed and show that a positive service learning experience also gave students a heightened awareness of the importance of social responsibility and is connected to improving career related and personal skills.

Research question two asked if students who have taken a service learning class have a more favorable opinion of career opportunities in a nonprofit organization. Although t tests showed no significance, correlations showed that students felt that their service learning experience helped them consider working for a nonprofit if their supervisor thanked them (.292, p < .05), if they were included in important meetings (.360, p < .01), if they felt people at the organization were interested in helping them learn (.311, p < .01), and if people at the organization took time to show them how to do certain tasks. Correlations also showed that students believe they would find it rewarding to work for a nonprofit if they were thanked by their supervisor (.284, p < .05), if they were included in important meetings (.371, p < .01), if they felt that the people at the organization were interested in helping them learn (.337, p < .01) and if they felt that the people at the nonprofit appreciated the work they did (.290, p < .05). There were significant correlations that indicate students felt that their service learning experience helped them explore their career options if their supervisor gave them important tasks to do (.252, p < .05), if their supervisor praised them for their work (.365, p < .01), if their supervisor thanked them for their work (.366, p < .01), if people at the organization treated them with respect (.276, p < .05), if they were included in important meetings (.419, p < .01), if they felt people at the organization were interested in helping them learn (.440, p < .01), if people at the nonprofit took time to show them how to do certain tasks (.345, p < .01) and if they believed that people at the nonprofit appreciated the work they did (.339, p < .01).
Career Values, Personal Values and Social Responsibility

Research question three asked if students who have taken a service learning class have different career values than students who have not. The $t$ tests showed that although there was a difference between the two groups, it was not significant. Correlations were also analyzed for each group to point out where the potential similarities and differences were. For both groups, the correlation between creativity/initiative and expression of personal values was significant (.414, $p < .01$ for the service learning group and .579, $p < .01$ for the non-service learning group). The correlations between high income potential and a stable and secure future were also significant for both groups (.473, $p < .01$ for the service learning group and .571, $p < .01$ for the non-service learning group). For the service learning group, the correlation between leadership potential and flexible work hours was significant (.451, $p < .01$), but it was not for the non-service learning group. However, the correlation between leadership and high income potential was significant (.407, $p < .01$) for the non-service learning group, but it was not significant for the service learning group.

Students often choose career paths based on limited knowledge of themselves or the world of work, or often because of what their parents or friends suggest. Service learning can open new possibilities to such students, who can learn that their vocational calling in life may involve more than making money; it may involve serving others as well and working to better our society.

Research question four asked if students who have taken a service learning class have different personal values than students who have not. A significant difference was found as $t (120) = 2.35, p < .020$. Out of the 11 statements listed under the personal values dimension, service learning students placed a significantly higher level of importance on working for social justice, helping others, promoting racial understanding, understanding other countries and cultures, becoming a leader and developing a meaningful philosophy of life than non-service learning students. Non service learning students identified “becoming wealthy” as personally important.

Research question five asked if students who have taken a service learning class have a different sense of giving back to society than students who did not. A significant difference was found between the groups as $t (120) = 3.34, p < .001$. This study shows that regardless of whether a service learning student pursues a career in a nonprofit organization after graduation, he/she does see the importance of social responsibility and the value of nonprofit organizations to society more so than those who did not participate in a service learning course.

Finally, research question six examined if the quality of the service learning experience influenced the likelihood of a student to consider a career with a nonprofit organization. A regression was performed using the eight statements in the appreciation dimension on the survey as the independent variables and the question about the impact of the service learning experience on their career choice after graduation. The analysis showed that the quality of the service learning experience helped students in the service learning group consider a career in a nonprofit organization. In addition to the positive results of the regression, the correlations discussed as part of research question two in this chapter also show that students who had a positive service learning experience at a nonprofit organization and felt appreciated would be more likely to consider a career in nonprofits.

Implications for Practice
This study adds weight to the argument that participation in service learning supports many of the goals of higher education by enhancing the personal and cognitive development of undergraduate students who are planning a career in public relations. Service learning can enrich an individual’s existence and teaches students how to make a difference in the civic life of our communities by developing the right combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make a difference. Findings from previous research support the notion that service learning helps students become more involved in their communities, impacts a student’s belief in the importance of social justice and can build a value foundation. Whether students want to work for a publicly-held or privately-held for-profit company, they need to understand the importance of social responsibility. Pro bono work, volunteering or company sponsorship are just a few ways that companies recognize the long-term benefits of corporate social responsibility and demonstrate their community support.

In this study, students in each group were asked to indicate their level of agreement with five statements about giving back and the importance they place on nonprofit organizations and what they do for society. The service learning group agreed more strongly with all five statements: “I believe individuals have a responsibility to give back to society,” “I believe that nonprofit organizations work for the better good of society,” “People should donate time to nonprofit organizations that work to better society,” “People should donate money to nonprofit organizations that work to better society,” and “I believe more support is needed for nonprofit organizations that work to better society.”

And although it is not a new conclusion, the findings of this study show that social responsibility and civic engagement should continue to be reinforced as a key concept in public relations and public relations education. It also shows us that service learning should continue to be used as a teaching strategy through which the future leaders of both businesses and nonprofit organizations can realize and reinforce their responsibility to society. For schools that do not offer service learning opportunities as part of their communication program, professors may want to explore how to include service learning in an effort to reinforce the values of the public relations profession and do their part to produce socially responsible, civically engaged graduates.

**Leadership and career values.**

As reported in the introduction of this study, nonprofit organizations are currently facing a crisis. Based on the correlations found in this study, non-profit organizations should begin to actively reach out to their local colleges’ public relations department. If the school does not have a service learning program, a nonprofit could find out if any classes offer discussions on nonprofit organizations as part of curriculum and then make a presentation to that class. Public relations professors and departments that do not have a service learning program should consider incorporating service learning into their curriculum. Not only has it been proven to be a positive pedagogical tool, but demonstrates to students the significance of these organizations to society, while teaching social responsibility and civic engagement.

Additionally this study showed that service learning can enhance skills learned in the classroom that are important to students after graduation. Students felt the work they did at the nonprofit organization helped them improve their skills, if their supervisor gave them important tasks to do (.386, p < .01), praised them for their work (.562, p < .01), thanked them for their work (.496, p < .01), if the people at the organization treated them with respect (.525, p < .01), if
they were included in important meetings (.460, p < .01), if they felt the people at the organization were interested in helping them learn (.487, p < .01), if the people at the nonprofit showed them how to do certain tasks (.338, p < .01) and if they felt the nonprofit appreciated the work they did (.593, p < .01). Students felt they improved their people skills during their service learning experience if their supervisor praised them for their work (.295, p < .05), if the people at the organization treated them with respect (.442, p < .01), if they were included in important meetings (.329, p < .01), if they felt people at the organization were interested in helping them (.341, p < .01), if people at the nonprofit showed them how to do certain tasks (.424, p < .01) and if they felt the nonprofit appreciated the work they did (.485, p < .01).

There can be little doubt that service learning can provide a win/win/win experience for students, partnered organizations and the future of the non-profit sector.
Bibliography


Wilson, L. (1997, July). Non-profit service organization partnerships with university communications programs: Cultivating the values of community service and volunteerism. Paper presented at the conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Chicago, IL.
### Appendix A  Respondent Demographics – Service Learning and Non-Service Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>SL n = 61</th>
<th>SL Percent</th>
<th>NSL n = 61</th>
<th>NSL Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American/Asian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American/Chicano</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Latino</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B  Participants by Major – Service Learning and Non-Service Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>SL n = 61</th>
<th>SL Percent</th>
<th>NSL n = 61</th>
<th>NSL Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication/Mass Comm</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comm/Public Relations</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix C Correlation Table – 2-tailed Significance (N = 61)

## Appreciation During Service Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>42. I improved my career skills during my SL exp.</th>
<th>43. I improved my people skills during my SL exp.</th>
<th>44. I understood my class work more because of my SL exp.</th>
<th>45. Knowing that SL was part of the class made it more appealing.</th>
<th>46. If I had the opportunity I would choose another SL class.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Received important tasks to do at my nonprofit.</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I was praised for my work.</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I was thanked for my work.</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.35**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I was treated with respect.</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I was included in meetings.</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. People were interested in helping me learn.</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. People showed me how to do certain tasks.</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I believe people appreciated the work I did for them.</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.39**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05  
**p < .01
### Overview of Key Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>29. Flexible work hours are important.</th>
<th>30. Leadership potential is important.</th>
<th>31. SL helped me consider working for a nonprofit.</th>
<th>32. Nonprofit work could be rewarding.</th>
<th>33. Nonprofits offer personal satisfaction.</th>
<th>34. A person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>flexible work hours are important.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>leadership potential is important.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>SL helped me consider working for a nonprofit.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>nonprofit work could be rewarding.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>nonprofits offer personal satisfaction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>a person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>.45 **</td>
<td>.27 *</td>
<td>.24 **</td>
<td>.31 **</td>
<td>.35 **</td>
<td>.26 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>.33 **</td>
<td>.23 **</td>
<td>.37 **</td>
<td>.36 **</td>
<td>.41 **</td>
<td>.38 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>.79 **</td>
<td>.53 **</td>
<td>.48 **</td>
<td>.59 **</td>
<td>.51 **</td>
<td>.47 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>.68 **</td>
<td>.58 **</td>
<td>.63 **</td>
<td>.54 **</td>
<td>.57 **</td>
<td>.54 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>.50 **</td>
<td>.50 **</td>
<td>.43 **</td>
<td>.51 **</td>
<td>.49 **</td>
<td>.44 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>.56 **</td>
<td>.48 **</td>
<td>.55 **</td>
<td>.50 **</td>
<td>.46 **</td>
<td>.45 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
can be successful at a nonprofit.

<p>| | | | | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 35. SL helped me explore my career options. | .52 ** | .53 ** | .48 ** | .54 ** | .51 ** | .61 ** | .60 ** | .42 ** | .34 ** | .27 * | .20 *
<p>| | | | | | | | | | |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 36. People should give back to society. |   |   |   |   |   | .71 ** | .76 ** | .64 ** | .60 ** | .50 ** | .36 ** | .37 * | .31 ** | .34 ** | .33 ** |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 37. Nonprofits work for the good of society. |   |   |   |   |   |   | .77 ** | .78 ** | .64 ** | .43 ** | .32 * | .39 ** | .14 ** | .35 ** | .20 ** |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 38. People should donate time to nonprofits. |   |   |   |   |   |   | .75 ** | .59 ** | .43 ** | .27 * | .24 ** | .23 ** | .33 ** | .29 * |   |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 39. People should donate money to nonprofits. |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | .54 ** | .50 ** | .39 ** | .42 ** | .26 * | .35 * | .09 |   |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40. More support is needed for nonprofits.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. My SL experience will help me find a job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. SL helped improve my career skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. My SL exp improved my people skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. SL helped me understand my coursework.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Knowing SL was a part of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
class made it appealing.

46. I would choose another SL class in the future.

Note: *p < .05
**p < .01
The Kindle Crisis: Exploring Ways to Evaluate Online Crisis Communication

Timothy W. Coombs
Sherry J. Holladay
Eastern Illinois University

Abstract

This study examined 210 online reactions posted at a Kindle forum in response to an apology posted by Jeffrey Bezos, CEO of Amazon.com. Bezos apologized to Kindle owners for removing access to copies of George Orwell e-books they had purchased. The Kindle Crisis offered a unique opportunity to study stakeholder responses to crisis communication in an online environment. Reactions were examined for insights into this case and helped to develop a method for systematically evaluating online responses to crisis response strategies. Posted messages were coded for acceptance of the apology (acceptance, conditional acceptance, and rejection), purchase intention, and word-of-mouth intention. Chi-square tests and mean scores revealed a strong preference for accepting the apology and positive purchase intention. A version of the Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance was used to more precisely evaluate the magnitude of behavioral intention and word-of-mouth. Finally, analysis of rejection reaction postings provided insights into additional actions crisis managers might take and how organizations might make their crisis communication more interactive in an online environment.
Introduction

An important trend in crisis communication research is the move from a sender perspective (what the organization communicates) to a receiver/stakeholder perspective (how the organization’s messages are perceived by stakeholders). Originally, crisis communication research reflected a sender orientation by focusing only on what the organization said, with the assumption that the messages would have the desired effect on stakeholders. In contrast, the receiver/stakeholder perspective examines how stakeholders perceive the crisis and the organization’s response to the crisis (Lee, 2004). It is important to consider both perceptions of the crisis and the response because the nature of the crisis affects the appropriateness of the response (e.g., Coombs, 1995; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002, 2006). Research on Contingency Theory and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) has used experiments and surveys to map factors that shape stakeholder perceptions of the crisis situation and how they perceive and/or react to various crisis response strategies (e.g., Coombs, 2007b). Even definitions of crisis now acknowledge the importance of stakeholder perceptions (e.g., Coombs, 2007a).

Experimental research is critical to advancing the crisis communication research agendas presented by Contingency Theory and SCCT. Both theories take a social science approach to the in the hopes of building evidence-based crisis communication recommendations (Coombs, 2010; Jin & Pang, 2010). No research method is perfect and any experimental design has an artificial element necessary for controlling the threats to internal validity required to make claims of causation. Although there are numerous advantages to experiments, typically they do not allow us to get a sense of naturally occurring stakeholder reactions to crisis responses. Even if you were to survey stakeholders after a crisis, the survey adds an artificial stimulus element to the study. Would stakeholders have even thought about the crisis without the prompt from the questionnaire?

The online environment provides a potentially useful forum for exploring stakeholder reactions to crisis communication. Many people are willing to post comments about nearly anything online, and this includes their reactions to organizations’ crisis responses. The challenge is to identify an appropriate crisis, an appropriate online forum for studying responses, and a large enough sample to study. Again, these types of studies would be exploratory because people who post online are not representative of all stakeholders.

There are two unique characteristics of people who go online. First, they are the ones who are online and not all stakeholders have online access. Second, they often are active and willing to post messages about topics that interest them. We could use these characteristics to advance our understanding of people’s perceptions of and reactions to crises, as long as we acknowledge the limitations of such a sample. Examining online responses to crises that are relevant to those online would allow us to get a sense of how people in that stakeholder group of online, motivated stakeholders are perceiving the crisis and the organization’s crisis response. Practitioner interest in stakeholders who are active online has grown rapidly (e.g., How, 2009; Reputation, 2009). Such exploratory research could contribute new insights into our understanding of stakeholder perceptions that could then be examined more rigorously through research questions and hypotheses in later experiments.

Apology holds a central role in the discussion of crisis responses. The term apology is used frequently with various definitions ranging from a simple expression of concern to accepting responsibility for the crisis (Cohen, 2002; Kellerman, 2006). For this paper we are viewing apology as a clear acceptance of responsibility for the crisis. It is the acceptance of responsibility that creates legal liability and leads some crisis managers to shy away from an apology (Tyler, 1997). In July of 2009, Jeffrey Bezos, CEO of Amazon.com, apologized online at the Kindle Community discussion board to Kindle owners for removing access to copies of George Orwell e-books they had purchased. Several days earlier the company had refunded their money for the e-books (only 99 cents). Amazon.com deleted the books because the third-party seller on Amazon.com did not hold the copyright so the books legally never should have been sold.
The Kindle Crisis presents a unique opportunity to study stakeholder responses to a crisis apology. Bezos posted the message to a discussion board for Amazon.com customers in an area called the Kindle Community and one that potential customers would view as well. Within a six day period, there were over 600 responses to the apology. While we cannot claim these responses are representative of all Amazon.com stakeholders, they do provide insights into how people who participated in the Kindle Community discussion board at that time perceived the crisis, reacted to the apology, and the evaluated the effectiveness of the apology as a response. Although some may argue that the vocal online stakeholders are simply an aberration to be dismissed, the growing industry built on monitoring online conversations about organizations and their products suggests these stakeholders are harbingers to be taken seriously. We subscribe to this later view when considering online responses to crisis communication to be a valuable source of information about crisis communication effectiveness.

Review of Relevant Crisis Communication Literature

Following Sturges (1994), crisis communication can be divided into three broad categories: (1) instructing information which helps people cope physically with the crisis including an explanation of what happened; (2) adjusting information which helps people cope psychologically with a crisis; and (3) reputation repair. Corrective action involves repairing damage inflicted by the crisis and efforts to prevent a repeat of the crisis (Coombs, 2009). Efforts to prevent a repeat of the crisis address psychological concerns by reassuring stakeholders they will not be subjected to the negative event again.

Discussions of apologies are common in the crisis communication literature as part of strategic efforts to help repair damaged relationships and reputations. Three aspects of apologies have been the focus: content, source, and timing (Wooten, 2006). Literature focusing on the content of apologies often references legal advice to avoid self-incrimination (Cohen, 2002). Literature demonstrating a source focus often stresses how organizational leaders are ideal sources of apologies and that apologies are likely to be perceived as more effective when communicated by top leaders. For instance, Kellerman (2006) claims that CEO apologies are useful because they acknowledge the leader is ultimately responsible for the problem and serve an institutional purpose by seeking to restore the organization’s reputation. Kellerman also notes that apologies can serve a moral purpose when the source demonstrates genuine remorse and asks for forgiveness. However, executives often underestimate the benefits and overestimate the costs of apologizing (Kellerman, 2006). Third, the timing of apologies has been examined as a factor affecting the value of apologizing. As with all crisis responses, a response should be issued quickly because a lack of response is likely to keep the story in the media limelight. In the case of apologies, a time lapse may lead receivers to question the sincerity of the apology. But a late apology is better than no apology (Wooten, 2006).

We favor Hearit’s (2005, 2006) view of apology as conciliation. Conciliation involves mortification, where the organization accepts its guilt, accepts the criticisms it has received, and seeks forgiveness for the transgression. The apology literature suggests that the strategy need not occur in isolation and may be more effective when combined with other crisis response strategies (e.g., Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Wooten, 2006). Bradford and Garrett (1995) found that conciliation often is used in conjunction with corrective action and compensation strategies (giving people money or goods) in order to restore faith in the relationship.

Overview of the Case

Amazon.com is synonymous with online books. Amazon.com survived the dot.com bubble and has thrived as a seller of online books, magazines, newspapers, and other more traditional merchandise. Still, Amazon.com is best known for books. To strengthen its position in the digital world, Amazon.com introduced the Kindle in 2007. The Kindle provides a combination hardware and software platform for reading e-books and other digital media. Kindle 2 and Kindle DX,
improved versions of the original, were introduced in 2009. Through Amazon.com, customers can buy electronic books and read them on their Kindles. However, the e-books cannot be shared because of a Digital Rights Management (DRM) system. DRM is designed to protect copyrighted material in a digital age. Through encryption or a digital watermark, DRM prevents people from sharing a file. DRM systems have been used for music, film, and books to prevent piracy. So when an e-book is purchased for a Kindle, that book can only be used on the purchaser’s Kindle. It cannot be used on other Kindles or electronic readers nor can it be resold to another person. These characteristics make e-books different from traditional paper books.

The beauty of e-books is ease of storage and portability. Hundreds of books can be stored on a Kindle. It is much easier to carry one Kindle than a box of books. Readers can take notes and mark text on the Kindle as well. On July 16, 2009, some Kindle users found another difference from paper books. Amazon.com could delete books from its servers, thereby “erasing” books from a Kindle. Kindle is much like an iPod in that both “players” are synchronized with a larger system. For an iPod, the user syncs it with his or her computer through i-Tunes. Kindles sync with Amazon.com through the WhisperNet software. When WhisperNet is turned on, the Kindle will sync itself with Amazon.com’s server. Actually that can benefit a customer. If you buy a lot of books and have to delete some from your Kindle for space reasons, your purchases are stored on the Amazon.com server and you can restore them at a future date.

In July 2009, Amazon.com realized that a third party had sold copies of George Orwell books, including 1984, without holding the copyright. The pirated books were “illegal.” Without advance notice or explanation, Amazon.com erased those e-books from its servers and reimbursed customers who had purchased them. The absence of an explanation for the deletions led to a firestorm on the Internet and spread to the traditional media. Some customers were outraged that Amazon.com “took” their books. The deletion also meant that people lost any notes they made on the e-books when the files were unexpectedly removed from Amazon.com’s servers. People were quick to point out the irony that 1984 was among the deleted books and the similarities to the world of Orwell’s Big Brother. Blogs and tweets complained about the heavy-handed tactics. The traditional media talked of “memory holes” and employed other terms from 1984. Clearly the situation was escalating into a crisis.

Technically, Amazon.com did not go into people’s Kindles and erase e-books. The e-books were erased from the Amazon.com server and were deleted when people synced through Whispernet. If a customer had not synced, they would still have the copy. Or if the customers had saved their books to a storage device and only accessed the stored books when WhisperNet was off, they would still have the books. Amazon.com maintained the action was permissible under its Kindle user agreement. Whether the “illegal” e-books were deleted from a server or directly from a Kindle is a technical distinction that most people involved in the controversy did not care to make. The bottom line remained the same; the books disappeared from the Kindles with no warning or reasons given to the customers. The actions violated customer expectations. In July of 2009, Amazon.com faced the Kindle Crisis.

The Kindle Crisis had upset some customers, could turn off potential customers, and was reaching other stakeholders via online and traditional media. Consider how a lawsuit was filed by a teenager because the action resulted in him losing his homework -- the Kindle “ate his homework.” The Kindle Crisis was damaging Amazon.com’s reputation and posed a potential financial threat as well. Action was needed because the threat could spread and become a serious disruption for Amazon.com. The Kindle situation met the requirements to be designated a crisis and require the application of crisis management (Coombs, 2007a).

The Kindle Crisis is an example of an Internet-oriented crisis. The crisis originated and transpired predominately online. Moreover, the primary constituents (customers and potential customers) were online because Amazon.com is an online retailer and the product involves e-books. While the Internet environment does not change the fundamentals of crisis management and
communication, it does change the tools and the timing. Because “Internet time” moves faster than
traditional time, speed is even more essential. Crisis managers must utilize Internet-based
communication as part of their response. Crisis managers need to be where the crisis action is. If the
action is primarily online, crisis managers need to identify where online their messages need to
appear in order to be consumed by the relevant stakeholders. This is not a new strategy because
media selection always begins with how best to reach the intended targets with the message.

The event was breaking online July 17th, following the July 16th deletion of the books. Just
under 2,000 people were notified the books had been deleted and their purchase price refunded. The
e-mail read: “The Kindle edition books Animal Farm by George Orwell. Published by
MobileReference (mobi) & Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984) by George Orwell. Published by
MobileReference (mobi) were removed from the Kindle store and are no longer available for
purchase. When this occurred, your purchases were automatically refunded. You can still locate the
books in the Kindle store, but each has a status of not yet available. Although a rarity, publishers can
decide to pull their content from the Kindle store.” People were not happy with this vague statement
and wanted clarification. Customers sought clarification with posts on the Amazon.com discussion
boards under the folder heading “Mysterious George Orwell refunds.” These comments helped to
create the need for the crisis response.

The Kindle Crisis communication unfolded in two steps. The first step was a statement
issued by Amazon.com spokesperson, Drew Herdener: "These books were added to our catalog
using our self-service platform by a third party who did not have the rights to the books. When we
were notified of this by the rights holder, we removed the illegal copies from our systems and from
customers' devices, and refunded customers. We are changing our systems so that in the future we
will not remove books from customers' devices in these circumstances." This statement was
delivered to traditional and online media outlets on July 17th, shortly after the deletions. Although
Herdener’s statement did not appear online at the Kindle Community site, bloggers and traditional
media outlets used his statement in their discussions of the Kindle Crisis. Herdener’s statement was
primarily a form of instructing information designed to explain the actions taken by Amazon.com
(Sturges, 1994). Compensation and a suggestion of corrective action appear in the message as well.
The refund was offered (compensation) and Amazon.com promised not to repeat such remote
deletions in the future (corrective action).

The second statement was an apology from Amazon.com CEO Jeffrey Bezos on July 23, 2009, at
12:16 PM (PDT):

“This is an apology for the way we previously handled illegally sold copies of 1984 and other
novels on Kindle. Our "solution" to the problem was stupid, thoughtless, and painfully out of line
with our principles. It is wholly self-inflicted, and we deserve the criticism we've received. We
will use the scar tissue from this painful mistake to help make better decisions going forward,
one that match our mission.

With deep apology to our customers,
Jeff Bezos
Founder & CEO
Amazon.com

The message was posted to the Kindle Community discussion board on Amazon.com. The primary
users of the discussion board are Kindle users and/or those interested in learning more about Kindles.
However, anyone who joins the Amazon.com discussion boards could read and post to that area.
Given the deletions occurred several days before, it is unclear why Bezos elected to post at that time.
However, some speculated the timing of the posting was related to earnings reports that were to
appear around that time. Regardless of the reason, the response was slow in Internet time. As noted
earlier, a late apology is still better than no apology at all.

At this point we have a descriptive analysis of Kindle crisis response. Based upon existing
research, the Amazon.com communication could be judged effective. There was a progression from
instructing and adjusting information followed by reputation repair through an apology. However, such descriptive analysis is speculative in nature. We are positing that online reactions provide a source of evidence-based assessment of crisis communication effectiveness.

Examining online reactions to this online apology from Amazon.com’s CEO is an important step forward in the research on stakeholder reactions to apologies. The online environment enables us to analyze “concrete” responses/reactions that are in direct response to the crisis communication. It also allows us to explore if people are willing to voice their support or rejection of the crisis response. In addition, it permits us to examine their reasons for supporting or rejecting the crisis response. Finally, it enables us to see if those posting report the incident and the subsequent crisis response will affect their purchase intentions and word-of-mouth communication, two potentially important outcomes of the handling of the crisis.

Research Questions
The goal of this exploratory research was to examine the Kindle Community discussion board reactions to the July 23, 2009 online apology from Jeffrey Bezos. The following research questions were posed:

RQ1: How did the Kindle Community postings indicate the apology was received by this community?
RQ2: How did the Kindle Community postings indicate the apology affected the behavioral intentions of these writers?
RQ3: How did the Kindle Community postings indicate the apology affected the word-of-mouth communication intentions of these writers?
RQ4: Did reactions to the apologies differ for Kindle owners and Kindle non-owners?
RQ5: What suggestions for additional corrective action appear in the posts?

Method

Procedure
The data for this investigation were 210 relevant responses that appeared on the Kindle Community discussion board in the two-day period following Bezos’s apology on July 23 at 12:16 pm PDT. Each post was treated as the unit of analysis. The Kindle Community provides an appropriate forum for the analysis of reactions to the apology because participants are Kindle users, potential Kindle users, and/or Amazon.com customers. By posting on this site, Bezos indicated this is the intended audience for the apology and therefore responses appearing on the Kindle Community are appropriate data for our analysis. The first Kindle Community post was stamped one minute after the time stamp of Bezos’s apology post, indicating some rapid responses from the Kindle Community.

In order to be included in the data set the posting had to indicate it was a response to the apology. Examples of phrases signaling it was a response include: “That took a lot of courage,” “Thank you for posting,” “Amazing apology,” and “Actually, I don’t think an apology was needed.” Postings unrelated to the apology and postings indicating they were responses to other people’s postings also were excluded from the data set because we wanted to examine only online comments that were reactions to Bezos’s apology. Of the 210 posts, 65.7% (n = 138) followed Bezos’s apology on the 23rd and 34.3% (n = 72) appeared on the 24th.

Coding categories
Four categories of information in the responses pertained to our research questions and were coded for the analyses. First, the writers’ reactions to the apology were coded into one of three mutually exclusive response categories: (1) acceptance of the apology (e.g., the writer indicated s/he accepted the apology through comments that praised the apology or Bezos); (2) conditional acceptance of the apology (e.g., these comments took the form of “yes… but…”); posts indicate the apology was appreciated but lacking in some way. For example, the writer indicated the apology was accepted but the problem was not solved or it was nice that an apology was posted
but the books were still deleted); or (3) rejection of the apology (e.g., the writer indicated s/he rejected the apology outright or the apology was unacceptable because it was insufficient in some way). These reactions are important because they signal the extent to which message posters accepted the apology and are an indication crisis response effectiveness.

Second, message contents were coded for statements of behavioral intention about purchase behaviors. The purchase behavior categories were: (1) positive behavioral intention (e.g., will remain a loyal customer, will continue to buy e-books, intend to purchase Amazon.com products); (2) negative behavioral intention (e.g., will no longer use the Kindle or purchase e-books from Amazon.com); or (3) no purchase-related behavioral intention.

Third, word-of-mouth communication intentions were coded. The word-of-mouth communication categories included: (1) positive word-of-mouth (e.g., will communicate favorable messages to others about the Kindle, will endorse the Kindle to others, will recommend e-books from Amazon.com); (2) negative word-of-mouth (e.g., will say negative things about Amazon.com and/or about the Kindle, will tell others not to buy a Kindle or Amazon.com products); and (3) no word-of-mouth communication intention.

Fourth, postings were coded according to whether the writers included a statement about Kindle ownership. Two categories were used: (1) stated they owned a Kindle or (2) did not mention they owned a Kindle.

Fifth, messages were coded for the inclusion of suggestions for additional corrective action. The four categories were: (1) no call for corrective action; (2) a call for corrective action as a solution to this specific situation (e.g., provide free copies of the deleted Orwell books); (3) a call for corrective action to address the larger issue of the user agreement and/or terms of service that allows Amazon.com to control Kindle user’s libraries of e-books (e.g., calling for an end to Amazon.com’s ability to delete books, or to end DRM or digital rights management); and (4) a general call to replace “illegal” e-books with legal copies of the book (e.g., how “illegal e-book” problems will be handled in the future).

Two coders coded the Kindle Community postings. The coders reached 95% agreement on the first three categories, 100% agreement on the fourth category, and 88% agreement on the fifth category. Coding discrepancies were then resolved through discussion.

Results

Reactions to Bezos’s Apology

Reactions to the apology were coded as follows: 71.4% (n = 150) accepted the apology; 15.7% (n = 33) indicated conditional acceptance of the apology; and 12.9% (n = 27) rejected the apology. To address RQ1, a one-sample chi-square test was performed. Results demonstrated a significant difference in the proportions, χ²(2, N = 210) = 137.40, p < .001). The effect size was .33. Follow-up tests revealed two pairwise comparisons differed significantly. Proportions of those who “accepted” and “conditionally accepted” the apology differed significantly, χ²(1, N = 183) = 74.80, p < .001), as did those who “accepted ” and “rejected” the apology, χ²(1, N = 177) = 85.47, p < .001). The proportions of those who “rejected” and “conditionally accepted” the apology did not differ significantly, χ²(1, N = 60) = .60, p = .44.

Behavioral Intention

The analysis of the behavioral intention variable (RQ2) revealed 68.1% (n = 143) of the postings did not state purchase-related behavioral intentions toward Amazon.com. About 21.4% (n = 45) reported positive behavioral intentions while 10.5% (n = 22) reported negative behavioral intentions. A one-sample chi-square test indicated a significant difference in the proportions, χ²(2, N = 210) = 117.97, p < .001). The effect size for the test was .28. The follow-up pairwise comparisons revealed all comparisons differed significantly. The difference between proportions of positive and negative behavioral intentions differed, χ²(1, N = 67) = 7.90, p = .005), as did the comparisons between no behavioral intentions stated and positive behavioral intentions stated, χ²
(1, \(N = 188\)) = 51.08, \(p < .001\), and no behavioral intentions stated and negative behavioral intentions, \(\chi^2(1, \(N = 188\)) = 51.08, p < .001\). Overall, the majority of the reactions to the apologies did not include statements of behavioral intentions. But when statements of behavioral intention were included, twice as many reflected positive behavioral intentions than negative intentions.

**Word-of-Mouth Communication**

References to word-of-mouth communication were examined for RQ3. The distribution of the word-of-mouth communication variable revealed the great majority (96.2%, \(n = 202\)) of the reactions to the apology did not mention an intention to engage in word-of-mouth communication. Only 8 (3.8%) postings mentioned either a positive (\(n = 5\)) or negative (\(n = 3\)) word of mouth intention. Due to the small \(n\) sizes, no statistical analyses were performed.

The Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance was used to examine RQ4. The Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance was originally developed to detect bias in news media coverage but has been extended to other types of messages and has been used to evaluate organizational reputations (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). The limitation is that the data must be consistent with the tri-part structure of the formula (Hurwitz, Green, & Segal, 1976). The Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance utilizes three coding categories: (1) favorable; (2) unfavorable; and (3) neutral. When the numbers are entered into the formula, a value ranging between +1 and -1 is created. Values near zero indicate balanced treatment in the messages. The Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance is designed so that it will always: (1) increase when the frequency of favorable content increases; (2) decrease when the frequency of units of unfavorable content increases; (3) equal zero if the units of content are balanced/neutral; (4) equal zero if the numbers of units of favorable content are equal to the number of unfavorable content (Janis & Fadner, 1943). The Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance is superior to simple proportions because the resulting value: (1) provides an assessment of the strength and direction of the imbalance and (2) is standardized so that researchers can compare the scores from different data sets. For instance, the Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance for two different media channels could be compared or messages from different stakeholder groups could be compared.

For RQ4, we compared comments posted by self-identified Kindle owners (\(n = 61\)) and non-owners (\(n = 25\)). The 124 posts that did not explicitly reference Kindle ownership status were excluded. For reactions to the apology, the Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance for owners was .53 compared to a score of .09 for non-owners and .40 for the entire sample. For behavioral intention, the Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance for owners was .11 compared to -.20 for non-owners and .02 for the entire sample. Word-of-mouth communication was not analyzed given the small number of posts related to that topic. The data indicate that those who own Kindles were more accepting of the apology and indicated positive behavioral intentions. Non-Kindle owners were near the neutral point for accepting the apology and indicated they would not purchase or use a Kindle. These findings are consistent with research that demonstrates positive feelings towards an organization and/or product affect reactions to crises (e.g., Pullig, Netemeyer, & Biswas, 2006). One could argue that the non-Kindle users were irrelevant to the crisis response and that Amazon.com rightly chose to focus on retaining current users. However, the non-Kindle owners were still Amazon.com customers and many indicated they had considered buying Kindles but the crisis reinforced their choice not to buy or triggered a decision not to buy a Kindle. Although the non-Kindle owners are still relevant to the crisis response because they are potential owners, they would be a lower priority than retaining customers. Even though the Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance score was negative, there were non-Kindle owners who indicated they still intended to purchase a Kindle.

To address RQ5 we examined the posts for suggestions of additional corrective action (\(n = 88\) posts). Two dominant themes emerged when examining posts that rejected the apologies: (1) failure to provide compensation in the form of free copies of the deleted books (\(n = 8, 9\%\)) and (2) failure to prevent future remote deletions of books (\(n = 74, 84\%\)). Although those who rejected the apology
were in the minority of those posting, their comments offered insights into what else Amazon.com could be doing or be perceived to be doing to address the crisis.

**Discussion**

This exploratory study examined Kindle Community reactions to Bezos’s online apology and offers unique contributions to the literature in a number of areas. First, it focuses on the online environment and a particular group of constituents who would be especially relevant to the apology and interested in the contents of the apology. Bezos’s apology was posted online to a group that consists of either current Kindle users or Amazon.com customers, a target audience for future Kindle purchases. Their participation in the Kindle Community signals their relevance to the apology. Thus, the sample includes people who are the target audience for the apology and appropriate to the study of reactions to apologies. However, it is important to note that not all Kindle users, or potential Kindle users, participate in the Kindle Community. Hence, the sample is not truly representative of those who may have been affected by the e-book deletions.

Second, this research method enables us to examine Kindle Community participants’ direct responses to the apology. By studying unsolicited posts we see unfiltered reactions to the apology as well as spontaneous statements of purchase intention and word-of-mouth communication intention. This provides naturally occurring, rich data. The method did not require researchers to intervene in the data collection process by asking specific questions. Rather, writers posted what was important to them. This study supports the value of this research method. The direct responses provide insights into reactions to the crisis communication, behavioral intentions, and reasons for rejecting the apology.

Third, the research demonstrates the utility of the Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance for examining online responses to crisis communication. The Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance provides a way to gauge the favorable-unfavorable nature of responses in a standardized measure that allows for comparison between data sets or sub-sets of one data set. In this case we could compare the reactions of Kindle owners to non-Kindle owners to gain additional insights. This research is important because it demonstrates how data available on the Internet can be used to examine responses to crisis communication, in this case apologies.

The findings suggest that the significant majority of Kindle Community readers accepted Bezos’s apology—the crisis response was effective. A few endorsed the product and/or organization by claiming they will continue to be loyal customers and say positive things about Amazon.com. Based on these results, we can determine the apology seems to have been effective for members of this Kindle Community group who posted in response to the apology.

Acceptance of the apology is like account acceptance in the crisis response literature. It signals receivers find the response to be effective. Fuchs-Burnett (2002) notes this generally requires that the apology be accompanied by a course of action that exhibits awareness of the wrongdoing coupled with corrective action (Cohen, 2002; Fuchs-Burnett, 2002; Hearit, 2005, 2006). Herdener’s statement and Bezos’s apology indicates Amazon.com will learn from the incident, make better decisions in the future (although exactly what that will involve is unspecified), and stop the remote deletion practice. However, the dominant theme in the suggestions for additional corrective action was remote deletion. The lack of specific corrective action seems to be a weakness in Amazon.com crisis response. Interestingly, our analysis showed that within two days of posting the apology, Amazon.com should have been aware of that weakness.

The apology was a singular post during the Kindle crisis. While stakeholders publicly responded to the apology, no one from Amazon.com responded to these comments. Granted, the majority of the comments were positive but there is an undercurrent of negativity that warrants attention. Stakeholders raised two concerns that reflect the limited corrective action by Amazon.com. First, some stakeholders felt people should be given free copies of the books that were deleted. Their point was that Amazon.com made the error in allowing the sale of the e-books
yet customers were paying the price. In September of 2009, Amazon.com offered customers whose Orwell books had been deleted either a free replacement book or $30 (either a check or Amazon.com credit) (Metz, 2009). This correction occurred nearly two months after the initial incident and over a month after posts had suggested Amazon.com take the action.

Second, many posts indicated they were upset that Amazon.com still had the capability to delete copies. The vast majority of additional correction action suggestions urged Amazon.com to renounce the policy of remote removal and even create software to prevent Amazon.com from having that “power.” The discussion centered more on DRM in general rather than the Orwell deletion situation and were a minority of those posting (74 out of 210). People either did not find the Amazon.com statements about ending remote deletion reassuring or did not realize the statement had been made. Whatever the reason, DRM and remote deletion remained a concern among those posting to the discussion board. Bezos’s apology triggered feedback from stakeholders but Amazon.com was slow to process the feedback. Even if Amazon.com did not want to enter into a public debate over its policies, it could at least posted to the Kindle community that they were aware of the concerns and were considering their options. Bezos’s apology posting provided an opportunity for engagement that was underutilized. Although stakeholders responded to the apology post, Amazon.com did not publicly engage the stakeholders or acknowledge those online comments.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this work. First, it was exploratory. Second, Kindle Community members who voluntarily posted in response to Bezos’s apology provided the data. These results are based only on those who perhaps are enthusiastic enough about the organization and its products to join the Kindle community. Undoubtedly there are Kindle users who do not participate. The study did not include Amazon.com customers who are not members of the Kindle community. Although the group we studied was probably the real target audience, this method does not help us understand how those who were not Kindle Community participants would react to the apology. Kindle Community participants were, and it seems will continue to be, Amazon.com enthusiasts. They will continue their support in spite of this crisis.

Conclusion

In one respect, Bezos’s apology was a type of “preaching to the choir.” It was a safe bet that Kindle users would be sympathetic to the situation. The data analysis proves that the response was effective, particularly with Kindle owners. Overall, most posts accepted the apology and indicated positive behavioral intention. An organization must reinforce its loyal stakeholders so the Bezos apology is effective in that regard. While generally effective, we can identify a few problems with the Amazon.com crisis response based upon the postings. There was a small subset of posts, mostly non-Kindle owners, who rejected the apology and were concerned about a perceived failure to end the existence of the remote deletion technology. Amazon.com would have been aware of the concern through a cursory examination of the response postings. We should note DRM and remote deletion is complex and technical issue that would be difficult to address fully through online postings. For whatever reason, this issue of concern to a minority of the stakeholders was ignored. Perhaps more importantly, we can argue that Amazon.com did not follow through on an engagement opportunity.

Even though Bezos’s apology was posted on a discussion board that promotes interaction, the apology was not interactive. Amazon.com offered no additional messages beyond Bezos’s original apology on the discussion board. The engagement aspect of the apology post was lost. Of course, that lost opportunity may be a function of crisis communication in general. The organization’s reaction to the crisis is the priority rather than using the situation as an opportunity for engagement. It could be crises are not considered an appropriate time for engagement - but that is a larger issue for future research. While Amazon.com could have done more, it was successful in reassuring its Kindle user base and keeping them happy.
Online postings can be useful to organizations trying to gauge stakeholder reactions to crisis communication strategies. Examining online reactions may allow them to assess the effectiveness of the crisis response, identify potential weaknesses in the response, judge the effects of the response on behavioral intention, and determine if additional crisis responses are needed. Online postings provide real-time, unobtrusive feedback. The results suggest this type of data set holds promise for future investigations. It can help the organization gauge the effectiveness of its crisis response and possible weaknesses in the response by directly monitoring the reactions of target stakeholders.
References


Comparison of Perceived Journalism and Public Relations Ethics as Seen in Establishing Media Credentials for Bloggers and Citizen Journalists without Gatekeepers

CLAUDIA CUDDY
cuddy@rowan.edu

SUZANNE FITZGERALD
sparks@rowan.edu
Rowan University
Introduction

Journalists and public relations practitioners hold a somewhat adversarial relationship. Affectionately known as the “hacks” and “flacks,” the two types of professionals have provided a watchdog role for each other, perhaps creating some of the relational conflict. Public relations practitioners traditionally have relied on journalists and their editors to add credibility to news releases and information through their gatekeeping function. On the other hand, journalists have relied on public relations practitioners for access to organizational information and breaking news.

With the onset of significant blogging and citizen journalism, both sets of professionals are somewhat stymied by the lack of refereed information and credentials of new media outlets. As such, we decided to investigate the ethical dilemmas of establishing appropriate media credentials as well as verifying the accuracy of citizen journalists as self-gatekeepers.

By conducting two modified Delphi studies of journalism professors and journalists as well as public relations professors and practitioners, respondents were asked several questions in a panel format regarding journalistic and public relations ethics. The authors selected five educators and five practitioners each to ascertain their opinions regarding media credentials for bloggers and also the use of citizen journalists who don’t have the benefit of gatekeepers/editors to monitor their copy.

The Delphi method as systematic, interactive forecasting relies on a panel of independent experts. The carefully selected experts answer questionnaires in two rounds. After each round, a facilitator provides an anonymous summary of the experts’ forecasts from the previous round as well as the reasons they provided for their judgments. Then, panelists refine their answers and the group converges toward consensus through a second set of ranked responses.

The authors conducted two Delphi studies of two rounds each with 10 journalism professors/practitioners and 10 public relations professors/practitioners from several states throughout the nation. Two questions were asked in each round. The first question concerns how to best establish media credentials for bloggers. Should all bloggers be given “press” or media credentials to any news conference or special event as do their more traditional counterparts?

The second question concerns citizen journalism and “unchecked” or unedited content and its legitimacy. Should citizen journalists be accorded the same respect as their more traditional counterparts?

By asking both journalists and public relations practitioners, we looked at two sides of a transaction/relationship. Most public relations practitioners elect for journalists to receive or not to receive media credentials. On the other hand, public relations practitioners rely on gatekeepers, often editors, to evaluate the worth of a story or issue. Evaluating both sets of professionals yields an interesting set of responses to these ethical dilemmas of who is a journalist and what constitutes legitimate copy.

Literature Review

Citizen Journalists, Bloggers, and Gate Keeping

“Citizen journalism” lends itself to disparate interpretations, yet most people seem to understand its basic usage. Goode (2009) says “citizen journalism” refers to a range of web-based practices whereby “ordinary” users engage in journalistic practices. These include current affairs-based blogging, photo and video sharing, and posting eyewitness commentary on current events (p. 1288). Flynn (2006) adds that citizen journalists are people outside the traditional, mainstream news business who use blogs (their own or others’) to share newsworthy stories, provide analysis of news stories and events, and post or send newsworthy photos to mainstream media outlets (p. 216).

One of the simplest descriptions, although open to debate, comes from Gillmor (2006). He says a citizen journalist is a “passionate nonexpert using technology to make a profound contribution, and a real difference” (p. 140). Furthermore, Gillmor calls citizen-generated media “global conversation
that is growing in strength, complexity, and power. When people can express themselves, they will. When they can do so with powerful yet inexpensive tools, they take to the new-media realm quickly. When they can reach a potentially global audience, they literally can change the world” (p. xv).

The newsletter of the Educause Learning Initiative (2007) says “citizen journalism refers to a wide range of activities in which everyday people contribute information or commentary about news events.” However, says this newsletter, “the notion of citizen journalism implies a difference between simply offering one’s musings on a topic and developing a balanced story that will be genuinely useful to readers.”

The controversy of definition may stem from the belief of many professional journalists that only a trained journalist can understand the rigors and ethics involved in reporting the news (Glaser, 2006). As Glaser says, “There are many trained journalists who practice what might be considered citizen journalism by writing their own blogs or commentary online outside of the traditional journalism hierarchy.”

People have nearly limitless access to information, allowing them to exercise their own news judgment. They are increasingly serving as reporters and editors for themselves and others. Indeed, the case has been thoughtfully articulated that, “We’re all journalists now” (Fancher, p. 35).

Jeff Jarvis, in his BuzzMachine blog (2006), suggests substituting the term “networked journalism” for citizen journalism. He says, “‘Networked journalism’ takes into account the collaborative nature of journalism now: professionals and amateurs working together to get the real story, linking to each other across brands and old boundaries to share facts, questions, answers, ideas, perspectives. It recognizes the complex relationships that will make news. And it focuses on the process more than the product.”

The role of citizen journalists is blurry in the eyes of public officials, even when the citizen journalist is also a member of the so-called “professional media” (Thompson, 2009).

The filtering system for news from source to receiver has become clogged. “Gatekeeping” is the system of screening and selecting what news will be disseminated to the public. In this way, some stories pass through “the gate,” while others do not. Considerations regarding advertisers, news importance, audience interest, space, and time determine selections (DeFleur, 2010). An editor has historically served as the news gatekeeper, the person who decides what shall pass through.

Although a gatekeeper’s selections can be biased, at least criteria exist for making decisions. In the blogosphere today, where anyone reports news, specific criteria may not be controlling decisions for selection or omission. Just about anything is fair game for reporting and sharing, possibly with little responsibility for fact checking and presenting balanced news. Whether or not a gatekeeper is active, most major stories of importance do find their way into the press in one medium or another (DeFleur, 2010).

The question arises regarding not only who can monitor the filtering of news once it’s gathered, but who will allow access to those people who will produce the news: who will grant media credentials to reporters, either traditional or nontraditional. A typical example is represented by the BCS (Bowl Championship Series) (2010) in their granting of credentials:

A “press agency” for purposes of these criteria shall mean a daily or weekly publication, cable system, radio or television station or network requiring immediate news coverage…Except for television camera operators, a credential may be issued only to an authorized full-time, salaried representative of, or a representative who regularly and customarily performs services for, the agency submitting the request.

Although the BCS limits granting credentials to the traditional press, many organizations have begun looking at the issues involved with the new wave of press. Advice to freelancers typifies providing “proof” of the quality of reporting:
“When utilizing press passes to cover an event, it’s important to send a copy of all footage or published material to the PR firm or Media Relations staff who handled press access for the event. In cases where a tear sheet or CD of footage/audio is not provided, a journalist risks being blacklisted or sent a bill for the cost of tickets/admission” (Carter, 2009).

While that guideline applies to traditional journalists as well, citizen journalists who follow through and meet the request can begin to build credibility.

Another example from the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) for their 40th Annual Meeting includes credential guidelines for media, freelancers, Internet news outlets, journals, journalism professors and students, and public information officers and writers. Which category would citizen journalists fit? None, by strict adherence to the guidelines; however, if citizen journalists can produce bylined articles that would be acceptable to the SfN, perhaps they would be admitted. The description under “Internet News Outlets” reads:

“To verify credentials, SfN requires Internet news outlets to provide a printed copy of the online publication, including current publication masthead or editorial page listing your name and editorial title as well as information on audience, circulation, and funding.”

In addition, the reporter has to meet one of three other criteria listed.

Under traditional guidelines, getting a press pass may be difficult. A chain of blogs called Journalism that Matters: Citizen Journalists and Government Press Releases (2009) produced a plethora of information. Some traditional journalists who had left their formal jobs and were now blogging were sometimes denied press passes, while others continued with the privilege due to their prior association with media. Police departments, which typically grant press passes in communities, are in a quandary as to who should have access to information and who should not.

Hynes (2009), on the Journalism That Matters blog, says this issue drives us into the “difficult territory of defining who are members of the press. If we suggest that members of the press are only those that have a substantial number of local readers, and we make it more difficult for people who do not have a substantial number of local readers, then we make it more difficult for new members of the press to emerge, and gain the substantial number of readers they need to be considered members of the press. It is a sort of chicken and egg problem.”

Williams (2009) replied to the situation saying he didn’t think it was a freedom of press issue as much as freedom of information issue. He writes, “The Internet is challenging the whole idea that there is a distinct, or even semi-distinct, class of citizen called the press who should receive information and another class, the public, whose access to information should be mediated by the first group. There may be situations in which the distinction between traditional online journalists needs to be broken down, but this doesn’t seem to be one of those. This seems to be information that ought to be made available to anyone who requests it. The fact that you have a blog is irrelevant.”

Restricting public information and media credentials isn’t exclusive to police departments. Radio talk show host Bill Press was denied media credentials from the Congressional Radio-Television Galleries. To gain access, he sought an internship with U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders. He says he will continue to cover news conferences and hearings for Sanders’ staff, and then he will use the information on his morning radio program. In his words, “There is more than one way to skin a cat” (Stein, 2009).

According to Hynes (2009), the problem of media access denial may get worse before it gets better, “especially as more and more downsized traditional journalists set up their own online news sites and attempt to get access.” Several advocacy groups are examining the issue, including Citizen Media Law Project with its Online Media Legal Network, a project hosted by Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society, which offers legal aid to online journalists.
A March 2010 decision by the New York City Law Department to modernize the City’s credentialing system states: “To receive press credentials, an applicant must show that he or she has covered, in person, six news events where the City has restricted access, within the 2-year period preceding the application” (The New York Press Club, 2010). These applicants now include self-employed newspersons and other individuals who gather and report the news, such as bloggers.

The turnaround came after a 2008 lawsuit challenged the existing system. One of the attorneys in the lawsuit, Norman Siegel, commented, “Online journalists will now be considered as 21st century journalists and be treated equally to print, television and radio journalists” (The New York Press Club, 2010).

Perhaps the frustration is summed up by Doug Thompson (2010), blogging on Journalism that Matters, about the double standard that has existed. “As a reporter for our local paper, I am on the list for press releases. However, I also publish a community blog/news site and I get different treatment when dealing with them as a blogger and not a reporter. The sheriff's department will send a press release to my paper e-mail address but not to the one for my blog… the Virginia State Police earlier this year tried to exclude me from a press conference because a local sheriff's deputy told them “Oh, he's a blogger.” When I flashed my press pass from the paper they changed their tune.”

**Method**

As described earlier in the introduction, the authors selected both practitioners and educators from a variety of geographic settings, organizations and universities. Some respondents were known by the authors while others were selected randomly through Google and organization websites.

Once selected, the potential respondents received a brief introductory e-mail accompanied by the following questions:

1. Should all bloggers be given “press or media” credentials to any news conference or special event as do their more traditional counterparts?
2. Should “citizen journalists” be accorded the same respect/privileges as their more traditional counterparts who use gatekeepers/editors?

Using the Delphi method, once the authors received the first set of responses, they compiled them and sent the 20 responses asking each respondent to rank order the responses in this second and final round. After receiving the ranked responses, the authors were able to draw some conclusions regarding journalists as compared to public relations professionals as well as overall findings.

**Results**

*First Round, Public Relations*

**Question 1.** Most public relations practitioners responded with a resounding “no” to the first question in the first round. Respondents suggested that credentialing blogs and other forms of online media should be conducted as a case-by-case practice. Other comments indicated that all bloggers aren’t equal. Bloggers with demonstrated influence and reach should be defined by those hosting the news conference/event. Bloggers, like traditional media, should subject themselves to the credentialing process and meet established criteria. Bloggers who pen responsible and respected blogs should be included. Two of five practitioners believed that bloggers have become a mainstreet source of information and as such are credible and influential and thus should receive media credentials.

Public relations educators all indicated that bloggers should not necessarily be given media credentials to news conferences/events. Educators indicated that although some bloggers have
established a reputation for fair and professional treatment of information, they aren’t necessarily journalists. Educators suggested a need for adherence to journalistic standards and professional codes of conduct as well as commitment to responsible use of communication channels. Not all bloggers have the same level of training or motivation and may not be accountable to anyone. They do not have the chain of fact checkers. According to educators, bloggers can say what they want without sanction apart from legal redress—always a risky route.

**Question 2.** Regarding the second question, **public relations practitioners** agree that citizen journalists, like bloggers, do not always provide credible, unbiased information. Without training and expertise in a particular area, citizen journalists are not given much credence by PR pros. According to one practitioner, “While I respect and admire the efforts of citizen journalists in principle, what separates them from the traditional news media is the lack of a gatekeeper/editor to ensure that the coverage is accurate and objective. Until citizen journalists are held to that standard, they cannot be accorded the same respect/privileges.”

**Public relations educators** concur that citizen journalists should not be accorded the same privileges of their traditional counterparts. Educators indicated the need to accord citizen journalists privileges based on a record of responsible reporting. Because citizen journalists lack the same standards or accountability, they should not receive the same “privileges.”

**First Round: Journalism**

**Question 1.** Most **journalists** note that it depends on the blogger. Bloggers should have access if they represent credible news outlets. According to one respondent, “The point of media credentials is to allow designated, professional journalists to cover an event and write/broadcast for the public.” One journalist indicated that bloggers should receive access after the more established media outlets. Several journalists indicated the need for a code of conduct/standards for bloggers to legitimize and authenticate them.

Most **journalism professors** indicate that bloggers should not be accorded the same respect/privileges as their more traditional counterparts unless and until they meet the same criteria that traditional journalists must meet. Those who follow journalistic standards should be credentialed to then disseminate information in a wide and credible way. One educator suggests that if bloggers can show a legitimate interest in covering an event, they should be included in the interest of openness.

**Question 2.** Most **journalists** responded that respect/privileges have to be earned so that it is situational. One respondent notes that citizen journalists are not professionals who go to school to learn their profession. Another journalist notes that the public reacts differently when it knows it is dealing with an established media outlet versus the website of a citizen journalist. Not having a gatekeeper makes readers skeptical of what they read. One notes that respect should be earned.

**Journalism professors** note that those citizen journalists “who conduct their work in keeping with accepted standards and with an acknowledgment and adherence to journalism’s high ideals of accuracy, fairness and ethics,” should receive the same respect/privileges as their more traditional counterparts. One educator notes that it was an anonymous citizen journalist who captured the killing of Nada Aghan-Soltan in Iran.
Second Round: Ranked Responses, Question 1

For **Question 1**, we looked at all 17 respondents (3 of the 20 first-round respondents did not complete the second round) and determined the means of their answers. We then selected the three most highly ranked choices. These choices represent the sentiment that all bloggers should not be given media credentials. Bloggers should receive media credentials if they can demonstrate a viable audience, if they work for traditional news organizations, if they follow journalistic standards, or if they have a legitimate track record.

**All Public Relations Respondents.** Public relations practitioners and educators alike believe that all bloggers should be not given media credentials. One respondent sums it up for the public relations experts: “There should be a process in place through which bloggers and other unaffiliated or amateur journalists can be afforded media access.” Another respondent notes, “Bloggers, like traditional media, must subject themselves to the credentialing process and meet established criteria. The purpose of credentialing the media, in part, is to make sure that only credible journalists have access.”

**All Journalism Respondents.** Journalism experts were somewhat divided in their responses to the question regarding bloggers receiving media credentials. The top overall response was “yes.” This respondent indicates that the only way to keep the public informed is to keep access to all types of media open. However, this expert suggests that a system of credentials for these outlets would be wise. Other journalism experts note that bloggers should apply for media credentials. Those granting the credentials should use the same or similar criteria to grant these credentials for bloggers and traditional media outlets.

Second Round: Ranked Responses, Question 2

For **Question 2**, we again looked at all 17 experts as a composite selecting the top three highly-ranked responses. All three of the top-ranked responses used the same wording, “respect has to be earned.” The top responses indicate that citizen journalists, like bloggers, must have a track record of honest, fair reporting and should go through a filtering process.

**All Public Relations Respondents.** Regarding the second question, public relations experts indicate that citizen journalists should not be accorded the same privileges as their more traditional counterparts who use gatekeepers/editors. Their skills, experience, and agendas may not be the same as traditional journalists. Another expert notes that not having a gatekeeper can make readers skeptical of what they’re reading, contributing to a lack of respect. Experts indicated a concern with the agenda of a citizen journalist rather than a traditional journalist who is responsive to both a code of ethics and a gatekeeper.

**All Journalism Respondents.** Regarding citizen journalists, journalism experts note the same sentiment as their public relations counterparts—that respect and privileges are earned. One expert notes, “We give traditional media respect because of who they are and what they represent in our society. But for a citizen to be elevated to that status and gain respect, he/she must have a track record of honest, fair reporting.”

Interestingly, many journalism educators selected responses from public relations educators as their most highly ranked responses and vice versa. Journalists had similar, yet distinct answers from those of their public relations colleagues.
Discussion

The purpose of a Delphi study is to create consensus from a panel of experts—in this case, experts from two distinct fields. Although individual respondents differed from the “no” responses to both questions 1 and 2, the majority of public relations and journalism experts believe in the need for a credentialing system. All experts seem to concur that while bloggers and citizen journalists offer the public more access, that access must be tempered by some method of filtering the information.

In conclusion, future research should explore what type of standards/credentials could be developed and implemented so that bloggers and citizen journalists alike could receive the “privileges” of the profession. In addition, we plan to conduct in-depth interviews with major organizations like the U.S. Navy and the American Medical Association to discuss their current media credentialing practices.
References


Using Relationship Management to Encourage Ethical Practice among Cultural Strangers: A Survey of Millennial Generation Public Relations Agency Employees

Patricia A. Curtin, PhD.
Professor, SOJC Endowed Chair in Public Relations
School of Journalism & Communication
1275 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97405-1275
pcurtin@uoregon.edu
541-346-3752

Tiffany Derville Gallicano, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
School of Journalism & Communication
University of Oregon

Kelli Matthews
Managing Director
Verve Northwest Communications
Eugene, OR
Adjunct Instructor
School of Journalism & Communication
University of Oregon

Acknowledgment: This research was supported by the Public Relations Society of America Foundation and the University of Oregon.

Abstract
This study reports data from a nationwide survey of the Millennial Generation of public relations agency employees. We examined organization-employee relationships and factors affecting ethical decision making. The survey employed Hon and Grunig’s (1999) scales to measure relationship outcomes: control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction. The results of the organization-employee measures were reported in previous research, and they are only used here to illuminate the relationship between ethics and the organization-employee relationship. In addition, the survey explored the usefulness of Bowen’s (2005) practical model for ethical decision making from the perspectives of Millennial agency practitioners. Millennials were also asked to share their opinions about the helpfulness of educational training and PRSA’s code of ethics.
Introduction

Many public relations agency managers are viewing new public relations graduates with dismay, saying “the most important target is themselves in all aspects of life, including time management” (Porter Novelli, p. 10). One agency will no longer hire recent graduates, citing their lack of work ethic (Hollon, 2008). Another manager notes new hires “believe that work should be fun and that dues-paying is for suckers” (Porter Novelli, 2008, p. 2).

Generation bashing is nothing new: “Bemoaning the self-involvement of young people is a perennial adult activity” (Rosenbloom, 2008). Yet contemporary critics are singling out this new generation for particularly harsh criticism concerning its lack of work ethic. While “members of other generations were considered somewhat spoiled in their youth, [members of this group] feel an unusually strong sense of entitlement” (Alsop, 2008, p. 2F) and are “more American Idle than American Idol” (Generation Y, 2009, p. 47).

The object of criticism is the Millennial Generation, also known as Generation Y, defined here as those born in 1982 or later. Children of the Baby Boomers, they are the largest and most racially diverse generation, almost 40% minority, and the fastest growing segment of the workforce (Armour, 2005). Their managers, however, consistently express exasperation concerning Millennials’ sense of entitlement, difficulty in taking direction, self-indulgence, greed, shortsightedness, poor skills, and lack of work ethic (CareerBuilder, 2007; Harris Interactive, 2008; Randstad, 2008).

Little empirical study exists, however, concerning Millennials’ perspectives on work and ethics, particularly in public relations. To fill this gap, we received a Public Relations Society of America Foundation grant to survey Millennial agency practitioners about their relationships with their employers and their approaches to ethical decision making. Our goal is to extend theoretical development in ethics and employee-organization relations (EOR) while providing agency management with guidance on how best to train and mentor this new generation.

Generational studies can be inherently problematic in that they can promote stereotyping. Many studies, however, have demonstrated that generational demographics often translate into demonstrable psychographic differences, particularly in regard for respect for authority and workplace expectations (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; Weston, 2006). In fact, our results demonstrate both wide differences in individual decision making and strong commonalities in general expectations concerning workplace ethics, both of which provide insight into productively managing these young professionals.

Literature Review and Research Questions

A Harris Interactive (2008) poll of professionals found that Millennials expect to work hard, although their older colleagues (Gen X, Baby Boomers, the Silent Generation) don’t perceive them as hardworking, and they respect members of older generations, although that respect is not returned. In fact, according to scholars, Millennials are more accepting of rules and authority than their predecessors, Gen X, and they are more likely to exhibit trust in authority figures (Hershatter & Epstein, 2006). Millennials don’t do well with ambiguity and risk, however: “They’re very reliant on people to tell them what they need to do. . . . they’re not very good at accepting end-line responsibility” (Hershatter & Epstein, para. 17). They are also conflict averse and seek consensus (Berger & Reber, 2006; Winograd & Hais, 2008) to the extent that “Millennials are alarmed by the prospect of even apparent ethical dilemmas or conflicts” and believe conflict can be resolved through more information gathering (e.g., Chobi, 2008, para. 4). Our first research question, then, asks
How do Millennial public relations agency employees approach ethical dilemmas?

The few extant empirical studies demonstrate that Millennials distinguish between innocuous (i.e., “white lie”) types of transgressions and serious breaches of laws and ethics (Freestone & Mitchell, 2004; Pelton & True, 2004). The basis for these distinctions is a respect for authority, as noted above, which leads to deontological (rules-based) reasoning, as well as a valuing of trust, which leads to a concurrent use of utilitarian (consequence-based) reasoning. According to Bowen (2005), however, combining deontological and utilitarian reasoning is not a pragmatic alternative for public relations practitioners: Mixing paradigms “leaves no single approach as the clear or safe choice... Mixing paradigms to this extent might lead to confusion for both internal and external publics” (p. 209). Instead, she developed a “layperson-accessible practical model for ethical decision making” based on deontological Kantian principles (Bowen, 2005, p. 192), which she successfully tested on older, well-established practitioners. Other studies have found that older practitioners tend to follow rules and take deontological approaches more frequently than do younger practitioners (Coleman & Wilkins, 2009; Kim & Choi, 2003; Pratt, 1994). This study asks

Do Millennial public relations agency employees find Bowen’s model helpful for making ethical decisions?

Some researchers have criticized rational approaches, such as Bowen’s model, as privileging white male forms of ethical decision making (Cortese, 1990; Gilligan, 1982), although empirical results to date have been mixed on this point (Coleman & Wilkins, 2009). Thus, we also ask

Do Millennial public relations agency employees differ by gender or ethnicity in how helpful they find Bowen’s model?

Additionally, the public relations literature is divided on whether practitioners of any age find codes of ethics or education and training helpful in making ethical decisions (see Bowen, 2004; Curtin & Boynton, 2001; Gale & Bunton, 2005), leading us to ask

Do Millennial public relations agency employees find educational training and codes of ethics helpful for making ethical decisions?

In terms of Millennials’ expectations of others, in a nationwide survey of 37,000 undergraduates, 39% said high ethical standards were their top consideration in choosing an employer (Green, 2006). Additionally, 79% wanted to work for a company that was socially responsible, 64% said they were loyal to their employers because of the socially responsible values held, and 56% said they would not work for a socially irresponsible company (Cone, 2006). An international survey conducted two years later confirmed this trend: 88% of Millennials wanted to work for a group with matching social responsibility values, and 92% of U.S. respondents said they would leave an employer whose values didn’t match theirs (PriceWaterhouse-Coopers, 2008).

In fact, preliminary research suggests that Millennials, contrary to popular opinion, don’t tend to complain about the amount or type of work they do, they complain about a work culture that isn’t meaningful (Gerdes, 2007; Gursoy et al., 2008). In a study of public relations professionals, Blum and Tremarco (2008) found that for those respondents who had been with their firm for two years or fewer, which would include Millennials, job satisfaction was significantly correlated with the belief that “My firm has strong values—and lives them,” and job satisfaction was significantly correlated with perceived ethical dealings with employees (p. 15).

This connection between job satisfaction and ethics has also been explored through the lens of relationship management theory, particularly the subfield of organization-public relations (OPR)
known as employee-organization relations (EOR). Scholars can use EOR to evaluate relationships between employees and their organizations in terms of four relationship outcomes: satisfaction, trust, control mutuality, and commitment (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Trust is the belief that the organization is fair and competent and keeps its promises. Satisfaction is the extent to which an organization meets positive expectations. Control mutuality measures satisfaction with the amount of influence employees have in the relationship, and commitment refers to the extent to which the relationship is worth the time and effort required to maintain it.

Kim (2007) found that one antecedent of good relationship outcomes was organizational justice. Employees have an expectation of “fair behavior by management and fair organizational policies and systems” (Kim, 2007, p. 191). Additionally, practitioners believe ethical decision making should be marked by respect, trustworthiness, and openness, which are key aspects of good relations, suggesting a tight link between relationship management theory and ethical decision making (Boynton, 2006). Another study (Kang, 2009) found a link between organizational environment and ethics, but the response rate was too low to lend much validity to the findings. To further explore this link, we ask

**What is the relationship, if any, between EOR and Millennial public relations agency employees’ ethical decision making?**

**Method**

Given the lack of a sampling frame for this demographic, we recruited survey participants through a mixture of convenience and snowball sampling. PRSA sent a solicitation letter and two follow-up reminders on our behalf to people who had been members for no more than 2 years. Because this list included those outside our target group, two qualifying questions were used to ensure that respondents were Millennials and that they worked at an agency. To avoid recruiting only those participants who were the most professionalized (i.e., members of PRSA), we also solicited participants through online channels (blogs, PR Open Mic, Facebook) and encouraged participants to share the survey link with fellow Millennial agency employees.

Following a pretest, which resulted in slight changes to the wording of a few measures, we posted the survey online at SurveyMonkey. A total of 433 people accessed the survey, but 152 were not of the correct age and/or not employed by agencies, leaving 281 qualified respondents. Of those, 223 answered the majority of questions, for a completion rate of 79%. In accordance with IRB guidelines, respondents could skip questions; thus, the total number of respondents varies from question to question. Since our purpose at this point was descriptive, however, we believe that 223 respondents allowed us to paint a broad picture of Millennial agency employees and their concerns.

To address how respondents would solve ethical dilemmas, the survey included three hypothetical scenarios (Appendix A). Closed-ended choices were provided for each, with each succeeding scenario offering a narrower range of possible options. A number of measures were used to test the utility of the main components of Bowen’s (2005) model of ethical decision making (Figure 1). The first step requires respondents to exhibit autonomy: Can they act based on reason alone? Three 5-point Likert-scaled questions asked respondents to rate their autonomy in terms of perceived pressures from workplace politics, the need for job security, and personal ambition. Three questions used a 5-point scale (significantly to insignificantly) to measure the degree of impact each of these three factors had on ethical decision making. Three more questions asked whether these factors resulted in more or less ethical decision making or made no difference.
The model provides six principles or rules to be applied during the subsequent two steps of the decision-making process. Respondents were asked to rate how useful they would find each of the six on a 5-point scale ("not useful at all" to "very useful"). Respondents rated the utility of education/training and PRSA’s code of ethics using the same scale.

To measure relationship outcomes (control mutuality, trust, commitment, satisfaction), we used the 5-point Likert-scaled items from Hon and Grunig’s (1999) study (Cronbach’s α ranged from .886 to .958: The full results of the EOR portion of the survey were reported previously and are used here only to illuminate the relationship between EOR and ethical decision making). Demographic questions addressed gender, race/ethnicity, agency size, and income. Open-ended comments were sought throughout the survey to lend context to the quantitative findings.

Results

The average respondent was female, Caucasian, working at an agency with fewer than 25 employees, and making $30,000 to $39,999 per year, which approximates the demographic profile of recent public relations graduates (Table 1), providing support for our use of inferential statistics.
TABLE 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Indian or Alaskan Native</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic, Latino or Latina</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency size</td>
<td>&lt;25 employees</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 to 50 employees</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51 to 75 employees</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76 to 100 employees</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;100 employees</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>&lt;$20,000</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$20,000 to $29,999</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$30,000 to $39,999</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$40,000 to $49,999</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;$50,000</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How Millennials Approach Ethical Dilemmas

The first ethical dilemma addressed job security by having participants respond to a request from the boss to not disclose the corporate ties of a medical source when pitching a story to the media (Appendix A). Most respondents (53.5%) skirted the dilemma by saying they would refer the issue to a superior and ask for help. Just over a fourth (26.5%) agreed to the request. Another 15.0% said they would reject the assignment outright, despite running a risk of being fired; the remaining 5.0% said they would make the pitch as requested but reveal the truth if pressed.

In the second dilemma, a colleague asks for volunteers to pose as citizens at a town meeting and either ask an easy question of the agency’s client or a difficult question of the opponent. Again, most respondents (69.5%) avoided the situation by waiting for someone else to volunteer, even though it meant less chance of career advancement. A total of 22.1% would volunteer to ask either question; 8.4% would ask the easy question only. The last scenario, involving spying on an activist group, forced respondents to choose an action option. The results were almost evenly split: 52% would pose as a member of the group; just under half (48%) would decline the assignment.

Forty respondents commented on the scenarios. One said, “I honestly don’t think these sorts of things happen,” but five said they had faced similar situations at work. In terms of how problematic they found the situations, comments ranged from “I wouldn’t work at a PR agency that was using these tactics” to “These aren’t that big of a deal.” The four respondents who believed that the situations were unethical used deontological reasoning, with transparency the principle used. The eight respondents who thought the scenarios were not ethically challenging used utilitarian reasoning (e.g., “Pretending to be a volunteer is just what a reporter will do to get a good story. I don’t think anyone is really getting hurt.”). The other main theme that emerged came from six respondents who said they would pretend to be a member of the activist group if they agreed with the group’s goals; they didn’t assume that they would be asked to monitor the group precisely because it was problematic for the client.
Some respondents (14.2%, n = 33) skipped the scenarios, although 10 contributed comments. Six respondents said they didn’t answer because they didn’t believe the choices provided were sufficient. They said, “There is almost always another solution” and requested “more information” and “deeper looks.” Four said they didn’t answer because they would never face these situations; they wouldn’t work for an agency that asked such things of its employees. As one said, “Our agency holds tight to our core values. No one in my agency would ask me (or participate) in any of the above actions.” Another added, “I would not want anything to do with [these situations] and would seek solutions to stop them. If I got fired, I would take pride knowing that I did the right thing . . . although that doesn’t pay the bills.”

**Applying Bowen’s Model**

The first step of Bowen’s (2005) model requires subjects to ask themselves whether they are autonomous by considering whether they are being guided by political influence, monetary influence, or pure self-interest. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with statements such as the following: “Because of internal politics in my workplace, I make decisions about ethical issues that I am not entirely comfortable with.” Most respondents thought they were autonomous, with few believing that workplace politics, the need for job security, or personal ambition led them to make decisions about ethical issues with which they were not entirely comfortable (Table 2). Workplace politics garnered the highest level of overall agreement (15%) as an influential factor in making at least slightly uncomfortable ethical decisions, followed by the need for job security (12%) and personal ambition (7.5%).

**TABLE 2: The Relative Role of Autonomy Factors in Ethical Decision Making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workplace politics</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal ambition</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Millennials were asked to rate the impact of these autonomy factors on their ethical decision making, however, the order changed (Table 3). In response to questions such as “To what extent do internal politics at your workplace affect the ethical decisions you make?” almost a third (31.3%) thought the need to keep their jobs was a significant influence, closely followed by personal ambition (29%). Only 13.4% fingered workplace politics as having a significant impact on ethical decisions.

**TABLE 3: Degree of Impact of Autonomy Factors on Ethical Decision Making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Significant</th>
<th>Somewhat Significant</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not Too Significant</th>
<th>Not Significant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workplace politics</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal ambition</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final set of autonomy questions asked respondents whether the autonomy factors ultimately led them to make more or less ethical decisions (Table 4). In every case, most respondents said these factors didn’t play a role either way. For the remainder, however, a larger number of respondents said that workplace politics, job security, and personal ambition led them to make more
ethical decisions, rather than less ethical decisions, with personal ambition demonstrating the clearest demarcation of a positive influence on ethical decision making.

**TABLE 4: The Influence of Autonomy Factors on Ethical Decision Making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More Ethical</th>
<th>Less Ethical</th>
<th>No Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workplace politics</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal ambition</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No significant differences emerged by gender with regard to the impact of workplace politics, the need for job security, or personal ambition. Minorities, however, reported feeling a significantly greater impact from issues of job security ($t = 2.31, df = 173, p = .022$) and personal ambition ($t = 2.08, df = 171, p = .039$) than did non-minorities.

According to Bowen’s (2005) model, practitioners who can rule out political influence, monetary influence, and pure self-interest can proceed to seeing if the ethical decision they are about to make would receive an affirmative answer to six questions (practitioners who cannot rule out political influence, monetary influence, and pure self-interest should “defer the decision to another issues manager” or “use group consensus decision making” (p. 193). Based on the pretest, changes were made to the wording of four of the six questions. Bowen’s question, “Could I (we) obligate everyone else who is ever in a similar situation to do the same thing I am about to do (we are about to do)?” was slightly adjusted to “Should everyone else who is in a similar situation do the same thing I am about to do?” In addition, Bowen’s question, “Would I (we) accept this decision if I (we) were on the receiving end?” was changed to “If I were the customer (or other public), would I accept this decision?” Also, Bowen’s question, “Am I proceeding with a morally good will?” was changed to “Am I proceeding with good intentions?” Finally, Bowen’s question of “Are dignity and respect maintained?” was changed to “Will the dignity and respect I have for myself and others be compromised by this decision?” This last question would now require a negative answer, rather than an affirmative answer, to pass the test. We did not change the other two questions, which include “Have I (we) faced a similar ethical issue before?” and “Am I doing the right thing?”

Respondents found all six of the model’s questions to be useful. Responses for finding the model’s questions to be useful ranged from 60.2% for the question about having everyone in a similar situation do the same thing the practitioner is considering to 93.7% for the question about not compromising dignity and respect for self and others (Table 5). Conversely, about a fifth of the respondents did not find the test that would require everyone in a similar situation to do the same thing to be useful, and about 15% did not find putting themselves in the other’s shoes or relating to a similar situation to be useful.

**TABLE 5: Perceived Utility of Bowen’s Six Principles for Ethical Decision Making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Useful</th>
<th>Not Too Useful</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Useful</th>
<th>Very Useful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other shoes</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar situation</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right thing</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone else same thing</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good intentions</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity and respect</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>77.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although previous literature suggests men would find the model more useful than women would, women were significantly more likely than men to find the questions about doing the right thing ($t = 2.23$, $df = 168$, $p = .027$), requiring everyone in a similar situation to do the same thing ($t = 2.50$, $df = 171$, $p = .020$), and proceeding with good intentions ($t = 3.16$, $df = 171$, $p = .002$) to be helpful. No significant differences were found between minorities and non-minorities on these measures.

Correlations were run to determine if workplace politics, job security, or personal ambition were related to the perceived utility of the six tests (Table 6). Workplace politics did not significantly correlate with any of the measures. Those who believed job security was an issue they faced were significantly less likely to find treating themselves and others with dignity and respect to be useful. Personal ambition was significantly negatively correlated with the utility of four of the six principles: putting themselves in the other’s shoes, asking if they were doing the right thing, proceeding with good intentions, and not compromising their own or others’ dignity and respect.

**TABLE 6: Correlation of Autonomy Factors and Six Principles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Workplace Politics</th>
<th>Job Security</th>
<th>Personal Ambition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other shoes</td>
<td>-.087</td>
<td>-.124</td>
<td>-.151*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar situation</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>-.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right thing</td>
<td>-.116</td>
<td>-.122</td>
<td>-.238**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone else same thing</td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>-.125</td>
<td>-.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good intentions</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-.024</td>
<td>-.172*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity and respect</td>
<td>-.089</td>
<td>-.165*</td>
<td>-.248**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * correlation is significant at the .05 level;  
** correlation is significant at the .01 level.

A total of 30 respondents commented on this section of the survey, and we summarize the main themes here. Six respondents said they didn’t feel pressured at work, for example I’ve actually found (and appreciated) that my agency strongly considers my personal opinion of what is ethical. I haven’t been in many situations where I’ve needed to make decisions based on ethics, but when I was, I was pleased to see that my employer appreciated my thought process and input.

Many more respondents, however, blew the whistle on what they believed were unethical actions either committed by their employers or asked of them by their employers. Among these, six mentioned the phantom experience (i.e., inflating credentials and capabilities). One participant wrote, “Sometimes my employer makes me tell clients that I have more work experience than I really do.” Five mentioned financial misdeeds. One commented  My employer has a bad habit of taking clients to dinner and offering to pay. When we return to the office the next day, I am given the receipts and told to complete an expense report and bill the total charge to the client under “administrative costs.” This is both unethical and unprofessional, and when I voiced my concern, I was told that “all the agencies do it—it’s no big deal.” It is unfortunate that lying to clients is considered acceptable practice.

Another who mentioned financial misdeeds said, “I felt I had no choice but to comply with his requests in order to keep my job.” Five respondents mentioned lying to clients separate from the phantom experience and financial misdeeds, including “I was told to lie about feedback I’ve gotten from reporters about the level of ‘newsworthiness’ of an announcement.” Three others mentioned media relations issues, including puffery and “relentless” pitching to uninterested journalists.
One respondent was asked to astroturf for a client but simply neglected the assignment, noting, “Thankfully, my supervisor never asked about it or followed up with me on the project.” Two mentioned problems because their values did not align with those of the client in terms of environmental or corporate responsibility, leading one to conclude that “Public relations was fun in college to learn, but it’s not fun to do.”

Overall, the comments revealed a distinction between those who felt they had autonomy on the job and those who didn’t, such as the respondent who wrote:

At this point in my life, a job is a job, and in terms of ethics, I’ll do what I have to do to keep my job, my personal feelings will take a back seat. With the economy so bad, it’s just one of those things. I can’t afford to let my personal feelings complicate my career.

**The Role of Education/Training and Codes**

In terms of the utility of education/training and the PRSA code of ethics, most respondents (73.6%) rated education/training highly, while not quite half (46.7%) rated the code highly (Table 7). Only 10% didn’t find education/training useful, whereas 23.2% didn’t find the code useful.

**TABLE 7: Perceived Utility of Education/Training and PRSA Code of Ethics in Ethical Decision Making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Education/Training</th>
<th>PRSA Code of Ethics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not useful at all</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too useful</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat useful</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very useful</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fourteen respondents commented on this section. Among them, two mentioned that family values and upbringing were the major factor that guided their ethical decision making. Three mentioned teachers who had stressed ethics and inspired them to think more about ethical issues. Four mentioned they were not familiar with PRSA’s code of ethics, even though at least one of these mentioned being a PRSA member. Three stated that the code simply wasn’t helpful because it wasn’t enforced, wasn’t the focus of PRSA activities, or simply wasn’t practical: “PRSA is a nice organization but when making day-to-day decisions, but you’re not going to bring up the ‘code of ethics’ with your boss. Come on . . .”

**The Relationship between EOR and Ethical Decision Making**

To explore the relationship between relationship outcomes and ethical decision making, correlations were run between the four relationship outcome indices and the autonomy factors (workplace politics, economic necessity, personal ambition) and their impact on ethical decision making, Bowen’s (2005) six principles, and the utility of education/training and PRSA’s code of ethics. Table 8 shows a strong relationship between the autonomy factors described in Bowen’s model and Hon and Grunig’s (1999) relationship outcome indices.
Table 8: Correlation Table Showing Relationships between EOR and Autonomy Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Index</th>
<th>Workplace Politics</th>
<th>Economic Necessity</th>
<th>Personal Ambition</th>
<th>Impact of Politics</th>
<th>Impact of Economics</th>
<th>Impact of Ambition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control Mutuality</td>
<td>-.425**</td>
<td>-.414**</td>
<td>-.369**</td>
<td>.277**</td>
<td>.278**</td>
<td>.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>-.455**</td>
<td>-.476**</td>
<td>-.388**</td>
<td>.245**</td>
<td>.271**</td>
<td>.171*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>-.331**</td>
<td>-.376**</td>
<td>-.326**</td>
<td>.234**</td>
<td>.188*</td>
<td>.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>-.454**</td>
<td>-.473**</td>
<td>-.416**</td>
<td>.250**</td>
<td>.197**</td>
<td>.100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * correlation is significant at the .05 level; ** correlation is significant at the .01 level.

A lack of control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction significantly correlated with workplace politics and economic necessity but not the impact of personal ambition. A lack of trust correlated with all six of Bowen’s measures. Poor employer-employee relations, then, are tied to a felt lack of autonomy on the part of employees. Correlating Bowen’s six principles with Hon and Grunig’s outcome indices resulted in only one significant correlation: Those who believed that the dignity and respect they had for self and others was useful for ethical decision making also reported greater satisfaction ($R = .193, p = .011$). No significant were found between the utility of education/training and the code and the relationship outcomes.

A few comments addressed aspects of the interrelationship of good employer relations and ethical decision making. The most common was four respondents who mentioned problems associated with their superiors lying and with a general lack of transparency, which led to ethical stress and poorer employee-employer relations, particularly since these transgressions went unpunished. Another two mentioned financial improprieties and the relationship stresses they engendered, such as

I do not have much respect for my bosses. I feel that they are unethical people who only care about themselves or the money they are making. They do not offer guidance or good ideas. I’m disappointed with the lack of leadership in my firm.

Discussion

We address each of the research questions below, followed by a discussion of the implications for public relations theory and recommendations for public relations agency managers. One overarching observation, though, is that we learned almost as much from how these Millennial Generation agency practitioners filled out the survey and what comments they made as we did from the numerical data.

Research Questions

1. How do Millennial public relations agency employees approach ethical dilemmas? Our findings confirm that this generation is conflict averse, with the majority preferring to find a way to avoid an issue rather than take a stand. When asked to respond to specific situations, almost 15% avoided the dilemmas entirely by not responding to the survey questions; the majority of the remainder chose the option to duck the situation when this option was offered. For those who did take a stand, more followed the boss’ orders than refused any of the assignments. Contextual data suggest that respondents often used utilitarian reasoning, stating that if no one seemed to be hurt by the action, then it was permissible, a perspective that may reflect Millennials’ valuing of consensus and team work, as well as respect for and trust in authority. Those who rejected the assignments most often used deontological reasoning, relying on transparency as the guiding principle.
The contextual data also confirm the anecdotal literature (e.g., Chobi, 2008) that Millennials value information seeking as a means of avoiding confrontation and achieving consensus. Those respondents who agreed to monitor the activist group viewed the assignment as research, which was to be encouraged. Overall, information was viewed as inherently value neutral, no matter how it was collected.

2. Do Millennial public relations agency employees find Bowen’s model helpful for making ethical decisions? 
Of note is that our pretest demonstrated that the wording of some aspects of the model did not resonate with Millennials. A number of pretest subjects found Bowen’s (2005) question “Am I proceeding with morally good intentions” confusing, an issue that was resolved by removing the word “morally.” Similarly, “Could I obligate everyone else who is in a similar situation to do the same thing I am about to do?” was recast as “Should everyone else who is in a similar situation do the same thing I am about to do?” The question “Would I accept this decision if I were on the receiving end?” was changed to “If I were the customer (or other public), would I accept this decision?” Finally, the question “Are dignity and respect maintained?” was changed to “Will the dignity and respect I have for myself and others be compromised by this decision?”

The first step in the model requires subjects to determine if they are able to act autonomously, relying solely on pure reason. The majority of respondents (about 75%) believed that political, economic, and personal ambition factors were not problematic when making ethical decisions. Only about 20% of respondents agreed that if their autonomy was compromised, their ability to make ethical decisions was as well. Most Millennials, then, disagree with the basic precondition of the model. In fact, about 80% of respondents said the three autonomy factors either had no effect on their ethical decisions or caused them to make more ethical decisions rather than less, as Kantian ethics would suggest. According to the model, however, should autonomy not be possible, using group consensus decision making is a possibility, and the results of this and other studies suggest that a group consensus approach is inherently appealing to this group.

About 75% of respondents said they would find the six principles helpful when making ethical decisions, although it should be noted that we only tested attitudes. More research is needed to determine how Millennials would actually use the principles, or not, in practice. Deontological reasoning was evident in some of the comments, however, lending support to the conclusion that deontological approaches could resonate with a majority of this population, although the comments also suggest a vocal minority prefer utilitarian approaches.

3. Do Millennial public relations agency employees differ by gender or ethnicity in how helpful they find Bowen’s model? 
Contrary to expectations, women found half the principles significantly more useful than did men. More research is needed to determine why women believed the principles were more useful. Given the increasing feminization of the field, it might mean that a majority of young practitioners will find deontological reasoning quite useful, despite what the previous literature has suggested (e.g., Coleman & Wilkins, 2009; Kim & Choi, 2003, Pratt, 1994).

Minorities reported experiencing significantly more constraints on their autonomy. Given that Millennials comprise almost 40% minorities, these findings should prove cautionary because they suggest that a rapidly growing segment of the profession might find themselves in situations in which they do not feel empowered and are thus pressured to make less ethical decisions. This finding is supported by work linking Maslow’s hierarchy of needs with public relations practitioners’ ethical decision-making process in which it was found that practitioners would often feel forced to make less ethical decisions when faced with the need to meet basic or security needs (Boynton, 2001). As one respondent noted, “At this point in my life, a job is a job, and in terms of ethics, I’ll do what I have to do to keep my job . . .”

Given the relatively small number of minority respondents, all ethnicities were combined in our analyses, which is less than ideal. More work is needed to parse out differences among races and ethnicities so that researchers are not simply relying on broad dichotomies of minority versus non-minority, which obscures important distinctions between and among groups.
4. Do Millennial public relations agency employees find educational training and codes of ethics helpful for making ethical decisions? Perhaps the most significant finding of this part of the study is that most Millennials list education and training as useful, and almost half rated the PRSA code of ethics as useful. These numbers are much higher than those found in previous studies (Curtin & Boynton, 2001; Gale & Bunton, 2005) and support the literature that suggests Millennials value ongoing education and training and like clear instructions (Hershatter & Epstein, 2006).

A number commented on particular teachers or supervisors from whom they had learned how to approach ethical issues. As one respondent stated, “I am very lucky to have an immediate supervisor with an extremely strong commitment to ethical practice . . . an important step for a young professional.” The PRSA code of ethics was not quite as highly valued, and the contextual data suggest that this may stem from the perception that it lacks traction in the workplace because of lack of enforcement and difficulty of application.

5. What is the relationship, if any, between EOR and Millennial public relations agency employees’ ethical decision making? Of note is that relationship outcomes did not significantly correlate with decision making tools and principles, such as education, training, and the deontological approach of the model, except for a weak correlation between satisfaction and treating self and others with dignity and respect, which may simply be an artifact of the data. What yielded quite robust findings were the correlations between relationship outcomes and autonomy measures.

The findings provide strong evidence for the conclusion that agency employees from the Millennial Generation believe they have a significantly better relationship with their employers when they experience fewer constraints on their ethical decision-making autonomy. As one noted, “I have expressed concern on actions that I felt would be unethical and as a result convinced the team not to move forward.” Where relations were more strained, respondents often suggested that they felt ethically constrained because their employers lacked ethics.

In the cases of strained relationships, Millennials often employed a deontological stance, noting that lying was never ethical and that the “everyone is doing it” argument lacked validity. The results lend support to the trade literature that this generation desires work that is socially responsible and values driven (Cone, 2006; Porter Novelli, 2008). They want to work for a company whose values align with their own. As a couple respondents observed in relation to the ethical dilemmas, “Our agency holds tight to our core values. No one in my agency would ask me (or participate) in any of these actions,” and “I would not take a position with a company that forced me to make this choice, it’s an unfair situation to be placed in.”

Implications for Theory and Limitations

This study finds conflicting support for Bowen’s model. First, although Bowen (2005) stated the model was accessible to laypersons, she tested it on older, well-established practitioners. Our study demonstrates that the wording of some parts of the model is problematic for a Millennial audience, suggesting that its utility would be improved by further simplifying the language to sound a bit less like 18th-century philosophical principles.

Autonomy is a basic presupposition of the model, yet many Millennials did not subscribe to this assumption, believing that they could make good ethical decisions despite, or possibly even because of, potential restrictions on their autonomy. One group who did believe that restrictions on autonomy affected their ability to make good ethical decisions was minorities. Consequently, the model may systematically exclude this growing group of minority practitioners from being able to make a decision without either referring it to someone else or engaging in group consensus decision making, as advised by the model for cases in which autonomy cannot be achieved. Given the pressures of job insecurity and internal politics faced by the minority respondents in this study, referring ethical dilemmas to others might not be pragmatic, particularly when ethically questionable requests are given by supervisors. Although this is not a fault of the model, it suggests that more
work is needed to identify the structural barriers still facing minorities on the job. It should also be noted, however, that the ideas of deferring ethical decisions to others and engaging in group consensus would appeal to the Millennial Generation of practitioners. In addition, although most respondents did not agree with the model’s assumption of autonomy as necessary for ethical decision making, they could still find the subsequent stages to be of use.

In fact, Millennial practitioners rated the utility of the six principles highly, lending support to a deontological model for the industry. This study, however, did not test the model in action, that is how Millennials would apply the model in actual situations. Further research should use methods that better capture process, such as ethnography, to determine how well the model works in practice. Further research should also follow up on the finding noted above that most respondents believe they can either set aside factors that constrain their autonomy or even use these factors to positively inform their ethical decision making. This approach suggests Millennials might find a model to be more useful that is based on third-wave feminist ethics, which balances principles with individual values and context (e.g., Jagger, 1998). Such an approach combines deontological and utilitarian approaches without devolving into ethical relativism, and the contextual data suggest that at least some Millennials would find such an approach inherently more satisfying.

In terms of relationship management theory, this study lends strong support to the extant literature that posits the interrelationship of EOR and practitioner ethics. The main contribution of this study is to parse out that factors affecting ethical decision-making autonomy are strongly related to relationship outcomes, which emphasizes an environmental linkage. Practitioners who experience more autonomy feel empowered to make better ethical decisions and report higher levels of trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment with their employers. More research is needed to tease out the dimensions of this relationship, and while previous literature suggests that practitioners see a link between relationship outcomes and ethics in general (Boynton, 2006; Kim, 2007), further research is needed to determine if the strong relationship between autonomy and relationship outcomes holds across other age demographics.

**Implications for Agency Managers**

These findings suggest that contrary to popular opinion, Millennials don’t lack ethics. It might be better said that they may have different values than older generations, but many also demonstrate a strong belief in ethical decision-making processes that align with those of older practitioners. In fact, what is notable is the number who felt compelled to blow the whistle on what they saw as their employers’ lack of ethics. And most often, these ethical infringements were issues addressed by the PRSA code of ethics, such as not lying, and by a recent PRSA Board of Directors professional standard advisory (PSA-10) on phantom experience. In fact, it’s ironic that a problem managers have reported with Millennials is that of lying or embellishing experience on résumés (Dorsey, 2008); our study suggests the problem is not theirs alone. It may be more productive, then, to examine how Millennials’ values differ and how managing those differences can be profitably accomplished.

As this study confirms, Millennials respect authority, but that authority is dependent on trust and respect established through a strong sense of organizational mission and integrity. Interestingly, agency size was not a significant factor in any of our measures. Sheer size didn’t matter, but contextual data suggest that having a clear mission or values statement that was well known by employees and evidenced every day in the workplace was key to Millennials’ satisfaction. They value integrity and social responsibility, and they are quite loyal to employers who not only espouse similar values but who also live them. Loyalty suffered when Millennials believed that their agency employers lacked integrity or were willing to sacrifice values, especially when immediate supervisors were not reprimanded for ethical infractions. Their trust, then, must be earned through not just talking the talk but also walking the walk. This is a generation that has been brought up to
value transparency, and they use transparency as a principle by which to judge actions. They don’t generally tolerate creative bookkeeping on clients’ accounts or inflating facts to clients or journalists because it violates their sense of trust and expectation of transparency.

Millennials value mentoring, with many mentioning in this study the key role played by a supervisor or teacher. They value education and clear rules, such as those provided by codes. Assigning mentors to these young employees, then, as well as ensuring that any applicable code of ethics is readily available, will help them work through ethical dilemmas rather than try to simply avoid them, as this conflict-averse generation is prone to do.

More generally, Millennials value information, seeing it as key to understanding and working through issues ethical and otherwise. Information is an asset and as such is almost value neutral—how information is gathered is not as much of an issue as is the fact that information should be gathered. In fact, some have dubbed this group Generation Why because they continuously seek information and knowledge to understand the context for what they are doing. As one respondent said, “I like to know why we do things, not just how to do them.” Providing context and demonstrating how work contributes to agency goals and missions fulfills this need to know and generates more enthusiasm for work and better insight into issues that might arise. As Carolyn Cone (2006), chairman of Cone Inc., notes, “Companies need to provide hands-on cause-related experiences and then clearly and consistently share related societal impacts” with their Millennial employees.

While these suggestions sound relatively straightforward, they may be harder to implement not because of any inherent quality of the Millennials but because of inherent qualities of older generations. As one article addressing management issues notes, “Whenever someone older needs to place blame for all that goes wrong in this world, they can pin it on the newest generation. They’ve got no morals, we say, they’ve got no work ethic” (Walton, 2008, p. E1). Our expectation is that younger practitioners will simply be younger versions of ourselves and hold the same values; when they don’t, it causes us to question whether they belong in our profession as part of our group.

Giddens (1991) has termed this expectation of shared values ontological security. We expect a continuity in social relationships and the environment in which they take place. We are able to deal with the complexities of modern life, according to Giddens, precisely because we trust that our world is constant and knowable; it operates according to shared values. We take those shared values for granted, for “the ordinary is normal, the normal is natural and what is natural does not need a reason” (Van Leeuwen, paraphrasing John Stuart Mill, 2008, p. 151).

But what happens when we run into a cohort with different values? When that cohort stems from a distinctly different culture, we tend to make allowances, realizing that how things are done in Southeast Asia will likely differ from how things are done in U.S. agencies. But we have an expectation of shared values within our own environment, whether that be our schools or U.S. public relations agencies. And when our ontological security is threatened by difference, it “puts our certainties to the test about what is normal and healthy” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 148); “Thus, Millennials become the ‘other’ by which we define ourselves, which leads to the reduction of complex relations to simplified dichotomous binaries—Us versus Them—and the discourse of stereotyping” (Curtin, 2009, p. 21). What our study suggests, however, is that it is much more productive to instead think of Millennial practitioners as cultural strangers, much as we would our colleagues from Southeast Asia.

Van Leeuwen (2008) coined the term cultural strangers precisely to describe those who are part of our environment yet in other ways are not part of our shared values. By recasting Millennials in this way, we can recognize their simultaneous similarities and differences. Such recognition can be anxiety-producing, in that it threatens our notions of normalcy and tradition, yet at the same time, it can bring into play a sense of fascination and fun, of discovering different perspectives and ways of seeing the world. (Curtin, 2009, p. 21)
We would hasten to add that viewing Millennials as cultural strangers does not mean we are advocating embracing ethical relativism. While their values may be different, our study demonstrates that their sense of ethics is, in fact, in many ways quite similar to those of older practitioners. In fact, they might even demonstrate a greater allegiance to deontological thinking and to the principles underlying PRSA’s code of ethics than have their predecessors. In this sense, they may even have something to teach older practitioners, if those practitioners can learn to get beyond the natural anxiety that results when ontological security is threatened.

**Conclusion**

Our conclusions are tempered by the limitations of the study. We lack a good sampling frame for this demographic, and while our results confirm much of the previous anecdotal and scholarly literature, they should still be viewed with a bit of skepticism. We are also limited in what we can say from a survey—we didn’t interview participants to get their perspectives, nor did we observe ethical decision making in action. What we can do is paint a broad picture of how Millennials report their relations with their agency employees and their approach to ethical decision making.

We conclude that in some ways, Millennials have been maligned because their values are not necessarily those of their predecessors. In turn, our study reveals that Millennials are also having their sense of ontological security challenged through observation of their older colleagues’ actions, and many lament what they perceive as a lack of ethics in older generations. In fact, Millennials’ sense of ethics is closer to those of their superiors than either side might think, and they value good relations with their employers. What they ask, however, is that agencies have clear values statements and adhere to them, and that they allow Millennial practitioners a glimpse of the big picture so they can better do their work. From our perspective, these are suggestions that can only improve the profession.
References


Appendix A: Ethics Questions From Survey

1. Please indicate the one answer that is closest to your experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Skip this question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Because of internal politics in my workplace, I make decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about ethical issues that I am not entirely comfortable with.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of the need to keep my job, I make decisions about ethical issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that I am not entirely comfortable with.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of my desire to get ahead, I make decisions about ethical issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that I am not entirely comfortable with.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If there are any decisions you have made that you are uncomfortable with, feel free to use the space below to provide a description. Your answers are confidential.

2. Please provide the one answer that would most closely match your response to the following hypothetical situation.

A birth control pill for men has been developed. A pharmaceutical company has paid your agency to coordinate interviews with Rachel Kelly, a doctor. Rachel is receiving payment from the pharmaceutical company for her media appearances. Your boss asks you to pitch Rachel’s appearance to local media throughout the United States. Your boss says that you are not to reveal that Rachel is being sponsored by a pharmaceutical company. Your boss explains that it doesn’t matter anyway because the birth control pill has been thoroughly tested for safety, and your boss shows you ample evidence. Your boss just wants to ensure that the media treat Rachel as a health expert rather than as a corporate spokesperson. What do you do?

a. Pitch Rachel’s appearance. When media ask about the sponsor, say that you are doing this to promote Rachel’s stature as a national expert.
b. Pitch Rachel’s appearance. When the media ask about the sponsor, ignore your boss’ instructions and reveal the pharmaceutical sponsor.
c. Explain to your boss that you do not feel comfortable with this assignment. (The last person who challenged the boss was let go three months later.)
d. Refer this situation to someone about your level in your workplace. Ask for help.
e. Skip this survey question.

3. Please provide the one answer that would most closely match your response to the following hypothetical situation.

A candidate for mayor has hired your public relations agency. In a staff meeting, Caitlin from the public affairs team says that she needs two people to pose as citizens at a debate between your client and the opposing candidate for mayor. The team needs one person to ask an easy question of the candidate who is employing your agency and one person to ask a difficult question of the opposing candidate. Caitlin says that she knows the opposing candidate will be using a similar strategy against
your client. She says the agency would greatly appreciate the help, and it would be a wonderful personal favor to her as well. She did this for her boss when she was an account coordinator, which helped her get quickly promoted. What do you do?
   a. Volunteer to ask either question.
   b. Volunteer to ask the easy question of the agency’s candidate.
   c. Stay quiet and let someone else volunteer.
   d. Skip this survey question.

4. Please provide the one answer that would most closely match your response to the following hypothetical situation.

Jaime is an influential vice president in your agency, and she has national recognition. You have wanted to make a good impression on her; however, you have not had the opportunity for much interaction. She approaches you with a special assignment. Jaime asks you if you would feel comfortable monitoring an activist group by attending its meetings and pretending to be a volunteer. She says that you in no way need to accept the assignment if you don’t feel comfortable. You realize that if you turn this assignment down, she will ask your co-worker, Catherine. What do you do?
   a. Accept Jaime’s assignment.
   b. Politely decline Jaime’s assignment.
   c. Skip this survey question.

Feel free to use this comment area for the questions on this page.
(Questions 2, 3, and 4 appeared on the page.)

5. Please indicate the one best answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent do internal politics at your workplace affect the ethical decisions you make?</th>
<th>Significantly</th>
<th>Somewhat significantly</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not too much</th>
<th>Insignificantly</th>
<th>Skip this question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. If internal politics play a role, do they guide you toward more ethical or less ethical decisions
   a. More ethical
   b. Less ethical
   c. Internal politics do not play a role
   d. Skip this survey question.

7. Please indicate the one best answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent do internal politics at your workplace affect the ethical decisions you make?</th>
<th>Significantly</th>
<th>Somewhat significantly</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not too much</th>
<th>Insignificantly</th>
<th>Skip this question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
extent does the need to keep your job affect the ethical decisions you make?

8. If the need to keep your job plays a role, does this desire guide you toward more ethical or less ethical decisions?
   a. More ethical
   b. Less ethical
   c. The need to keep my job does not play a role
   d. Skip this survey question.

9. Please indicate the one best answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent does your desire to get ahead affect the ethical decisions you make?</th>
<th>Significantly</th>
<th>Somewhat significantly</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not too much</th>
<th>Insignificantly</th>
<th>Skip this question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

10. If your desire to get ahead plays a role, does this desire guide you toward more ethical or less ethical decisions?
   e. More ethical
   f. Less ethical
   g. The desire to get ahead does not play a role
   h. Skip this survey question.

11. We would like to find out how helpful the following questions are for deciding whether a decision is ethical. Please indicate how practical these questions would be for ethical decisions you might encounter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If I were the customer (or other public), would I accept this decision?</th>
<th>Not useful at all</th>
<th>Not too useful</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>Skip this question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have I faced a similar ethical decision before?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I doing the right thing?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should everyone else who is in a similar situation do the same thing I am about to do?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I proceeding with good intentions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the dignity and respect I have for myself and others be compromised by this decision?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Please indicate how helpful your education and the PRSA code of ethics are in making ethical decisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational training for making ethical decisions</th>
<th>Not useful at all</th>
<th>Not too useful</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>Skip this question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRSA’s code of ethics for making ethical decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feel free to use this comment area for the questions on this page. (Questions 11 and 12 appeared on this page.)
Who Really Cares about Ethics?
Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Purchase Intention

Melissa D. Dodd
Doctoral Student
University of Miami
Melissa.d.dodd@gmail.com
765.432.9899

Abstract
The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is intrinsically linked to both ethics and the practice of public relations. While past research has shown us that it is no longer a question as to whether or not a corporation should be socially responsible, but is a requirement of organizations by consumers, modern research has yet to conclusively show that organizational involvement in socially responsible activities positively affects financial performance. This study extended the existing body of literature related to CSR and financial performance with the inclusion of consumers’ perspectives. In combination with Ajzen and Fishbein’s Theory of Reasoned Action model for predicting behavior, this study used interviews and surveys of consumers to show that a positive relationship exists between CSR and financial performance or that consumers are more likely to purchase a product if they perceive the company that makes it as socially responsible. Additionally, comparisons were made among populations within the study based on demographic data, resulting in conclusions about those populations that are more likely to purchase products based on CSR activities. Some qualitative data was also included in order to further explicate consumers’ understanding of CSR in general as well as in regards to specific organizational involvement in socially responsible activities.
Introduction

Modern corporate social responsibility (CSR) has many names, such as corporate citizenship, corporate philanthropy, corporate giving, corporate community involvement, community relations, community affairs, community development, corporate responsibility, global citizenship and corporate social marketing. Likewise, the definition of CSR changes from researcher to researcher. For example, CSR can be generally defined as the organization incurring responsibilities to society beyond profit maximization. (Pava and Krausz 1995, 1) A more specific definition of CSR is offered by Business for Social Responsibility: “operating a business in a manner that meets or exceeds the ethical, legal, commercial, and public expectations that society has of business” (Kotler and Lee 2005, 3).

Purchase intention can most readily be understood as the likelihood that a consumer intends to purchase a product. The concept of purchase intention is rooted in psychological and behavioral studies; therefore, the theory of reasoned action works well for identifying and understanding associations between CSR and purchase intentions for this study. Armitage and Christian (2004) explained that the theory of reasoned action holds that “behavior is solely dependent on personal agency (i.e., the formation of an intention), and that control over behavior (e.g., personal resources or environmental determinants of behavior) is relatively unimportant” (p. 6). In other words, the theory of reasoned action was designed to deal with relatively simple behaviors in which the prediction of behavior required only the formation of an intention.

Although the core of CSR is concerned with responsibilities beyond profit maximization, the relationship between an organization’s involvement in socially responsible practices and its effects on the financial performance of organizations have yet to be conclusively determined. It is important to recognize the relationship between consumers’ purchase intentions and organizations’ involvement in socially responsible programs because often CSR is dismissed as merely another public relations tool. However, understanding the underlying reasons consumers make purchases in relation to CSR would contribute to the understanding of CSR as a strategic management function overall. Furthermore, the literature addressing CSR in relation to an organization’s financial performance is conflicting; however, the majority of literature recognizes that a positive association exists between CSR and organizations’ financial performance. Auger et al. (2007) posited that, “The literature on the importance of social product attributes is much less developed than the branding literature. Most research, both commercial and academic, on the importance of these attributes suggests that a growing number of consumers are taking ethical and social issues into account when purchasing products” (p. 2). To put this in numbers form, Harrison (2003) found that, “By 1996, 67 percent of adults were claiming to consider a company’s ethical stance when buying a product and 55 percent would not deal with a company if they disliked its ethics” (p. 129). More importantly, however, Harrison (2003) cited that in 2001, 80 percent of consumers surveyed in the UK believed that companies should attach at least as much importance to social responsibility as profitability when making business decisions. (p. 129) Despite evidence that consumers appear to feel so strongly about organizational involvement in socially responsible programs, Abouzeid and Weaver (1978) determined that social responsibility was not a dominant goal in any of the 220 companies they studied.

Therefore, this study sought to go straight to the source of an organization’s financial performance, the consumer. Most indicative of the need for this study, Thompson (1995) stated that, “…knowledge about marketing ethics has increased substantially over the last several years, in large part because of the many empirical studies that have been conducted. However, the majority of this research has analyzed the ethical judgments of marketing professionals—consumers’ considerations of ethical issues has been neglected” (Creyer and Ross 1997, 422).
Corporate Social Responsibility and Financial Performance

Much of the research regarding CSR has focused on the financial aspects of the topic. McGuire et al. (1988) offered an excellent overview of the dilemma encountered when examining the relationship between CSR and financial performance: “One view is that firms face a trade-off between social responsibility and their financial performance. Those holding this view propose that firms incur costs from socially responsible actions that put them at an economic disadvantage compared to other, less responsible firms” (p. 854). Thus, many organizations see involvement in socially responsible activities as a negative association.

Contrary to this viewpoint, McGuire et al. suggested the alternative view that the cost of CSR is minimal and that firms may actually benefit. Likewise, in interviews with corporate executives, Holmes (1976) found that, “A significant change in executive opinions and corporate philosophies of social responsibility has occurred over the past five-year period. Executives anticipated more positive than negative outcomes from the social efforts of their firms, and almost all executives believed that corporate reputation and goodwill would be enhanced through social endeavors” (p. 40). Therefore, CSR and financial performance was viewed by many organizations as having a positive association.

A third and final perspective suggested by McGuire et al. stated that no association could be seen between CSR and financial performance or “that the costs of socially responsible actions are significant but are offset by a reduction in other firm costs” (854). The relationship between CSR and financial performance is controversial; however, the majority of research and studies have revealed a positive association between CSR and financial performance. For example, Pava and Krausz (1995) analyzed 21 noteworthy studies related to CSR and financial performance. Their results indicated that of the 21 studies analyzed, the majority revealed a positive association, and more studies revealed that no association existed than that a negative association existed.

Numerous similar studies using content analyses methodology to show a positive association between CSR and financial performance have been done. Bragdon and Marlin (1975) conducted one of the earliest studies of CSR as it relates to financial performance studies. The researchers used measures of financial accounting in comparison to levels of pollution to show that lower levels of pollution had a positive association with better financial performance. Belkaoui (1976) also used pollution as a CSR topic of choice to show that stock returns were higher for firms that disclosed pollution control information in annual reports than for a control sample. In addition, Cotrill (1990) used Fortune magazine’s annual survey of corporate reputations in comparison to market share. Cotrill concluded a positive association existed between CSR and market share. Also, Roberts (1992) tested the stakeholder theory (McGuire et al. (1988) explained that, “Stakeholder theory suggests that a firm must satisfy not only stockholders and bondholders, but also those with less explicit, or implicit, claims” (p. 854)) using financial accounting measures to conclude, once again, that a positive association existed between CSR and financial performance. Finally, Cochran and Wood (1984) used accounting data across five years and compared it to three categories of socially responsible corporations (best, honorable mention, and worst) identified by Moskowitz (1975). Cochran and Wood concluded that with operating earnings/sales as the financial performance measure, firms with “best” rankings outperformed “honorable mention” firms, which, in turn, outperformed “worst” ranked firms. Therefore, a positive association between CSR and financial performance was recognized.

However, research and studies on the association between CSR and financial performance have not always revealed a positive association, and it is important to address some prominent studies that have concluded that the relationship between CSR and financial performance has been identified as negative or nonexistent. One of the earliest and most commonly cited studies concluding that the relationship between CSR and financial performance is negative was Vance (1975). Vance used Moskowitz’s (1975) social responsibility index in comparison to a percentage...
change in stock prices. He concluded that a negative association existed between CSR and financial performance. Vance is one of very few researchers to find a negative association.

More studies have found that no association existed at all than that a negative association existed as posited by Vance (1975). For example, Bowman and Haire (1975) performed a content analysis, examining the annual reports of 82 firms in the food processing industry between 1969 and 1973. By examining the amounts of attention given to CSR in the firms’ annual reports, they divided the firms into upper, middle, and no mention of CSR categories. Then the groups were compared to returns on equity percentages. Bowman and Haire (1975) concluded that the mean return on equity for firms in the middle group was 14.3 percent, while the mean return on equity for firms with no mention of CSR was 9.1 percent. Therefore, Bowman and Haire posited that at least a moderate amount of involvement in socially responsible programs increased financial performance. However, Bowman and Haire were unable to conclusively show that the upper-grouped firms produced a higher mean return on equity than firms in the middle group.

Likewise, Alexander and Buchholz (1978) used Moskowitz’s (1975) social responsibility index in comparison to market-based returns to conclude that “no significant relationship exists between social responsibility ratings and market-based returns” (Pava and Krausz 1995, 156), and Freedman and Jaggi (1982) examined the Council on Economic Priorities air and water pollution measures in comparison to various financial accounting measures to conclude that, “In general there is no association between pollution measures and financial performance” (Pava and Krausz 1995, 157).

While the majority of studies in CSR and financial performance have indicated a positive association, the literature clearly lacks an examination of purchase intentions in relation to CSR. It is important to recognize the relationship between consumers’ purchase intentions and organizations’ involvement in socially responsible programs in order to both fill this gap in the literature and position CSR activities as a strategic management function of public relations.

The Theory of Reasoned Action

In order to predict the importance CSR plays in consumer’s purchase intentions, it is necessary to review some basic information and the relevant research and studies in behavioral theory. Specifically, this study is foundationally based on Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1980) theory of reasoned action; however, the theory is complex and controversial. Therefore, it is important to specifically address attitudes as they are capable of predicting behavior through the theory of reasoned action.

Historically, attitudes have been assumed to be direct predictors of behavior, thus the emergence of attitude scales such as the Thurstone (1931), Likert (1932), Guttman (1944) and Osgood (1957) scales. After a review of the current literature, Allport (1935) concluded that, the social psychological study of attitudes has been one of the core areas of discipline for decades, and that, “No other term appears more frequently in the experimental and theoretical literature” (798). Moreover, Armitage and Christian (2004) posit that although attitudes serve a great number of functions, attitudes as they serve to guide people’s behavior account for the vast majority of research on the topic. (1)

LaPiere’s (1934) study is perhaps one of the first and most widely cited examples of discrepancy between attitudes and behavior. LaPiere toured the United States with a young Chinese couple during times of anti-Chinese sentiment. After visiting 250 different establishments, the group was denied service on only one occasion; however, when LaPiere subsequently wrote the same establishments, 118 of the 128 replies claimed that they would not accept members of the Chinese race as guests in their establishment. LaPiere concluded, “Only a verbal reaction to an entirely symbolic situation can be secured by the questionnaire. It may indicate what the responder would actually do when confronted with the situation symbolized in the question, but there is no assurance
that it will. [...] If social attitudes are to be conceptualized as partially integrated habit sets which will become operative under specific circumstances and lead to a particular pattern of adjustment they must, in the main, be derived from a study of humans behaving in actual social situations. They must not be imputed on the basis of questionnaire data” (236-7). Likewise, Whitlow (1935) used questionnaires to predict the behavior of approximately 600 high school students over a six-year period. Whitlow concluded, “A particular student may behave in a way directly opposed to his attitude; or with respect to a particular item of conduct the behavior of the students in the aggregate may contradict their attitude. In other words, a professed attitude is not a criterion for predicting behavior” (491).

Following LaPiere (1934) and Whitlow’s (1935) conclusions, many researchers shifted their focus and concentrated on developing attitude measurements and theoretical positions on the measurement of attitudes, as they were capable of predicting behaviors. Perhaps, the most prominent of these studies is Wicker (1969). Wicker (1969) examined 42 studies (not necessarily using the theory of reasoned action) to determine that attitudes only generally correlate with behaviors, r = .15, and that corresponding correlations rarely exceed r = .30 (Armitage and Christian 2004, 2).

Moreover, Corey (1937) assessed attitudes toward cheating using, what was considered at the time, a highly reliable measure of attitudes toward behavior. Corey (1937) found only r = .02 between attitude toward cheating and overt behavior.

Triandis (1967) concluded that, “there is a gap between those who are primarily concerned with the measurement of attitudes and those who have written theoretically about the measurement of attitudes. The former frequently rest their case after providing us with a single score, whereas the latter make a large number of theoretical distinctions but do not provide us with precise and standard procedures for measurement” (228). In so much, theoretical research was further split into examining potential moderators versus variables that might mediate the attitude-behavior relationship.

Baron and Kenney (1986) defined the difference between moderator and mediator measurements. A moderator variable “partitions a focal independent variable into subgroups that establish its domains of maximal effectiveness in regard to a given dependent variable” (1173). However, mediator refers to a variable “which represents the generative mechanism through which the focal independent variable is able to influence the dependent variable of interest” (1173). Armitage and Christian (2004) add that “as far as they are aware, only one variable has been investigated in this regard, namely, behavioral intentions” (4).

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) stated, “Behavioral intentions are regarded as a summary of the motivation required to perform a particular behavior, reflecting an individual’s decision to perform a particular behavior, reflecting an individual’s course of action, as well as an index of how hard people are willing to try and perform the behavior. The idea that behavioral intentions mediate the attitude-behavior relationship represents a significant move away from the traditional view of attitudes: rather than attitudes being related directly to behavior, attitudes only serve to direct behavior to the extent that they influence intentions” (Armitage and Christian 2004, 4-5).

Thus, deriving from Fishbein’s extension of Dulaney’s theory of propositional control (1967), researcher Martin Fishbein introduced the theory of reasoned action in 1967 (See Dulaney 1967 and Fishbein 1967). Originally termed the Fishbein model, the theory of reasoned action is based on the assumption that human beings are usually quite rational and make systematic use of information available to them with the ultimate goal being the prediction and understanding of behavior. The theory is founded on the idea that the influence of attitude on behavior is mediated through behavioral intentions, and that behavioral intention is a function of two basic determinants: attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms. A person’s attitude toward a behavior is basically the individual’s positive or negative evaluation toward performing the behavior, and subjective norms are the individual’s perception of the social pressures from relevant referents to perform (or not perform) the behavior.
Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) posit that a person’s beliefs underlie a person’s attitudes. Ajzen and Fishbein add that, “Although a person may hold a large number of beliefs about any given object, it appears that he can attend to only a relatively small number of beliefs—perhaps five to nine—at any given moment. According to our theory, these salient beliefs are the immediate determinants of the person’s attitude” (63).

Therefore, according to the theory of reasoned action, the first step in predicting behavior is elicitation of salient beliefs, and because elicitation usually produces sets of beliefs that differ from respondent to respondent, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) recommend eliciting beliefs from a representative sample of the population and selecting the most frequently elicited beliefs to create a modal set for the population, termed “modal behavioral beliefs.” Next, the strength of beliefs is measured through weighting. For example, respondents are asked to indicate the likelihood that performing the behavior will result in a given outcome. According to the theory of reasoned action “a person’s attitude toward a behavior can be predicted by multiplying their evaluation of each of the behavior’s consequences by the strength of their belief that performing the behavior will lead to that consequence and then summing the products for the total set of beliefs” (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980, 67).

Subjective norms, which beliefs are also considered to underlie, must also be measured in order to predict behavior. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) recommend assessing not only a person’s normative beliefs (a person’s belief that a specific referent thinks he should or should not perform a behavior) but also, the person’s motivation to comply with each of his or her referents or the weight of those referents.

Finally, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) state, “We have argued that with the aid of appropriate elicitation and measurement procedures, it is possible to predict a person’s attitude toward a behavior from a weighted sum of his or her beliefs about performing the behavior and to predict his or her subjective norm from a weighted sum of his normative beliefs. Since attitude toward a behavior and subjective norm are the determinants of intention, it should theoretically be possible to predict intention directly from the two sets of beliefs” (76). However, in order to predict behavior, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) argue that certain conditions must be met: the set of behavioral beliefs must predict the attitude toward the behavior, the set of normative beliefs are predictive of the subjective norm and the attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm must be shown to predict the intention. (76)

Additionally, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) contend that in order for behaviors to be predicted using the theory of reasoned action, each component above must correlate specifically in terms of target, context, time and action. For example, “an individual’s attitude toward exercising (action), to get fit (target) in the gym (context) in the next week (time) should be more closely related to a measure of behavior designed to tap exercising to get fit in the gym in the preceding week, than (say) an index of fitness” (Armitage and Christian 2004, 3).

In order to better understand the theory of reasoned action, the following example is offered by Armitage and Christian (2004): “Consider the following example of Gary’s intention to use a condom. Gary’s mother might want her son to use a condom every time he has sex with a new partner, but Gary is only likely to do so to the extent that he is motivated to comply with his mother (very little in this case). Similarly, Gary’s latest partner also wants Gary to use a condom everytime he has sex with her; in this case, however, Gary is very motivated to comply with his new partner and therefore is more likely to intend to use a condom. Within the theory of reasoned action, both behavioral and normative beliefs are summed to produce global measures of attitude and subjective norm, respectively” (5-6).

Since the theory’s conception in 1967, many researchers have found that it has adequate predictive utility. Bagozzi (1981) conducted a field study of blood donors examining hypotheses within leading attitude-behavior theories, including the theory of reasoned action. Bagozzi (1981) concluded that behaviors under an individual’s complete volitional control showed that attitude
influences behavior only through its impact on intentions, as described by Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1980) theory of reasoned action. Moreover, Bagozzi (1981) found support for measuring the attitude-behavior relationship in regard to Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1980) correlation of target, context, action and time. Bagozzi (1981) states, “The present study also demonstrates the sensitivity of the intentions-behavior and attitude-intentions relationships to specificity considerations. With respect to the former, the relations are strongest when the corresponding variables are measured at comparable levels of specificity with regard to action, target, context and time. With respect to the latter, the relationship is strongest when the respondent is allowed to adjust intention according to the degree of behavioral commitment he or she is willing to make. It appears that attitudes and intentions can correspond in terms of the consequences of the act as well as in terms of the action, target, context and time elements” (625).

Like Bagozzi (1981), Burnkrant and Page (1982) assessed the determinants of the intention to donate blood. Based on Bagozzi’s (1981) findings, Burnkrant and Page assumed that intention would fully mediate intention, resulting in behavior. Burnkrant and Page concluded that, “Our results provide strong support for the validity of a two-component (i.e. attitudinal and normative) conceptualization of the determinants of behavioral intention” (560). Moreover, Schlegel et al. (1977) extended the generalizability of the theory of reasoned action through measuring alcohol drinking by adolescents. Schlegel et al. concluded that their research had shown the theory of reasoned action to be sufficiently strong and “compared favorably with results obtained from applications of the [theory] to other behaviors” (428).

Furthermore, Davidson and Jaccard (1975) tested the theory of reasoned action using phone interviews of women on the topic of family planning. The researchers attempted to show the predictivity and generalizability of the theory. Davidson and Jaccard concluded that, to the degree that attitudinal and normative components predict behavioral intention, the theory provides highly active predictions of family planning intentions. (1077) Also, the researchers found that a high correlation was present between individuals’ attitude toward performing a given behavior and beliefs about the consequences of performing that behavior. (1079) And finally, Davidson and Jaccard showed support for the theory of reasoned action as correlations are stronger when the traditional attitude toward the object is replaced with attitude toward the act in predicting specific behaviors (as suggested by the theory of reasoned action). (1079) Davidson and Jaccard performed a two-year study of family planning behavior again in 1979. Again, Davison and Jaccard (1979) found predictive validity of the theory and concluded “Even prior to the adjustments made for attitude change and the sequence of events, both intention and the attitudinal and normative components measured at the first interview provided reasonable correlations with behavior during the subsequent 2 years (the lowest validity coefficient was .508)” (1374).

Possibly, the most overwhelming evidence of the theory’s predictive utility is Sheppard et al. (1988). Sheppard et al. (1988) conducted two meta-analyses of past studies utilizing the Ajzen and Fishbein model. Sheppard et al. (1988) found that, “Based on the data […], a frequency-weighted average correlation for the intention-behavior relationship was .53. This correlation is based on 87 separate studies with a total sample of 11,566 and is significant at the 0.01 level. Based on the data […], a frequency-weighted average correlation for the attitude-subjective norm-intention relationship was .66. This correlation is based on 87 separate studies with a total sample of 12,624 and is significant at the 0.001 level. These results provide strong support for the overall predictive utility of the Fishbein and Ajzen model” (336).

Perhaps most closely linked to the study at hand, the theory of reasoned action has been proven effective in marketing literature. In applying the theory to predicting and understanding consumer behavior, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) demonstrated the theory’s ability to predict purchase intentions by asking 37 college students to indicate their intentions to perform two or three different behaviors in reference to five brands in three product types (automobile, toothpaste and beer). While Ajzen and Fishbein stressed correspondence between measures, they concluded that “there is little
doubt that buying intentions can be accurately predicted from corresponding measures of attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm. With respect to the products and behaviors considered in this study, the attitude toward the behavior seemed to be the more important determinant of buying intention” (169).

In a review of the relevant marketing literature, Ryan and Bonfield (1975) cited that the theory had several shortcomings and recommended a larger body of marketing research using the theory; however, they also concluded that evidence across studies indicate that the theory has “value in predicting and explaining variance in intentions and behaviors over a wide range of purchase intentions and purchase behavior” (125). Ryan and Bonfield (1975) found that across the relevant literature, the average correlation between behavioral intention and behavior was .44. (125) Moreover, it is important to note, as Ryan and Bonfield (1975) have, that much of the marketing research based on the theory of reasoned action has not actually measured behavior, rather much of the research, both positive and negative, has measured the relationship between variables in the theory of reasoned action.

Wilson et al. (1975) applied the theory of reasoned action to a study of adult housewives answering questionnaires and then observing their behavior when selecting between six different brands of toothpaste, which they were given at no-charge for their participation in the study, from a display. Wilson et al. concluded that the theory of reasoned action can be applied in a marketing context, and that attitude toward action (as suggested by the theory of reasoned action) predicted behavioral intention better than other models. Additionally, it was argued that attitude toward action has considerably greater predictive power in purchase situations where barriers exist to purchase (e.g. financial, status effects, time etc.). (47) Likewise, a study by Tuck (1973) used the theory of reasoned action to show correlation across different user groups of a specific brand of bedtime drink, Horlicks. Tuck (1973) found that when the total sample was considered, the correlation was .74, and all correlations were significant at over the .005 level. (347) Tuck added, “Predictions of behavior will be improved (in my experience and that of other users of the model) by the measurement of normative beliefs according to the [theory of reasoned action]” (347).

Furthermore, Ryan and Bonfield (1980) used questionnaires and interviews of prospective loan customers at a credit union to study the theory of reasoned action as it resulted in behavior (loan application). Ryan and Bonfield determined their study supported the validity of the theory of reasoned action. (92). The researchers stated, “The results of this study are consistent with the findings of other researchers who have investigated this [theory]. […] The mediating effect of behavioral intentions was shown, and the ability of this deterministic [theory] to predict unobtrusively observed real world group behavior adds external validity evidence to previous support” (90). Moreover, Ryan and Bonfield added “behavioral intention not only provides a quantitative criterion that is more convenient to monitor than overt behavior, but it also appears to mediate the effect of attitudes and norms on subsequent behavior” (90).

Unfortunately, several researchers have concluded that the theory requires revision in order to increase accuracy, and this is important to note. Most of this research focuses on alteration of one or more of the theory’s components. Ajzen and Fishbein argue, in most of these instances, that the theory is not being properly used, most often in regards to specificity across components indicating target, action, context and time. For example, assessing the attitude of a woman about punishing children is different then assessing the attitude of a woman about punishing her own children. Therefore, specificity is not stable across components predictive of behavior using the theory of reasoned action. Nevertheless, with this type of research guiding the relevant literature indicative of negative correlations between attitude and behavior using the theory of reasoned action, it is, therefore, important to address the major limitations of the theory.

Sheppard et al. (1988) explains that the theory, although it is frequently applied in these situations, is not applicable to situations in which “(1) the target behavior is not completely under the subjects’ complete volitional control, (2) the situation involves a choice problem not explicitly
addressed by Fishbein and Ajzen and/or (3) subjects’ intentions are assessed when it is impossible for them to have all of the necessary information to form a completely confident intention” (325).

Moreover, it is important to note that the theory was later revised to include behaviors that may not be under the individual’s complete volitional control (the Theory of Planned Behavior); however, for the purposes of this study, it was assumed that purchase intentions are completely under the consumer’s volitional control. Therefore the theory of reasoned action was used in this study, rather than its revised counterpart, the theory of planned behavior (See Ajzen 1988, 1991).

**Hypotheses and Research Questions**

Because the majority of research indicated a positive association between financial performance and CSR, this perspective will be the basis for determining the relationship between CSR and purchase intention. Therefore, this research assumes the relationship between financial performance and purchase intention to be similar. Furthermore, assuming that intent implied behavior, the theory of reasoned action worked well for predicting associations about attitudes of consumers in regards to CSR and purchase intention for this study. In addition, it was interesting to research consumers’ awareness of organizational involvement in socially responsible practices on a basic level.

H1: A positive association exists between an organization’s involvement in CSR programs and consumers’ purchase intention. Thus, consumers are more likely to purchase an organization’s product if that organization is involved in socially responsible practices.

RQ1: Are consumers aware of specific organizational involvement in socially responsible practices?

RQ2: Are consumers aware of a lack of specific organizational involvement in socially responsible practices?

**Methods**

The methodology of this study sought to follow the established guidelines of Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1980) theory of reasoned action in order to answer the hypothesis. After assessing consumers’ salient beliefs and forming a modal set of behavioral beliefs for this study, consumers were initially asked to explain what CSR means to them. As few corporations have even fully grasped the concept of CSR, an explanation of CSR followed this question, including the variety of names CSR goes by and examples of CSR programs. Next, consumers were asked a series of questions based on the predetermined salient beliefs to determine the level of importance that CSR plays in their purchasing decisions. A second part of the interview and survey asked consumers which, if any corporations they consider to be particularly socially responsible or irresponsible.

The initial part of the research followed the guidelines posited by the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) to determine if consumers are more likely to purchase products from organizations based on involvement in socially responsible activities. The second part of the research, asking consumers which specific corporations they consider particularly responsible or irresponsible, was compared to *Fortune* magazine’s top and bottom ranked socially responsible companies in 2007.

**Participants**

Participants were general consumers from a variety of backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, education and income levels or representative of U.S. consumers in the Midwest region.
**Procedures**

Thirteen interviews were initially conducted at a popular Midwest business and 287 surveys were collected (14 percent response rate). Surveys were sent to approximately 2,000 webmail accounts at a large Midwestern university. Webmail accounts included faculty, staff and students at the university.

Participants were interviewed and surveyed with regard to the influence organizational involvement in socially responsible programs has on their intentions to purchase a product. Demographic information including age, gender, level of education, marital status, income level, political affiliation and whether or not they have children was collected in order to cross analyze results and ensure a representative sample is present.

**Results**

Results of this study were encouraging in regards to the indication of a positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and consumer purchase intention. Also, comparisons between Fortune data and this study’s data had moderately positive results.

**Demographics**

Of the 287 responses, the majority (37.6 percent) of respondents indicated that they were between the ages of 18 and 25 (n=108). Fifty-eight respondents (20.2 percent) indicated that they were between the ages of 26 and 35, 33 respondents (11.5 percent) indicated that they were between the ages of 36 and 45, 46 respondents (16 percent) indicated that they were between the ages of 46 and 55 and 41 respondents (14.3 percent) indicated that they were 56 or older. Also, the majority (62.9 percent) of respondents indicated that they were female (n=180), and 106 respondents (37.1 percent) indicated that they were male.

Respondents were also asked to indicate marital status and if they had any children. In regards to marital status, similar amounts of respondents indicated single (n=135) and married (n=137), 47.4 percent and 48.1 percent, respectively. Only 12 respondents (4.2 percent) indicated that they were divorced, and one respondent (0.4 percent) indicated that they were widowed. Also, in regards to children, 59.4 percent of respondents (n=170) indicated that they did not have any children, and 40.5 percent (n=116) indicated that they had between one and five or more children.

The highest level of education completed and annual household income of respondents was also assessed. The majority of respondents (47.4 percent) indicated that they had completed a graduate degree or higher (n=135). Ten respondents (3.5 percent) indicated that high school was the highest level of education they had completed, 59 respondents (20.7 percent) indicated that some college was the highest level of education completed, eight respondents (2.8 percent) indicated that an associate’s or professional degree was the highest level of education they had completed, and 73 respondents (25.6 percent) indicated that the highest level of education they had completed was a bachelor’s degree. Also, in regards to annual household income, similar amounts of respondents indicated an annual household income of less than $25,000 (n=92) and an annual household income of more than $75,000 (n=90), 33.5 percent and 32.7 percent, respectively. Fifty-one respondents (18.5 percent) indicated an annual household income of between $25,000 and $50,000, and 42 respondents (15.3 percent) indicated an annual household income of between $51,000 and $75,000.

Finally, respondents were asked if they identified with a political party, to indicate which one. The majority of respondents (n=118 or 41.3 percent) indicated that they identified with the Democratic Party. Fifty-two respondents (18.2 percent) indicated that they identified with the Republican Party, 27 respondents (9.4 percent) indicated that they identified with the Independent Party, 14 respondents (4.9 percent) indicated that they identified with an other party, and 36
respondents (12.6 percent) indicated that they identified with no or “none” party. Thirty-nine respondents (13.6 percent) chose “not to answer this question.”

Hypothesis

Study participants were asked to select from a set of advantages and disadvantages. They were asked to select all that apply to the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing products from socially responsible businesses in the next six months. The resulting beliefs and the frequencies of these beliefs can be seen in Table 1. Other advantages responses included: helps education, helps the economy, helps me, morally right, encourages other businesses to do the same, helps promote better informed citizens, helps sustain current jobs and creates new jobs. Other disadvantage responses included: limited product selection, reduced shareholder wealth, job losses, inconvenient and difficulty in identifying socially responsible businesses/products.

Table 1: Identification of Modal Salient Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Identification of Modal Salient Beliefs</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Helps the community (advantage)</td>
<td>89.2%</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Helps the environment (advantage)</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Helps with human/workers’ rights (advantage)</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Higher prices for consumers (disadvantage)</td>
<td>64.8%</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Helps decrease poverty (advantage)</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Helps with health care (advantage)</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Higher costs for businesses (disadvantage)</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Helps prevent crime (advantage)</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Supports causes I don’t believe in (disadvantage)</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>None (disadvantage)</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Wastes time, money and/or energy (disadvantage)</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Does not help me (disadvantage)</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Other advantage</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Other disadvantage</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>None (advantage)</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL:</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,604</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) recommend using the least arbitrary decision rule by choosing as many beliefs as necessary to account for a certain percentage, typically 75 percent. (p. 70) Seventy-five percent of 1,604 equals 1,203, which means the first nine beliefs were used based on the sum of the first nine beliefs’ frequencies.

The strength of each belief was then measured by the assessment of salient belief strengths gathered through an initial interview process. This can be viewed as a limitation to this study because the initial interviews may or may not be indicative of the surveys being analyzed. However, only four of the belief strengths (helps the environment, helps with human/workers’ rights, helps the community and higher prices for consumers) were predicted from those ascertained through the initial interviews because the majority of survey participants selected “unsure/none” for the remaining outcome evaluations, which results in the product of the belief strength and the outcome evaluation being “neutral” or zero. In other words, the product of the outcome evaluation and belief strength would be zero because the outcome evaluations were zero. The initial interview results showed that each of the four aforementioned belief strengths can be predicted to be “moderate” (2).

Outcome evaluations were assessed by participants responses to the question “how good/bad are socially responsible businesses at the advantages/disadvantages you selected?” Participants
selected from the following: extremely good (3), quite good (2), slightly good (1), unsure (0),
slightly bad (-1), quite bad (-2), extremely bad (-3).

Therefore, using the nine previously identified modal salient beliefs, Table 2 adds the
outcome evaluations and belief strengths and takes the product of each outcome evaluation and its
belief strength in order to predict attitudes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Buying from socially responsible businesses…</th>
<th>Outcome Evaluations</th>
<th>Belief Strength</th>
<th>Product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Helps the community (advantage)</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Helps the environment (advantage)</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Helps with human/workers’ rights (advantage)</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Higher prices for consumers (disadvantage)</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Helps decrease poverty (advantage)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Helps with health care (advantage)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Higher costs for businesses (disadvantage)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Helps prevent crime (advantage)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Supports causes I don’t believe in (disadvantage)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, results indicate that participants have a moderately positive attitude (+10) toward
purchasing products from socially responsible businesses.

The next step in Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1980) theory of reasoned action involves determining
subjective norms or beliefs that important others (referents) think that participants should or should
not perform the behavior in question (in this case, purchasing products from socially responsible
businesses in the next 6 months). Table 3 (below) displays the results of participants’ identification
of specific referents who believe they should or should not purchase products from socially
responsible businesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Referents</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Community members</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Union</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Other group/individual</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to determine the subjective norm, participants were then asked to indicate their normative beliefs and motivation to comply with these referents. Other group or individual responses included: teachers, students, universities, advocacy groups, nonprofit organizations, businesses, myself and the U.S. government.

Normative beliefs were assessed by asking participants to indicate how much the referents they had selected think they should or should not purchase products from socially responsible businesses. Participants selected from the following scale: Should (3), (2), (1), (0), (-1), (-2), (-3) Should Not.

Motivation to comply was assessed by asking participants, in general, how much they want to do what the referents they selected think they should do. Participants selected from the following scale: not at all (0), slightly (1), moderately (2), strongly (3).

Therefore, using the referents identified (above, Table 3), modal normative beliefs and motivation to comply were assessed, and each referent’s modal normative beliefs were multiplied by the motivations to comply. The results of each referent’s product were then added. Table 4 shows the results of the subjective norm.

Table 4: Normative Beliefs about Buying from Socially Responsible Businesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referents</th>
<th>Normative Belief</th>
<th>Motivation to Comply</th>
<th>Product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Friends</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Family</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Spouse</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Church</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Community members</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Co-workers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Employer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Union</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Other group/individual</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, it can be predicted that participants have a highly positive (+21) subjective norm or that most of their important others think they should purchase products from socially responsible businesses.

When combined, the products of the attitude (Table 2) and subjective norm (Table 4), indicate the overall intention toward the behavior (purchasing products from socially responsible businesses in the next 6 months).

Therefore, the attitude (10) is decidedly moderately positive, and the subjective norm (21) is decidedly highly positive. The average of these two numbers is 15.5, showing a positive intention toward the behavior. In so much, the high products and average of these variables show that a positive relationship exists between corporate social responsibility and consumer purchase intention. Therefore, the H of this study is correct: Consumers are more likely to purchase products if the company that produces them is perceived to be socially responsible.

Additionally, comparisons were made among the following populations: age, gender, marital status, children, education, annual household income and political affiliation. The results of comparisons among populations and with overall results are presented in the following table (5).
Table 5: Comparisons Among Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparisons Among Populations</th>
<th>Product 1 (Attitude)</th>
<th>Product 2 (Subjective Norm)</th>
<th>Average (Products 1 &amp; 2)</th>
<th>Difference (15.5) Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>+5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;$25,000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25-50,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$51-75,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;$75,000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>+14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s or Professional Degree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>+9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or higher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>+8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 18-25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 26-35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>-4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 36-45</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>+2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 46-55</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 56+</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>+6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Party</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Party</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>-5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Party</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>+14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None (Party)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Children</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gender**

A significant difference exists between male and female populations in regards to subjective norms or the person’s beliefs that specific individuals or groups think he or she should or should not purchase products from socially responsible businesses and his or her motivation to comply with these referents. However, a significant difference does not exist between males and females in regards to attitude toward behavior.

In so much, both males and females have a positive attitude toward purchasing products from socially responsible businesses, which is consistent with the overall results; however, it can be determined that females are far more likely to purchase products from socially responsible businesses provided their important others think that they should based on the significant difference in subjective norms. In comparison to the overall results, females are moderately (+5.5) more likely and males are slightly (-1.5) less likely to purchase products from socially responsible businesses.

**Marital Status**

Based on marital status, the researcher chose to only compare single and married participants (n=272) because the amount of participants in the divorced and widowed categories were not enough to represent the sample. The differences of the products indicate that married individuals are slightly
more likely than single individuals to purchase products from socially responsible businesses; however, in comparison to overall results, both single and married individuals are slightly (-4.5 and -1, respectively) less likely to purchase products from socially responsible businesses.

**Income**

Next, based on annual household income, respondents were asked to select the option that best described their annual household income, and options were as follows: (1) less than $25,000 (n=92); (2) $25,000-50,000 (n=51); (3) $51,000-75,000 (n=42); and (4) more than $75,000 (n=90).

Results based on annual household income, in comparison to overall results, indicate results close to the overall population. Participants indicating annual household incomes less than $25,000 and more than $75,000 were both slightly more likely to purchase products from socially responsible businesses (+1.5 and +1, respectively). Participants indicating annual household incomes between $25,000 and $50,000 and between $51,000 and $75,000 were slightly less likely to purchase products from socially responsible businesses (-0.2 and -1.2, respectively).

**Education**

In regards to level of education, the original question asked respondents to indicate their highest level of education completed, and the options are listed as follows: (1) High school (n=10); (2) Some college (n=59); (3) Associate’s or Professional degree (n=8); (4) Bachelor’s degree (n=73); and (5) Graduate degree or higher (n=135). Each group was analyzed, and, in comparison to overall results, participants indicating high school as the highest level of education completed were extremely more likely to purchase products from socially responsible businesses (+14). Participants indicating associate’s or professional degree and graduate degree or higher were moderately more likely than the overall results to purchase from socially responsible businesses (+9.7 and +8, respectively). Also, participants indicating some college were slightly less likely (-2.5) and bachelor’s degree were moderately less likely (-6.5) to purchase from socially responsible businesses. It is important to note that participants indicating high school education indicated the second highest subjective norm of all demographic populations, meaning this group is much more likely to purchase products from socially responsible businesses if they believe their important others think they should.

**Age**

Age was analyzed based on participants’ selection from the following age groups: (1) age 18-25, (2) age 26-35, (3) 36-45, (4) 46-55 and (5) 56+. Each group was analyzed, and, in comparison to overall results, ages 18-25, 36-45 and 46-55 were slightly more likely (+2, +2.7 and +3, respectively) to purchase products from socially responsible businesses. Interestingly, ages 18-25 were slightly less likely (-4.2), and ages 56+ were moderately more likely (+6.5) to purchase products from socially responsible businesses. Also, it is important to note that ages 56+ indicated a significantly higher subjective norm than other age groups, which indicates that this age group is much more likely to purchase products from socially responsible businesses if they believe their important others think that they should.

**Political Affiliation**

Additionally, political affiliation was analyzed and produced interesting results in comparison to the results overall. Individuals indicating a political affiliation with the Democratic Party were slightly more likely (+3), individuals indicating a political affiliation with the Republican Party were slightly less likely (-2.5), and individuals indicating a political affiliation with the Independent Party were moderately less likely (-5.2) to purchase products from socially responsible businesses. The product of individuals indicating “none” for political affiliation exactly matched (15.5) the overall intent to purchase from socially responsible businesses. Most interestingly, individuals indicating a political affiliation with an “other” party were extremely more likely (+14.3) to purchase products from socially responsible businesses. This population shows the highest intent to purchase from socially responsible businesses than any analyzed in this study, but also has the highest subjective norm (52.5) than any population analyzed in this study.
Children

Finally, results were analyzed based on populations with and without children. Participants were asked to select from the following options on the survey: (1) I don’t have any children, (2) 1, (3) 2, (4) 3, (5) 4, and (6) 5 or more. The researcher has selected to group these options into individuals indicating no children (n=170) and children (n=112), regardless of how many children indicated.

Participants without children are more likely to not purchase from socially responsible businesses than those with children. In comparison to overall results, both participants with and without children are slightly less likely (-2.6 and -4.5, respectively) to purchase products from socially responsible businesses.

Research Questions

Participants were also asked to identify specific businesses that they considered to be particularly socially responsible and irresponsible. Analysis of these responses revealed the following significant results for businesses identified as socially responsible, in order of frequency or “top ten”: Starbucks (n=30), Patagonia (n=18), Target (n=16), Wal-Mart (n=14), McDonald’s (n=11) and Eli Lilly (n=11), Apple (n=9) and Ben & Jerry’s (n=9) and Walt Disney (n=8) and Whole Foods (n=8). The following businesses were identified as socially irresponsible, in order of frequency: Wal-Mart (n=78), AIG (n=19), Exxon Mobil (n=15), GM (n=15), McDonald’s (n=14), Nike (n=10), Enron (n=8) and Ford (n=6). There were not enough significant results to create a “bottom ten.”

Research question 1 revealed that, in comparison to Fortune magazine’s top ranked socially responsible companies for 2007 (CHS, United Parcel Service, Whole Foods Market, McDonald’s, Alcan, YRC Worldwide, Starbucks, International Paper, Vulcan Materials and Walt Disney), which are identified from surveying executives, directors and analysts per industry, participants in this study identified four of the Fortune top ten: Starbucks, McDonald’s, Walt Disney and Whole Foods. However, Starbucks was ranked 8th by the Fortune study, whereas participants in this study identified it more often than any of the other businesses cited. This is not necessarily indicative of a ranking of 1st by participants, but it can be assumed that, as the most often identified, it should be ranked as such. Likewise, participants in this study ranked McDonald’s 5th, while Fortune ranked it as the 4th most socially responsible business. Walt Disney and Whole Foods tied for 9th and 10th rankings by participants in this study; however, Whole Foods was ranked 3rd by Fortune, but Walt Disney was ranked 10th as most socially responsible.

Research question 2 revealed that, in comparison to Fortune’s ten bottom ranked least socially responsible companies for 2007 (Visteon, Dana, CA, Delphi, Federal-Mogul, ArvinMeritor, Huntsman, Navistar International, Lyondell Chemical and Toys “R” Us), participants in this study did not identify any of the same businesses as the Fortune study did. However, Fortune ranked Delphi as the 4th most socially irresponsible business, and participants in this study identified GM, which is operated in part by Delphi, as the 4th most often cited socially irresponsible business. Also, it is interesting to note that Wal-Mart was identified both 4th as socially responsible and 1st as socially irresponsible by participants.

Overall, it appears that participants in this study had at least a moderate degree of awareness of social responsibility as it applies to specific businesses, identifying four to five of the ten same businesses as experts in the industries. Thus, the research questions can affirmatively be answered that consumers are moderately aware of specific organizational involvement in socially responsible activities and are slightly aware of specific organizational involvement in socially irresponsible activities.

Qualitative

Additionally, qualitative data was collected that is important to note. Participants were initially asked to define what CSR means to them because CSR has proven to be an ambiguous and controversial topic. While it seemed that participants generally understood CSR, many participants in
this research were skeptical about organizational participation and promotion of CSR. For example, one respondent commented, “Social responsibility on a corporate level is a ploy to increase sales. Nothing more.” Another respondent commented, “I believe social responsibility is just a PR and marketing ploy. Starbucks may be paying a living wage to South American coffee growers, but are they offering decent health insurance and retirement plans to their coffee house employees?”

Despite skepticism, this study still shows that consumers are more likely to purchase products from socially responsible businesses, and, therefore, businesses should seek to implement and promote CSR activities, and many participants in this study agreed, indicating that CSR was an important, necessary business activity aimed at genuinely responsible business practices. For example, one respondent commented, “It is very important. For things to change in this world, socially, environmentally, etc., businesses need to take a leading role.” Another respondent commented, “I think social responsibility comes from the corporate top executives and trickles down. When a company is socially responsible everybody wins, not just the top echelon. I believe these companies will prosper even in difficult times.”

Specifically, in relation to the H of this study (A positive association exists between an organization’s involvement in CSR programs and consumer’s purchase intention.), many participants’ qualitative responses supported the H. For example, one respondent stated, “I am more likely to purchase products from socially responsible companies over socially neutral or irresponsible companies. The bad thing is that socially irresponsible companies do a good job of hiding any questionable activities they may be involved in, so sometimes I don't have this piece of information to inform my shopping. I try to choose responsibly whenever I can.”

However, a significant number of qualitative responses indicated that the higher prices associated with socially responsible businesses prevented them from purchasing products from those companies. For example, one respondent commented, “I believe that there will always be a struggle when it comes to social responsibility, mostly because of the money issue, where companies who are socially responsible generally charge higher prices for their products because it is harder to be socially responsible. It comes down to whether or not people are willing to do what is ethical and what is cheap, and unfortunately, most have to choose cheap over ethical because they do not make enough money to choose what is ethical.”

Discussion

The primary purpose of this research was to recognize the relationship between consumers’ purchase intentions and organizations’ involvement in socially responsible programs. The study’s H predicted that a positive association exists between an organization’s involvement in CSR programs and consumers’ purchase intentions or that consumers in this study are more likely to purchase an organization’s product if that organization is involved in socially responsible practices. Additionally, consumers’ awareness of specific organizational involvement in socially responsible and irresponsible activities was identified.

Overall, the results of this study support the H. Specifically, a positive association exists between an organization’s involvement in CSR programs and consumer’s purchase intentions. The attitude toward the behavior (10) is decidedly moderately positive, and the subjective norm (21) is decidedly highly positive. The average of these two numbers is 15.5, showing a positive intention toward the behavior. The high products and average of these variables show that a positive relationship exists between corporate social responsibility and consumer purchase intention.

Also, the research questions were affirmatively answered in regards to participants’ awareness of specific organizational involvement in socially responsible and irresponsible activities. It appears that consumers have at least a moderate amount of awareness in this regard. It is recommended that further research be conducted on this specific area.
Limitations

The major limitation to this study could be that belief strength was not assessed with the survey participants. This could be eliminated by including belief strength questions in the survey; however, interviews are preferred to the survey method because the amount of questions can be overwhelming, resulting in survey fatigue.

Also, this study did not use frequency-averaged weighted sums, as many other studies on this topic have used. This can be seen as a limitation in regards to comparisons of this study with other similar studies using the theory of reasoned action. Future researchers should analyze this data with more statistical competency than this researcher had at her disposal during the time research was conducted.

Another limitation to this study is that this study is not indicative of consumers, in general, but is only applicable to the population studied. Also, within the population studied, education level and income level were high in relation to regional (Midwest) demographic averages. Moreover, future research should seek a larger sample size in order that higher amounts of participants are present within demographic comparisons.

Finally, following the guidelines of the theory of reasoned action, purchase intention should result in purchase behavior; however, it can be argued that several other mediating variables exist that result in purchase behavior, as addressed in the literature review of this study. For example, qualitative data from this study indicated that price was a major variable in purchasing behavior.

Implications

Therefore, having addressed the limitations of this study, it has implications for consumers and businesses, as well as the public relations profession within this population. Possibly most important to the implications of this study, is the comparison of numbers among demographic consumer groups in this study. For example, it is possible to compare the products of attitudes and subjective norms in terms of age, gender, marital status, etc. From this, it can be determined if particular demographic groups in this study are more likely than others to purchase products if the company that produces them is perceived to be socially responsible. Comparisons were made among the following populations: age, gender, marital status, children, education, annual household income and political affiliation. The results of comparisons among populations and with overall results are presented in Table 5.

From the results of participants in this study, it seems that female consumers whose highest level of education completed is high school or a graduate degree and whose annual household income is less than $25,000 and who are associated with an “other” political party are the most likely demographics to purchase products from businesses based on CSR.

Businesses patronized by consumers in this population should, therefore, seek to invest in the implementation and promotion of CSR activities among applicable demographics. Promotion of CSR activities per demographics is needed in order to make the public aware of these activities, thus, making consumers in this study more likely to purchase the business’s products.

In so much, a future implication of the positive relationship between consumer purchase intention and CSR, as determined by this study, may be an increase in demand for practitioners with a strong background in CSR. For example, a respondent to this research stated, “I believe that being 'socially responsible' will become a greater issue in the years to come. Differing viewpoints on it will also unearth. It's somewhat similar to ethics. Those companies that stick with topics that are more common ground for many consumers will be the most successful. For example, a fight against cancer campaign, a cause for human freedoms, giving to foster children, using clean energy, recycling and helping people who want to have a better future are all great ways for companies to show good will and make a powerful difference in our world.’’ Practitioners with the abilities to understand the many facets of and viewpoints on CSR will be most likely to succeed. Moreover, practitioners able to replicate this study or similar studies for a specific business’s demographics would be in greater demand.
In addition, practitioners often have difficulties proving the financial worth of public relations because results of public relations' activities are difficult to measure in terms of monetary units. However, the combination of public relations' activities aimed at the implementation and promotion of CSR programs and the replication of this study could be used to show an increase in profits for the business based on aiming CSR activities at specific demographics. For example, profits per demographics could be assessed at varying times prior to implementation of a CSR program, throughout the implementation and promotion processes and following the campaign or, in the case that the activities are of a more permanent nature, once the program has been established. Thus, public relations could demonstrate its financial worth to a business.

Based on results of this study and implications for businesses, it can be concluded that CSR is a multi-faceted challenge, but worth the associated risks. It is in the best interest of consumers, businesses, public relations practitioners and society, in general, that businesses patronized by consumers in this study undertake the challenge of implementing socially responsible programs and activities as a strategic management function aimed at increasing profits; however, future research and studies are still necessary.

**Future Research**

Because it is the first of its kind in regards to social responsibility, it is recommended that this study be replicated in order to determine likewise results of products in tables 2 and 4 in other populations. Specifically, it is recommended that this research be replicated using the revised version of the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behavior.

Moreover, it is recommended that researchers simply ask the question: “Are you more likely to purchase products if the company that produces them is socially responsible?” The researcher could then use these variables in comparison to others.

This study could also be taken a step further using the weighting of attitudes and subjective norms, as many studies using the theory of reasoned action have done (see literature review). Also, it could easily be further analyzed from differences within the final results: It is interesting to note the significant differences that occur within the final products of these variables. For example, within the single v. married comparison, the majority of married individuals were strongly motivated to comply with family, while the majority of single individuals were only moderately motivated. More significantly, the normative beliefs about church for the majority of single individuals were that church was neutral (0) on wanting them to purchase products from socially responsible businesses; however, married individuals believed strongly (3) that church wanted them to purchase products from socially responsible businesses. Likewise, significant differences could be identified throughout this data. Analyzing the differences within final products could contribute to the understanding of the underlying reasons consumers make purchases in relation to CSR and to the understanding of CSR as a strategic management function overall.

In conclusion, this study should result in future scholarly research and analyses on this important topic. It could also be replicated in applied settings to determine key publics to target communications about businesses’ participation in socially responsible activities, i.e. those publics that will be more likely to purchase products based on this information, and to enhance the demand of public relations practitioners. From the results of this study and the implications of these results, it seems that organizational participation in CSR programs and activities results in a win-win situation for everyone affected: consumers, organizations, the public relations profession and society, in general.

**Acknowledgement**

Special thanks to Dr. Dustin Supa, Assistant Professor of Journalism at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., for his assistance as the thesis chair for this paper.
References


Likert, R. A. “A technique for the measurement of attitudes.” *Archives of Psychology* 140 (1932).


The Influence of Cultures on SNS Usage: Comparing Mixi in Japan and Facebook in the U.S.

Xue Dou
Pennsylvania State University

Abstract
The purpose of this study is to explore and identify the cultural influence on people's Social Networking Sites (SNS) usage. Using Hofstede’s individualism/collectivism and Hall’s high/low context cultural values, this study examines the content of comments on online communities in Mixi, a SNS in Japan, and Facebook. A content analysis of comments that appeared on the SNS communities of three car brands (Lexus, Cadillac, and BMW) revealed that Mixi users and Facebook users differ in the use of visually oriented information and in the types of comments they wrote. Specifically, Mixi users used significantly more visually oriented information in comments than Facebook users. In addition, comments by Mixi users were more likely to ask for and provide advice and information, while comments by Facebook users were more likely to express their feeling towards the brands.
Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS) have been getting increasing attention from public relations practitioners. One of the reasons is that SNS represent a great opportunity to facilitate two-way communication between companies and their publics. Although other online communication tools, such as websites and blogs, have been used for establishing two-way communication with their publics, the nature of SNS as a sphere for building and maintaining relationships makes itself much more attractive for public relations practitioners than any other online communication tool. According to a study by Wright and Hinson (2009), 72% of public relations practitioners feel that social media have enhanced their public relations activities, and 84% of them believe social media (including blogs) offer organizations a low-cost way to develop relationships with members of various strategic publics. Both of these numbers increased from the study in 2008, and this illustrates the increasing importance of social media in public relations field.

Recently, several studies showed that the popularity of SNS became a worldwide phenomenon. As of June 2008, there are more than 580 million SNS users worldwide and 78% of them are living outside of the U.S. (comScore, 2008). The number of users increased 23% in Asia Pacific and 35% in Europe from 2007 compared to an increase of 9% in North America. Given the increasing popularity of SNS around the world, SNS hold a lot of potential benefits for companies in international public relations. By utilizing SNS and facilitating two-way communication with their publics outside the country, companies could have better understanding about their international publics and their images among international markets. This will help companies to exercise appropriate crisis management and build brand equity among their international markets.

Facing the popularity of SNS in public relations, a number of studies about SNS have been conducted recently (e.g., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). However most of the studies have been designed to investigate SNS in the U.S. context and little is known about what SNS look like and how SNS have been used in other countries. This study, therefore, is designed to fill in this gap by comparing Mixi, the most popular SNS in Japan, and Facebook in the U.S. The findings of this study will contribute to answer the questions how SNS are used differently as a socializing media in the two countries and how cultures shape these differences.

Mixi, Facebook, and the reasons to compare them

Mixi started its service in 2004 and soon became the most popular SNS in Japan. In March 2009, Mixi had more than 16.3 million members, and 88.5% of Japanese SNS users had joined Mixi (Internet Association Japan, 2007). Currently, Mixi is open to people over 15 who have an invitation from a current member of the service, although people who are over 18 are only allowed to join Mixi before December 2008. Mixi is especially popular among teens and 20-year olds who account for more than 60% of total Mixi users (Mixi, 2007).

The founders of Mixi were influenced by the American SNS Friendstar, and decided to provide the same service in Japan. However, instead of using the same function and layout that Friendstar did at that time, they “glocalized” Friendstar in order to make Mixi fit into the Japanese society (E-Business Laboratory, 2005). Mixi has been constantly adding or deleting some of its services according to Japanese users’ needs. For example, Mixi started Mixi Mobile from 2006 given the increasing number of mobile internet users at that time. From those facts, we can say that Mixi is the SNS which reflects Japanese culture.

Facebook, a popular SNS in the U.S., started its service in 2004. Despite the presence of many other strong competitors such as Myspace, Facebook increased its users in a rapid pace, and has more than 60 million active users in the U.S. and 300 million active users worldwide in 2009 (Facebook, 2009; Inside Facebook, 2009). Facebook is especially popular among college students in the U.S., and people between 18 to 25 years old accounts for 44% of its total number of U.S. users (Inside Facebook, 2009).
There are some advantages to compare those two SNS in this study. One is the similarity of main users’ age group. Both of them are especially popular among teens and 20-year olds, and this will reduce the influence of age variable in the study. Another reason is that both of them are used for more general reasons compared with other SNS such as Myspace which is more for niches who enjoy sharing information about music with others. The last one is that they become a very popular SNS in their countries by reflecting users’ needs to its service as I mentioned above. Those fundamental similarities of the two SNS will provide more reliability to the study, and make the cultural influence on SNS more salient.

**Literature Review**

*Research in Online Public Relations*

In the last decade, various online communication tools, such as websites, blogs and SNS have been utilized for practicing public relations. Those tools allow companies to communicate with their publics around the world in a spontaneous manner, and thus brought a lot of convenience for companies’ public relations activities. In the late 90s when the Internet started to get attention with public relations field, Kent and Taylor (1998) introduced a strategic framework to facilitate relationship building with publics through the Internet. They stressed the advantages for companies using the Internet to practice dialogic communication, which defined as “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (p. 325). In addition, they introduced five principles for successful integration of dialogic public relations and the Internet, that are the dialogic loop, the generation of return visit, the usefulness of information, the intuitiveness/ease of the interface, and the rule of conservation of visitors.

Past studies have examined how public relations practitioners use online communication, and have provided many strategic implication of utilizing online communication in the public relations field. For example, several studies about websites have shown that websites can be utilized as an impression management tool and media relations tool (e.g. Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007; Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Reber & Kim, 2006; Kirat, 2007). Other research also investigated companies’ weblog usage in public relations. Those studies indicated the possibility of utilizing weblogs as a relationship management tool (e.g. Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007).

**Social Networking Sites**

Comparing with websites and weblogs, SNS are a relatively new online communication media and have just started to be utilized in the public relations field. Because of this short history, there are not enough studies about SNS and how can we define SNS is still under investigations. Boyd and Ellison (2007), for example, proposed that SNS is “a web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those are made by others within the system.” According to Downes (2005), SNS is “a collection of individuals linked together by a set of relations.”

Overall, SNS can be regarded as websites that facilitate communication between users. It provides a convenient interface which allows users to post their comments, pictures, and videos on their own pages, or send them to their friends. In a typical SNS, users could have their own profile page where they list their interests or background information. SNS also allow users to form and participate in “groups” where users can get information and share their interests with others. Through SNS, users can easily maintain and build networks with others.

Because SNS allow users to easily share information, connect with others, and form virtual communities, SNS offer many opportunities for companies to cultivate relationships with their publics. Recent studies of SNS in the public relations field investigated how companies are trying to use SNS to reach their publics and build relationships with them (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Waters,
Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). However, much research related to SNS conducted in public relations study is designed to analyze SNS from the companies’ perspective, and little is known about how users use SNS to interact with companies and brands. Therefore, this study will investigate SNS from the users’ perspective.

Culture and online communication

Internet is an international medium. Therefore, differences in online communication across countries and the influence of cultures on online communication need to be examined. In the field of public relations, how companies can exercise international public relations has been a major topic among both scholars and practitioners. There is an increasing support for the idea that public relations practices can be influenced by cultures, and therefore, knowing the differences of cultures is crucial to start international public relations (e.g. Curtin & Gaither, 2007). Without knowing how online communication is influenced by cultures, this might cause misunderstanding between companies and foreign publics, and prevent companies from achieving public relations goals.

A number of researcher across disciplines have conducted cross-cultural comparisons of online communications in various topics, such as website designs (Cyr, Bonanni, Bowes, & Ilsever, 2005), website contents (Okazaki & Rivas, 2002; Wurtz, 2006), e-commerce (Gong, 2009, Yun, Park, & Ha, 2008), and online avatars (Koda, Ishida, Rehm, & André, 2009). Several cultural comparison studies in online communications have been done in public relations research as well (e.g. Tian, 2006). Recently, Kang and Mastin (2008) employed Hofstede’s cultural dimensions in a comparative analysis of international tourism public relations websites in 44 countries. The study found that the differences of power distance and individualism/collectivism affect websites’ design and content. For example, countries with high power distance have complex design layouts and feature in a Q&A space, whereas countries with low power distance preferred to handle users’ inquiries in interpersonal ways, such as e-mail.

These cultural comparison studies have often used Hofstede’s (1980) and Hall’s (1976) cultural dimensions as a base for explaining differences of online communication style among cultures. Among several dimensions proposed by Hofstede and Hall, individualism/collectivism, and high/low context are the most widely used dimensions in online communication studies (e.g. Ardichvili, Maurer, Li, Wentling, & Stuedemann, 2006; Cry et al. 2005; Ferle & Kim, 2006; Gong, 2009; Okazaki & Rivas, 2002; Wurtz, 2006). In their comparison study between the U.S. and Korea, Ferle and Kim (2006) adopted individualism/collectivism and high/low context to assess the impact of culture on people’s online behavior and communication preference. Okazaki and Rivas (2002), on the other hand, used these two dimensions to analyze Japanese multinational corporations’ online communication strategies across different countries. These studies showed that the differences of online communication styles, such as prefer to use text or image and emphasize individual or group value, can be predicted by using these two dimensions.

This study also adopts individualism/collectivism and high/low context to examine how culture could influence people’s communication style in SNS. Individualism/collectivism is a cultural dimension which explains how people in different cultures manage relationship with others (Hickson & Pugh, 2001). Thus, it is especially appropriate to use this dimension for this study since SNS is all about socializing with others. High/low context is another cultural dimension which reflects the influence of culture on people’s relationship management strategy (Hickson & Pugh, 2001). Especially, high/low context explains whether one culture prefers direct or indirect communications and text-based or symbol-based messages (Mooij, 2005). This dimension can help us to assess the differences in writing style of massages in SNS, and therefore is a relevant cultural dimension for this study.
Individualism/collectivism and High/low Context Communication

Individualism/collectivism is one of the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1980). In an individualistic culture, people are “I” conscious. The ties between individuals are loose, and people tend to be independent. Because individuals in this type of culture regard their individual value as the most important, they don’t hesitate to express their private opinion. In addition, there is less mutual obligation in individualistic cultures, and accomplishing personal goals are more important than in-group goals. The division between the private space and the public domain are strict, and therefore people tend to avoid asking personal questions and hesitate to share their own personal information with others, especially someone they are not familiar with (Ferle and Kim, 2006; Hickson & Pugh, 2003; Hofstede, 1980; Mooij, 2005).

In a collectivistic culture, on the other hand, people are likely to be interdependent. The emphasis is on belonging and the idea is to be a good member. The priority is given to relationship with people, and therefore in-group goals are more important than personal goals in collectivistic culture. Because of this interdependence, the identity of individuals in this type of culture is based on the social system. When people in collectivistic culture introduce themselves to others, they tend to provide many background information about themselves since these information are important to show who they are. In addition, the distinctions between the private space and the public space are blurred in this culture. Thus people in collectivistic culture feel more comfortable about sharing private information with others than people in individualistic culture (Ferle & Kim, 2006; Hickson & Pugh, 2003; Hofstede, 1980; Mooij, 2005).

Hall (1976) proposed high context and low context as a framework to help understanding the differences of communication style among cultures. In high context cultures, people prefer to use indirect and vague messages. Meaning of a message is not always explicitly manifested, but rather most of the information are hidden in the context or internalized in the person. Thus, time is needed to program messages in high context cultures. Moreover, individuals in this type of culture prefer to use visual information. Symbols are often utilized in high context cultures since symbols convey shared meaning in a society. In low context culture, direct and straightforward expression is preferred. Messages are more likely to be informative in nature in order to ensure that the listener receives the message exactly as it was sent. People in low context culture prefer explicit verbal message rather than symbols since visually oriented communication brings ambiguity (Ferle & Kim, 2006; Wurtz, 2006; Mooij, 2005).

Japan and the U.S. are different in both individualism/collectivism and high/low context communication. In Hofstede’s (1980) study, Japan and other Asian countries score low in individualistic index, and therefore are classified as collectivistic culture. Japan scores 46 in individualism index whereas the U.S. scores 91 which is the highest number among all countries in his study. In addition, Japan has been described as high context culture, while the U.S. has been classified as low-context culture in previous studies (Hall & Hall 1990; Mooij, 2005). Given the differences of cultural values between Japan and the U.S., the following research question is presented.

RQ1: What are the differences between Mixi and Facebook in terms of how users use these two SNS to communicate each other?

Particularly this study proposes two hypotheses about how individualism/collectivism and high/low context communication affect people’s communication styles in SNS. In the context of SNS, the differences of individualistic and collectivistic cultures could be manifested in users’ behaviors of disclosing personal information. As it was discussed above, sharing background information, such as where they are living, is a way for showing who they are in collectivistic cultures. Therefore, SNS users in collectivistic cultures would more likely to disclose their personal information than those in individualistic cultures.

H1: Mixi users will share information about themselves more than Facebook users.
If the communication in SNS has influence from high and low context cultural value, there should be more visually oriented information, such as photographs and emoticons, in high context culture countries than low context culture countries. In fact, several studies have showed this pattern in online communications (Ferle and Kim, 2006; Wurtz, 2006). Therefore the hypothesis related to high and low context culture value is:

H2: Comments in Mixi will have more visually oriented information than those in Facebook.

Method

To answer the stated research question and hypotheses, a content analysis was conducted of comments gathered from online communities existing on Mixi and Facebook. After taking nationality and familiarity of brands in both countries into consideration, communities for three car brands, Lexus (TOYOTA), Cadillac (GM), and BMW were chosen for this study. There are two types of communities on Facebook; Facebook Groups and Facebook Pages. They are similar in nature, however, they are slightly different in terms of functionalities and how they are used. Facebook Groups are similar to a typical virtual community where people who have similar interests become the members of the groups and share information with each other online. Facebook Pages, on the other hand, are used more as a place for disseminating information from the creator of the page to “fans” which refers to people who joined the page. The creators of brands’ Facebook Pages are often the staff of the companies who are dedicated to manage the pages. In this study, only Facebook Groups are used for analysis since these are more equivalent with online communities existing on Mixi, and therefore are more appropriate to be compared.

The study firstly analyzed the functionality the communities offer to users (e.g., places to put comments and links of outside information) in order to find overall interface differences between the two SNS. In addition, the study will analyze comments that appear on discussion boards (and “walls” for Facebook) in order to find whether there are differences between Mixi users and Facebook users in terms of the use of visually oriented information, disclosing their personal information, and what types of comments they write in SNS online communities.

Data Collection

One SNS community from each brand in Mixi and Facebook was selected for the analysis (total of six communities). Among many online communities associated with each of the three car brands on Mixi and Facebook, one was selected by entering each brand’s name on the search box of Mixi and Facebook. The community which had the largest membership was chosen for analysis. As a result, the numbers of members in the three Mixi communities were 13,213 for Lexus, 6,101 for Cadillac, and 18,770 for BMW. For the three Facebook communities, the members were 5,567 for Lexus, 3,108 for Cadillac, and 5,927 for BMW.

Fifty comments were chosen from each community. For Mixi communities, 50 comments were extracted from each of the first 50 threads (one comment for each thread) that appeared on the discussion boards. For Facebook communities, 50 comments were selected from both discussion boards and “walls”. Twenty five comments were chosen from the first 25 threads that appeared on the discussion board, and other 25 comments were chosen from the first 25 comments that appeared on the walls. If a Facebook Group didn’t have more than 25 topics on discussion board, the number of comments collected from the discussion board was the number of the threads that appeared on the discussion board.

The procedure for choosing one comment from each thread is as follows. Firstly, each topic was assigned with a number from 1 to 10 according to the order in which the threads were updated. Among many comments that appeared in a thread, the ten newest comments were assigned with a number from 1 to 10 according to the order in which the comment were posted. The comment chosen for analysis was the one which had the number corresponding to the number assigned for each
thread. If the thread had fewer comments than the number assigned for the thread, the count was repeated until the assigned number was reached. For example, if a thread was assigned with the number of 1 (or 3), the comment which posted most recently (or the third most recent comment) at that time was chosen for analysis. If a thread only had five comments while the thread was assigned the number 9, the fourth most recent comment was chosen for analysis. Same method was used for choosing a comment from a thread that appeared on the “walls” of Facebook communities.

Comments were collected during the last week of December, 2009. Those comments written in languages other than English were excluded from the pool. In addition, the comments that only had pictures were excluded from the pool as well. As a result, 150 comments were collected from both Mixi and Facebook communities, and the total number of comments analyzed in the study was 300.

Coding procedure

Coding was conducted by three bilinguals (Japanese and English) including the author herself. Two other coders were hired by the author and given a codebook containing definitions and coding rules. Comments selected from Mixi communities were coded by author and one of the two coders, and comments selected from Facebook communities were coded by the author and another coder. The author conducted the training and answered any questions regarding the definitions of the variables and procedures. Coders worked independently and were not permitted to discuss the SNS communities with each other.

The independent coders examined the presence of visually oriented information and personal information in each comment. In addition, the coders were also asked to identify the most salient comment types for each comment. Eight comment types were constructed for this study. Three of the eight comment types have subcategories and the coders were asked to identify these subcategories as well. The definitions for each variable are shown in Appendix 1.

Inter-coder reliability analysis was used to test internal consistency. Percentage agreements between the two coders were 100% for the use of visually oriented information, 98% to 100% for the disclosure of personal information in both Mixi and Facebook comments. For type of comments, the percent agreements were 85.3 % for Mixi comments and 87.3% for Facebook comments. These were well within acceptable limits (Kassarjian, 1977). For type of comments, disagreements occurred mainly between “offering advice and information” and “advertising something.” It was found that coders sometimes couldn’t easily discern whether the comments were simply written for providing information to others or if there were advertising intentions behind the comments. The comments that had coding disagreements were rechecked and a final decision was made through discussion between the coders.

Results

Functionality

The six SNS communities were analyzed regarding functionality. In terms of similarity between Mixi and Facebook communities, all of the six SNS communities had functions to show a general description of the community, who the members of the community are, and who the administrators of the community are. In addition, all the SNS communities provided discussion boards. One of the Mixi communities and two of the Facebook communities had a function to post external links related to the communities. However, for Mixi communities, links that could be added were restricted to links with Mixi communities, while for Facebook communities, there was no restriction. In terms of differences between the two SNS, all of the three Mixi communities had a function to show what other communities the members were in, and a function to list related events. Moreover, one of the three Mixi communities had a function to create and conduct surveys. These are the functions that couldn’t be found in Facebook. On the other hand, all of the three Facebook
communities had a “wall” where members can freely post the comments, and the dedicated places to update pictures and videos.

Disclosure of personal information
The first hypothesis predicted that comments from Mixi communities would have more personal information than the comments from Facebook communities. Eight percent of the comments from Mixi and 4% of the comments from Facebook had at least one type of personal information. The most frequently mentioned type of personal information within the Mixi comments was “information about where he/she lives” (3.3%), followed by “family information” (2%), “gender” (0.7%), “age” (0.7%), and “other” (1.3%). Looking at the comments from Facebook, the results were first “information about where he/she lives” (2%), with “family information” (1.2%) next and then “occupation” (0.7%). There was no information about “occupation” mentioned in Mixi comments, and no information about “gender”, “age”, and “other” in Facebook comments. Chi-square test failed to find the significant difference in the disclosure of at least one type of personal information, $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 2.13, p > .10$, and no significant differences was found among subcategories of personal information either. Therefore, H1 was rejected.

Use of visually oriented information
The second hypothesis of this study predicted that comments that appeared in Mixi communities would have more visually oriented information than comments that appeared in Facebook communities. Among the 150 comments that were gathered from Mixi communities, 54% of the comments have at least one type of visually oriented information, 12% of the comments have photographs, 48.7% of the comments have emoticons, and no comments have other types of visually oriented information. For the 150 comments that were gathered from Facebook, 23.3% of the comments have at least one type of visually oriented information, 12.7% of the comments have photographs, 10.0% of the comments have emoticons, and 1.3% of the comments have other types of visually oriented information. Chi-square tests confirmed that Mixi and Facebook differed significantly in the use of at least one type of visually oriented information, $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 29.74, p < .01$, and the use of emoticons, $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 54.10, p < .01$. Therefore, H2 was supported.

Type of comments
Comments were further analyzed to examine whether there were differences among types of comments appearing Mixi and Facebook, respectively. Chi-square tests revealed that overall there was a significant difference between the two SNS, $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 60.52, p < .01$. Mixi had significantly more comments than Facebook for “asking for advice and information” (19.3% vs. 8%), $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 8.17, p < .05$, and “offering advice and information” (36.0% vs. 9.3%), $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 30.42, p < .01$. On the other hand, Facebook had significantly more comments than Mixi for “showing positive feeling or support for the brands, companies, and shops” (30.7% vs. 8%), $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 24.70, p < .01$, and “showing neutral feeling about the brands, companies, and shops” (7.3% vs. 1.3%), $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 6.51, p < .05$. No significant differences were found for “showing negative feeling about the brands, companies, and shops”, $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 1.31, p > .10$, “advertising something”, $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 2.93, p > .05$, and “showing opinion to comments wrote by others”, $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 0.14, p > .10$ (Table 1). However, there was a significant difference for “showing appreciation for the comments written by others”, $\chi^2 (1, N = 300) = 7.64, p < .01$, which is a subcategory of “showing opinion to comments written by others.”

In summary, the results of this study suggest that there were differences between Mixi users and Facebook users in terms of the use of visually oriented information and type of comments. Mixi users used significantly more emoticons than Facebook users when they make comments in SNS communities. In addition, Mixi users made more comments about asking information and providing
information to other community members, and Facebook users made more comments that show their positive and neutral feeling about brands, companies, and shops.

**Conclusion**

SNS are gaining popularity among various countries in the world, and this makes SNS a valuable medium to communicate effectively with consumers overseas. However, there appears to be a lack of research examining how SNS are used differently among countries and cultures. In this study, two SNS from two different countries were analyzed, and the influence of culture on how people make comments on SNS were examined by adopting Hofstede’s and Hall’s cultural values. It was found that people in high context culture (Mixi users) tended to use more visually oriented information than people in low context culture (Facebook users) when they communicate with others in SNS.

Unexpectedly, no differences were found in terms of the amount of personal information written in the comments, although the study predicted that people in collectivistic culture (Mixi users) would disclose more personal information about themselves in SNS communities. Overall, there were only few comments that contained personal information among both Mixi comments and Facebook comments. This might be due to the fact that all of the three Mixi communities analyzed in this study had more than 6,000 members, and people might not feel comfortable disclosing their personal information in such an environment. An additional argument can be made that although sharing personal information is a way for people to show who they are in a collectivistic culture, it does not translate to the online environment. Future research could analyze different sizes and types of SNS communities in order to further understand people’s behavior of disclosing personal information in different cultures.

The results of this study also revealed that the types of comments people wrote differed among Mixi and Facebook communities. Mixi users tended to write comments in SNS community that involved asking or providing advice and information, while Facebook users made comments because they want to express their feeling towards the brands. These behavioral differences between Mixi users and Facebook users might result from the differences of collectivistic and individualistic cultural values. In a country which has a collectivistic culture like Japan, people tend to be interdependent, and being a good member of a community is regarded as a virtue. The large number of comments asking or providing advice and information that were found in Mixi communities might be a manifestation of this collectivistic cultural value. Meanwhile, the individualistic culture is “I” conscious and there is less mutual obligation among people. This cultural value might influence Facebook users’ behavior on SNS communities, and as a result, Facebook users tend to use SNS communities as a place for expressing their passions and opinions towards the product and brand, rather than sharing advice and useful information.

These findings suggest that when companies utilize SNS for communicating with their international publics, they need to know how the SNS were used differently among countries in order to have better understanding about international publics and build relationships with them effectively. For instance, given the differences in the use of visually oriented information and what people write as comments in SNS communities between Japan and the U.S, companies could position the Japanese SNS communities more as a place to clarify consumers’ inquiries about the products, while providing more space where people can freely express their opinions towards the products in their U.S. SNS communities. In addition, companies need to understand the importance and meaning of using visually oriented information, especially emoticons, when they communicate with consumers from high context cultures.

**Limitations and Future Research**

This study has several limitations. First of all, since this study only analyzed the SNS communities of automobiles, the results may not be generalized to other types of products’ SNS
communities. Future research could analyze low involvement products, such as instant coffee or shampoo, and examine whether people in individualistic/collectivistic and high/low context cultures would comment differently in those products’ SNS communities.

In addition, although Japan is recognized as a typical collectivistic and high context culture country, and the U.S. is seen as a representative of individualistic and low context culture country, the results of this study might not be applicable to other countries due to the other social and infrastructural differences. Future studies need to examine SNS communities in various countries in order to clarify the effect of individualistic/collectivistic and high/low context cultural values on people’s behavior of using SNS communities.

Lastly, since there is no geographic boundary on the Internet, people can easily access and even join other countries’ SNS, especially if they understand the native languages of the countries. During the data collection process, the author found some comments that were written by people from countries other than Japan and the U.S. Particularly, BMW’s Facebook communities had several members from various countries. Some people use their native languages and others use English when they post their comments. Therefore, some comments collected from Facebook might not be written by people with individualistic and low context cultures, and there are also possibilities that some comments collected from Mixi were not written by people with collectivistic and high context cultures. At the same time, it raises an interesting question of whether people will adjust their cultural values and change their behaviors in a SNS of a country that has different cultural values with them. Future studies could look into this issue in order to increase our understanding about the influence of cultures on people’s SNS usage.
References


Appendix 1: Coding Sheet

1. Use of visual oriented information: Indicate whether the comment includes visual oriented information below.
   1) – Photograph: Photograph means a picture that is made by using a camera.
      No / Yes
   2) – Emoticon: Emoticon means those pictorial symbols forming a record or communication.
      Example: 😊 :-( ☆ ♥
      Abbreviations such as “lol” are NOT counted as emoticons.
      No / Yes
   3) -- Others type of visual oriented information:
      No / Yes

2. Disclosure of Personal Information: Indicate whether the comment includes comment writer’s personal information listed below.
   1) – Gender
   2) – Age
   3) – Occupation
   4) – Information about where he/she lives
   5) – Family information
   6) – Other types of personal information

3. Type of Comments: Indicate the type of the comments by circling one of the numbers below. If a comment contains more than two types of meaning, please choose the most salient one. Here, “related products” mean car parts, such as tires, and goods that are used for assisting the driving, such as GPS navigators.
   1. Asking for advice and information
      The comments that ask for advice and information about the brand’s cars, related products, companies that own the brand, and shops that sell the brands’ car or provide services related to the brand’s car.
   2. Offering advice and information
      The comments that offer advice and information about the brand’s cars, related products, the company that owns the brand, and shops that sell the brand’s car or provide services related to the brand’s cars.
   3. Showing negative feeling about the brands, companies, and shops
      The comments that complain or criticize about the brands, the company that owns the brand, and shops that sell the brand’s car or provide services related to the brands’ cars.
   4. Showing positive feeling or support for the brands, companies, and shops
      The comments that express positive feeling or support for the brands, the company that owns the brand, and shops that sell the brand’s car or provide services related to the brands’ cars.
   5. Showing neutral feeling about the brands, companies, and shops
      Telling their thoughts about the brands, the company that owns the brand, and shops that sell the brand’s car or provide services related to the brands’ cars without showing any positive or negative feeling. The comments that are perceived to contain equal amount of negative and positive opinion should be included here as well. In addition, this type also includes those comments that simply state what kind of car they have.
   6. Advertising something
      61 – Advertising cars or related products
      The comments that tell people he/she wants to sell new and second hand cars of the brand and related products including car parts and goods that could be used in the car.
      62 – Put wanted ads of cars from that brand or related products
      The comments that tell people he/she wants to buy the brand’s cars or related products
through the communities.
63 – Advertising other related online communities or websites
The comments that ask people to join online communities or visit websites that are related
to the brands.
64 – Advertising something unrelated to the brand.
65 – Others
7. Showing opinion to comments wrote by others
The comments that were written mainly for showing appreciation, criticism, or other
types of opinion to comments written by others.
71 – Showing appreciation for the comments written by others.
72 – Criticizing or complaining about the comments written by others.
73 – Others
8. Others
81 – Related to the brand
82 – Unrelated to the brand

Table 1: Results for Type of Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Comments</th>
<th>Mixi</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ (df = 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Asking for advice and information</td>
<td>29 comments</td>
<td>12 comments</td>
<td>8.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19.3%)</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Offering advice and information</td>
<td>54 (36%)</td>
<td>14 (9%)</td>
<td>30.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Showing negative feeling about the brands, companies, and shops</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>5 (3.3%)</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Showing positive feeling or support for the brands, companies, and shops</td>
<td>12 (8%)</td>
<td>46 (30.7%)</td>
<td>24.70**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Showing neutral feeling about the brands, companies, and shops</td>
<td>2 (1.3%)</td>
<td>11 (7.3%)</td>
<td>6.51*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Advertising something</td>
<td>25 (16.7%)</td>
<td>37 (24.7%)</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Showing opinion to comments wrote by others</td>
<td>17 (11.3%)</td>
<td>15 (10.0%)</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Others</td>
<td>9 (6.0%)</td>
<td>10 (6.7%)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01
Twitter, a micro-blogging service, is one of the fastest-growing social media that is changing the ways organizations communicate and build relationship with their stakeholders. Launched in 2006, Twitter has grown exponentially worldwide and was estimated at 75 million user accounts at the end of 2009, according to RJMetrics.com. In the United States, Twitter had 27.3 million unique visitors to its web site as of February 2010, according to Quancast.com. Public relations professionals and marketers see the growing popular Twitter community as a golden opportunity to establish and maintain relationships with various publics and stakeholders as well as networking, building credibility, trust and commitment among their “followers.” However, casual observations of many organizations’ Twitter accounts could have revealed that Twitter was often used to provide product or service information, or even to sell, in a one-way communication manner—an uncharacteristic nature of social media.

This study examines how three Fortune 100 companies (Ford, Home Depot and State Farm) used Twitter to engage with their publics to build and/or maintain relationships with them. The three companies were chosen based on their high scores of engagement and influence values determined by two online analytic tools—Klout and Tweet Level. Using Hon and Grunig’s organization-public relationship as a conceptual foundation, this study examines the companies’ “tweets” to determine the extent to which they engaged with their “followers” to build trust, satisfaction and commitment. Contents to be analyzed include a) Type of Tweets (retweet, reply, status updates); b) Categories (customer service, announcement, tips, conversation, other); c) Content message (question, response, reach out, follow up, appreciation, compliment, information, seek participation, other); and d) Mechanics (tweets with picture, video, hashtag, emoticons).

Overall, the majority (81%) of 507 collected tweets were replies or addressed to another Twitter user. Almost 13 percent were general status updates and about 6% were retweets. Half of the tweets (49.9%) were engaged in general conversations, followed by customer service (23.9%), and announcement (20.7%). Only a handful of tweets (6 out of 507) gave tips or how-to information. Further, 23.5% of all tweets were information related, about 16% of tweets expressed appreciation or thanks to the followers, and 13.6% were answers to followers’ inquiries. Almost 16% of tweets fell into “Other” category as they pertained to miscellaneous topics.
Introduction

A major aspect of effective public relations is developing relationships with publics. Engagement is a fundamental component of building relationships. Hon and Grunig (1999) developed *Guidelines for Measuring Relationships in Public Relations*, arguing that public relations helps an organization become more effective when it is able to build and measure long-term relationships with strategically identified publics (p. 9). They also suggested that organizations should aim to establish communal relationships, in which both parties are involved in the relationship and “provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other” (p. 21). In future directions, Hon and Grunig urged researchers to explore the effect of the Internet and emerging media on relationship building between an organization and its publics because organizations might conduct most relationship building online.

As Hon and Grunig predicted, emerging media have begun to change the way organizations communicate and build relationships with their stakeholders. One of the fastest-growing social media sites is Twitter, a micro-blogging service, launched in 2006 and boasting 20.9 million unique visitors to its web site in September 2009, according to comScore. In the United States, Twitter has grown 1,700 percent since September 2008.

The Council of Public Relations Firms calls this booming growth in emerging media “a historic juncture” in which the future of the public relations industry will be shaped and defined in this shift (Rand & Rodriguez, 2007, p. 1). At the time the Council’s survey was conducted, public relations professionals agreed on some key themes that affected both corporate communication and agency professionals. Overall, “corporate communicators must build trust with audiences through more authentic information and greater transparency” (p. 3). Additionally, all marketers and communications specialists must recognize that the consumers own the brand. Marketers must be willing to release some control of their brands (p. 3). Public relations practitioners and marketers must amp up the creativity to engage their audiences via social media. Rand and Rodriguez (2007) suggested that social media and public relations should fit hand-in-hand, considering that “public relations has been about creating and sustaining conversations, about engagement and relationships, which social media is all about” (p. 5).

Public relations professionals and marketers indeed see the growing popular Twitter community as a golden opportunity to establish and maintain relationships with various publics and stakeholders as well as networking, building credibility, trust and commitment among their “followers.” Recently, we have seen more and more books and blog posts written to provide communication professionals with guidelines on how to successfully and effectively implement social media into their communication programs. However, experts such as Catharine Taylor (2009) argue that many organizations are still not using social media, specifically Twitter, to its full potential. Taylor cites a Weber Shandwick report (2009), which detailed that although a large number of *Fortune* 100 companies are holding a Twitter account, most are not “active tweeters” and most are not engaging followers. Taylor (2009) suggests that additional data would be helpful, such as how long the companies have been actively tweeting and what the content of the conversations are.

Casual observations of many organizations’ Twitter accounts could have revealed that Twitter was often used to provide product or service information, or even to sell in a one-way communication manner—an uncharacteristic nature of social media. Thomases (2010, pp. 280-288) observed that companies have used Twitter for various purposes: To deliver customer service...
(@ComcastCare, @JetBlue), build awareness and solicit feedback (@CocaCola), build relations and hold conversations, and promote sales (@DellOutlet, @Bestbuy_Outlet, @Amazondeals).

The purpose of this study is to, through content analysis of tweets, determine how three Fortune 100 companies are utilizing Twitter to actively engage their audiences to build and/or maintain long-term relationship as Hon and Grunig have advocated.

Engagement

In the discussion of marketers and public relations practitioners using social media to build relationships, experts such as Katie Paine (2010), Brian Solis (2010), Cory Treffiletti (2009), Michael Brito (2007), and Lee Odden (2010), cite the importance of engaging consumers through the use of social media. According to Katie Paine (2010), “engagement is essentially the first step in building a relationship between your customers and your brand” (“Measuring Engagement”). Basically, audience engagement is creating a dialogue between an organization and its consumers in order to establish genuine relationships.

Social Media Bible authors Lon Safko and David Brake (2009) proposed four categories of social media engagement: Communication, Collaboration, Education, and Entertainment. They contended that companies or other organizations can engage with their consumers through social media by initiating both one-way and two-way communication, educating interested consumers about the organization through information that is personally relevant to the consumer, participating in communication that is initiated by the consumer, frequently posting new and relevant information that would be of interest to consumers, seeking consumer participation with the brand or feedback about the organization, or by simply generating relevant content that entertains the consumer. We believe that these types of online communication aimed to create dialogue between an organization and its consumers without the influence of gatekeepers are a good way to actively engage and build relationship with the organization’s stakeholders.

For the purpose of this study, “engagement” is operationally defined as when a user publicly responds to a follower (through a @reply), repeats another user’s update (through a retweet), poses questions to followers, seeks participation, holds a conversation via words of compliments or appreciation, shares relevant information, tips, or advice that followers might seek by associating with the user.

Methodology

A content analysis was conducted of three corporate Twitter accounts with status updates (“tweets”) posted between January 20, 2010 and February 4, 2010. Each of the three companies’ (@Ford, @HomeDepot, and @StateFarm) tweets were tracked over the two-week period in order to examine their engagement, as previously defined.

A selection process was conducted to determine the final three Fortune 100 companies to analyze. A list of the Fortune 100 companies was attained from Fortune Magazine (via CNNmoney.com). Each company name was manually searched on Twitter’s website using the “Twitter Find” feature on a pre-established Twitter account. Out of the 100 companies, 47 companies had Twitter accounts. At this point, 47 companies were found on Twitter without filtering for idle accounts or accounts that appeared to be “brand-jacked,” or unofficial accounts that were not being operated by the company being depicted. After selecting only the accounts that were authentic (had correct, specific company contact information listed), unprotected and active, 43 out of the Fortune 100 companies remained.
Casual observations of many organizations’ Twitter accounts during the “Twitter Find” phase of the selection process allowed for a quick glimpse of each organization’s Twitter page. Eight organizations stood out as having active Twitter accounts, meaning that the account had a significant number of followers and that the page was often updated with original tweets, as well as responses to followers and retweets of status updates from other users. These informal top eight organizations included: Chevron (@Chevron), Ford Motor Company (@Ford), Verizon Communications Inc. (@Verizon), Home Depot (@HomeDepot), State Farm Insurance Co. (@StateFarm), Pepsi Co. (@pepsico), Best Buy (@BestBuy), and Cisco Systems Inc. (@CiscoSystems).

To determine further how engaging and influential these Twitter accounts are, we turned to three online Twitter analytics—Klout and Tweet Level—to generate a brief summary of the organizations’ Twitter statistics.

The Klout Score measures a Twitter account’s “sphere of influence” on other Twitter users, according to Klout.com. The tool was created by Joe Fernandez, a former researcher, Binh Tran, a software and technology consultant, and Richardson Soegito, an IT consultant. A “score” is calculated by measuring reach (number of followers, number of reciprocated followers, how far tweet content has been spread, mentions, retweets, etc.) and amplification ability (engagement via reply messages, difference in followers who retweet, how often tweets are sparking action, etc.). Click-through rates on links that are tweeted by a user are also taken into consideration when calculating the Klout Score. The higher a Twitter account’s score on a scale from 1-100, the “wider and stronger sphere of influence” the account makes, according to Klout.com.

Tweet Level was created by Edelman and is used to measure a Twitter account’s “importance on Twitter,” according to Tweetlevel.Edelman.com. Similar to a Klout Score, Tweet Level measures a user’s “importance” on a scale of 1-100 and the higher the score, the better. Tweet Level takes into account influence, number of followers, engagement via participation rates, and trust, which is associated with retweets.

After obtaining the scores generated by Klout and Tweet Level for the top eight companies, the scores were compared and three organizations with high scores on both analytics tools were selected for a more in-depth content analysis. Companies that had a high Tweet Level score, especially in the engagement category, and a respectable Klout Score were: Ford Motor Company (@Ford), Home Depot (@HomeDepot), and State Farm Insurance Co. (@StateFarm).

Ford Motor Company (@Ford) received a Tweet Level score of 69 for engagement and a Klout Score of 54. Home Depot (@HomeDepot) received a Tweet Level score of 72.7 for engagement and a Klout Score of 45. State Farm Insurance Co. (@StateFarm) received a Tweet Level score of 68 for engagement and a Klout Score of 30.

As of February 11, 2010, Ford Motor Company (@Ford) had 24,850 followers, Home Depot (@HomeDepot) had 19,056 followers, and State Farm Insurance Co. (@StateFarm) had 4,980 followers on Twitter.

A website called Print Your Twitter (printyourtweets.com) was utilized to obtain an archive of each of the companies’ twitter updates during the designated two-week time frame (January 20, 2010 to February 4, 2010). Each tweet is a unit of analysis and was coded based on types of tweet (a simple status update, a reply, or a retweet), content categories (customer service, announcement/information, tips/advice, conversation, other), message content (ask question, answer
question, clarification, follow up, appreciation, compliment, share information, seek participation, other), and mechanics within the tweet (picture, link, video, hashtag, emoticons).

**Findings**

A total of 507 tweets were collected during the two weeks with Ford generating 263 tweets, Home Depot 142 and State Farm 102. Overall, the majority (81%) of tweets were replies or addressed to another Twitter user. Almost 13 percent were general status updates and about 6% were retweets. (See Table 1)

Regarding the content categories, almost half of the tweets (49.9%) were engaged in general conversations, followed by customer service (23.9%), and announcement (20.7%). Only a handful of tweets (6 out of 507) gave tips or how-to information. (See Table 2)

When looking further into the content of the tweets, we found that almost a quarter (23.5%) of all tweets issued some kind of information or announcement to the company’s followers. About 16% of tweets expressed appreciation or thanks to the followers, and 13.6% were answers to followers’ inquiries. Almost 16% of tweets fell into “Other” category as they pertained to miscellaneous topics. (See Table 3)

We also looked at whether each tweet used a hashtag or an emoticon, and if it included a link to a website, picture or video. While 26.4% of tweets contained a link to a website (to provide more information), most of them didn’t include a link to video or picture nor did they use a hashtag to group a discussion or an emoticon to add tone to the message. (See Tables 4-8)

Because the three companies offers different products and services, we wanted to see if they might have used Twitter differently. The cross tabulations of types of tweets revealed that all three companies devoted more than 80% in replying or addressing to their stakeholders. While both Ford and Home Depot also retweeted another Twitter user, the number of reweets was far in between (15 out of 253 for Ford, and 15 out of 142 for Home Depot), and State Farm did not retweet at all during the two weeks of our study. (See Table 9)

How differently the three companies used Twitter appeared to be in the content categories—customer service, announcement, tips or how-to, conversation, and other. Given its being in the retail industry, it’s understandable that Home Depot would lead in customer service category (50% of its tweets). State Farm led in the conversation department (65% of its tweets), followed by Ford (54%) and Home Depot (31%). Ford was more likely than Home Depot or State Farm to issue information or announcement-related tweets (26.6%, 15.5%, and 12.7%, respectively). As reported earlier, the three companies seldom tweeted about tips or how-to information in their status updates. (See Table 10)

Regarding the content message the three companies expressed (question, response, clarification/reach out, follow up, appreciation, compliment, information, seek participation, and other), Ford, whose tweets fell mostly in the information and conversation categories, also tweeted informative messages more than Home Depot and State Farm (30%, 20%, and 10.8% respectively). It also answered followers’ questions (18.6%, 7.7% and 8.8% respectively) and held conversations in miscellaneous topics more frequently (20.2%, 7% and 16.7% respectively). Home Depot, whose tweets were mainly customer-service oriented, reached out (25.4%) to those who tweeted about its products and services (positively or negatively), followed up (13.4%) the progress if the problems were resolved, and asked questions (6.3%) more than Ford and State Farm.
did. The message content of State Farm’s tweets, which were primarily in the Conversation content category, expressed appreciation (32.4%) and compliments (12.7%) to their followers. (See Table 11)
References


Fortune 100 Twitter findings: Frequency Tables

### Table 1: Types of tweets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retweet</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reply</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status update</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Content Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcement, info</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips, how to</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: Message Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Content</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask question</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer question</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification/reach out</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliments</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek participation</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4: Tweets with a link</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Valid Percent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Tweets with a photo link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6: Tweets with a video link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: Tweets with a hashtag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8: Tweets with an emoticon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9: Types of Tweets by Company's name

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Company's name</th>
<th>Ford</th>
<th>Home Depot</th>
<th>State Farm</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%Types of Tweets</td>
<td>%Company's name</td>
<td>%Types of Tweets</td>
<td>%Company's name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweet Count</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reply Count</td>
<td></td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>80.2%</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Update</td>
<td></td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Count</td>
<td></td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Company's name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>Home Depot</td>
<td>State Farm</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Content categories</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Company</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcement, info</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Content categories</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Company</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips, how to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Content categories</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Company</td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Content categories</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Company</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Content categories</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Company</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Content categories</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Company</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11: Message Content by Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message Content</th>
<th>Ford</th>
<th>Home Depot</th>
<th>State Farm</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company's name</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ask question</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Message</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Company</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer question</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Message</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Company</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarification/reach out</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Message</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Company</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Follow up</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Message</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Company</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appreciation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Message</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Company</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compliment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Message</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Company</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Message</td>
<td>66.4%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Company</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seek participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Message</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Company</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Message</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Company</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Message</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Company</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
U.S. and European Perspectives on Teaching Ethics to Public Relations Students

Elina Erzikova

Abstract

To examine university teachers’ perceptions of ethics instruction in the PR curriculum, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 52 American (n=32) and European (n=20) educators. The American participants were interviewed during two national and two international conventions during 2007 and 2008. The researcher undertook a trip to Europe to meet communication educators in seven universities in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Germany in the fall of 2008.

First, European and U.S. educators perceived ethics instruction as an important aspect of the PR education. However, while American educators called for a more thorough instruction in the professional ethics, European teachers emphasized the need to educate communication professionals who are experts in ethics in the philosophical sense.

Second, while American PR educators feel obligated to help the industry thrive, European educators distance themselves from the industry seeing universities as autonomous enterprises that are not “accepting orders” from practitioners.

Third, according to European educators, American PR educators tend to create a rather normative or ideal image of the profession, whereas Europeans tend to provide their students with a realistic picture of public relations practices.

Overall, the present study found that in the same manner as PR practices reflect national specifics of the countries in which PR activities take place, PR educational philosophies reflect national PR practices and broader societal contexts. Teaching philosophies might diverge, and in some cases, quite sharply, meaning that there might not be an opportunity to generalize educational practices even within Europe or the U.S., needless to say, in the global scope.
Introduction

Despite Aristotle’s contention that ethical behavior cannot be taught, but must be a part of a person’s upbringing, moral philosophy was studied at the medieval university (Sloan, 1980). These days, ethics education is not taken as a panacea for the moral problems since awareness of ethical conduct does not necessarily result in moral behavior. Although the effectiveness of ethics education has not been supported (Bok, 1976), to leave ethics out of a curriculum might mean the failure to prepare students for real life, which is saturated with moral anxiety. The pressure for moral education increases with the intensity of moral confusion in society (Radest, 1989). U.S. scholars argued that the public relations practitioner’s role as a corporate conscience should become central in the wake of the threat of terrorism and large corporations’ financial misconduct (Grunig & Grunig, 2009). The question arises whether and how universities and colleges prepare future public relations practitioners to deal with ethical dilemmas, withstand pressure from unethical supervisors, and become proactive in establishing a moral element in organizations’ strategic decisions (Grunig & Grunig, 2009).

In an attempt to answer this question, this comparative study examines public relations educators’ perceptions of ethics instruction in the PR curricula of Western European and U.S. universities. While European PR education is labeled as “largely United States centered” [Vercic, van Ruler, Butschi, & Flodin (2001) cited in Sriramesh (2009)], this study focuses on both similarities and differences between American and European teaching philosophies that can be explained by such environmental variables as the history and culture of higher education in the U.S. and Western Europe.

Literature Review and Research Question

Modern Thoughts about Teaching Ethics

Acknowledging the fact that there is not an agreed-upon definition of the term “moral education,” Callahan (1980) nevertheless proposed that ethics education is “an educational process with the goal of improving moral behavior, instilling certain virtues and traits of character, and developing morally responsible persons” (p. 71).

The report by the Hastings Center (1980) said that ethical principles are already being implicitly communicated in various university courses, whereas the main goal of explicit teaching of ethics is “to uncover hidden assumptions, unchallenged and unexamined values, and treat the realm of morality with all the rigor and discipline that other areas of human study and concern already receive in the university” (p. 8). Callahan (1980) articulated the following goals of teaching ethics: Stimulate students’ moral imagination, or evoke such emotions as empathy, sensibility, and caring; teach students to recognize ethical issues, or detect hidden value biases and see the moral implications of personal and collective decisions; elicit a sense of moral obligation, or to act in accordance with the perception of right and good; develop analytical (logical) skills to help students analyze ethical propositions and their justification; and, finally, tolerate and, thus, reduce disagreement and ambiguity while resolving moral dilemmas.

The formulation of the last goal has been modified to fit the era of globalization. Recently, scholars’ attention has shifted from the problem of reaching consensus to the goal of managing dissensus in a global village (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). Particularly, 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 greater sensitivity to cultural diversity and pluralism; such an understanding becomes a synonym of ethicality, or obedience to moral conduct, in public relations.

Ideally, public relations scholarship should be diverse since it reflects a variety of international PR practices. Yet, there is a scarcity of empirical research outside of the U.S.
Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009). L’Etang (2008) argued the “U.S. born” dominant paradigm in PR has been criticized by a number of non-U.S. scholars for its focus on “functional issues such as effectiveness, excellence, methods, evaluation, professionalism, PR role and status” (p. 10). Meanwhile, functionalism presumes a consensus which is hardly reachable due to the fact that different individuals have different views about what is functional and what is dysfunctional (L’Etang, 2008). In her opinion, “Although many academics seek to ‘build PR theory’ one might wish to question the existence of such. The very term ‘PR theory’ almost seems to imply there could or should be a single framework” (p. 13).

L’Etang (2008) argued that while the dominant paradigm encompasses such perspectives as feminist, rhetorical and relational, it failed to incorporate other critical perspectives. Particularly, the dominant paradigm is based on positivist approaches and quantitative methods, whereas critical and cultural scholars [post-positivists, or those who were “othered by the dominant paradigm” (p. 253)] value qualitative methods of inquiry.

The fundamental societal changes in norms and values resulted in the perception of education as an economic investment, whereas the “fundamental purpose of and reason for education—that is, the search for truth—is forgotten” (Mendonca & Kanungo, 2007, p. 7). Not surprisingly, some graduates of a prestigious university believed that money, fame, and power are main life achievements (Mendonca & Kanungo, 2007).

In this light, a question arises whether ethics courses, being introduced into universities’ curricula so rapidly these days, are able to contribute to student perceptions of education in its original meaning—as the process of acquiring knowledge and skills and developing character, and to have a positive impact on student moral development. To Boylan and Donahue (2003), to enter a profession means to enter an ethos, or a set of values and norms that constitute an environment in which the profession operates. Therefore, an overall task of higher education is to communicate to students professional values and provide them with an understanding of appropriate ways of professional practice.

American and European Universities and Globalization

The university is the second oldest institution in the West (the first one was the Roman Catholic Church). Being a key to social mobility and progress, the university has had its status as a powerhouse for centuries (Rothblatt & Wittrock, 1993). Yet, its high societal status does not guarantee its absolute autonomy from the challenges imposed by economic, political and social developments. In regard to the modern time, the globalization era has been labeled a threat that is more serious than previous epochs of scientific revolution, industrialization, secularization, and totalitarianism (Currie, DeAngelis, de Boer, Huisman, & Lacotte, 2002).

It appeared that such a strong word as “threat” is used mainly to denote governments’ attempts to force universities to become competitive players in the global market arena. Meanwhile, a number of scholars have argued that business-like behavior and concern about maximizing profit are not compatible with the purpose of higher education (Hostetter, 2007). As Adrian (2005) put it, the modern university has become a political and economic force that has eroded its core identity and created a crisis of purpose in institution. The “free” search for “truth” has been lost in the rush to wealth and power, and economic development has become the principal objective rather than a derivative of higher learning (p. 153).

Historically, America’s reliance on free markets turned the national system of higher education to dependency on market’s needs in services and products. U.S. universities accept financial help from industry in return for research and future employees (Trow, 1993). Accordingly, students as consumers have shaped the university curriculum to meet expectations and demands of the job market. By contrast, in Europe, the market has not dominated the sphere of high culture (Trow, 1993). While U.S. universities perceive their role as contributors to technological and
industrial development, European universities see their role as developing theory or contributors to knowledge for its own sake (Owen-Smith, Riccaboni, Rammolli, & Powell, 2002). As an example, although the Dutch government is concerned with the economic aspect of higher education, nevertheless, the government leaves a certain degree of autonomy to the institution and thus, diminishes the presence of market mechanisms in the system of higher education (Currie et al., 2002).

However, recent developments in Europe (e.g., the collapse of Soviet regimes, the disenchantment with State planning and large-scale bureaucracy) have led Europe to a search for new models of higher education. Since the theme of the market in higher education has acquired global attention, American models have attracted “special international interest” (Rothblatt & Wittrock, 1993).

European universities that were traditionally recognized as flagmen of higher education for almost a thousand years lost their world leadership to U.S. universities in the past 50 years (Caddick, 2008). To address this problem, the European academic community initiated the so-called Bologna Process, which among many other goals seeks to apply the UK/US degree structure (bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees) to universities in 46 European countries to create “a single education currency” (Caddick, 2008).

The revolution in communications has allowed more frequent exchange of ideas among international academic communities and provided more opportunities for the cross-fertilization. Like never before, scientific ideas are readily accessible and thus, subjects of adaptation and assimilation (Rothblatt & Wittrock, 1993). Coupled with an increasing level of intercultural communication that might lead to the decrease in the strength between the territory and social identity and the emergence of a “global consciousness” (Rizvi, Engel, Ruthkowski, & Sparks, 2007), the sovereignty of a particular university as a policy-maker becomes questionable. Indeed, there are growing tensions between the historic mission of the university as the transmitter of ideas and values (Hostetter, 2007) and the necessity to respond to market demand and competing economies. As Currie et al. (2002) argued a shift from cooperation to competition has already happened in the higher education system worldwide. This shift has not been welcomed by the entire academic population (Seccion Especial, 2004). One of the reasons is that this process (as many others that originate in the West) is associated with Americanization (Hall, 1991).

While universities have been coerced by governments to become more market oriented, practitioners, particularly those who work in public relations believed that globalization is “forcing the need to clearly articulate the essence of the brand—its values, its ethics and its principles” (Hayes, 2008, p. 16). In the US, the role of public relations education as the process of immersion into the profession is not limited to the transmission of professional knowledge and skills, but it is also concerned with introducing professional beliefs and values to students. Moreover, public relations students should receive a well-rounded education that serves as a precondition for a fulfilling life.

Based on discussion above, the following research question is proposed:

RQ 1: In regard to ethics instruction in public relations, do teaching philosophies and practices differ depending on where—in the U.S. or Europe—respondents teach?

Method

Participants. To examine teacher perceptions of ethics education, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 52 American (n=32) and European (n=20) educators. The sample was selected to represent different nationalities, genders, age groups, and teaching experience. The American participants were recruited and interviewed during two national and two international conventions during 2007 and 2008.

The researcher undertook a trip to Europe to meet communication educators in seven universities in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Germany. Appointments with them were
made via email before the trip, and face-to-face interviews were conducted in their offices in October-November 2008.

The overall sample consisted of 30 males and 22 females with the age range from late twenties to early sixties. Six participants had a Master degree and 46 had a Doctorate degree. The majority of participants had their degrees in Communication and related fields, and their teaching experience at the university level varied from 2 to 40 years.

Both groups of educators—American and European—included recognized leaders in public relations education, who have published numerous journal articles and book chapters and have served as editors and co-editors of communication journals and books. Some of them were well-known experts in public relations ethics and communication ethics. These individuals have known each other and collaborated with each other for many years, and thus, similar attitudes could be formed among the colleagues. Thus, to assure the variance of the data, some junior faculty were purposively included in the sample.

Instrument. To capture teacher perceptions of ethics education, a semi-structured interview consisted of 10 questions was developed.

Since qualitative in-depth interviews are more like conversations, they help “uncover participants’ meaning perspective” (Marshall & Roswell, 1989, p. 82). Therefore, the conducted interviews focused not only on collecting factual information (e.g., resources in teaching ethics), but also spotlighted respondents’ opinions and values attributed to different aspects of ethics education. During interviews, respondents were specifically asked to provide the interviewer with examples from their experience as public relations educators. This evidence became part of “thick description” (Denzin, 1994) of the data.

All interviews were conducted in English. The interviews averaged 40 minutes in length. The participants agreed to audiotape their interviews which were then transcribed for analysis.

Findings and Discussion

This study examined similarities and differences in teaching philosophies and practices of American and European teachers. The main finding of this study is that all participants strongly agreed that ethics education is essential for public relations students. The 52 teachers provided diverse explanations of why ethics needs to be taught to future professionals, and educators often mentioned more than one reason. Qualitative analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) suggested that there were a number of themes (organized as propositions in this manuscript) associated with the importance of ethics instruction at the university and college level.

Proposition 1. American and European public relations educators think that ethics are important for education, but they view this importance in different ways.

The theme of awareness appeared to be the most frequently mentioned by U.S. educators. However, there was not a single interpretation of the meaning of this notion.

Awareness as preparedness to deal with ethical dilemmas.

One-third of U.S. participants explained that ethics education is vital because “it creates awareness that the professional world is saturated with ethical dilemmas” and this is why it is so important to “give an understanding of what is ethical and what is not.” As one female educator said, “I don’t think that PR students understand what they will be confronting. It’s not a golden lovely world out there where everybody plays fair.” In her opinion, educators should prepare students to face not only “a big hairy incident” akin to Enron, but also to deal with “little things” that might not appear as unethical at the first glance: A request to use “hyperbolic word in the press-release” or usage of a “company’s logo in the proposal without client’s permission.”

Two U.S. participants emphasized that PR graduates should be aware that they would be expected to advise management on key decisions in ethically challenging situations.

Awareness as the responsibility to use knowledge in the ethical way.
Seven U.S. participants thought that ethics instruction is an essential part of PR education because it creates awareness about the morality of knowledge, or the necessity to be responsible for “what we do with what we know.” One participant noted,

The core reason for why we teach ethics is that communication students need to know that by learning new expertise—how to persuade and influence people—they have a moral obligation not to use it in a way that would be harmful to people.

Another respondent echoed by this: “By the very nature of the profession, we are powerful and influential in society. We have to be aware of that and aware about how our actions do impact society.”

Awareness as an induction into the profession.

One-half of interviewed American educators perceived ethics instruction as being “best suited” to create awareness that, as one senior teacher said, “Education is not about knowledge and skills only but also about a basic subscription to ethical values of the occupation.” The fact that public relations is an inherently ethical occupation that has moral obligations to society was articulated by another participant:

The idea is being ethical is essential to the stature of public relations as a professional activity. And by definition to be professional, the activity must uphold some kind of public interest which is what is embedded in your code of ethics. So it [ethics education] is absolutely essential and our job as educators to communicate values to our students.

Overall, the majority of U.S. educators underlined the importance of ethics education as education that contributes to the improvement of the profession and society: Commitment to professional values, moral obligations to society to behave ethically, and the ability to perform a counseling function in a complicated ethical situation.

European educators appeared to have a more homogenous opinion about the importance of ethics education. They were united in their perception of the essentiality of ethics education as a means to make students “be aware of themselves, their identities and their personal values;” as education that encourages them to think that “every decision that they make in lives has an ethical aspect.” In other words, the majority of European participants emphasized the importance of ethics education as the process of character development. A world-known European educator and scholar said:

There is no a causal relationship between an ethics course and making good choices on the job. But definitely, ethics education helps students become more critical and reflective, and more reflective people will make more thoughtful decisions.

“Reflectivity” appeared to be a key word in European educators’ discussion of ethics education. One of the teachers explained that “reflecting means comparing your understanding and practice (if you had worked before you entered the university) before and after a theory was introduced.” Besides that, the teacher thought that for students, it is also very important to be exposed to different opinions and compare your understanding of ethical dilemmas with understandings of classmates. He added,

I want students to say, “When I face with an ethical dilemma, I understand that I can look at it from more than one point of view, I can analyze it using different theories. But at the end, I need to make a judgment, and this is my judgment, and my values will make me behave this way or that way.” I want my students to understand that an ethical choice is a self-conscious choice based on reflective thinking.
While American educators emphasized their commitment to the public relations industry, European teachers underlined their universities’ disengagement from the industry. A young female professor who teaches a PR course at a leading European university said:

We incorporate ethics in courses throughout the curriculum, but not because we are afraid that students after graduation would do unethical things. We integrate ethics in the discussion of the theory of science. We talk about ethics not from an applied perspective but from a science perspective.

However, the issue of “loose coupling,” or a lack of cohesion between the European system of higher education and PR industry might not be so simple and straightforward as it might appear at the first glance. As a doctoral candidate (a teaching assistant) said,

Our tradition of higher education is not to train people for a certain job. Officially, we don’t prepare students to be excellent PR managers or journalists. However, it’s a complicated issue. Only three percent of students are going to have careers as researchers, and more than 90 percent of graduates will have jobs in communication. Of course, I teach them with this fact in my mind. But at the same time, I don’t hand them out strategies and tactics like “how to make your business grow.” In my opinion, this is not what the university is about.

A senior professor said that they have “some courses on skills but they are not our focus.” In her opinion, the goal of the university is to give “reflective knowledge, not only applied knowledge.” The colleague of this professor provided the rationale for this goal by saying that knowledge is outdated very fast, and this is why the university should concentrate on developing the analytical mind. In her opinion, it is hardly possible to help students become “skeptical and critical about social reality” if PR courses are taught as “you teach a PR Campaigns course – by providing students with a check list ‘what you need to do to make your campaign successful.’”

American scholars (Elliott, 2007) are concerned that university textbooks that address practical ethics do not do so in a satisfactory way: They introduce classical moral philosophies only briefly and, thus, reduce them to slogans. A few European scholars brought up this issue in their interviews. A professor, who teaches a media ethics course in a European university, said that he had a chance to look at an American PR textbook. He found it to resemble a “school book or recipe book.” Such a textbook might fit the “American functionalist environment,” but it is questionable if this text can be used in Europe. The teacher said that he assigns undergraduate students to read “hundreds of pages of original texts every week” because “students need to learn by themselves” instead of “being supplied with recipes about how to act.” In this regard, an American educator (Duffy, 2000) argued that “Textbooks must not only prepare students in practical matters, such as how to plan a public relations campaign, but in ideological matters” (p. 311).

Another European teacher appeared to have the same teaching philosophy of independent study (“the essence of university life”) as his colleague who teaches the media ethics course. He also assigns his undergraduates to read original texts, and these manuscripts come from major academic communication journals. Asked about whether students perceive such assignments are being too difficult and time consuming, the teacher said that the students “complain but they still do then” because the students understand that they are expected to read academic texts in the university.

Proposition II. American and European public relations educators’ practices reflect different teaching philosophies.

The realism/idealism dichotomy might be a rather questionable concept in both philosophical and common senses (Pierce, 2007). However, some phenomena are difficult to describe without these two categories. Keeping in mind limitations of this dichotomy, this study nevertheless appeals to the concepts of realism and idealism to define some differences in American and European teachers’ philosophies.
Presumably, the fact that participants in the U.S. and Europe teach the same expertise contributes to developing similar thoughts and beliefs. As an example, the statement made by a well-known U.S. ethicist, “I want students to think not so much about what they should do but more about why they should do the right things,” was echoed by many American and European educators.

However, a notable difference appeared in the overall direction and tone of American and European monologues. The majority of U.S. educators indicated a special role of public relations professionals as contributors to an ethical climate of society and exhibited a positive, “can do” attitude while talking about a possible impact of ethics courses. This is reflected in the following inspirational rhetoric of one U.S. educator:

A larger message that I send to them [students] is that we are responsible, we are covenant of the earth, and if we don’t take care of the earth, if we don’t care of the people, it’s no purpose of us. We are stewards of the earth. And I expect PR to be used in this manner.

The majority of American educators emphasized that their goal is to give their students an understanding that public relations is not isolated from the community in which PR operates, and this is why public relations professionals serve interests larger than those of the organization that hired them. As one senior educator said, “The organizations’ interests are never devoid from the interests of other people in society.”

Another senior teacher and scholar linked the profession, ethics, and democracy:

We have a role in society; we have a role in a democracy that we have to perform, and there are certain things that we can’t do because they are unethical from the professional point of view.

Addressing the issue of PR professionalism and ethical behavior, an American educator linked professionalism and ethics by saying, “If you want to be a professional, do the right things because the difference between PR professionals and those who are selling their time to a higher bidder is expertise and ethical standards.”

Meanwhile, European educators were rather careful in their opinions about a special ethical role of PR professionals in society. A distinct theme of the majority of European participants was a clash between PR theory and PR reality. As one teacher said, “The main goal is to give students realization that at the theoretical level, things might look simple, whereas in the reality, things are much more complicated.”

According to European educators’ perceptions, generally, in the real PR practice, an individual is constrained by “too many factors and too many actors.” One teacher writes down theoretical statements of PR scholars and quotes of PR practitioners on a blackboard, inviting students to discuss differences between “normative and real PR.”

Another teacher, a former PR manager for a non-governmental organization, said that to perform well in the professional life, students need “to understand pressures and constraints” of the reality before they enter the profession, and this is why teachers of his department constantly address “controversies of PR practice.”

Across the three countries—the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Germany—educators revealed similar philosophies when addressing a discrepancy between theory and practice. As one teacher, a former PR practitioner said, “We encourage students to hear about difficult issues in PR and about criticism of PR work by critics and journalists; sometimes they are very rude. We encourage them to write essays about it and make presentations.” Students of this teacher monitor the PR Watch website and constantly meet with practitioners and critics during guest lectures.

Another teacher, talking about the Excellence Theory (Grunig, 1992), called it a “PR professional 20th century ideal model of relationships.” In his opinion, these relationships are ideal because they are described as “reciprocal and are not shaped by imbalances in power.” Meanwhile, in his opinion, an appropriate framework of thinking should be, “What would be realistic
expectations against ideal?” The teacher added that a “discussion about approximation to ideal” is needed if teachers want to shape a realistic understanding of PR practice among students. In his opinion, American higher education is closely tied to the industry that leads to the practice of a “narrow vocational training” in communication departments. Meanwhile, his department “stepped over making it [education] not merely vocational training” but the education that meets requirements of academic professions. Importantly, the department remains “open for standards set by both the industry and vocationalism,” but these standards do not override an academic principle of liberating minds.

A European teacher whose area of expertise is political communication said that while visiting the U.S., she witnessed a negative PR campaign, which focused more on diminishing the image of a rival rather than improving the image of a candidate for whom a group of PR practitioners worked. The teacher commented on it by saying, “It might be all right from a professional point of view, but it’s questionable from the ethical point of view.” This idea—“PR” does not automatically mean “ethicality”—was well pronounced in a number of European monologues.

Another teacher noted that since public relations has such a strong association with spin, his academic duty is to examine manipulative PR practices. The teacher asked, “Is it ethical to pretend that spinning doesn’t happen?” And then he concluded, “It would diminish PR education if we didn’t talk about embarrassing issues.”

Coming back to American interview participants, it is important to emphasize that none of the American participants said that they avoid discussion of “the dark underbelly of the PR industry” (Burton, 2007). In this regard, one American teacher remarked that “ethics is a luxury” these days, whereas her colleague said, “Reputation of PR is as low as it could go.”

However, it did not appear that in their classes, U.S. educators pay the same amount of attention to negative PR practices as European teachers seem to do. As an American PR instructor said, “You can learn better if you see what other people do is right.” Another American teacher provided a further explanation for why positive examples should be included in teaching discourse. He said that when students go to the profession, “they will observe others and have both positive and negative exemplars.” A possible danger is that PR graduates might have only negative exemplars, and “they will think that this is how the industry, the profession operates.” This is why by “sensitizing students to ethical situations and even giving them a little bit of moralizing information,” public relations teachers “equip students better to deal with ethical problems when they go to the profession.” Another U.S. educator was concerned with the fact that students “have a lot of models for amoral points of view in terms of professional lives and relationships.” In this sense, ethics education is crucial since it provides students with other—ethical models—for their professional lives.

To summarize, although both groups of the participants—American and European—realize that public relations practice is far away from being consistently ethical, they take different paths to prepare students to deal with questionable ways of doing PR. While European teachers (“realists”) spotlight the dark side, American educators (“idealists”) emphasize the bright side. It is important to clarify that these paths do not run in opposite directions; teachers do not bring up exemplars that are either totally negative or purely positive. It is rather a combination of both. If the PR practice can be imagined as a continuum that runs from white to black, a large grey segment would appear in the middle, symbolizing the complexity of labor of “developing and nurturing relationships” (Berger, Reber, & Heyman, 2007). This complexity was acknowledged by all participants in this study regardless of the country in which they teach.

Proposition III. European participants think that there are apparent differences in ethics education in the U.S. and Europe.

European teachers did not believe that American PR is more ethical than European PR, or that bosses in the U.S. put less “unethical” pressure on PR managers than bosses in Europe do.
Nevertheless, according to European educators, American PR educators tend to create a rather normative or ideal image of the profession, whereas Europeans tend to provide their students with a realistic description of PR practice.

Attempting to explain such a discrepancy within the Western academic world, European educators brought up a number of factors. First, they believed that culture (e.g., positive “can do” attitude) influences teaching philosophies and practices of U.S. educators. As a European teacher said, “Probably, American teachers think that they have more influence on students than European teachers do.” And her colleague believed that whether in everyday life or academia, Europeans “are more skeptical, cynical, and realistic,” compared to Americans.

Second, European participants, who are familiar with American PR scholarship, believed that the scholarship tends to emphasize and call for normative PR rather than to explore its real practice. As a result, American teachers, who are scholars as well, are inclined to concentrate students’ attention on ideal rather than on existing models, contributing to the building of the dominant paradigm (L’Etang, 2008). A leitmotiv of the resistance movement that emerged against the U.S.-based dominant paradigm in the middle of the 1990s (L’Etang, 2008) was clearly heard in monologues of European educators, who insisted on their own way of conceptualizing, practicing, and teaching public relations.

Third, the majority of European participants pointed out that American universities that educate PR professionals are closely tied to the PR industry. In L’Etang’s (2008) words, “A key assumption of the dominant paradigm seems to be that academic work should contribute directly to practice” (p. 252). In European participants’ opinion, such a dependency potentially puts a lot of pressure on PR educators who might feel obligated to be “cheerleaders or apologists or both for the profession.” Meanwhile, European universities that educate future PR practitioners are “full universities, not applied science universities,” meaning that they are responsible for the “general liberal education” that seems to be disengaged from industries.

In this regard, Nessmann (1995) argued that PR programs in the U.S. and Europe differ significantly in their structure and nature. The majority of European universities do not offer a degree specifically in public relations and emphasize a broader communication degree, whereas more than 160 American universities have a PR degree program or at least a sequence. Moreover, Hazleton and Cutbirth cited in Nessmann (1995) noted that European universities focus on theory more than on practical skills, whereas American universities are preoccupied with job-related training, since U.S. educators want their students to compete effectively on the job market.

According to the majority of European teachers, the fact that universities maintain their right to be neutral toward the PR industry has its implication for ethics education: “It’s more about teaching critical thinking than training to solve work problems.” This remark of a European teacher was a leitmotiv of interviews with European communication educators.

Fourth, one-third of Europeans linked the religiosity of American society and “undivided personal and professional identity.” This tie, according to one participant, “makes Americans think that they should confront what they believe is not right, even if they might sacrifice a job in this struggle.” Another teacher said that the missionary culture makes teachers inspire students “to go and change the world,” and this rhetoric is understood by the students who have been part of the missionary culture from the early age.

Fifth, the majority of European teachers believed that because their universities have a much more diverse undergraduate population than American universities, the teachers, as one educator said, “cannot be ethical dictators who try to impose some rigid ethical standards on people who come from very different assumptions and different experiences in the world.” In his opinion, Students should emerge from here being critical and reflective, showing awareness of issues, showing the ability to appreciate both sides of a question before drawing the conclusion, and not trying to adopt some unreal pure PR ethics which doesn’t recognize that PR is based on the real working world.
While spotlighting differences in American and European PR education and analyzing their causes, European teachers emphasized that in the same manner as PR practices worldwide cannot be treated as “right or wrong,” PR education cannot be judged from an ethnocentric point of view. As one European teacher said, “PR is a kind of mirror to society. PR people are social beings and what they do reflects society.” Accordingly, PR education in general and teaching approaches in particular are social and culturally bound phenomena, and they should be analyzed taking in consideration a multi-level societal context (university, region, country, and continent).

**Proposition IV:** American and European educators appear to be similar in their perceptions of challenges in teaching ethics.

Difficulties associated with teaching ethics to public relations students originate from multiple sources at different levels—individual, professional, and societal. These challenges include but are not limited to an increased student religiosity, vaguely defined professional codes of ethics, relations with journalists, and overall societal environment. 

**Religiosity.** A few U.S. and European teachers addressed the issue of student religiosity which is defined as a “person’s degree of adherence to the beliefs, doctrines, and practices of a particular religion” (Dube & Wingfield, 2008, p. 503). One professor said that he found that “religious absolutism often can be quite dysfunctional in terms of public relations work.” In his opinion, when students appeal exclusively to the Bible, such a practice tends to “short-circuit any kind of individual critical thinking.”

Two other American educators noted that quite often, their PR students confuse ethics with religion. However, as a response to teacher’s attempt to show that “religiosity” does not automatically mean “ethicality,” students might complain that “the teacher challenges my religious beliefs.” The two respondents admitted that they are not ready to deal with challenges imposed by student religiosity, and they think the U.S. educational community should discuss this issue to find meaningful ways to respond to manifestations of religious indoctrination in classroom.

European educators were divided in their views of whether religiosity is a difficult issue to deal in ethics class. Some of them saw it as a challenge—“to allow students freedom of speech without something which is damaging to beliefs of religious students.” In that particular university, the majority of communication students represented Christian and Muslim believers, and their debates on religious topics imposed a challenge for a teacher who had to follow the policy of a secular university and did not allow turning the class in a religious battleground. In his opinion, in that university ethics comes into play in terms of respecting differences in an international classroom.

Another European teacher said that the fact that his students represent a number of religious denominations helps him to address ethical issues in communication: “My mission is to draw on this diversity.” As an example, while covering the topic of corporate social responsibility (CSR), the teacher asked students from Bangladesh and Pakistan if they were willing to comment on what CSR is from an Islamic point of view:

They said that companies pay automatically—a percentage of their profit is deducted to the community fund. It’s the law because Mohammed said so. This example illustrated how Islamic principles are infused in countries’ financial system. In another class I was talking about a free choice in developing an organizational strategy. Islamic students said, “It’s an Allah choice.”

In this teacher’s opinion, by being exposed to a variety of opinions and learning about how the world differs in problem-solving approaches, students gain better understanding of themselves by uncovering their own prejudices and respect opinions and lifestyles that are different from their own.
Apparently, the process of self-disclosure is a difficult one. As one American teacher said, “It takes a while to get students comfortable enough to discuss their concerns in class.” The reason is that students think that they need to be politically correct and “do and see things” in a socially expectable way.

A European teacher said that he treats his “Understanding Public Relations” course as a “very international course” in which ideas from any country are welcomed. In his view, an opportunity to freely express a personal view is the practice that distinguishes a university course from a training course.

Overall, while American PR educators are concerned with the internationalization of the PR practice, European teachers are in the process of finding ways to manage diversity within their communication classes.

*Professional ethics code.* While talking about the necessity to evaluate student learning in ethics class, one American professor remarked that educators cannot be successful in this task since there is “no way to evaluate the success in something that hasn’t been described yet,” meaning that the profession has not articulated its ethical standards. He said:

- Public Relations Society’s ethical standards are basically about trade protection: “don’t break the law,” and “don’t steal somebody else’s clients.”
- As far as any kind of substantive ethical standards for the profession, it’s all watered down and it’s voluntary.

Moreover, in this teacher’s opinion, the profession does not seem to be engaged in active debates about what these standards should be. So far, the profession has been restraining the trade, and “this is not ethics, it is business arrangement.” In this regard, Benson (2008) argued that academics should “distance themselves from their too-close historic association with business” (p. 20) and develop more close ties with non-governmental organizations.

*Teaching controversy.* Two American participants pointed out that an ethical controversy is embedded in the very process of teaching PR majors: “We teach students to write a letter to the editor and sign someone’s name. Is it ethical?”

A European educator said that PR students are taught to get their messages through in an editorial content or journalistic stories without really saying, “I represent this company.” In her opinion, “It is quite similar to brand placement.” Yet, the teacher said that she would not take a stand by saying that it is completely unethical: “It depends on not so much PR people’s perceptions, but the audience’s perception of what is ethical and what is not.” This statement might have an implication for teaching ethics to PR majors: While making a decision about a case in which ethics is involved, practitioners should take into consideration not only their personal values and professional codes, but also know the audience’s attitude toward the issue. “Who decides what is ethical?” is a crucial question that indicates the complexity of decision making process in public relations.

*PR ethics in the international setting.* At least a half of participants addressed challenges in teaching ethics imposed by the era of globalization. One U.S. female professor said that in her class, she focuses on case studies because “many of them are international, and the purpose of that is to show how complex ethical decisions can be.” The teacher said that for her, ethics exists not only at the theoretical impersonal level: “Ethics is in my office when international students come to cry on my shoulder about American bombing of a foreign country.”

Another American participant believed that some ethical principles are easy to students to understand. For example, “Do not bribe’ is easy.” However, when this principle is applied abroad, it becomes much more complicated. As the teacher said, “What if you are in Turkey and need to place something in media? You have to pay a journalist, and it’s embedded in their culture and this is how they do journalism in Turkey.” Another participant echoed this statement, saying: “What is baksheesh? Is it social respect or a criminal act?” Apparently, the answer depends on the country in which baksheesh (a gratuity or alms) is being offered. In the U.S., it is an inappropriate act akin to bribery, whereas in some Asian countries, baksheesh is part of culture (Curtin & Gaither, 2007).
Although a senior educator believed that his goal is “to get students to recognize ethical issues in a real world situation,” meaning to help them see how general principles apply for specific situations, the teacher admitted that he could not say with a certainty what ethical standards for the practice of PR are applicable in the global scale.

A European teacher, an author of a few books about public relations, said that while a “set of techniques used by PR practitioners are very similar around the world,” PR professionals use them in a variety of ways, “depending on the nature of the media, the nature of society, and people’s values.” In his opinion, although the UK is much more similar to the U.S. than many other European countries, nevertheless, British PR practice is quite different from American PR.

Another European educator believed that American and European educators might have different opinions about how to teach ethics to PR majors because of significant cultural differences. He said that while “American culture encourages earning a lot of money and CEO’s million dollars salaries are acceptable in the U.S., European culture encourages to be “normal” [to be satisfied with a modest income]. We don’t think that a million dollars salary is ethical.”

Problem of evaluation of student learning. American and European educators were united in their opinion that evaluation of student learning might be the most difficult part of the teaching process. As one U.S. teacher said, “We test, we don’t evaluate.” Indeed, many participants in this study emphasized that tests—a multiple choice or even open-ended questions—cannot be taken as a reliable measure of student effective learning in part of predicting their behaviors. As one European educator said, “You can assess the awareness of ethical dilemmas and understanding of theoretical frameworks but in part of choices that they [students] might make after graduation... It’s beyond of my control!” Another participant echoed, “You can make students learn but you can’t make them behave.”

At the same time, the majority of educators believed that “continuous exposure to ethics leads to more thoughtful behavior,” and they referred to studies that examined perceptions of ethics courses by university graduates. As a European teacher said, “We ask them [students] not for knowledge only, but also for an opinion that indicates whether students are growing in their perceptions of ethical issues.”

The majority of participants recognized the need for more subtle and sophisticated methods of assessing student learning than “in-class tests/exams.” Among methods mentioned by the participants were: Written essays, student presentations, class discussions, reflective journals, and informal observations and meetings. An American teacher said that one informal meeting helped her realize that a student, who “performed very well in class while recognizing ethical dilemmas in scenarios, did not apply ethical theories for herself.” The teacher said that the student wanted to mention in her resume the fact of conducting research. The teacher asked for details, and the student answered that she wrote research papers for money. It appeared, according to the teacher, the student thought about herself as a “good businesswoman,” and did not see anything wrong in being paid for research papers. The teacher concluded: “The only way to know if you sparked, launched, cultivated, nurtured ethical thought and behavior is seeing it over time.”

Journalism vs. Public Relations, or Who is responsible for a bad PR image? Regardless of the country in which they teach, participants were concerned with tension that exists between journalism and public relations professions. A world-known American PR educator made it clear that this situation negatively affects the educational process:

I am not convinced and never will be convinced that journalists are inherently more ethical people than public relations people are. But journalists love to feel it. Law and ethics is often taught by a journalism faculty member, and PR students come out feeling bad about themselves because PR people are characterized as liars and journalists are characterized as heroes of society.
A European educator said that in her country, if someone wants to offend a journalist, he or she needs to call him or her a “PR person.” Another European teacher said that the image of PR is worse than its practice, and a “break through” seems impossible since journalists are attuned to bad PR practices and ignore positive acts.

A European teacher whose research focused on relations between journalists and PR managers found that journalists expect PR people to be advocates for their companies and do not expect them to reveal “the whole truth” in a testimonial manner, because journalists want to “get easy to digest, straightforward information,” and they do not want to “complicate things.”

While a number of participants believed that journalists contributed to creating a negative image of public relations, a European expert in organizational communication believed that this “unwanted” image was built in the 1970-1980 by American professionals themselves. In his opinion, in that time PR people “tried to influence public opinion too heavily.” Later on, “they learned from the science that PR is limited in its ability to influence people’s minds.” However, there are still a lot of efforts to “green-wash a questionable image.” This teacher is used to discussing “window-dressing” practices with his students. As an example, he asked them to think about “why an American fast food company supports sports?” Students saw elements of “green-washing” in the company’s efforts, but in general, they agreed that helping athletes is better than “doing nothing,” meaning not trying to balance harm caused by unhealthy food.

Another European teacher said that ordinary people believe that “PR people are dishonest and journalists are honest, but they don’t know how much newspaper information comes from press-releases prepared by PR practitioners.” As an example, this teacher offered his students to discuss a “white powder case.” This event happened in a European city. One day, a large city territory was covered by a white powder, but media labeled it a “light grey powder.” The teacher presumed that PR managers of the plant that was responsible for the eruption of the white substance, aimed to avoid association with anthrax. However, instead of handing his conclusion to students, the teacher walked them through the process of decision-making, asking them if they were PR managers and journalists, what would they do in such a situation? Would they call the substance a “white powder” and possibly scare the population? Or would they “stretch the truth” by calling it a “light grey powder”? The teacher said that such “a small thing was an eye-opening experience” for his students, a sort of introduction to the topic of purposeful frames in PR and journalism—frames that might be the result of a collaborative decision of representatives of both professions.

A European participant who teaches PR and journalism students as a adjunct professor while working full time as a television reporter, noted that the recent tendency of employers to pay less and make journalists work more negatively affects their relationships with PR practitioners. He said that in the 1990s, he used to sit with PR managers and talk through details of the story, and PR people always appreciated such attention. Now he “shoots and runs” to get the story to the air. He said that a leitmotiv of his lectures is that good PR managers are open and truthful, and if some reason they cannot provide journalists with accurate information, they would say, “Sorry, I cannot comment on this,” instead of misleading them with “fluffy words.”

Anecdotal data show that PR researchers’ interest in investigating corporate social responsibility (CSR) in various organizational settings is growing every year. Meanwhile, it appeared that CSR might be perceived as an oppositional practice to public relations. In one European teacher’s opinion, PR might be seen as a kind of semi-legal secret activity—“doing and looking back,” meaning “if we get away with it, that’s great,” whereas CSR is about avoiding doing unethical things not because of the fear of disclose but because “it’s fundamentally wrong to do, it contradicts our values.” The existence of this frame—CSR is oppositional to PR—should be taken into consideration by PR teachers whose goal, among many others, is to prepare graduates to advocate for the profession in an argumentative way.

Quit or comply? The issue of how PR graduates should react if management wants them to engage in unethical behavior appeared to be very important for participants in this study. In this
regard, an American educator said that PR graduates’ first ethical choice happens when they choose for whom to work. Another teacher said that an ethical choice of PR practitioners would be “to help organizations stop doing unethical things.”

However, there was a disagreement about whether a PR graduate should confront management if the boss forces the PR person to act unethically. Approximately one-third of American educators believed in a “quit-job” approach. One female educator said that she advises her students to have a six-month salary put aside to walk away from the organization any time. In this regard, one European teacher said that if PR graduates would leave their job every time they want to avoid an unethical situation, “their careers would be pretty short.” Another American participant said that she recommends to her students to start looking for another job immediately after they suspect that the company tolerates dishonest behavior, but quit the job only after they find another one.

Five American educators believed that PR graduates should become “educational” while trying to convince the boss to avoid an unethical path. As one American teacher said, “Ethics education helps students understand that they are not powerless,” meaning that they have tools to deal with ethical dilemmas. As this educator explained, instead of slamming the door and quitting the job, the PR professional should “do research and show what happened to people who followed this [unethical] way.”

An American teacher said that he constantly emphasizes to his present and former students that as PR practitioners, they are not alone while facing an ethical dilemma: “One of the most important sources of your decision making is your network. You can call anybody up, and without even being totally specific, you can explain what is going on and ask them what they would do and why.” As an international PR practitioner in the past, this educator used this approach in his practice.

One American teacher said that often, a PR practitioner’s willingness to stand up for his or her beliefs helps prevent questionable campaigns. As an example, this teacher told a story of her former student who worked as a PR manager for an educational institution only six months when a tragedy happened: a few students died in a car incident. The supervisor of this manager wanted her to use this case to publicize the institution. Though the manager realized that she could have been fired, she still refused to implement such a campaign and convinced the boss to withdraw his decision as unethical.

A European teacher, who combines teaching and working as a journalist, said that in some situations, a PR person does not have other choices except to quit. He brought an example from his practice that he shares with his students. A PR manager of a large corporation was respected by journalists for his honesty and expertise. Yet, one day he disseminated information that turned out to be false. The PR manager resigned from his job after he realized that he was deceived by management that provided him with false information.

A common theme of the majority of responses was that while PR managers should consider an option of compromises, they should know “where to draw the line.” As a PR instructor said, “When you find yourself in such [problematic] situation, you try your best using your argumentative skills, your best ability to persuade your boss not to act unethically.” However, if “no matter what you said, decisions are made…There is always a job.”

Proposition V: Participants believe that the best method to teach ethics is to combine a few approaches.

The majority of participants said that there is no a single best approach in teaching ethics to undergraduate students. One participant summarized the responses by saying that the best method is a mix of approaches. In his opinion, the key to effective student learning is to make ethics instruction “real and relevant” by employing, first, cases from the news that have a “local angle” that “makes students be interested” in the cases and, second, “talk through ethical scenarios.”

Participants in this study outlined a number of approaches in teaching ethics that certainly reflect their teaching philosophies.
Keeping journals. An American senior educator said that “reflective management is the essence of public relations.” Ideally, the ability to reflect on professional issues should be cultivated in college. In this regard, an American participant shared his experience in teaching PR students:

In my class, students kept journals, describing their experiences, and at the end of the course one common thing went out—now they recognize ethical dilemmas, now they are looking at their lives in different way. What happened is that they recognized humanity. They began to see that they are not just PR practitioners, they are still human. And that humanity demands of them certain responsibility: “I must approach my practice in a way that I can justify it as the right way.” Studying ethics theories allows them to see certain ways to make decisions and then begin to look at their own decisions.

Shadowing professionals. Another approach to better familiarize students with their future occupation was articulated by an American teacher:

I found a good exercise—to go to do interview with professionals. Ask them a set of questions about if the practitioners had ethical dilemmas and how they resolve them. Then students write an evaluation of both the situation and the professional, whether it was done well or they would do it differently.

Writing a moral code. An assignment to write a personal moral code appeared to be a creative and meaningful way to help students articulate their personal values and professional intentions. One American educator said that her students write a personal professional ethics code that becomes part of a portfolio. First, the teacher advises her students to observe potential employer’s reaction on the code while he or she goes through the portfolio. If the employer stopped and paid attention to the code, it might be a good sign—he or she cares about ethics. If the code did not draw attention of the employer, it might be an alarming signal. Second, the teacher advises her graduates to hang their ethics codes on the office wall to make it public. In this case, if the boss wants a PR practitioner to do something that violate ethics, the practitioner can always say, “Wait a minute! It was in my portfolio when you hired me; you knew that it was my consideration. And many ways, it can be considered a contractual obligation.”

Another teacher, emphasizing the importance of an assignment to write a personal ethics code, said:

One student emailed me years after graduation, saying, “I just started reading my own moral code. I want to tell thank you for guiding me along through this process, and I am confident to tell you that in most part, I’ve been living up to my code.”

In this regard, communication teachers appeared to believe in the ethical capacity of their students, or their abilities to comprehend ethics issues. One American teacher said, “In essence, all of them [students] have [ethical] capacity. The question is how much knowledge, practice and reasoning abilities they have,” meaning that good intentions should be backed up with experience, self-confidence, and critical thinking. Another educator remarked that unethical people do not choose the PR profession—unethical people might gravitate to professions that provide a chance to earn millions of dollars.

Proposition VI: The majority of American and European educators think that the best format of ethics instruction delivery is to combine a free-standing course with ethics discussions in every course.

Participants appeared to have different opinions on what format of ethics instruction—a free-standing course or ethics incorporated throughout the curriculum—is the best way to insure student effective learning. One participant’s opinion summarized views of the group of American and
European teachers (24 participants) who believe in the approach of “ethics throughout the curriculum:”

Ethics needs to be taught as an essential part of every course because every choice that is made—whether a strategic planning choice or wording choice—has an ethical component to it. Any time when you make ethical choices that can affect others you are making ethical judgments, and you have to be mindful of applications of these ethical judgments.

A group of nine participants disagreed by saying that PR education should include “a stand alone PR ethics course, maybe media ethics course, certainly, separate from law.” In one teacher’s opinion, “Ethics needs to be slow cooked, in the sense that it needs to be integrated in everything we do, as oppose to garnish we sprinkle on the top at the end of the course, “By the way, everything that PR professionals do should be ethical.” This opinion represents a number of participants who think that “ethics deserves to be a separate capstone course.”

The majority of respondents believed that the most effective way is to have a free-standing course and use ethics discussion in every course in every class meeting.

This study showed that the balance of theory and practice was a challenging endeavor for American PR educators. As one teacher said,

If you go too philosophical, you lose them [students]. If you go absolutely practical, they don’t understand how to apply the situations in specifics. Try to find a balance where they can reason through abstractly but still see practical application. That’s a hard work.

Overall, the analysis of qualitative interviews showed that American and European teaching philosophies and practices are overlapping, and differences between them are explained by larger differences (e.g., societal and university culture and history). While U.S. educators emphasized the necessity to study norms and values of the profession, European educators focused on studying classical theories and articulating student personal values, or encouraging them to develop their “own personal take on public relations” (L’Etang, 2008).

Conclusion

As a response to European convergence, a doctrine of a European Space for Higher Education was developed in Bologna, Italy, in 1999 (Seccion Especial, 2004). When it is fully implemented in 2010, the doctrine will result in a borderless system of higher education in Europe (e.g., unified credits transfer system, the ability of students and professors move across countries, and internationally compatible degrees). The Bologna process reflects concern of the high level educational managers that European universities are “unemployment factories” and their desire to modernize the process of teaching to meet requirements of labor market (Seccion Especial, 2004).

European participants in this study represented universities that have already introduced a new structure of university courses—graduate and postgraduate cycles. However, it appeared that communication teachers were not enthusiastic about the changes. Although only one senior teacher openly said that a new Bachelor-Master structure is a “step back,” other teachers found other ways to express their disagreement with the system of education that is set up to “educate students in a direct and efficient way.” They think that the task of universities is to provide a broad liberal education, which will help graduates reach their personal and professional goals, as opposed to a “narrow vocational training” that gives skills but does not liberate minds. Apparently, the Bologna process as a response to globalization has produced tension between the European identity and culture and the necessity to compete in the global business.

The two groups—European and U.S. educators—demonstrated similar attitudes toward ethics instruction in the public relations curriculum, seeing it as an important aspect of communication education. However, while American educators called for a more thorough instruction in the professional ethics, European teachers emphasized the need to educate communication professionals who are experts in ethics in the philosophical sense. Thus, two different dimensions of ethics
education emerged: Ethics instruction that helps students comprehend and subscribe to norms and behaviors of the PR profession (normative ethics), and ethics instruction that helps student to understand the nature of moral thought and practice (meta-ethics).

Importantly, both American and European educators were concerned with evaluation of student learning, saying that they might be able to evaluate students’ performances in class, but they are not able to predict what framework graduates choose in the practice public relations and personal lives.

The specifics of the system of higher education in the U.S. and Europe led to the situation in which American PR educators feel obligated to help the industry thrive, while European educators distance themselves from the industry seeing universities as autonomous enterprises that are not “accepting orders” from practitioners. Accordingly, approaches in teaching ethics differ in the U.S. and Europe. While American teachers believe that good examples are able to induce moral behavior (Pratt, 1991), Europeans educators tend to focus on negative cases. One of the explanations of such a strategy of European teachers is the fact that 85% of PR practice is asymmetrical (press agentry, public information, the two-way asymmetrical model) (Nessmann, 1995). Moreover, Benson (2008) appealed to PR professionals and educators to set “realistic ground rules” and “abandon an ethical and intellectual project that suffers from a real ‘legitimation’ crisis” (p. 18).

While analyzing a number of public relations cross-national research projects, Nessmann (1995) said that these studies showed a great impact of culture on practical PR. In regard to a cross-cultural comparison, the present study found that in the same manner as PR practices reflect national specifics of the countries in which public relations activities take place, PR educational philosophies reflect national PR practices and broader societal contexts. Thus, the teaching philosophies might diverge, and in some cases, quite sharply. It means that there might not be an opportunity to generalize educational practices even within Europe (Vercic, van Ruler, Butschi, & Flodin, 2001; Nessmann, 1995), needless to say, in the global scope. However, an attempt to uncover similarities among national PR practices continue to attract scholars’ attention (Vercic et al., 2001), and there is a hope that a research interest on educational practices will be increased as well.

Finally, it is important to underline that a leitmotiv of qualitative interviews was that universities as advanced academic communities should perform a dual service to society: to disseminate knowledge and provide guidance for the responsible use of knowledge.
References


The Licensed Ethical Conscience: A study of Public Relations Ethics in Brazil

Angela M. Fischer, Student in the Masters Degree of Public Relations Program, College of Communication, Boston University
**Introduction**

As the largest country in South America with the eighth largest economy in the world, Brazil merits attention in the practice of public relations. As the first country to license public relations as a legalized profession since 1967, it provides a research terrain for the effect of licensing on ethical behavior, credibility and the role of public relations as the conscience of an organization.

The debate of licensing has persisted in the United States, as well as on a global scale—especially with globalization and integration of communication fields. Codes of ethics are difficult to enforce; therefore, organizations in the United States only suggest ethical conduct accompanied by blurred definitions of public relations. In contrast, public relations is a defined legal profession in Brazil. In fact, in order to practice as a licensed professional a practitioner must have a degree in public relations and qualify for a license from a state’s regional council (Molleda, Athaydes, 2003).

Some arguments for licensing of public relations include defining public relations, unifying the profession and educational system, establishing credibility and identifying standards and values. In contrast, arguments against licensing include challenging first amendment rights, lacking power to enforce and experiencing restrictions of creativity from enforcement. Does the licensing in Brazil put public relations professionals in a management function, and therefore, the position as the conscience or ethical counsel of an organization? Does licensing increase ethics by creating a “universal” standard of conduct and a clear definition of public relations? In a survey conducted by Brazilian communication association Aberje, communicators occupy more of a management role of strategic planning and ethical counseling as opposed to a technician role in Brazil (Nassar, P., Furlanetto, M., Figueiredo & Figueiredo, S. 2008). What are the ethical standards and dilemmas faced by public relations professionals in Brazil? Through interviews with professionals working in the area of public relations in Brazil, I have developed direction to answer these questions of ethics, licensing and management conscience roles regarding public relations.

Brazil serves as a testing zone, where public relations practitioners can learn about the ethical effects of a licensed profession. From a review of research about ethics codes in Brazil, little has been contributed to the field. This study expands the concept of public relations licensing addressed almost exclusively by Molleda and Athaydes (2003) to include ethical implications. The qualitative data will further the field of public relations through insights about licensing, ethical behavior and cultural influence of public relations in a globalizing world of social media and integrated communications.

**Literature Review**

*Ethics vs. Culture*

Most published literature focus on ethics or public relations in Brazil, and few articles combine the aspects of ethics, licensing and public relation. Through an exploration of ethics in a country with a different system of public relations, we can test the possibility and functionality of a global code of ethics in the field of public relations. A universal code of ethics is challenged by the relative nature of national, local and personal cultures coupled by the unenforceability of such codes. National culture affects ethics. “As business organizations move from domestic to global and transnational competition, they are finding that cultural values vary significantly across national boundaries, and are likely to affect business practice,” said Beekun, Stedham & Yamamura (2003, p. 267).

With the increased globalization of business, the effect of culture on ethics has become a subject demanding attention. To this point, relatively few studies analyze the relation between ethics and culture in Brazil. Culture is such a broad concept that in order to study it specific values need to be defined. In Beekun’s survey of 126 Brazilian and U.S. professionals, he used the well-established framework of national culture established by Hofstede. His cultural dimensions include individualism and collectivism. The greatest cultural difference appears in this particular dimension (Beekun, Stedham & Yamamura, 2003). Egoism is more dominant in individualistic cultures, and the
utilitarianism ethical philosophy is used to make ethical decisions in collective cultures, such as Brazil. Brazil is a collectivistic culture focusing more on actions that lead to the greatest benefit for the most members of a group. One of the greatest challenges in researching ethics is attaining truthful responses instead of what people view as more acceptable responses.

Each country has different laws that guide actions of organizations; however, ethics requires an even higher standard. While countries adhere to different laws, could they agree on similar standards of ethics?

Global ethics is not always a question of a country’s values being right or wrong, or better or worse than another’s (El-Astal, 2005). If ethics just included right or wrong, as the term is most commonly defined, then a universal code could be possible. However, El-Astal explained, “It is not possible to go from principle to practice because our day-to-day practice is based somehow on our cultural heritage, local customs and circumstances. Not all countries define phrases like ‘fair dealing’ in the same way.” Codes provide guidance, but to this point have not been enforced, nor should be, according to many scholars (Fitzpatrick, 2002). In the United States, the Public Relations Society of America created a code in 1959 based on enforcement. However, through a series of changes to the code, it now serves as a mere guideline. Although the code is not enforceable, nor do all public relations practitioners follow the code, the suggested guidelines approach may prove to lead to more ethical behavior than strict rules that professionals steer around.

Culture influences the public relations work of organizations. According to Sriramesh (2009), culture is linked to public relations and both affect each other. This culture is determined by environmental influences, the political system, economics, development, media systems and activism. The government influence of Brazil affects the practice of public relations as a controlling force—for good or bad.

**Licensing and the Ethical Conscience**

In a study on the “corporate conscience,” Bowen demonstrated how senior-level public relations professionals act as ethical counsel to an organization and serve as part of the dominant coalition (2008). With a standard as a licensed profession in Brazil, public relations professionals would serve in management roles and therefore as the ethical consciences of their organizations. According to a study conducted by Aberje, the largest communication organization in Brazil, corporate communication in Brazil is a strategic management function (Nassar, Furlanetto, Figueredo, 2008). Those working in the field of communication are viewed in the management function as opposed to a mere technician. If the public relations professionals in Brazil are part of the management function and adhere to a standard code of ethics as part of the licensing procedure, they would act more ethically than those who have no code and are viewed as technicians—as is often the case in the United States. This idea will be contended, tested and discussed in this study.

Bowen’s multinational study showed that public relations ethics was in a state of neglect. Professionals do not embrace ethical principles and counsel in decision-making. He argues that the ethical conscience of an organization is within the top echelon of the public relations function. His research addresses the ambiguity around the role of ethics counsel in public relations and provides a theory to establish public relations as the ethical conscience of an organization. “Moral philosophy intersects the interests of business in the challenging mandate for corporate accountability and transparency. The central responsibility for ethical organization decision–making can be seen in terms of helping an organization communicate with its stakeholders and publics (Bowen, 2008, p. 272).” Organizational policies and decisions come from top management from legal, finance and operations. Bowen argues that this group of decision-makers should include a public relations professional to represent the values, beliefs and views of various publics whom they represent. Ethical analysis will help an organization make decisions aligned with the interests of its stakeholders. Public relations management advises the dominant coalition and serves as the ethical conscience of an organization. Bowen confirms that public relations professionals should act as a
corporate conscience, integrity and honesty judge, or ethics counsel to top decision makers in the organization. Bowen explored the uncultivated area of the role of public relations as the ethical conscience through qualitative research including focus groups and interviews with IABC members. One theme that emerged from his study was that an analysis of ethics was not necessary if the organization followed legal requirements and sought to do no harm.

Although the United States does not license public relations professionals to protect first amendment rights of free speech, the laws of the land apply to the field. In Brazil, the laws include a licensing process accompanied by a legally enforceable code of ethics. Culture influences both laws and ethical guidelines. Although the government influences public relations through laws or licensing, the media serve as the fourth-estate to regulate government control.

Bowen’s study showed that moral reasoning was preferred over legalism. “Public relations practitioners who were favorable towards the role of ethics counsel or ethical conscience expressed a preference for using moral reasoning to examine the potential consequences of decisions on publics (p. 272).” In Brazil, public relations professionals who are licensed may have rules from the government, but keeping a strict list of rules does not make a more ethical professional. The same principle applies to public relations professionals in the United States. Those who act ethically just to meet legal requirements are less ethical than those who use principles of moral reasoning to do what is in the best interest of all publics involved.

From his study, Bowen concluded, “Acting as an ethical conscience advances not only the mutual interests of publics and the organizations that serve them, but also advances the stature of public relations as a management function—a function with a solid foundation in ethical counsel and practice (p. 273).”

According to a study by Molleda and Ferguson, the public relations professional who is considered part of management is responsible for the ethics and social responsibility role in an organization. In their survey of public relations professionals in Brazil, 66 percent occupied managerial roles (2004). Whereas women in the United States assume the technician role and make less than men, the relationship and value-focused Brazilian society allows for women to occupy managerial positions. The public relations practitioner can only employ the role as a change agent and conscience with a voice in management.

**Ethical Codes Conflicts**

As the pioneering advocate for a universal code of ethics, Kruckeberg viewed a code based on theories and philosophy agreed-upon by those in the profession as the “logical universal beginning (1989, p. 13).” In a time before the increasing globalization of today, he recognized the value of standards in order to work on a multinational level. He said, “To ignore transnational corporations’ growing impact is myopic; to ignore the particular ethical considerations peculiar to the needs of professional communicators of multinational companies is folly (p. 16).”

Hunt & Tirpok support a universal ethics code, as they view the proliferation of codes from different organizations as a threat to public trust in communication with a clear message and mission (1993). In support of Kruckeberg, they assent to the usefulness of ethics codes even though they may be interpreted according to countries and cultures.

Despite the benefits presented by Kruckeberg (1989) and Hunt and Tirpok (1993) of a universal code of ethics for public relations practitioners, culture influences ethical practices in each country. According to Ferrari (2009), different countries, regions and even groups define public relations based on unique cultural differences. “Everything we do in public relations requires adjusting to local realities that take into consideration the influence of culture, politics, the economy, media and the idiosyncrasies of each nation (p. 725).”

Wright (1993) presented the idea that a strong and enforceable code of ethics is not a prerequisite of an ethical professional. “Ethics codes are unenforceable, only as good as those who subscribe to them, and don’t reward people for their ethical behavior (p. 15),” Wright said. The
voluntary nature of public relations codes of ethics makes them unenforceable. However, even an official licensing program may not be entirely enforceable, as suggested in the discussion of this study. Wright explained that codes don’t have a real absolute function without enforcement. “In reality codes of ethics in public relations are more cosmetic than anything else,” he said. “They’re warm and fuzzy and make practitioners feel good about themselves, but they don’t accomplish much (p.15).”

Culture influences the understanding and practice of ethics in public relations. Cultures vary in language, non-verbal communication and social customs (Smeltzer & Jennings, 1999).

Oftentimes, the cultures of different countries conflict with codes of ethics. Smeltzer and Jennings (1998) said, “To some companies, adapting to foreign cultures often requires ethical compromises (p. 57).” These companies may work within other countries in a manner contrary to codes of ethics, and sometimes the very tenets of capitalism and human rights. Each country enforces different laws. Although an action may be legal, it may not be ethical—the two components are not transposable. For example, “grease” payments, or bribes to facilitate international business are allowed under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Although such practices may be considered “legal,” the ethicality can easily be disputed. Accepted international practices may violate laws and commonly accepted standards of ethics and social responsibility in the United States. Smeltzer and Jennings questioned, “Should individual national cultures or should company ethics codes control the firm’s ethical decision for international operations?” How can organizations work ethically on an international turf with no ethical regulations or rules? Smeltzer and Jennings ascertain that a company with two sets of values—one for domestic and another for international business—is “headed for an ethical crisis (p. 63).” While arguing the inevitable influence of culture on international business, they defend the idea that absolutes should exist, supporting an international code of ethics.

**History of Public Relations in Brazil**

Although the practice of public relations started in Brazil in 1914, it did not develop until the 1950s due to governmental control and dictatorship. The first instance of public relations in Brazil involved a transnational company, which represents the multinational interactions of the field today. The Canadian electricity company The Sao Paulo Tramway Light and Power Company Limited, today known as Eletropaulo-Eletricidade de Sao Paulo, created a public relations department led by Eduardo Pine Wolf. Under the democratic rule of President Getulio Vargas, a national policy on industrial development contributed to the growth of the communication industry. The government officially recognized the profession of public relations in 1967 by law number 5,3277. This new law required those working in the field of public relations to receive a bachelor’s degree in the field and register with the government. Brazil was the only South American country with a monarchy throughout most of the nineteenth century. It was also the first country to license public relations—a practice influenced by the governmental control associated with the dictatorships (Ferrari, 2009, p. 705). The military influenced the licensing of public relations in an attempt to control communication, which has had a more negative than positive effect on public relations in Brazil.

At the time of the governmental recognition of the profession, Brazil was proudly recognized as the first country to legalize public relations. However, controversies exist around whether the regulation contributes to the growth and credibility of the field, since it occurred at a time when public relations was not clearly developed or defined. The government passed the law at a time when the military and government controlled communication more closely for national security.

In 1980, Brazilian citizens protested the policy demanding more freedom of speech and transparency in government communication. With undesirable regulations to practice public relations, those working in functions of public relations refer to their work as organizational communication—a conglomerate of public relations, marketing and internal communication. “If you work in the area of organizational communication or business communication, you don’t need to
have an undergraduate degree in public relations. In fact, you can have a degree in any area from publicity to engineering,” said Mateus Furlanetto, assistant director of Aberje (Furlanetto, 2010). According to Furlanetto, the law is damaging to the profession, since those who did not receive an undergraduate degree feel uncomfortable in the practice. The federal counsel, known as CONFERP gives citations and tickets to companies if those working in public relations do not have a license. In contrast, the government also requires many companies to have someone doing the public relations work, leading to more outsourcing and covert titles (Furlanetto, 2010). This type of regulation has already proven difficult in Brazil because of the size of the country and variance in educational opportunities.

In a survey study conducted by Mele, Debeljuh and Arruda, they found that 77 percent of Brazilian companies surveyed have some kind of ethics document, such as a code of ethics. They attributed the significant number of companies with codes to the trend of revising codes of ethics in South American countries to separate corporate values from government corruption (2006, p. 28). Although some may argue that simply having a code does not translate into more ethical actions, Mele, et al. found a correlation between the number of documents in each company and “the intensity of means used to implement them (Mele, et al., 2006, p. 31).” Despite the issues associated with implementing a code of ethics, perhaps, more codes instead of a universal code could increase commitment to ethics.

Despite the law and federal regulating body, the licensing is difficult to enforce with the expanding and globalizing field of public relations (Molleda & Athaydes, 2003, p. 271). While licensing could define public relations, creating a more unified and ethical profession, licensing in Brazil has not proven to define public relations. In fact, the results will show that the opposite may have occurred.

Although the government recognizes public relations with licensing, the public has not entirely granted legitimacy to the profession (Molleda, Athaydes & Hirsch, 2009). Brazilians mistrust the “government characterized as bureaucratic and inefficient (p. 736).” The connection of public relations to government creates a negative image of public relations in the eyes of citizens. In many developing nations, including Brazil, the government becomes more important than the general public to those working in public relations (Taylor & Kent, 1999). The government control of media influences the practice of public relations. Some professionals and scholars do not support the licensing, because it limits freedom instead of promoting ethics. This in-country study provides insights of those working in public relations on the concept of licensing and its effect on ethics.

According to Smeltzer and Jennings, the corruption of the Brazilian government has tainted the country’s reputation and stunted its economic development (1999). In a culture benefiting the self-interests of those in control, ethics is shadowed by undercover bribes, poverty and crime. Smeltzer and Jennings explained, “Many foreign firms elect not to do business in Brazil because of so much governmental uncertainty and risk...Why send an executive to a country where officials may use force when soliciting huge bribes from foreign executives? (p. 61).” The licensing of the government does not create more trust and support of the practice of public relations. In fact, it hinders growth and international expansion.

In a survey of registered public relations practitioners in Brazil, Molleda and Athaydes found that professionals support the licensing of the practice, but would like to see better management of federal and regional councils to enforce legislation (2003). Although licensing may increase bureaucracy through regulation and enforcement, practitioners indicated that licensing would better define public relations and protect practitioners with an educational background and training in the field.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the effects of government licensing on the ethical role of public relations professionals in Brazil. With an understanding of licensing and its
effects on the profession, we can learn if a code or rules could be universally enforced to create understanding with global communication among various cultures.

This study is the first glimpse of a different system and view of a field that is becoming more global and requiring more international recognition. Through personal interviews with professionals in the field of public relations in Brazil, this study provides insights of the reality of the field of public relations. An understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the field allows for future changes that will create a more credible global profession.

**Methodology**

After reviewing scholarly literature about codes of ethics and the practice of public relations in Brazil, I decided to hit the ground in the city of Sao Paulo and explore the profession through in-depth interviews with professionals working in public relations from a variety of organizations. From the information gleaned through interviews, I will prepare a quantitative survey for future exploration of the role of public relations in Brazil. Through 11 qualitative interviews about public relations, licensing and ethics with professionals from hotels, public relations firms, event companies and communication organizations, I gained an inside understanding of the field. The interviews included 16 questions about public relations, the licensing procedure, codes of ethics and the management role of the professional. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese, recorded, transcribed and translated. Allowing the professionals to comfortably express their views in their own language provided rich discussion and straightforward insights. The responses included opinions and insights on the role of public relations, licensing and perceptions in Brazil.

The interviews provided more insight and direction for further research in the area of public relations in Brazil. A survey will confirm or disprove the conclusions of the qualitative in-country research. The interviews were thematically analyzed based on six themes to show general patterns and consensus among the varying professionals.

**Results**

1. Fear of the Undefined Term, “Public Relations”

The interviews shed light on the concept and implications of licensing public relations in Brazil. Although a license from the government is required to practice public relations, the majority of professionals who work in the area of public relations do not have a license. Therefore, the term “public relations” is avoided and most people interviewed showed adherence and insecurity with the term “public relations,” preferring to use organizational communication. In order to receive a government license, a professional must have completed four years of undergraduate coursework. A professional who graduated in journalism, followed by a master’s degree and doctorate degree in public relations cannot receive the license. About half of students who do graduate in public relations do not receive the government license because it requires a yearly fee without any benefits to the professional. Although licensing is required by law and using the title public relations without a license could result in fines, the government has little control over unifying, defining and establishing a standard of ethics for the profession. In fact, the licensing limits those working in the field and is leading to the extinction of the field of public relations by narrowing it by definition and practice.

The interviewed public relations professionals gave varied, vague definitions of public relations, including “It is a way to show your company. It is usually a human resource function,” “PR is any form of relationships with society, clients, the community—any external or internal relation. Everything I do represents the company and is public relations” and “I don’t think those who work in the area even know what it is.” About half of respondents mentioned concepts of publicity, image, media relations and mediation. Most subjects did not have titles of “public relations.” The fear of the public relations title is attributed to the law.
“People don’t even enter public relations anymore, because of the preconception—the area is losing,” said Paulo Nassar, Aberje president. “For example, a journalist can work in communication without an education in public relations. New terms are simply invented for the functions of public relations and the field is not identified anymore.” Licensing does the opposite of defining public relations; it is abolishing the profession by forcing professionals to find new titles that require less work to use. Interview participants labeled themselves as journalists, marketing managers, public affairs directors, event planners, media relations specialists and communications directors—but not public relations practitioners.

2. Government Influence with Licensing

The initial hypothesis of this study included the idea that government licensing would increase the ethicality of public relations practitioners, because certification is accompanied by a code of ethics and a clear definition of the practice. However, the majority of interview participants were not aware of the licensing procedures. They agreed the government does not have much influence, nor does it make the profession more ethical. Those familiar with the license claimed it had no effect in their profession. As only those with a bachelor’s degree in public relations qualify for the license, the majority of professionals working in the area of communication come from other areas.

In a study conducted by Nassar (2005), only 15.4 percent of communication professionals in Brazil have a degree in public relations. Most professionals do not recognize any benefit from a license number. They view it as a means for the government to take money from the citizens. One participant said, “I don’t know much about the government—not anything formal. They may say that a license is mandatory, but there’s always a way around that—under the table work. The government just wants money from regulation.”

Another interviewee agreed that government recognition doesn’t have a significant effect on the profession. “Even though a license is recognized by the government, the area doesn’t yet have the credibility that others have.”

While licensing could promote credibility and maintain quality in the profession of public relations, most professionals in the study did not embrace the licensing and viewed it either neutrally or negatively.

3. Management Function: the Ethical Conscience

According to the Aberje study (Nassar, 2008) on the role of public relations practitioners as the ethical conscience of an organization, those in the management role have more influence on ethical behavior. Of those interviewed, the majority considered themselves a part of the management function of the organization. This supports the assumption of Brazilians assuming the role of manager as opposed to technician. The majority viewed public relations as both a managerial and technical function in an organization. Although the question asked if they considered public relations a managerial OR technical function, most people responded with both choices. One interviewee said, “Public relations is a technical management function. It is an ability you need to be a manager, but it also involves technical aspects.”

Despite the fact that most professionals assumed a management title and viewed themselves as influencers and leaders in their organizations, the majority responded that they spent more time doing technical tasks instead of strategic planning. With an average of 10 years working for an organization, the professionals had enough time to assume a management position. This finding aligns with the idea of communicators as managers in Brazil.

4. The “Jeitinho Brasileiro”

A central theme of the interviews was the “jeitinho brasileiro,” which signifies a Brazilian way of getting around laws and rules of ethics through under the table actions. Despite rules or
licensing, professionals can practice public relations by simply redefining the term. This is one manifestation of the “jeitinho brasileiro.”

The law does not stop them from working in public relations without a license—they just don’t use the title. This same attitude annuls the effectiveness of a strict code of ethics. Having set rules, also allows for set ways to get around them. One interview participant commented, “Our area is trivialized because of an unethical history. We always found a way around rules and limits with our ‘little Brazilian way.’ Now these rules are very welcomed and we’ve been flooded with codes of ethics.” Similar to the derogatory stereotypes such as hacks, flacks and spin-doctors, “the little Brazilian way” alludes to unethical public relations practitioners. However the Brazilian term to characterize slightly unethical action is less harsh and even considered acceptable within the greater culture.

5. A Universal Code of Ethics: the Great Divide

In response to the possibility of a universal code of ethics for public relations, the interview participants were equally divided between a strong yes or no—no one remained indifferent. This reflects the general sentiment in the United States. For years, professionals and scholars have been divided on the possibility of such a code. At the dawn of public relations in the United States, Bernays supported a universal code of ethics and even a licensing procedure to protect the profession and ensure quality in the field (Molleda & Athaydes, 2003). Even with a licensing in Brazil, the majority of professionals do not follow a nation-wide code of ethics. When asked the relationship between culture and ethics, one participant responded, “Ethics and Brazilian culture are two things that completely contradict each other. Although a universal code would be perfect, it is complicated. For me, ethics is doing what you do with love, heart and feeling. If you believe in what you are doing, you will do it well and ethically.”

While some respondents supported the idea of a universal code of ethics, while recognizing some complications, other participants saw no possibility or benefit of such a code. Another participant said, “A universal code of ethics would be complicated and would actually harm small companies, especially small family-run businesses. There are some under-the-table deals that aren’t exactly ethical small businesses need to do to survive—it’s not always practiced the cute way it is written in a code.”

Some professionals valued a written, clearly defined code of ethics, but Nassar offered a different ethical solution (2010). His ethical outlook does not involve a strict absolute code but a relative understanding. “Businesses that have people in other countries need to understand the local culture and adapt to other countries with language, customs and traditions.” He explained that technically communicating by learning a language and customs of a country is an attitude of manipulation. The ethical judgment is based on the attitude. He suggests an attitude of the heart that respects other cultures and human beings as equal defines ethics. Nassar offered a solution, not in a formal code of ethics, but in a triangle of competent, legal and legitimate actions.

6. The Perception of Public Relations in Brazil

The professionals interviewed personally appreciated the role of public relations, but expressed a misunderstanding leading to a negative perception by most people in Brazil. The vague definition of public relations leads to a more negative view. Those interviewed did not really know how to explain public relations. Most agreed that public relations is important but trivialized in a way that harms the profession. Public relations is disappearing under titles of corporate communication and journalism. One professional said, “I work in this area and still don’t understand it.” The lack of knowledge and appreciation for the field creates a negative perception. The licensing has fragmented public relations in a way that it is not only misunderstood, but will soon cease to exist.
Discussion

The solution to creating a more ethical profession crossing cultural barriers does not have one simple answer. However, it is rooted in two-way communication and should be based on several ethical analyses. According to Coombs and Holladay, there is no magical code of conduct that will solve all ethical concerns faced by public relations professionals. “Anyone who offers the one-size-fits-all ethical solution is viewing the context of public relations too simplistically (p. 48).” Ethics should be rooted in the individual using situational decision-making by a moral individual instead of being guided by normative decision-making imposed by a society or government. Government enforcement is easily bypassed and strict laws could actually lead to more unethical behavior as people work under the table to find a way around government control.

Despite the law and federal regulating body, the licensing is difficult to enforce with the expanding and globalizing field of public relations (Molleda & Athaydes, 2003). While licensing could define public relations, creating a more unified and ethical profession, licensing in Brazil has not proven to define public relations. In fact, interview results show that the licensing is fragmenting the definition of public relations. Individuals work in event planning, media relations, strategic planning or marketing, but not “public relations.” According to a study by Molleda & Athaydes, Brazilian public relations professionals favor integrating professionals from different communication areas. While some professionals seek to integrate public relations with other areas of communication, others express the need to define public relations as a specific discipline. Integrating public relations could threaten the profession, allowing it to be smothered by marketing and advertising. However, with the current licensing requirements, public relations is disintegrating and fragmenting into other communication areas that don’t require a governmental license.

According to Wright, even a vague or broad code of ethics as some have suggested could be irrelevant or too ambiguous to follow. Instead of a universal ethics code, he presented the idea of altruism and virtue ethics as the motivating principle for ethics. Although a voluntary code could not be enforced, altruism could guide professionals’ ethical behavior. Through developing the individual practitioner and acting based on virtue ethics, he explained how with or without a standard professional code, individual practitioners choose to act ethically for their own satisfaction. This could be viewed as egoism as they please themselves and seek the respect of others, but could also be purely altruistic in wanting to do “good” for goodness sake. On the voluntary nature of codes, Wright said, “Most public relations practitioners are ethical because they want to be, not because they have to be (Wright, 1993, p. 18).”

The battle for an international code of ethics must be preceded by an understanding of the practice of public relation and ethical implications in each country before entering a global contract. Coombs and Holladay argue for a solution arising from individual commitment to ethics as opposed to an official code:

There is no magical code of conduct that will solve all ethical concerns experienced by public relations professionals. Anyone who offers the one-size-fits-all ethical solution is viewing the context of public relations too simplistically. From the postmodern perspective, ethics should stem from individual—or situational—decision-making by a moral individual rather than be guided by normative decision-making imposed by society. Normative decision-making reflects the belief system of those in power, benefits the privileged and reinforces that status quo. (p. 48)

Instead of struggling to enforce and license public relations, ethical behavior should be based on the most defining aspect of public relations—mutually beneficial relationships. The very act of two-way communication creates ethical behavior of practitioners.

Interviews show the licensing of public relations in Brazil is not preventing unlicensed practitioners from working in the field. Although the regulating government agency has a code of
ethics, practitioners are not aware or follow the code. The solution to a more ethical practice in Brazil may not lie in a universal code of ethics. Before creating a universal code spanning all nations and cultures, public relations professionals in Brazil must create a culture of ethics. The answer is not found in a strict set of rules, but virtue or agent-based ethics (Harrison & Galoway, 2005).

While action-based ethics such as a strict code do little to create ethical behavior, agent-based ethics focused on the character and motivations of individuals. Nassar’s triangle of ethics provides an agent-based idea to ethics that can be applied to the practice in Brazil. The triangle helps practitioners act with competence, legality and legitimacy. Public relations professionals need to use a quality technique, act within local and global laws and receive approval by all those affected by their actions. If practitioners follow these ethical guidelines, licensing and the idle code will not be necessary. By eliminating the infringing licensing, practitioners will freely work in the field with more virtuous motives. Action-based codes of ethics are more about an appearance and image of ethics, without actual ethical behavior created by an internally motivated character. In order to validate the findings in this study and provide more quantitative data on the understanding and effects of licensing on ethics in Brazil, a survey should be conducted. A follow-up survey will confirm or disprove the findings of the qualitative information gleaned from in-depth interviews. As a relatively untouched area of research, the licensing in Brazil allows for further study in order to create more ethical practitioners in Brazil and on a global level.

Conclusion

The ethical conscience is not correlated with the mere act of licensing and enforcement, but with the ethical character of individuals. The licensing process should be further investigated to determine the possibility and format for a global code of ethics for the field. Instead of creating more ethical practitioners guided by an enforced code of ethics, licensing is fragmenting and rescinding the definition and practice of public relations. The licensing case study in Brazil offers a base for future research on the effects of enforcement to shape imminent actions for a more credible global profession.
References


Furlanetto, M. ABERJE (Interview, Jan. 5, 2010).


Nassar, P. ABERJE (Interview, Jan. 5, 2010).


What Do Ads Buy?
Daily Coverage of Listed Companies on the Italian Press*

Marco Gambaro
marco.gambaro@unimi.it
DEAS, Università degli Studi di Milano

Riccardo Puglisi
riccardo.puglisi@gmail.com
Dipartimento di Economia Pubblica e Territoriale, Università di Pavia

Abstract
We match data on the daily newspaper coverage of a sample of Italian listed companies with Nielsen data on the monthly amount of advertising that a given company has purchased on a given newspaper. Controlling for newspaper and company fixed effects, we show that newspaper coverage of a given company is positively related with the amount of ads purchased on that newspaper by that company. We also find that coverage of a company is higher the day after a press release, but especially so on newspapers where more ads are purchased. This result on press releases is robust to controlling for ownership links between newspapers and companies, and –more generally- controlling for time invariant features of each company-newspaper pair, i.e. for (company × newspaper) fixed effects. Moreover, coverage is correlated with past day absolute return and trading volume, and this relationship appears to be steeper for those newspapers where more ads are purchased.

JEL Classification: K1; L2; N81

Keywords: Media Bias, Advertising, Press Releases, Stock Returns, Italian Press

* We have greatly benefited from discussions with Andrea Frazzini, Jim Snyder and seminar participants at the Media Economics workshop in Siena. We thank Nielsen Media Italia that kindly provided us data on advertising expenses.
Introduction

The media is the primary example of a two-sided market, whereas readers and viewers are offered valuable informative or entertainment content, while advertisers are sold the attention of the former. However, as highlighted in a recent game-theoretical model by Ellman and Germano (2009), advertisers could be interested not only in buying space on media outlets, but also in influencing what is featured in the so called “news hole”, i.e. the space where news and editorial content appear. This is the case, since the receptiveness of consumers to ads could be negatively influenced by media content that is at odds with the products themselves being advertised. By the same token, pieces of news that appear to be “objective” are likely to have a stronger persuasive effect on consumers than proper ads, so that there is a clear incentive to disguise ads as news stories.

Ellman and Germano define this as the “regulatory view” on advertising. On the other hand, according to the “liberal view”, advertising revenue has a positive influence on the quality of information provided by the media, since it allows them to be less prone to the influence of the incumbent government (Besley and Prat 2006) and of political parties (Gentzkow et al. 2006). At the end of the day, the comparative relevance of the regulatory and the liberal view of advertising must be assessed empirically. Yet, there is little evidence on this, with two important exceptions, which are both more consistent with the regulatory view of advertising. Reuter and Zitzewitz (2006) examine the correlation between mutual fund recommendations and past advertising expenditure on three personal finance publications and on two national newspapers, the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. They find that, controlling for fund characteristics and other confounding factors, there is a significantly positive correlation between ads and positive mentions on the three personal finance outlets, but not on the Times and the Journal. Moreover, a recent paper by Di Tella and Franceschelli (2009) shows that there is a negative and sizeable correlation between the amount of ads purchased by the Argentinean government on national daily newspapers and the amount of front page coverage that those newspapers devote to corruption scandals involving members of the incumbent government.

In this paper we provide new evidence on the link between advertising and media content, with a specific focus on the coverage of firms. More specifically, we investigate how a sample of 13 Italian companies listed on the stock market is covered on a daily basis by 6 different newspapers during the period 2006-2007, as a function of the monthly amount of ads being purchased by each company on each newspaper. We gather data on daily media coverage by performing automatic keyword-based searches of online news archives. Controlling for time-invariant characteristics of companies and newspapers, we find that newspaper coverage of a given company is positively and significantly related with the amount of ads purchased on that newspaper by that company.

As we will more thoroughly discuss in the next section, through their public relations (PR) departments companies themselves are a primary source of information for the media and the public about anything newsworthy happening to them: information flows from the company to the media and the public take the shape of routinely issued press releases. For our sample of companies we perform automatic searches of their own archives in order to obtain the exact dates when press releases are issued. Again controlling for newspaper and company fixed effects, we find evidence that coverage of a given company is much larger the day after a press release. But it is also the case that this increase in coverage is systematically larger on newspapers where that company has purchased more ads the month before. This latter finding is statistically stronger when adding controls for the coverage of a firm by a newspaper that is (at least partially) controlled by that company. It is also robust to a more demanding empirical specification, whereas we control for time-invariant characteristics of each company-newspaper pair, i.e. we exploit the time variation in media coverage, advertising expenditure and press release issuance.

In principle, companies enjoy sizeable degrees of freedom when choosing whether to issue a press release, and what to include into it. In fact, financial regulations typically oblige listed
companies to disclose price-sensitive information in a timely fashion through a press release. But this does not imply that all newsworthy information about a given company is included in its press releases.

In order to proxy for the “residual” flow of real world events about a company that is not necessarily captured by its press releases, we expand our analysis of newspaper coverage by controlling for the absolute daily return of that company on the stock market. It is also the case that a large movement in the price of a given stock is newsworthy by itself, irrespective of the presence of other newsworthy events causing it.

In fact, we find that the coverage of a given company is positively and significantly correlated with past day absolute return. There is also some evidence that this relationship is systematically steeper the larger the amount of ads being purchased by that company on that newspaper. However, when distinguishing between positive and negative returns, only the interaction of ads expenditure with positive returns is mildly significant. This latter result is quite robust to the more demanding specification described above, namely controlling for (company × newspaper) fixed effects. In other terms, newspapers appear to be reacting more strongly to (positive) company-specific newsworthy events, the larger the purchases of ads by that company.

Our results are also related to some recent literature on the links between media coverage and the behavior of financial markets. For example Barber and Odean (2008) show that individual investors appear to be net buyers of stocks being featured in the news, irrespective of the positive or negative tone of the news itself. If this is the case, our results point to an interesting synergy between the marketing and the investor relation department within listed companies: according to our findings, when a company buys ads on a newspaper, it also buys some additional attention of the newspaper to newsworthy events, which can induce readers as investors to be more willing to buy shares of that company. This in turn could translate in higher stock prices in equilibrium, i.e. a lower cost of capital for the firm (Fang and Peress 2008).

On top of the contributions on advertising & media coverage and on media & finance, our paper is also related to the comparatively larger literature on political media bias (Groseclose and Milyo 2005, Gentzkow and Shapiro 2009, Puglisi 2006, Larcinese et al. 2007, Puglisi and Snyder 2008, Ho and Quinn 2008, Knight and Chiang 2008, Durante and Knight 2009).

The paper is organised as follows. In section 2 we provide some background on the activities performed by firms’ PR departments and on the interactions of those with media organizations. In section 3 we describe the dataset, while in section 4 we present our main results, and in section 5 we perform some robustness checks. Section 5 concludes.

The internal organization of newspapers

The fact that a company and/or its products are covered by the media creates informative externalities. Those externalities (of a positive or a negative sign) can arise both in the product and in the financial market. If this is the case, the company in question can find it optimal to engage in public relation activities, in order to enhance or to influence editorial coverage.

To investigate this information dissemination activity, and its interactions with advertising and news selection, we have carried out 20 personal interviews with the different stakeholders involved (PR agencies, PR executives, newspaper editors in chief, publishers, newspaper sales executives). Companies value editorial space because (i) it is cheaper than advertising space and (ii) the news selection process carried out by the editorial team can attribute to a piece of news a degree of relevance and credibility that are difficult to obtain only through the means of advertising.

Peress (2008) investigates the link between media coverage and the extent of the earnings announcement drift, i.e. the predictability of stock returns after earnings announcements.
Even if they usually claim a more elaborate communication support, PR agencies routinely evaluate their output by collecting the articles they have obtained for a particular client, and multiplying the obtained position-weighted space by the appropriate price that one would pay for advertising that covers the same spaces and positions. This sum must be lower than the agency fee as a bottom line for efficiency.

Since the publication of a press release is free –conditional on the fact that the newspaper staff selects it-, companies compete fiercely on the intermediate information “market” where they can obtain valuable editorial space. The journalists we have interviewed, both in newspaper and magazines, declare to receive on average between 20 and 40 press releases on a daily basis, from which they pick up 1-2 news/articles per day. Since the same press release is sent to several journalists working for the same outlet, a conservative estimate of the publication rate on newspapers is around one article for every ten press releases. In specialized magazines, which are typically more focused on a particular topic, and where the matching between company disclosure and editorial interest is easier, the publication rate is higher, usually around one news every 3 or 4 press releases.

But this dissemination activity is important for media companies as well, since it reduces the costs to gather and verify the information to be published. In a typical newspaper, around 60% of published stories originate from some sort of public relation activity performed by firms and organizations. Moreover, following the enlargement of topics covered and the growth in the number of pages, this share has been steadily growing over the last twenty years (Gambaro 2007, Boyd Barret 1992).

According to Upa, in 2007 Italian companies spent 2013 million euros on public relation activities, and the growth rate in the previous 6 years has been more than double than the one for advertising on newspaper and magazines. This amount represents about 0.15% of GDP and around 10% of the total communication expenditure. Obviously public relations include other activities than media or investor relation, which anyway represent around half of total expenditure.

In Italy Public Relation officers, both internal and outsourced, are estimated in the range between 20,000 and 50,000 and they confront, or try to influence, 10068 journalists that are employed in the Italian press (2007 figure).

The newsgathering activity performed by a newspaper can be suitably described within a principal-agent setting, whereas the newspaper acts as an agent that selects news on behalf of its (collective) principal, i.e. the readers. The principal cannot perfectly observe the actions of the agent nor the intermediate market, which is fed by news agencies and press releases. This is the market where the newspaper on a daily basis would pick up the pieces of news to be published.

In a nutshell, the editor-in-chief selects the more relevant news and chooses the level of effort needed to study, check and write them down. When doing so, he would follow some sort of editorial line that is welcome to the readers.

A certain amount of effort and costs would on average translate in a given amount of precision, appropriateness and completeness for each published piece of news.

The maximum effort is given to the more relevant stories of the day, but on the margin there are several combinations of effort and relevance that can offer the same output to the reader. From this point of view, the editor can select the stories to be published on the basis of some type of portfolio considerations.

When the piece of information is related with a company or its products, a story-specific investment in disclosure and dissemination (press release, photos, contacts) can lower the cost for the newspaper to produce that news and therefore modify the rank of final relevance.

This is in some sense a grey zone, because it is unclear whether the PR activity performed by firms can be considered as a clear-cut instance of media capture (Besley and Prat 2006). Indeed, as discussed above newsworthiness and precision-enhancing effort must be jointly taken into account and they are both valuable to the reader, so that there is not an ex ante definite ranking of potential stories. On the other hand this is an equilibrium phenomenon, in that a company has no reason to engage in a costly activity if the news regarding it is published anyway.
In this setting the focus of the pushing company is on the (potentially) free editorial space, which must be compared with costly advertising, and the informative value given to the published story by the selection process itself.

There are circumstances where the company tries to soften or to erase a bad news. This can only occur in a dynamic setting, i.e. when the PR executive has a stable relationship with the journalist. Over time she gives the reporter exclusive news or valuable information; once she has credit, she can ask for some deviation from the editorial selection standard. The rational reporter must consider the actual value of the relationship over the future years and trade it off against the intensity of slant which is required on that particular occasion. Private incentives might play a relevant role here: for example, some valuable information can improve the reporter’s position and increase her salary.

A third typical situation is when a company is involved in a rent seeking activity. In this case the publication of a story containing the appropriate information is only a part of a larger process that usually includes (i) the hiring of some academics that would draft a piece of research matching the company goals and (ii) inducing the right person (usually public officials or decision makers) to read and pay attention to the obtained article. The information and the piece of research must be of interest for a large chunk of the readers in order to get published, but the only readers that matter to the company are those that ultimately decide about the rent.

While there are several qualitative and anecdotal papers on the relationship between public relation officials and journalists, and its effects on media output, only recently have more rigorous and quantitative studies emerged, mainly in the financial sector.

Bushee and Miller (2007) study a sample of 184 midsized companies that hired Investor Relation firms, and find that they have significant increase in disclosure, press coverage and trading activity. In the three setting described above the company can leverage on its advertising expenses over that particular newspaper both with the carrot of spending more, and with the stick of spending less (or completely withdrawing the advertising). While PR practitioners generally claim not to engage in this practice, this is perceived as a problem by journalists. In fact, media organizations adopt several institutional arrangements to deal with this problem.

Other things being equal, this leverage is more powerful when the advertising revenues per copy are larger, the advertising client are more concentrated both in number and by sectors, and when the publication is weaker.

When there is an exchange between advertising and coverage a newspaper can lose copies but the increased advertising can more than compensate this loss (Di Tella Franceschelli 2009).

From the company perspective, private incentives of top managers can play a significant role. Since the information ends up being mixed with entertainment and being personalized in stories and adventures, top managers receive an extra media exposure and can transform the company investment into private benefits such as salaries, stock options and future positions (Nguyen 2005). Following the seminal work of Reuter and Zitzewitz (2006) some papers have studied the interaction between advertising and coverage.

Gurun and Buttler find that on U.S. newspapers there is on average a more positive slant in articles about local companies (as identified by the distance between the newspaper’s and the company’s headquarters) than about non-local ones, and they present evidence that this slant is linked with local advertising expenditure.

Advertising can influence the editorial line of a newspaper also in more indirect and general way. Gabszewicz, Laussel and Sonnac (2001) propose a model where in order to get larger advertising revenues the publisher induces the editors to moderate the political message they convey to their readers, so that more readers may buy the newspaper. In this process of convergence the variety of political opinions available to the reader gets reduced.

The same line of reasoning is developed by Strömberg (2004): his political economy model delivers the result that media would find it optimal to give more coverage to topics that interest larger and richer social groups.
By the same token, in the case of European public televisions advertising revenues push the programs toward a growing commercial orientation (Gambaro 2005).

The interaction between advertising and editorial coverage depends both on the structure of the advertising market and on the internal organization of newspapers and advertisers.

There are differences between magazines and daily newspapers. In the former there are typically close links between the advertising department and the newsroom, up to the point that sometimes – and of course unofficially- sales department distribute on a weekly or a monthly basis the list of advertisers that should be covered by journalists. On the other hand, those links are typically milder in newspapers, where heavy advertisers rarely happen to be essential sources of newsworthy stories like in specialized magazines. In our interviews, both advertising executives and journalists assert that direct requests of quid pro quo are relatively rare in newspapers, while they are common in magazines.

In 2007 Italian newspapers collected 1702 million euros of advertising, which represents around half of total revenues. This figure is in line with other European countries, while in the U.S. advertising share is generally 80-85% of the total.

Geographic composition is also different. In Italy only 45% of the advertising is local, while in several north European countries the share is around 60%. The U.S. are on the opposite side of the spectrum, since only 20-25% of the advertising is national.

Our paper contributes to analyze the impact of advertising and public relation on media coverage, with a focus on listed companies. Daily returns and trading volume can be considered as the revealed opinion of the market about the value of the news that the subsequent day can be published on the newspaper. The sign of the return give also a rough but measurable indication of whether the news environment on a given day about a given company is positive or negative.

We deem newspapers as a suitable environment to test this relation. They are general oriented publication without a specific focus and -since on average they publish 200-250 articles every day- there is enough room for story selection and enough variation among different publications in editorial choices. Instead, in the case of TV and radio, the typical 25-minute long newscast includes 18-20 news, and more than half of them are in some way imposed by the real world and by the agenda setting climate of the media environment.

Moreover, within newspapers the relationship between the editorial and the sales department are weaker than within magazines, on the internet or in the professional press. From this point of view, any significant correlation between advertising and coverage would be particularly significant in a broader perspective.

Data description

To perform our empirical analysis, we combine four different types of data. First, in order to gather data on newspaper coverage, we have run automatic keyword-based searches of electronic archives for an initial sample of 6 newspapers (Corriere della Sera, Repubblica, Stampa, Resto del Carlino, Mattino di Padova and Tirreno) and 13 companies: Campari, Edison, ENEL, ENI, FIAT, Finmeccanica, Geox, Indesit, Luxottica, Mediolanum, Telecom Italia, Tiscali and Tod’s. For each (company × newspaper) match, we search -on a daily basis- for the total number of articles on that newspaper containing the name of the firm. Since newspapers vary in size both cross-sectionally and in the time series, we proxy for this size by counting the daily number of articles containing the word “il” (the definite article in Italian for masculine nouns). In the empirical analysis we will focus on the daily relative frequency of articles mentioning a given company on a given newspaper, i.e. we will divide the number of articles mentioning that company by the total number of articles featured on that newspaper on that day.

Second, Nielsen kindly provided us monthly data on amount of advertising purchased by each company that is listed on the Italian stock exchange on the main Italian newspapers. Since
advertising expenditure refers to brands (and not to companies), we have grouped advertising data for different brands on the basis of the company owning them. The purpose of this reclassification is to match the advertising data with data on newspaper coverage, press releases and stock returns, which is at the company level. The data covers the period 2006-2007.

Third, for our sample of companies we have searched in an automatic fashion their own archives, in order to obtain information on the exact days when press releases are issued. We thus construct a press release dummy which equals one the day after a press release about a given company has been issued, and zero otherwise.

Fourth, we exploit the Yahoo! Finance website to collect data on stock quotes and transaction volume for those 13 listed companies. In particular, we use the stock quotes to compute the absolute daily return.

Summary statistics of our variables are shown in Table 1. On average the companies in our sample are mentioned on one-third of a percentage point of the total of daily articles. The distribution of this variable is strongly skewed to the left, as shown by the fact that the median number of mentions is zero percent. The distribution of monthly advertising expenditure (expressed in thousands of euros) is similarly skewed, with an average amount of about 25,000 euros and a median amount of zero. At the company level, trading volume is again positively (and strongly) skewed, with an average of around 20 million of euros and a median of 2 million. This is not the case for absolute daily return, which is only slightly skewed.

In order to gauge some sense of the heterogeneity in the data, Table 2 reports descriptive statistics at the company level. The companies issuing the largest number of press releases during the time period are ENI and Telecom, with about 200 each. On the other side of the spectrum, the most parsimonious issuers of press releases are Campari and Mediolanum, with an order of magnitude less (i.e. around 20). Regarding articles mentioning each company, FIAT and ENEL enjoy the lion’s share, with about 19,000 and 16,000 articles respectively. On the other hand, Geox is overall featured on about 300 articles, while Campari appears on around 500 articles. FIAT and ENEL are characterised by the highest ratio between articles featuring them and number of press releases issued by them, while Geox and Finmeccanica have the lowest ratio.

For each company we also report the mean relative frequency of articles mentioning that company over the total number of articles being published by each newspaper (column 5). We can also compute this relative frequency conditionally on the presence or the lack of a press release being issued by that company the day before (columns 6 and 7). We can then calculate the percentage change in the relative frequency of articles in press-release vs. non-press-release days (column 8). In a nutshell, the average relative frequency of articles about a company in the lack of a press release is informative about the newsworthiness of that company when the company itself does not produce any additional news. On the other hand, the percentage change in the relative frequency of articles in the presence of a press release would be indicative of the capacity of each company to create additional media coverage.

With a cursory look at the table one can see that the largest companies in our sample, i.e. Fiat, Enel, Eni and Telecom Italia, do obtain the largest amount of newspaper coverage in the lack of an immediately preceding press release. On the other hand, smaller companies like Campari, Geox and Mediolanum, which start with a low level of coverage in the lack of a press release, enjoy the largest increase in newspaper coverage after the issuance of a press release. Quantitatively speaking, the average change is more than threefold for Campari, and more than twofold for Geox and Mediolanum.

Table 3 displays descriptive statistics at the newspaper level. Overall there are about 57,000 articles mentioning our sampled companies. In relative terms, Stampa is the outlet dedicating more room to companies, while Resto del Carlino and Tirreno dedicate the least. Similarly to what done in Table 2, for each newspaper we compute the relative frequency of articles mentioning one of our sampled companies, respectively in the presence and in the lack of a press release being issued the
previous day. We can also calculate the percentage change in coverage when moving from a non-
press-release to a press-release day. From this point of view, it turns out that Corriere della Sera and
Stampa are the outlets with the largest average increase in coverage after a press release.

Results

As mentioned in the introduction, we are especially interested in the relationship between media
coverage of companies and advertising expenditure, controlling for potentially confounding factors.
To get a first glance at the correlations in the data, we first compute monthly (instead of daily)
relative frequencies of stories about a given company on each newspaper: We are thus left with 1872
observations at the (company × newspaper × month) level. Second, we regress those relative
frequencies against a set of fixed effects for each company and each newspaper, plus dummies for
those cases where the company owns a significant stake in the newspaper itself. This is true for the
match between FIAT and Stampa, and for the one between Corriere and FIAT, Telecom Italia and
Tod’s. Finally, we compute the residuals of the estimated regression. We do the same (i.e. regress it
against a set of fixed effects and obtain residuals) for the total amount of ads being purchased by
each company on each newspaper the month before. Figure 1 displays a scatter plot of the coverage
residuals against the ads residuals, together with the corresponding linear fit. The relationship is
positive and strongly significant. 6 Controlling for ownership links and time-invariant features of
each company and each newspaper, our data suggests that companies buying more ads on a given
newspaper obtain significantly more coverage on that newspaper.

In order to delve further into this correlation, we run a set of fixed effects regressions with the
relative frequency of articles mentioning company \( c \) on newspaper \( n \) on day \( t \) as the dependent
variable. As mentioned in the introduction, we first focus on advertising expenditure and the issuance
of press releases by each company. More formally, we run the following type of regression:

\[
y_{nc,t} = \alpha_n + \beta_c + \gamma \cdot ADS_{nc,t-1} + \zeta \cdot pr_{c,t-1} + \phi \cdot ADS_{nc,t-1} \times pr_{c,t-1} + \epsilon_{nc,t}
\]

(1)

where \( y_{nc,t} \) is the relative frequency of articles mentioning company \( c \) appearing on newspaper \( n \) on
day \( t \), \( \alpha_n \) and \( \beta_c \) are respectively a newspaper and a company fixed-effect, \( ADS_{nc,t-1} \) is the
monetary amount of ads being purchased by company \( c \) on newspaper \( n \) the month before, \( pr_{c,t-1} \)
is a dummy which equals one if company \( c \) issued a press release on day \( t-1 \), and \( \epsilon_{nc,t} \) is the error
term. In order to properly take into account the fact that the error term might be serially correlated
within company-newspaper pairs (even after controlling for company and newspaper fixed effects)
and hence overestimate the precision of our results, we correspondingly cluster the standard errors at
the (company × newspaper) level. 7

Our regression output is displayed in Table 3, whereas we proceed by expanding the set of
explanatory variables. Thus in column [1] we simply control for purchased ads, we then add the
press release dummy in column [2] and the interaction between this dummy and ads in column [3].
In column [4] we add the two ownership dummies for Corriere and Stampa we have mentioned
above.

Across all specifications advertising expenditure is positively and significantly correlated with media
coverage. The effect is actually smaller in size when controlling for ownership links (column [4]). In
terms of magnitudes, a coefficient of 0.002 in columns [1]-[3] implies that an additional expenditure

---

6 Standard errors are clustered at the (company × newspaper level), in order to account for within-
cluster correlation in the error term.
7 See Bertrand et al. (2004).
of 50,000 euros per month by a given company (somewhat less than a standard deviation) is associated with one additional article every one thousand about that company. Since on average there are around 13,000 total articles per month, this correlation translates in an increase of about 13 articles per month.

The issuance of a press release is a very significant (and positive) predictor of newspaper coverage, across all specifications. When not controlling for the interaction between ads and press releases (i.e. in column [2]), an additional press release is associated with around one and a half additional article mentioning that company every one thousand. Column [3] shows that the interaction between press releases and advertising is positive and significant at the 5% confidence level. The effect is more strongly significant (and still positive) when controlling for the ownership dummies (column [4]). The magnitude of the conditional effect can be calculated as follows: at the mean level of monthly ads (about 25,000 euros per month) an additional press release is associated with 1.375 additional articles every one thousand (0.12 + 0.0007 x 25). On average, if a firm doubles the amount of advertising, the effect rises to 1.55 additional articles every one thousand. It would jump to around 2 additional articles every one thousand when considering a standard-deviation increase (i.e., around 66,000 euros per month).

The discrepancy in the size and significance of those findings when controlling or not controlling for the ownership dummies is consistent with the fact that companies holding a stake in a given newspaper are not constrained by the issuance of press releases in affecting media coverage about themselves.

In columns [5]-[9] we proxy “residual” real world events pertaining to a company (i.e. those not captured by the issuance of a press release) by controlling for \(|r_{c,t-1}|\), the absolute daily return of stock $c$ on day $t – 1$, by itself and interacted with advertising expenditure.\(^8\) It must be noticed that sample size decreases, since we are only considering days that are immediately preceded by a trading day, i.e. we do not include Sundays and Mondays in the sample.

We find that larger absolute returns are significantly correlated with wider media coverage: in column [5] a coefficient of about 3 implies that a one percentage point increase in the absolute daily return is associated with an increase of 0.03 percentage points in the amount of coverage.

The coefficient on the interaction term between monthly ad expenditure and the absolute stock return would be informative about whether newspaper coverage of a given company differentially reacts to the same stock return as a function of the amount of ads purchased by that company on that newspaper. In column [6] we find that this coefficient is positive and significant at ordinary confidence level. To get a sense of the magnitude of the estimated effect, consider a one standard-deviation increase in the amount of ad purchases: the reactivity of newspaper coverage to the absolute stock return would jump from 2.151 to 3.67, i.e. it would increase by more than 70 percent. However, the interaction term is not statistically significant in column [7], i.e. when controlling for the ownership dummies. One should also notice that the significance and magnitude of the ads variable, the press release dummy and the interaction term between the latter is practically unaltered when controlling for past absolute return.

A relevant concern here is that the estimated reactivity of newspaper coverage to the absolute stock return -by itself and interacted with ads purchases- does disguise different correlations in the case of positive vs. negative returns. In columns [8] and [9] we address this issue by separately considering positive and negative returns, properly interacted with lagged ads purchases. In fact, both

---

\(^8\) The last columns in Table 2 and 3 respectively report the estimated company and newspaper specific fixed effects, as estimated with the specification adopted in column [6] of Table 4. Those fixed effects provide a measure of the newsworthiness of each company and “news-proneness” of each newspaper after controlling for ads expenditure, press release issuance and stock market behavior.
positive and negative returns are significantly correlated with coverage, and the same is true for the two interaction terms in column [8]. On the other hand, when adding the ownership dummies, only the interaction of ads with positive returns is mildly significant at the 10% confidence level. If anything, the estimated reactivity of coverage is larger for positive returns than for negative ones (as shown by the p-value on the corresponding t-test), but one cannot reject at ordinary confidence levels the null hypothesis that the differential reactivity of coverage to stock returns as a function of ads purchases is not significantly different for positive and negative returns.

Up to now, in order to estimate our effects of interest, we have exploited the fact that -for each listed company in our sample and each trading day- we have media coverage data for six different dailies, which differ on the basis of the monetary amount of ads being purchased by that company. In other terms, we have checked whether coverage of a given company, conditionally on the issuance of a press release and the last available absolute return on the stock market, systematically depends on the amount of ads being purchased on the different newspapers. From this point of view, our identification strategy relies on both the time series and the cross-sectional variation across newspapers.

One could also try and explore the time variation in the amount of ads being purchased by company \( c \) on newspaper \( n \), and correlate it again with media coverage. More formally, we modify equation (1) by including fixed effects for each (company-newspaper) pair. This is of course a more demanding specification, since we are controlling for all time-invariant factors that are specific of a given (company-newspaper) pair, and we are solely exploiting the time series variation in newspaper coverage as a function of the time variation in monthly expenditure. Results of this exercise are shown in Table 5, which replicates the format of Table 4, with the sole exception of not including the specifications with the ownership dummies, as (company × newspaper) fixed effects would absorb them.

First, it is interesting to notice that in this setup the partial correlation with monthly ad expenditure is no longer statistically significant, with the sole exception of column [4], i.e. when controlling for lagged absolute return. On the other hand, it is still the case that newspaper coverage of a given company is significantly larger the day after a press release, and that this increase in coverage is systematically larger the more ads are purchased by that company on a given newspaper.

Columns [4]-[5] show that past absolute return is positively and significantly associated with newspaper coverage. Similarly to what found in Table 4, the interaction between the absolute return and ads expenditure is positive and mildly significant when not controlling for the ownership dummies (column [4]), while it is not significant when doing so. In column [6] we again distinguish between positive and negative returns. Both positive and negative returns are significantly correlated with coverage, but only the interaction of ads expenditure with positive returns is estimated to be positive and mildly significant at the 10% confidence level, while the one with negative returns is positive but not statistically significant. However, one cannot reject the null hypothesis that the two interaction terms are equal.

Robustness checks

In Table 6 we present some robustness checks of our results. The table is organized as follows: in columns [1]-[4] we add past day trading volume and its interaction with ads expenditure as explanatory variables. As argued by Barber and Odean (2008), larger than usual trading volume for a given stock is likely to be associated with the arrival of relevant news pertaining to that company. In fact, investors might disagree on how to interpret those pieces of news, so that there is a larger amount of transactions on the stock (see Frazzini and Lamont 2007 for additional references). In columns [1]-[2] we control for company and newspaper fixed effects, while in columns [3]-[4] we control for (company × newspaper) fixed effects: for both specifications, we first control for absolute returns and then distinguish between positive and negative returns.
We find that trading volume is a positive and significant predictor of newspaper coverage; moreover, when controlling for time-invariant features of each company-newspaper pair, the interaction between trading volume and ads expenditure is positive and mildly significant. On the other hand, the interaction between returns and ads expenditure is no longer significant at ordinary confidence level. The other results are reasonably robust to this specification, with the only exception of the positive correlation between newspaper coverage and ads expenditure, which is no longer significant with this more demanding specification. Of course, one should take into account that here we are interacting ads expenditure with the press release dummy, stock returns and trading volume within the same specification, so that approximate multicollinearity might lower the estimated precision of individual coefficients.

In columns [5]-[8] we replace last month’s ads expenditure with the contemporaneous value thereof, again interacted with the press release dummy and previous day absolute return. Endogeneity concerns clearly induce us to prefer the baseline specification—with previous month’s advertising expenditure as explanatory variable—, but one could argue that newspaper coverage more immediately reacts to contemporaneous expenditure. We replicate the set of specifications being used in columns [1]-[4], and we similarly find that advertising expenditure is no longer a significant predictor of newspaper coverage, even when not controlling for (company × newspaper) fixed effects. Compared to the baseline results shown in Table 4 and 5, the interaction between ads expenditure and the press release dummy is still positive and significant, but at a lower confidence level; on the other hand, the interactions between (absolute and positive) returns and ads expenditure do reach higher levels of statistical significance here. Finally, in columns [9]-[12] we control for the sum of ads expenditure during the last three months, again properly interacted with our variables of interest. The purpose of this exercise is to check whether the cumulative amount of ads being purchased by a given company on a given newspaper is a less noisy signal than previous month’s expenditure. The sign and statistical significance of ads expenditure, the press release dummy and their interaction is comparable to what found with the baseline specification. Interestingly, while the interaction of ads expenditure with neither positive nor negative returns is significantly different from zero at ordinary confidence levels, here one can reject the null hypothesis that those interactions are equal, i.e. the interaction with positive returns appears to be significantly larger than the one with negative returns.
Conclusions

In this paper we have investigated how—in a sample of Italian newspapers—coverage of listed companies is correlated with advertising. More specifically, we find that the amount of advertising a given company purchases on a given newspaper is positively and significantly associated with the number of articles mentioning that company. This result is robust to controlling for time-invariant features of newspapers and companies.

We have also matched coverage and advertising data with data on the exact days when companies issue their press releases. Unsurprisingly, newspaper coverage of a given company is significantly larger the day after a press release. But it is also the case that this increase in coverage is significantly larger on newspapers where that company has purchased more ads. This result is statistically stronger when controlling for ownership links between companies and newspapers, and when generally controlling for (company × newspaper) fixed effects.

We use the previous day absolute return of the company’s stock as a proxy for the presence of company-specific newsworthy events, which are not fully captured by the issuance of press releases, and find some evidence that positive returns obtain systematically more attention on those newspapers that receive more advertising from the company in question.

From this point of view, strategic actions by firms—in the shape of ads purchases—appear to influence the amount of information regarding them that is provided by actors like newspapers, which in principle should not behave as agents for a principal other than their readers.

In the future we plan to check whether this pattern of results is robust to extending our sample of companies and newspapers. From a broader perspective, one can replicate the analysis performed here in other country settings. Ex ante, in the case of daily newspapers, it would be interesting to check whether the correlations we have found are typical of countries where national level advertising is widespread, while they are less strong in countries like the U.S., where local advertising is comparatively more relevant.
References


Durante, Ruben and Brian Knight (2009). “Partisan Control, Media Bias, and Viewer Responses: Evidence from Berlusconi’s Italy” NBER working paper no. 14762.


Fig. 1: monthly advertising expenditure and media coverage
Table 1: summary statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>No of obs.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newspaper x company level variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relative frequency of articles on newspaper n mentioning company c (%)</td>
<td>53704</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.644</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monthly advertising expenditure, thousands of euros</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>66.61</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company level variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daily absolute return</td>
<td>6440</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daily trading volume, million of euros</td>
<td>6440</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>980</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: the relative frequency of articles on newspaper n about company c is calculated by dividing the daily count of articles mentioning company c on newspaper n by the daily number of articles where the word "il" (Italian definite article for masculine nouns) appears. This relative frequency is expressed in percentage points.

Sources: article counts come from keyword-based searches of online news archives. Ad data is from Nielsen, while financial data is taken from the Yahoo! Finance website.
Table 2: company level data, 2006-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPANY</th>
<th>number of press releases</th>
<th>number of articles</th>
<th>articles/(press releases)</th>
<th>relative frequency of articles (%)</th>
<th>rf of articles in days after a press release (%)</th>
<th>rf of articles in days with no press release (%)</th>
<th>change in relative frequency after a press release (%)</th>
<th>company-specific fixed effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>campari</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>21.95455</td>
<td>0.0332</td>
<td>0.1364</td>
<td>0.0299</td>
<td>355.66</td>
<td>1.07823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edison</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2062</td>
<td>49.09524</td>
<td>0.1530</td>
<td>0.2329</td>
<td>0.1480</td>
<td>57.405</td>
<td>0.95634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enel</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>15799</td>
<td>82.71728</td>
<td>0.8345</td>
<td>1.0048</td>
<td>0.7725</td>
<td>30.069</td>
<td>0.33429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eni</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>5855</td>
<td>42.73722</td>
<td>0.4961</td>
<td>0.6519</td>
<td>0.4587</td>
<td>42.117</td>
<td>0.64158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fiat</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>19142</td>
<td>248.5974</td>
<td>1.4380</td>
<td>1.7055</td>
<td>1.4059</td>
<td>21.307</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finmeccanica</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>1687</td>
<td>15.0625</td>
<td>0.1379</td>
<td>0.2359</td>
<td>0.1196</td>
<td>97.223</td>
<td>0.96697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>geox</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>8.51282</td>
<td>0.0292</td>
<td>0.0816</td>
<td>0.0261</td>
<td>211.58</td>
<td>1.09104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indesit</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>17.7963</td>
<td>0.0478</td>
<td>0.0991</td>
<td>0.0436</td>
<td>126.94</td>
<td>1.07585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luxottica</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>818</td>
<td>16.69388</td>
<td>0.1405</td>
<td>0.0707</td>
<td>0.1061</td>
<td>98.807</td>
<td>1.03209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mediolanum</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1513</td>
<td>65.78261</td>
<td>0.1135</td>
<td>0.3477</td>
<td>0.1061</td>
<td>227.74</td>
<td>1.00499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>telecomitalia</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>5350</td>
<td>26.22549</td>
<td>0.4171</td>
<td>0.4895</td>
<td>0.3883</td>
<td>26.067</td>
<td>0.94904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiscali</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2208</td>
<td>46.97872</td>
<td>0.1506</td>
<td>0.2834</td>
<td>0.1412</td>
<td>100.70</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>723</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.83228</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.0551</td>
<td>0.1377</td>
<td>0.0517</td>
<td>166.43</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tods</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>24.67857</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>028</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.08209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: for each company we report the total number of press releases being issued during the time period (column 2), the total number of articles being published on our sample of newspapers (column 3), the ratio between articles and press releases (column 4), the mean relative frequency of articles over the total (column 5), the relative frequency of articles conditional on a press release being issued the day before (column 6), the relative frequency of articles in the lack of a press release the previous day (column 7), the percentage change in the relative frequency of articles in press-release vs. non-press-release days (column 8). Finally in column 9 we report the estimated company-specific fixed effect, as obtained from a regression with the relative frequency of articles mentioning company c on newspaper n, controlling for newspaper fixed effects, previous month's ads, a press-release dummy, the absolute return on the stock market the day before, and the interactions of those latter variables with monthly ads expenditure. See the text for additional details.
## Table 3: newspaper level data, 2006-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWSPAPER</th>
<th>number of articles on sampled companies</th>
<th>total number of articles</th>
<th>freq of articles on companies (%)</th>
<th>freq of articles on companies the day after a press release (%)</th>
<th>freq of articles on companies in the lack of a press release (%)</th>
<th>change in relative frequency after a press release (%)</th>
<th>newspaper fixed effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corriere della Sera</td>
<td>7848</td>
<td>161137</td>
<td>4.87039</td>
<td>0.76762</td>
<td>0.31595</td>
<td>142.952</td>
<td>1.10025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repubblica</td>
<td>12261</td>
<td>335335</td>
<td>3.65634</td>
<td>0.45531</td>
<td>0.26113</td>
<td>74.3604</td>
<td>1.03781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stampa</td>
<td>6627</td>
<td>91414</td>
<td>2.53249</td>
<td>0.35695</td>
<td>0.18528</td>
<td>92.6563</td>
<td>0.9895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resto del Carlino</td>
<td>12726</td>
<td>502509</td>
<td>2.53249</td>
<td>0.35695</td>
<td>0.18528</td>
<td>92.6563</td>
<td>0.9895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattino di Padova</td>
<td>3770</td>
<td>127821</td>
<td>2.94943</td>
<td>0.38695</td>
<td>0.20607</td>
<td>87.7787</td>
<td>1.02805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirreno</td>
<td>13669</td>
<td>540162</td>
<td>2.53053</td>
<td>0.34859</td>
<td>0.16241</td>
<td>114.632</td>
<td>0.99255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: for each newspaper we report the total number of articles mentioning our sample of companies (column 2), the total number of articles being published during the time period (column 3), the mean relative frequency of articles mentioning those companies over the total (column 4), the relative frequency of articles mentioning a company, conditional on a press release being issued the day before (column 5), the relative frequency of articles in the lack of a press release the previous day (column 6), the percentage change in the relative frequency of articles in press-release vs. non-press-release days (column 7). Finally in column 8 we report the estimated newspaper-specific fixed effect, as obtained from a regression with the relative frequency of articles mentioning company c on newspaper n as dependent variable, controlling for company fixed effects, previous month's ads, a press-release dummy, the absolute return on the stock market the day before, and the interactions of those latter variables with monthly ads expenditure. See the text for additional details.
Table 4: daily coverage of listed companies, company and newspaper fixed effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure, previous month</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>5*</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>press release dummy</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[6.48]</td>
<td>[6.13]</td>
<td>[5.99]</td>
<td>[5.85]</td>
<td>[5.97]</td>
<td>[5.82]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure x press release dummy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5**</td>
<td>7***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[2.00]</td>
<td>[2.14]</td>
<td>[3.24]</td>
<td>[2.13]</td>
<td>[3.21]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dummy for owner's coverage on Corriere</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[0.76]</td>
<td></td>
<td>[0.86]</td>
<td></td>
<td>[0.86]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dummy for owners' coverage on Stampa</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.360</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.240</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.241</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[8.74]</td>
<td></td>
<td>[8.75]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absolute stock return, previous day</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.113</td>
<td>2.151</td>
<td>2.417</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[6.43]</td>
<td>[4.86]</td>
<td>[5.17]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure x absolute return</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive absolute return, previous day</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.359</td>
<td>2.626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[4.75]</td>
<td>[5.11]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure x positive absolute return</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative absolute return, previous day</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.896</td>
<td>2.169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[4.46]</td>
<td>[4.70]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure x negative absolute</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[2.41]</td>
<td>[1.15]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
test of equal slopes for positive and negative returns: p-value
- - - - - - - 0.12 0.13

test of equal slope for interactions of ads with positive and negative returns: p-value
- - - - - - - 0.67 0.28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0.45</th>
<th>0.46</th>
<th>0.49</th>
<th>0.45</th>
<th>0.45</th>
<th>0.48</th>
<th>0.45</th>
<th>0.48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R squared</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of companies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of newspapers</td>
<td>5370</td>
<td>5370</td>
<td>5370</td>
<td>5370</td>
<td>3791</td>
<td>3791</td>
<td>3791</td>
<td>3791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5370</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: the table displays the output of OLS regressions with the relative frequency of articles on newspaper n mentioning company c as dependent variable. Company-specific and newspaper-specific fixed effects are included in each specification. Monthly ad expenditure refers to the previous month. The dummy for owner's coverage on Stampa equals one for the coverage of FIAT on Stampa. The dummy for owners' coverage on Corriere equals one for coverage of Fiat, Telecom Italia and Tod's on Corriere. Standard errors are clustered at the (company x newspaper) level, and the corresponding t-statistics are reported in brackets below each coefficient. Significant at 1%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%. In columns [8] and [9] we separately consider positive and negative returns, properly interacted with the ad expenditure variable, and report the p-values of the tests for equal slopes and for equal interaction terms.
Table 5: daily coverage of listed companies, (company x newspaper) fixed effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure, previous month</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0003*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>press release dummy</td>
<td>0.150**</td>
<td>0.121**</td>
<td>0.099**</td>
<td>0.099**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure x press release dummy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absolute stock return, previous day</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure x absolute return</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>[1.50]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive absolute return, previous day</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.677**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure x positive absolute return</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>[5.35]</td>
<td>0.016*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative absolute return, previous day</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>[1.76]</td>
<td>2.204**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure x negative absolute return</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>[4.84]</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test of equal slopes for positive and negative returns: p-value</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test of equal slope for interactions of ads with positive and negative returns: p-value</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R squared</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of companies</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of newspapers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>5370</td>
<td>5370</td>
<td>5370</td>
<td>37911</td>
<td>37911</td>
<td>37911</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: the table displays the output of OLS regressions with the relative frequency of articles on newspaper n mentioning company c as dependent variable. (Company x newspaper)-specific固定效应。
fixed effects are included in each specification. Monthly ad expenditure refers to the previous month. Standard errors are clustered at the (company x newspaper) level, and the corresponding t-statistics are reported in brackets below each coefficient. Significant at 1%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%. In column [6] we separately consider positive and negative returns, properly interacted with the ad expenditure variable, and report the p-values of the tests for equal slopes and for equal interaction terms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>trading volume</th>
<th>current month's ads</th>
<th>three-month sum of ads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>advertising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expenditure</td>
<td>0.00 0.00</td>
<td>0.00 0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>press release</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dummy</td>
<td>0.00 0.00</td>
<td>0.00 0.00</td>
<td>0.08 0.08 0.00 0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expenditure x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>press release</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dummy</td>
<td>0.00 0.00</td>
<td>0.00 0.00</td>
<td>0.00 0.00 0.00 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dummy for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owner's</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coverage on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corriere</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dummy for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owners'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coverage on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stampa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absolute stock</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>return, previous day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expenditure x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absolute return</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>2.4 2.4</td>
<td>2.6 2.6</td>
<td>2.79 2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absolute return</td>
<td>0.01 0.12</td>
<td>0.48 0.76</td>
<td>0.42 0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>0.07 0.05</td>
<td>0.00 0.00</td>
<td>0.00 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absolute return</td>
<td>0.07 0.07</td>
<td>2.10 2.50</td>
<td>0.70 1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative absolute return, previous day</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[4.2] [4.4] [4.7] [4.9] [4.4] [4.8]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure x negative absolute return</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[0.7] [0.6] [1.4] [1.5] [0.3] [0.1]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trading volume, previous day</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[2.2] [2.2] [2.7] [2.7]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertising expenditure x trading volume</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[1.4] [1.4] [1.8] [1.8]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>test of equal slopes for positive and negative returns: p-value</th>
<th>0.1</th>
<th>0.1</th>
<th>0.1</th>
<th>0.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 5 - 4 - 7 - 4 - 0.21 - 0.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>test of equal slope for interactions of ads with positive and negative returns: p-value</th>
<th>0.9</th>
<th>0.9</th>
<th>0.3</th>
<th>0.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 9 - 8 - 2 - 7 - 0.04 - 0.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R squared</th>
<th>0.4</th>
<th>0.4</th>
<th>0.5</th>
<th>0.5</th>
<th>0.4</th>
<th>0.4</th>
<th>0.5</th>
<th>0.5</th>
<th>0.48</th>
<th>0.48</th>
<th>0.52</th>
<th>0.52</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 8 3 3</td>
<td>8 8 2 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of companies</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of newspapers</td>
<td>6 6 6 6</td>
<td>6 6 6 6</td>
<td>6 6 6 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>379 379 379 379</th>
<th>379 379 379 379</th>
<th>379 379 379 379</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>newspaper fixed effects</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>company fixed effects</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>newspaper x company fixed</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Notes: the table displays the output of regressions with the relative frequency of articles on newspaper n mentioning company c as dependent variable. Company and newspaper fixed effects are included in columns [1]-[2], [5]-[6] and [9]-[10]. In columns [3]-[4], [7]-[8] and [11]-[12] (company x newspaper) fixed effects are included as well. In columns [1]-[4] we add trading volume as a regressor, together with its interaction with past month's ads expenditure. In columns [5]-[8] we control for the contemporaneous level of ads, while in columns [9]-[12] we control for the sum of ads expenditure during the past three months. Standard errors are clustered at the (company x newspaper) level, and the corresponding t-statistics are reported in brackets below each coefficient. Significant at 1%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%. See previous tables for notes regarding specific variables.
Perception is truth: How elite U.S. newspapers framed the “Go Green” conflict between Beyond Petroleum (BP) and Greenpeace

María M. García
University of Missouri-Columbia

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the dynamics of conflict between an organization and its activist publics in the framework of an environmental crisis. A qualitative framing analysis of news content from major U.S. newspapers was employed to identify how the two organizations in conflict were framed. This study also explored the impact of corporate reputation, corporate social responsibility, and conflict with activist publics on organizational credibility and crisis attribution as reported in U.S. print news media. An in-depth discussion of the six dominant frames that emerged from the sample under study is included.
Introduction

Pro-social messages about the environment have increased significantly within the past decade. Support of environmental pro-social messages is evident with the thousands of people who gather annually to celebrate Earth Day in an effort to bring awareness to their local and national governments on policies to curb pollution and increase energy efficiency. As environmental consciousness continues to rise in society, new efforts on changing individual and organizational behavior will surface. Within the past year, delegates at the United Nations-affiliated Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit on Climate Change consented on a declaration that was presented at the Conference of Parties at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009. The declaration states, “Mother Earth is no longer in a period of climate change, but in climate crisis” (Pemberton, 2009).

Attempts to “Go Green” have not only made their way to the doors of public policy makers; they have influenced a wave of organizations’ corporate social responsibility message on both the public and private sectors within the marketplace. The “Go Green” campaign has evoked visible changes in major industries altogether. For instance, in the aerospace industry, the pro-social message to “Go Green” is not solely a marketing idea, but rather a necessity for survival in a world of rapidly depleting natural resources and increased fuel prices. Yu (2008) reported that within the past few years, U.S. airlines have explored the practicalities of turbine power and have already initiated actions to save energy: “From low-flush toilets and hybrid taxis to solar panels and recycled coffee grounds, some of the largest airports are aggressively implementing green measures to save on energy costs and to generate favorable impressions among travelers,” (para. 5). Moreover, government regulations have helped push for initiatives to seek alternative energy, develop improved technology, and use environmentally friendly material.

Conversely, with the rise in pro-social messages on corporate social responsibility to “Go Green”, members of society have grown cynical of corporate decrees, deducing such messages as simple PR or marketing schemes. BP, formerly known as British Petroleum, has received major criticisms for its pro-social messages on protecting the environment. Activist publics, particularly environmental groups like Greenpeace International, have boycotted, rallied, and initiated major endeavors to challenge the organization’s stance. For some activist publics, BP’s pro-social messages (i.e., “Go Green”) are conflicting due the product which sits at the core of the organization’s success—oil. The primary argument remains: both the nature and history of the [oil] business are accountable for environmental degradation (“Activists protest at BP”, 2001).

Public relations and mass communication research shows that conflicts and crises are both detrimental and beneficial to an organization. If improperly managed, an organization will lose public favor, which usually results in a longer recovery period (Coombs, 2000). When activist public are involved, each organizational message is critical to the preservation and promotion of the brand identity. When news media report on a conflict, their interpretation of conflict groups and placement of accountability shapes audiences’ perceptions.

This empirical case study is guided by the Attribution theory as its core theoretical framework, and employs a framing analysis. The role of news media is of particular significance in this line of research because of the way they frame a conflict and crisis. Conflicting parties are attributed with positive and negative connotations that have led to the defined hero and villain roles. Media also attribute responsibility to the conflict, which influences the public’s point of
view. Due to hyper-exposure, “critical journalists, consumer groups or NGOs may feel particularly compelled to test the validity of the corporate CSR claims” (Morsing, Schultz, & Nielsen, 2008, p. 97). Thus, if media audiences perceive an organization responsible for a crisis, its corporate reputation will ultimately suffer, and popular belief shaped.

Background

After the acquiring Amoco in 1998, British Petroleum’s Chief Executive Officer, Sir Lloyd Brown, initiated a new vision for his oil and energy company that competitors considered a conflicting message. At a time when scientific evidence of global warming was lacking and carbon regulations were not enforced, Sir Brown decided to rebrand the company with a corporate social responsibility message no other oil or energy company ever dared to do—to “Go Green”. “Out went the old British Petroleum shield that had been a familiar image in Britain for more than 70 years, and in came a green, yellow and white sunburst that seemed to suggest a warm and fuzzy feeling about the earth. BP press officers were careful not to explain exactly what ‘Beyond Petroleum’ meant, but the slogan, coupled with the cheerful sunburst, sent the message that the company was looking past oil and gas toward a benign, eco-friendly future of solar and renewable energy” (Frey, 2002). The tag line, logo, abbreviated brand name, and corporate social responsibility (henceforth CSR) message evolved into something that environmentalists could celebrate, or so it was thought.

Since British Petroleum repositioned itself, the conflict with environmental group Greenpeace International has grown two-fold. From boycotts to protests, Greenpeace relentlessly challenges BP’s stance and standards. On April 11, 2009, BP’s centenary celebration was canceled when rumors that BP activists were organizing a major rally to voice charges against the company. BP received another wave of mainstream news coverage when activists protested against them during the 2009 G20 summit in London. For ten years, BP’s efforts and messages have been challenged by Greenpeace, making it one of the most recognizable conflicts in within the “Go Green” movement.

Theoretical Framework

The current study primarily draws on the Attribution theory, derived from public relations research, for its theoretical framework. A framing analysis was used to inform the Attribution theory in this investigation. Entman (1993) defines framing as an active process of drawing out dominant themes from content. Dickerson (2001) explains, “repetition of certain words and phrases across the life of a story shapes meaning by telling readers what the important story elements are and how to think about them” (p. 168). Reese (2001) points out that framing is one way in which we try to make sense of the world: “framing refers to the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences” (p. 7). Studies in social science research have shown that prevalent frames in news content shape public opinion, and construct reality. Entman (2007) claims that framing is “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” (p.164). The study of framing as a media effect is based on the belief that framing has a psychological effect on individuals’ perceived reality. Pan and Kosicki (1993) argue that “framing is viewed as placing information
in a unique context so that certain elements of the issue get a greater allocation of an individual’s cognitive resources” (p. 57). Framing influences the way an individual understands an issue or makes sense of a news event from the portrayals of media producers, such that “[f]rames are seen as patterns of interpretation through which people classify information in order to handle it efficiently” (Scheufele, 2004, p. 402). Therefore, public opinion is immediately transformed when media attribute responsibility in a conflict.

The Attribution theory explains that once a crisis has unfolded, the publics involved will immediately assess crisis responsibility because people have a need to search for causes of an event. “Attribution theory posits that people look for the causes of events, especially unexpected and negative outcomes” (Coombs, 2007, p. 136). Over the past few years, scholars have examined the relevance of the Attribution theory to assumed corporate responsibility in crisis communication literature. Coombs (1998) examined how three elements of a crisis situation can affect perceptions of crisis responsibility: crisis attributions, organizational performance, and severity of the crisis. The author argued that “as perceptions of crisis responsibility strengthen, the threat of image damage should strengthen” (p. 180). He found that personal control attribution was positively related to crisis responsibility and negatively related to organizational image, and added that organizations with a history of crises (i.e., negative performance history) intensified the perception of crisis responsibility. Similarly, Lee (2004) explored causal attribution, organizational crisis responses, and crisis severity in relation to consumers’ cognitive, perceptual, and affective reactions to an organizational crisis. The author argued that both causal attribution and crisis response type affected the audiences’ judgment of organizational responsibility for the crisis, their overall impression of the organization, level of sympathy toward the organization, and trust in the organization.

**Literature Review**

**Conflicts with pro-social messages**

Pro-social messages are any nonviolent, social message designed to be helpful or beneficial to the whole of society, and are deemed preferable by society’s majority (Rushton, 1982). When an organization publicly announces its pro-social message, it attests to its corporate social responsibility. For message recipients, such pro-social messages are an extension of an organization’s personal promise. “Since brand support has been linked to the credible corporate promise of enriching the lives of consumers and other stakeholders, its perceived violation stands to reveal the falsehood of that promise” (Palazzo & Basu, 2007, p. 339).

When Palazzo and Basu (2007) explored how stakeholders perceived the consumption values communicated by a brand and related life values, they pointed out that a mixture of discontent on either of the two variables leads to activism, rejection, and indifference among stakeholders. The authors posited that conflict is best avoided when consumption values and life values the organization communicates are viewed favorably by stakeholders while the organization grounds itself on an identity.

In Insch’s (2008) investigation of corporate Websites from New Zealand’s electricity and gas retailers, and the pro-social messages that were highlighted in the home page, the author noted that all but one of the 18 Websites offered a detailed reference to the natural environment. The dominant theme within their pro-social messages was the intent to achieve greater energy efficiency. According to the author, 67% of the Websites communicated their goal to improve
energy efficiency through the use of enhanced technology and energy sources. Approximately 56% of the Websites highlighted minimizing negative environmental impacts through ‘clean’ or ‘green’ energy sources in combination with a position on ‘environmentally friendly’ energy sources under company development. The third most prevalent pro-social message identified among the Websites mentioned New Zealand’s obligation under the Kyoto Protocol and a mission to reduce greenhouse emissions.

Relevance and uses of Corporate Social Responsibility on corporate reputation

Previous studies (Kim, Kim, & Cameron, 2009; Palazzo & Basu, 2007; De Blasio, 2007; Cho & Hong, 2009) in crisis communication literature have found that CSR plays an important role in crisis management, particularly because it communicates an organization’s commitment to avoiding harm and improving societal standards. Kim et al. (2009) posited that “effects of CSR messages were contingent upon other crisis factors such as crisis types and crisis issues” (p. 13), noting that CSR-driven messages should be used accordingly and not as default. In facets of advertising and marketing, CSR is significant in that it communicates an organization’s intent to improve its corporate practices and impact on society overall.

Activist publics

“Significantly, the impact of globalization has led to the increasing migration of the target of civic engagement from political systems (e.g. nation states) to large (especially multinational) corporations, with powerful civil society associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International, or WWF beginning to target globally discernible branded corporate entities. As the No Logo debate shows, the best brands often face the highest pressure” (Palazzo & Basu, 2007, p. 338). In the past few years, crisis communication research (Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998; Cameron et al., 2001) has shown that one of the most difficult challenges an organization is faced with is appeasing activist publics. Palazzo and Basu (2007) describe activist groups as central to civic activism, such that “it often has its roots in a small but vocal minority who are able to influence public opinion through their salient acts” (p. 339). Anderson (1992) noted an increased expansion of activist groups over time: “In the 1980s, activists developed sophistication and expanded their influence; activism on a global scale became a trend” (p. 152). Whether the conflict is over a moral issue or past wrongdoing, activist publics are driven by their passion to challenge the organization openly, and to impede its operations.

Framing studies

Media can shape public opinion through framing, which can inevitably support or challenge dominant ideology. Demonstrated in analysis either quantitatively or qualitatively, framing affords simplicity as it identifies symbolic patterns attributed to a subject or event. Hume (2002) notes that “the press, through framing, plays a part in projecting cultural metaphors to a mass audience” (p. 38). In order to establish impact on audience perceptions, frames must be repetitious, creating a dominant message. Entman (1993) posits that the most impactful frames are those that possess the most cultural resonance, prominence, and repetition (frequency). As a means to identify dominant themes and patterns reported in media, many scholars have employed framing analyses to understand the issues under scrutiny at a specific moment in time within a given culture.

Studies in social science research have addressed the use of frames in the understanding of health issues, diplomatic relations, political movements, and war. For instance, Luther and
Zhou (2005) conducted a comparative content analysis of major daily Chinese and American newspaper coverage that focused on the SARS epidemic. Through framing analysis, the authors identified five major frames embedded within the both countries’ coverage and applied the presence-absence technique in their initial analysis of a sample of news stories, which led them to identify four major news frames and acknowledge a new frame. In Phalen and Algan’s (2001) study of the framing of the 1995 Fourth UN World Conference on Women in *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, the authors discovered that the newspapers were more concentrated on the geographical and ideological contexts between the United States and China than substantive women’s issues presented at the conference. In their content analysis, the authors identified recurring themes that helped explain the phenomenon at hand. Phalen and Algan (2001) contended “[t]he configuration of themes and agents made salient through horizontal and vertical repetition has the potential to reinforce certain interpretations of the conference” (p. 304). By documenting the location of the dominant frame in the news stories, the authors posited that the salience of one dominant frame shapes the public’s perception of the event, and transforms the very importance of the issues: “Given that people often read only the first few paragraphs of stories, this skew can have a significant effect on perceptions of the Women’s Conference” (Phalen & Algan, 2001, p. 305).

When Kensicki (2001) employed a framing analysis in her study of newspaper coverage of the Deaf President Now (DPN) political movement, she based her method design on the positive and negative framing of written and photographic content in three U.S. publications: *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and the *Silent News*. In her analysis, Kensicki (2001) found that the frames identified in the articles were majority positive in view of the movement. The author also ascertained four dominant frames from the content. By noting the frequency of these frames and identifying their most prevalent uses, she was able to associate the emergence of the frames in relation to the protest timeline. The author concluded that the overwhelming positive frames in the news coverage were evidence of media hegemony. In a similar study, Carpenter (2007) investigated the framing of the Iraq War. The author compared how elite and non-elite newspapers portrayed the war, and determined whether or not non-elite publications emulated elite publications in times of turmoil. She examined differences in the way they framed stories of the Iraq War, recorded the sources cited, and discussed predictors of how the newspapers disseminated information. Her analysis included two elite and four non-elite newspapers for a three-year time period during and after the U.S. War on Iraq in 2003. The author found that the use of frames and the inclusion of international, national, and local sources differed significantly. The origin of sources demonstrated that each publication type varied in how it portrayed the war to its readers. Finally, in Winfield and Friedman’s (2003) qualitative study of Election 2000, framing was approached from an ideological analysis. By analyzing six print articles and 45 broadcast transcripts from four major U.S. networks and three major newspapers, the authors identified a range of frames that were consistently used to portray the women.

My study examined the dynamics of conflict between activist publics and transnational organizations by focusing on the media framing of the “Go Green” conflict between BP and Greenpeace. This manuscript explored the impact of corporate reputation on organizational credibility, CSR, and conflict/crisis attribution as reported in U.S. print news media. This approach is important because newspapers serve as a catalyst for public debate on government policies (Sei-Hill et al., 2002). With the focus on frames and conflict attributes in the environmental crisis framework within print news media, this study posed the following research
questions: first, how do attributions in the conflict shape the way BP and Greenpeace were framed in the news stories? Second, how do the credibility frames in pro-social messages credited to BP compare to those of Greenpeace? Third, which conflict group was assigned overall causal attribution? And, fourth, what relationship emerges between the frames in the news stories?

Methods

To examine these questions, I collected ten years of news stories from the Lexis-Nexis database. One crucial element to this investigation is the time period in which the news stories were published. Since BP first launched its “Go Green” campaign in 2000, news stories dating back to 1999 offer significant value in my analysis. Since rumors of the BP’s repositioning surfaced in late fall 1999, that time period was included in the search. Thus, a full-text search was conducted using the following keywords: “BP” and “Greenpeace” for newspapers published in the United States from October 3, 1999 to October 3, 2009. To be included in the content analysis, a story had to mention the conflict between members of Greenpeace and BP in either the headline or body text in the general news, international news, or business/financial section. The initial search offered 125 news stories from local and national U.S. newspapers. American newspapers were the focal point for the sampling because the Western style of news reporting leads the rest of the world in the style of news coverage. Newspapers to be included in the final sample had to fit the criteria for large circulation size. Media news coverage of the conflict was gathered from: The Atlanta Journal and Constitution; The Boston Herald; Chicago Sun-Times; Dallas Observer (Texas); The Denver Post; The Houston Chronicle; The New York Times; The Oregonian; The San Francisco Chronicle; San Jose Mercury News; Seattle Post-Intelligencer; St. Louis Post-Dispatch; USA Today; The Wall Street Journal; The Washington Post; and The Washington Times. News articles were selected on the basis of relevance to the conflict. A final sample size of 40 news stories was pooled from the initial 60 that were yielded (refer to Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National U.S. newspapers</th>
<th>Quantity of news stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Jose Mercury News</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis Post-Dispatch</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Houston Chronicle</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Times</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Oregonian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The San Francisco Chronicle</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Post</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Washington Times</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Final sample
It should be noted that the top three newspapers included in the final sample that yielded the greatest amount of coverage on the conflict for the ten-year period were *The New York Times* (n = 14), *The Washington Post* (n = 9), and *The Houston Chronicle* (n = 7). Understanding the frames within such coverage is of importance not only because these newspapers offered the most coverage, but also because *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are elite newspapers that others model themselves after. Understanding the scope of their coverage affords a greater perspective of the way other newspapers frame the issue. *The Houston Chronicle* may have also offered more frequent reporting due to the proximity and location of BP’s national headquarters, which were located in Houston and Texas City, Texas.

**Framing analysis**

The aim of this research design is to recognize dual aspects of cause attributions and key frames ascribed to each conflict group in reference to the environment. As posited by Neuman (1992), “[H]ow bits of information gleaned from the news fit into a person’s larger framework of understanding important topics of public debate” (p. 7). A framing analysis of the news stories in this study is an essential tool used to identify the dominant attributions within the conflict that is communicated to the masses. Kiousis (2006) also posited that it is important to determine whether the research is measuring “the perception of the message sources, perceptions of channels through which messages travel, and perceptions of messages themselves” (p. 349).

From a preliminary reading of articles, four sets of frames were identified. Two frames that related to attribution were added to the list of frames in order to expand on the full scope of the study. Listed according to priority, the following frames and attribution concepts served as a guide for my qualitative framing analysis: 1) credibility frame; 2) power frame; 3) causal attribution; 4) social responsibility attribution; 5) hero frame; and 6) villain frame.

**Credibility.** Credibility (low or high) extends to the implied trustworthiness of the conflict group. For example, an article that stated “Last March, Lord John Browne, the group chief executive of the British oil giant BP, gave a speech at Stanford University” (Frey, 2002) implies BP is highly credible due to its association with a highly reputable university. An article that argued “When you talk to BP officials about that commitment, they trot out a host of examples to prove that it’s not just public relations. BP owns a big solar energy company. It has significantly lowered its greenhouse-gas emissions. It has a thriving biofuels program. And it is investing $8 billion over 10 years in alternative energy, like solar and wind power (though it includes natural gas as an alternative energy, which strikes me as a stretch). Yet at its core, BP remains an oil company, and no matter how much it says it wants to create more environmentally sensitive sources of energy, its basic task is still to stick holes in the ground in search of hydrocarbons” (Nocera, 2006) suggests BP is of low credibility because its CSR message is only a façade to its true purpose.

**Power.** Power relates to the financial or political status (low or high) of a conflict group characterized in the news story. For example, an article that contended “In fairness, though, it must be conceded that the evil BP committed the unforgivable act of merging with another evil oil company, Amoco Corp. of the United States. Following the merger, the evil conglomerate purchased the United States’ Atlantic Richfield Co. and Britain's Burmah Castrol PLC. The sinister mega corporation has also achieved record profits, partially as a result of higher oil and natural-gas prices” (Limbaugh, 2001) attributes BP with a high level of power because it partnered itself with another mega-oil company.
Social responsibility. The social responsibility attribution signifies which primary conflict group is assigned the greater role in carrying out the responsibility of the protection and preservation of the environment, which ultimately translates to the “Go Green” movement. For instance, an article that reported “‘In the last two years, we have developed a good off-grid rural market. We are selling solar home lighting systems that come with rooftop panels directly to villagers who have no access to electricity,’ said Anil Patni of Tata BP Solar, an Indian joint venture with the U.S.-based BP Solar. The company works with rural banks to offer small loans of about $300 to villagers to set up solar lighting systems” suggests that BP is meeting up to its corporate social responsibility.

Causal. Causal attribution reveals primary accountability for the conflict. For instance, an article that stated “Five months earlier, in another part of the pipeline also maintained by BP, a spill of 200,000 to 300,000 gallons of oil had been found, making it the largest oil spill ever on the North Slope. It was only when the federal government then demanded that the company conduct a thorough inspection of the rest of the pipeline that the corrosion was discovered” (Nocera, 2006) suggests that BP is the primary party held accountable for the conflict.

Hero. The hero frame conveys that the conflict group was favored more by the general public. For example, an article that stated “Although BP’s drilling programs off Alaska have sparked protests by Greenpeace, the company has scored points with environmentalists by withdrawing from a coalition of oil companies, automakers, electric utilities and others opposed to the Kyoto Treaty on global warming” (Behr, 2000) attributes a hero frame to BP. In this case, BP is taking a stance towards environmental regulation, which is a heroic act for an oil company.

Villain. The villain frame conveys that the conflict group was favored less by the general public. The villain in the conflict is one that is only concerned about self interests, selfish, and unresponsive to the well-being of society. For example, an article that argued “It may seem unfair that BP is the target of environmental and social-responsibility movements. Shouldn't Greenpeace et al. be going after Exxon Mobil, which still tries to sow public skepticism toward global warming theories and has reportedly worked behind the scenes to remove a prominent scientist from the United Nations climate change panel and still refuses to pay $5 billion in punitive damages ordered by an Alaska court after the 1989 Valdez oil spill?” (Frey, 2002) conveys BP as a victim of an oppressive attack initiated by Greenpeace—the villain in the narrative.

Within each story, conveyed meaning was derived from cited sources, quotes and the authors’ review of the conflict. Narratives were coded for patterns that explained the cause of the conflict, and an exhaustive identification of the primary actors involved was employed. It should be noted that more than 98% of the sample tallied more than a 500-word count. Each news story was read thoroughly until a substantive thick description was drawn.

Findings

Overall, the news stories were heavily embedded with the six frames and attribution concepts under investigation. A majority of the news stories (87%; n = 35) mentioned both BP and Greenpeace in conflict. The other 12% (n = 5) reported on only one of the two parties with
relevance to other issues that were still regarded critical to the environmental crisis (i.e., policy changes, current and emerging oppositions, and other conflict groups).

How attributions in the conflict shaped the way BP and Greenpeace were framed

The news stories conveyed BP as an organization with a great deal of power (75%; \( n = 30 \)), attributed the primary cause of the environmental crisis (72.5%; \( n = 29 \)), specifically climate change, and portrayed it as the main villain in the narrative (60%; \( n = 24 \)). BP also was framed as a company that somewhat lived up to its CSR (50%; \( n = 20 \)). Overall, the news stories framed the company as a mega-corporation that is the cause of the environmental crisis, not only due to its drilling activities in the Arctic, but also because it is an oil company. For example, one news article opens with a seemingly sarcastic tone as it describes BP's green-friendly logo and marketing campaign. One author emphasizes his feelings towards BP's CSR message:

“Walking through an airport earlier this week, I happened to spot a BP advertisement. You know the kind I'm talking about: the letters BP in lower-case type—making them somehow warmer and fuzzier—above a yellow and green sun, and the words 'beyond petroleum.' Like most BP ads, indeed, like virtually all BP marketing, it spoke to the company’s commitment to the environment. And here's what I thought when I saw it: 'Yeah, right’” (Nocera, 2006).

In a condescending tone, the author questions whether or not the company was living up to its commitment to be socially responsible. Nocera (2006) cites a previous incident that ultimately propelled the federal government to demand BP thorough inspections of its pipelines. Further evidence of the author’s cynicism and suspicion surfaces with the statement: “‘Still, it was hard not to wonder: this is the environmentally friendly oil company?’” The author compares BP’s record to its competitor, Exxon, and concludes that Exxon has a better history in containing and preventing oil spills. The BP corporate history, from changes in its CSR message to its logo, is provided before the author discusses the fallacies of BP’s message and the failures it must held accountable for.

Although Greenpeace assumed the role of an organization with some power (52.5%; \( n = 21 \)), it was framed as the hero in the conflict (72.5%; \( n = 29 \)). Greenpeace was viewed to meet the public’s expectations in carrying out its CSR (87.5%; \( n = 35 \)). The general public and the news writers perceived protests, boycotts, and public accusations as actions that enriched the organization’s reputation. Greenpeace was attributed the role of the watchdog and the protector of the helpless environment. News stories framed Greenpeace as the underdog that continually challenged evil oil companies, such as BP, in hopes to change their stance: “Earlier this month, BP had Ritzman and two other Greenpeace members arrested for trespassing when they set foot on the island. The three left the Arctic as a condition of their bail, but three others replaced them” (The Associated Press [AP], 2000). In this instance, Greenpeace is seemingly powerless in its protest; however, it remains relentless in its fight as other activists enter the conflict.

Comparison of BP and Greenpeace credibility frames in their pro-social messages

Both organizations’ level of credibility was associated to their perceived CSR. For instance, Greenpeace was perceived as highly credible in 72.5% (\( n = 29 \)) of the news stories and was viewed as having sustained its CSR in 87.5% (\( n = 35 \)) of the sample. In comparison, BP earned high credibility with 45% (\( n = 18 \)) of the articles and 50% (\( n = 20 \)) agreed that the organization maintained its CSR.
Greenpeace was framed as the conflict group with greater credibility because it was viewed as one that was more genuine in its pro-social message. The news media accepted Greenpeace as one of the most highly recognized rebellious nongovernmental organizations group whose stance was to challenge oil companies: “Greenpeace developed the hallmark tactic of boarding vessels at sea to advertise its protests. But beyond that, linked by the Internet and a sense of shared objectives, nongovernmental organizations are building networks of influence as the representatives of what they term ‘civil society,’ acting essentially as self-appointed watchdogs on dubious corporate behavior” (Cowell, 2000). Whenever Greenpeace organized a high profile protest, the tone of the news stories seemed supportive of the organization’s actions. On the other hand, BP was questioned for the accuracy in its reports, motivations for new projects, and true interests in the environment. As a large for-profit organization, BP was associated with other mega-corporations and oil companies that carried a poor crisis history. Moreover, historical references were made, comparing BP to the Exxon Valdez oil spill of 1989, which lowered BP’s credibility as an organization and the trustworthiness of its CSR message.

Assignment of overall causal attribution

BP was assigned with causal attribution more so than Greenpeace. From the sample, 72.5% (n = 29) portrayed BP as the cause of the conflict, whereas only 20% (n = 8) ascribed Greenpeace as the primary cause. The news stories acknowledged the dangers of global warming and climate change, and reasoned that oil companies were to blame for their lack of proactive measures of development in alternative energy. Although BP was credited as one of the more progressive oil companies in terms of solar energy research, it was still blamed for environmental degradation due to its product and its practice. One article stated: “[Greenpeace] and other environmentalists see the industry as greedily violating the pristine Arctic Ocean and setting the stage for a disastrous spill of crude into the gin-clear water” (AP, 2000). The imagery used in this statement enhanced causal attribution towards BP. Another reported: “Greenpeace is protesting BP’s Northstar offshore drilling platform, which is under construction off the north coast of Alaska in the Arctic Ocean. Northstar would be the first offshore drilling operation in the Arctic Ocean, and Greenpeace maintains that it would threaten the Arctic ecosystem” (Arctic Barge, 2000). As shown in the citation, BP is framed as a threat to the ecosystem. As the first to operate in an untouched territory, BP is automatically attributed cause for the destruction of the environment. It should also be noted that the presence of Greenpeace activists in any BP drilling operation insinuates suspicious activity on BP’s part. With Greenpeace playing the watchdog role in the news stories, readers immediately assign BP as the guilty party.

Relationship between the frames in the news stories

In my analysis, it was clear that there was a strong relationship between the hero frame and credibility frame. Greenpeace was framed as the hero because it was viewed as a highly credible organization with minimal cause attribution assignments. Reporters were forgiving even though Greenpeace was highly involved in the conflict, and was to some extent portrayed as the rebellious party. In many aspects, reporters expected Greenpeace to act as extremists to fulfill its responsibility as a grass-roots organization. As an activist public, Greenpeace was deemed strong if it acted aggressively to enforce regulations.

Another relationship that surfaced from the analysis was causal attribution, low credibility, and the villain frame. BP was conveyed as the villain, prescribed with low credibility or high causal attribution. The news stories relayed low credibility and high causal attribution as
characteristics of a villain. When BP was framed with low credibility, the new stories applied cues that defined the organization as a villain. BP was described as evil, selfish, and hurtful. BP was also identified as another oil company whose sole intention was to generate profit at the environment’s expense. Such descriptors cultivated a poor image of BP, which reinforced the notion of the notorious oil company that would doom our future.

A pattern of consistency between the frames was found in the two top elite newspapers, The New York Times and The Washington Post. It is important to take note of this since it points to evidence of media hegemony. News stories published in the same time frame, less than two months apart, were compared. The analysis showed that the newspapers’ frames paralleled one another. Between December 13, 1999 and June 1, 2001, the two most influential newspapers in this analysis, The New York Times and The Washington Post, framed BP as credible half of the time; extremely powerful; the cause of the conflict; not having lived up to its CSR in early 2000, but then meeting their standards in late 2000 and early 2001; and the villain.

Improving validity

As a means to improve validity, I applied the strategies of reflexivity and peer review. I actively searched for potential biases and predispositions during my data analysis and reassessed the conclusions drawn. Each news story was read in random order three times in a one month period, where personal notes and additional comments were reviewed. I also engaged in a discussion of my interpretations with a disinterested peer, which afforded an extensive examination of the study.

Discussion

As shown in previous research, framing shapes the way we perceive an event or an individual. By considering the angles to a story, we begin to see a more complete account of the larger picture. In this investigation, framing analysis plays a major role in informing attribution theory. Analyzing data from the approach of framing analysis cultivated meaning as the process identified how frames were attributed defining roles and the way media sculpted their coverage of the conflict and attributed responsibility. Due to the nature of the conflict, it was important to understand conveyed and embedded meaning within the news stories, and perceived blame. By applying a qualitative approach in framing analysis, we not only gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics infused in a news event, we can examine exactly how that event or individual has made an imprint on society by means of the media coverage that surrounded them.

By constructing a research design based on framing analysis, patterns of attribution, credibility in both organizations’ pro-social messages, assumed corporate social responsibility, and the relationship between activist publics and the organization were identified. As this study shows, the dominant frames and attributions that were identified in the news coverage can shape readers’ perceptions of the environmental issue and the groups that are deeply involved in setting policies.

By assessing the relationships between the frames, this study not only incorporated its findings into the greater theoretical framework of conflict and crisis literature, but contributed to the relevance of the framing of conflict in PR and mass communication scholarship. PR practitioners may especially gain insights that news media frame large organizations in the private sector differently from conflicting organizations in the public sector, relative to the crisis
and historical association at hand. The findings offered in this study further assist industry professionals in their knowledge of crisis and conflict frames, which may help in the development of PR strategy and conflict resolution. For PR scholars and practitioners, understanding elements of organizational conflict and crisis is of great importance not only due to the value of brand reputation, but also due to the influence of news media on public memory, and the ultimate framing of accountability. Lastly, the identification and comparison of the frames and attributes assigned to the conflict in this study will not only assist scholars and industry professionals in broadening their understanding of how media report conflict, but more importantly how public debates centered on government policies are formulated, especially in a crisis framework.

**Future research**

This study may be further enriched with the incorporation of a quantitative content analysis. In the near future, an expansion of this study shall include an analysis of time variation in the framework of conflict contingency between major American and British newspapers. A comparative study may lend insight to cross-cultural differences in the framing of this conflict. In supplement, a series of in-depth interviews from members of BP and Greenpeace could support and challenge the findings derived from my content analyses. It should be noted that these additional angles to my current study are held under high consideration to further enhance and expand the scope of this investigation.
References


Whatchoo Talkin' ‘Bout, Jenny?: Analyzing Messages in Jenny Craig and the 50 Million Pound Challenge’s Online Weight-Loss Programs

Christal R.S. Johnson
University of Oklahoma
Doctoral Student

Meta G. Carstarphen, Ph.D.
University of Oklahoma
Gaylord Family Professor and Associate Professor

Abstract
Guided by situational theory of publics, this study analyzed the messages on Jenny Craig and the 50 Million Pound Challenge weight-loss Web sites to determine if, and how, the sites are enabling Black women to remove constraints and promote information seeking in their weight-loss efforts. Black women have the highest rate of obesity in the country, and previous studies have concluded that culturally-sensitive factors such as family/social support, costs, and cultural relevance are variables needed in messages in order to engage Black women in the message and potentially move them to action. A content and rhetorical analysis of the home pages of Jenny Craig and the 50 Million Pound Challenge Web sites revealed that Jenny Craig lacks culturally-sensitive factors that motivate Black Women to attune to its message, whereas the 50 Million Pound Challenge succeeds. Implications for designing culturally-sensitive messages are discussed, as well as limitations of this study and possible direction for future research.
Introduction

Obesity is an international and national health concern (International Obesity Taskforce, 2009). Approximately 300 million people globally and 68 million nationally are obese (American Heart Association, 2008; International Obesity Taskforce, 2009). The rise in obesity (Body Mass Index ≥ 30) has contributed to a rise in health care costs and heart disease, diabetes, cancer, stroke, respiratory problems, osteoarthritis, gynecological problems, and death (Centers for Disease Control, 2009). Black women particularly are disproportionately affected compared to White women. Approximately 52% of Black women are affected by obesity compared to 30% of White women, which translates into higher morbidity and mortality rates among Blacks (American Hearth Association, 2008; Fitzgibbon et al., 2008). Furthermore, Black women are less likely to engage in exercise and regular physical activity than White women (Befort et al., 2008; Nies, Vollman, & Cook, 1999).

Black women desire to lose weight but are less likely than other racial/ethnic groups to participate in health-promoting behaviors, weight loss interventions, or weight loss (Befort et al., 2008; Clark et al., 2001; Kumanyika, 1987). Overall, researchers found that social and economic factors play a significant role in the target audience’s motivation to attune to a message in weight-loss programs and subsequently lose weight (Aldoory, 2001; Mastin & Campo, 2006; Springston & Champion, 2004).

Consumers are increasingly seeking health promotion behaviors on the Internet to help improve health outcomes (Baek & Yu, 2009; Evers et al., 2003). Among Black Americans, women more than men prefer health-related Web sites to gain control of their health (Cline & Haynes, 2001). Online weight-loss programs are one avenue that women take to achieve their weight-loss goals (Warner & Procaccino, 2007). Furthermore, online weight-loss sites function rhetorically, as locations of persuasive arguments about their programs and about their publics, or audiences. Web sites also project social identities as sites of engagement. One way of conceiving social identity is through the Burlean concept rhetorical definition that examines the nature of being through a negotiation of self-identification with the perceptions of others. Essential elements of the social identity of Web sites would include the home page, with its arrangement of message, design and voice/authority.

Although many exist, only a few weight-loss Web sites are culturally-targeted to Black women (Tsai et al., 2009). Research shows that factors including familial support, minimal costs, and familiar dietary patterns are important messages to incorporate into weight-loss messages for Black women. However, many mainstream commercial weight-loss Web sites stress individuality, costly fees, and unorthodox meals as a part of their program (Tsai & Wadden, 2005), which may decrease Black women’s involvement in mainstream weight-loss program messages (Thomas, Moseley, Stallings, Nichols-English, & Wagner, 2008).

Situational theory of publics predicts a person’s likelihood of information seeking and participation with an organization based on the person’s problem recognition, involvement and constraint recognition (Aldoory & Sha, 2008; Cameron, & Yang 1991; Grunig, 1978). An individual will actively seek information and take action if she recognizes obesity to be a serious problem (high problem recognition) directly affecting her (high involvement) and there are minimal barriers that inhibit her ability to lose weight (low constraint recognition).
Thus, this study examined messages, visuals, and strategies used in two weight-loss Web sites, Jenny Craig and the 50 Million Pound Challenge, to investigate how the two online programs are targeting Black women. Jenny Craig is one the largest nonmedical commercial weight-loss programs in the U.S. (Tsai & Wadden, 2005), and the 50 Million Pound Challenge campaign is Public Relations Society of America’s 2008 Silver Anvil Award winner (PRSA, 2008). Guided by situational theory, this study will employ content and rhetorical analyses to assess Jenny Craig’s approach in targeting Black women and compare it to the 50 Million Pound Challenge program, which is culturally-targeted to Blacks through messages that address socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors.

This study will assist practitioners in creating more culturally tailored messages in e-health communication, contribute to the paucity of literature that analyze public relations strategies in online weight-loss programs, and encourage commercial weight-loss Web sites to increase culturally-relevant factors that may increase participation among minority women and help decrease the disparity in obesity rates.

**Obesity and Black Women**

Obesity is defined as a range of weight that is “greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height,” or simply, “too much body fat” (American Heart Association, 2008; Centers for Disease Control, 2009). Obesity’s main culprits are too much caloric intake and too little physical activity. In the U.S., Black women are 60% “more likely to become obese and 50% more likely to be moderately to severely obese” than White women (Befort, Thomas, Daley, Rhode, & Ahluwalia, 2008, p. 410). Furthermore, Black women are less likely to exercise or maintain a healthy diet (Adams-Campbell et al., 2000; Befort et al., 2008; Hawkins, 2007). Research shows that economic and social factors are significant contributors of obesity rates among Black women (Barnes, 2007) and that more women would be motivated to decrease calories and increase physical activity if they found more culturally-focused programs that met their needs, which will be discussed in the next section.

**Weight-Loss Motivators**

Researchers have attempted to better understand barriers to weight loss in Black women and the type of messages that will promote weight loss and improved health outcomes (Aldoory, 2001; Mastin & Campo, 2006; Springston & Champion, 2004; Young, Gittelsohn, Charleston, Felix-Aaron, & Appel, 2001). Overall, researchers found that social and economic factors play a significant role in the target audience’s motivation to lose weight (Aldoory, 2001; Eyler et al., 1999; Fitzgibbon et al., 2008; Kumanyika, Wilson, Guilford-Davenport, 1993; PRSA, 2008; Thomas et al., 2008; Walcott-McQuigg et al., 2002; Young et al., 2001).

For example, In Thomas et al.’s (2008) study of obesity perceptions of Black and White women, they found that perspiration, access to transportation, and lack of self control were reasons that Black focus group participants cited as barriers to weight loss. In another study, Aldoory (2001) conducted focus groups and interviews with women from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds to understand factors that increase involvement in health communication messages. She found that similar identities (e.g., race, sex, culture), relevant and simple messages, and credible sources were antecedent factors that increase participants’ involvement in seeking and processing health information. Dr. Ian Smith, creator of the 50 Million Pound Challenge program, surveyed approximately 9,000 U.S. African American adults about
motivators to losing weight. Participants cited that looking good, free weight-loss interventions, familial, social, and community support, online needs, the importance of fighting back, and being there for grandchildren were factors that encouraged them to lose weight (PRSA, 2008).

Time is also a critical aspect of weight-loss in Black women (Hawkins, 2007). Thomas et al., (2009) found that Black women are inclined to “prioritize the needs of peer and extended family networks over independent, self-determined goal setting” (Thomas et al., 2009, p. 340). This leaves little time for physical activity and healthy meal preparation for themselves. Thus, weight-loss messages and treatments that use independent goal setting and exclude social and environmental factors are not realistic for Black women (Thomas, 2009).

A strong current running through the research incorporates what one scholar has described as the “Afrocentric paradigm” in affecting positive health outcomes among African Americans (Pittman, 2003). The leading scholar for Afrocentrism, Molefi Asante, has characterized this paradigm as a set of beliefs that positions African culture and history at the center of intellectual inquiry (Asante, 1980; Asante, 1983). This paradigm asserts that there exists an experience of Africanness that defines core identity in common ways for those of African descent, or of the African diaspora (Mazama, 2001). Moreover, what Asante describes as an “Afrocentric orientation” (Turner, 2002) provides a position of positive and affirming selfhood for African Americans. In other words, the contexts that mark this identity provide a framework in which its adherents experience a “victorious consciousness” (Mazama, 2001, p. 388).

Over time, other scholars have sought to apply Afrocentrism to specific disciplines, including design, counseling, history and communication (Armstrong, 2005). Such eclectic applications have unearthed the oft-repeated values on emphasis of community, or a communal identification over an individual identity. This priority leads to an elevation of family connectedness and spirituality as primary values, as well as recognition of holistic mind/body/spirit connections, plus a values system connected to service. As Pittman observes, the extension of collectivity, spirituality, impact and the rhythm of physical activity as cultural values into health studies can yield positive results (Pittman, 2003).

Overall, researchers found that social and economic factors play a significant role in the target audience’s motivation to lose weight, factors such as social and familial support, costs, cultural relevance, spirituality, mind/body/spirit connectedness, similar role models, childcare availability, family responsibilities, and transportation (Aldoory, 2001; Eyler et al., 1999; Fitzgibbon et al., 2008; Kumanyika, Wilson, Guilford-Davenport, 1993; PRSA, 2008; Thomas, et al., 2008; Walcott-McQuigg et al., 2002; Young et al., 2001).

Weight-Loss Programs

Researchers have explored culturally-targeted weight-loss programs to determine their success. Ard, Rosati, and Oddone (2000) created a culturally-sensitive version of the Duke University Rice Diet for 44 Black participants in their 8-week study by decreasing costs of the program, using traditional ethnic dishes with low-salt, low-fat methods, and including participants’ family members in the process. They found that through the use of a culturally-sensitive weight-loss program, participants lost approximately 15 pounds, significantly decreased cholesterol and blood pressure numbers, and improved their overall quality of life. Fitzgibbon et al. (2008) conducted an 18-month weight loss and weight-loss maintenance controlled trial for Black women using a culturally-tailored weight-loss program. Researchers controlled for factors that would help ensure successful weight-loss among Black women:
…for weight loss programs to be successful among black women, there must be a recognition and incorporation of the practices, attitudes, and beliefs of this particular subgroup. For example, dietary changes must target foods that are typically reported by black women as being part of their usual dietary patterns. We were cognizant of the importance of offering alternatives that reduce caloric content without sacrificing flavor. Goals for increased physical activity need to account for potential barriers, such as child care, hair styling, and family and work responsibilities. (Fitzgibbon et al., 2008, p. 1103)

The researchers reported no significant differences between the intervention and control groups. However, the study did show that Black women are interested in losing weight, as 213 participants were recruited for the trial and were given no compensation for their participation (Fitzgibbon et al., 2008).

Thomas et al. (2009) found that Black women generally have not found success with mainstream weight-loss programs. In Tsai et al.’s (2009) examination of different weight-loss practices between obese White and minority individuals, researchers found that Blacks and Latinos were “significantly less likely” to use commercial programs such as Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers, which may be influenced by the programs’ costs, promotion of rapid weight loss, or lack of proper monitoring of participants (Tsai et al., 2009). Therefore, mainstream weight-loss programs that lack cultural relevance may decrease Black women’s involvement in the messages and information on Web sites of mainstream weight-loss programs.

Situational Theory of Publics

Grunig’s (1978) situational theory of publics explains why and when publics are most likely to communicate. Members of a public are “affected by the same problem or issue, and behave similarly toward a problem” (Aldoory & Sha, 2008, p. 340). The situational theory of publics looks at level of involvement, problem recognition, and constraint recognition to predict the communication behaviors of information seeking and information processing (Aldoory, 2001; Grunig, 1978; Hamilton, 1992; Major, 1993; Vazquez, 1993). Level of involvement is the extent to which an individual is connected to a problem. Problem recognition represents the extent to which a person recognizes that action is needed to improve a situation. Constraint recognition is the extent to which individuals perceive barriers that inhibit their ability to address a problem (Grunig, 1989; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Hamilton, 1992; Heath, Liao, & Douglas 1995; Major, 1993). These three independent variables influence if and how much an individual engages in information processing and information seeking. Information processing is defined as paying attention to a message, even if it is unintentional, or “unplanned discovery of a message, followed by continued processing of it” (Clarke & Kline, 1974, p. 233). Individuals may not seek the information but are exposed to it (Aldoory, 2001). Information seeking, on the other hand, is defined as deliberately searching for information, or “planned scanning of the environment for messages about a specific topic” (Major, 1993, p. 253). This active communication may propel individuals to act on a particular issue. Individuals with high problem recognition of an issue, high involvement in an issue, and low constraint recognition to address the issue will likely engage in information seeking.

Applying this theory to Black women and weight-loss programs, one might expect that Black women recognize obesity as a serious problem (high problem recognition) that directly affects them (high levels of involvement) that they can address (low constraint recognition) through weight-loss. The situational theory of publics predicts that when barriers are removed,
Black women will actively seek information and be attuned to the message on weight-loss program Web sites.

**Research Question**

This study examined Jenny Craig, a mainstream commercial weight-loss Web site, and compared it to the 50 Million Pound Challenge site, a culturally-sensitive weight-loss Web site, to see if Jenny Craig offers similar weight-loss motivators for Black women that are exemplified in 50 Million Pound Challenge’s Web site. Based on previous literature, the following research question was posed:

*RQ1:* How do Jenny Craig and the 50 Million Pound Challenge Web sites compare in their appeals to Black women?

**Methodology**

This study used a quantitative content analysis and rhetorical analysis to examine Jenny Craig and 50 Million Pound Challenge’s Web sites. The content analysis was used as a *quantitative* method of counting words, phrases, and graphics to summarize the message on both sites. Furthermore, a rhetorical analysis was used as a *qualitative* method to examine how authors of each site attempt to persuade their audiences by qualitatively looking at the various components and interpreting how those parts fit together to summarize the message on each site.

The unit of analysis was the home page of each web site. Nielson and Tahir (2002) justified looking at Web site home pages because they are “the most important page of any Web site, getting more page views than any other page” (p. 1). The unit of analysis will be examined for words, phrases, and photos that represent cultural sensitivity and weight-loss motivators for women. The specific variables that represent weight-loss motivators will be discussed later on in the paper. The rhetorical analysis will examine the graphics, the designs, and the voice/authority of each site.

Two coders—one communications professor and the other a communications doctoral student—were employed for this study. The doctoral student completed the content analysis while the professor conducted the rhetorical analysis.

**Variables of Interest**

This study content analyzed the home page of each Web site for direct and indirect references to the following variables: time, social support, family support, similar identities, and program costs.

*Time*

This variable addressed words, phrases, or images that may discuss such things as time constraints; weight-loss methods that members can utilize with limited time; or ways to balance care-giving responsibilities and weight-loss efforts.

*Family and Social Support*

Words, phrases, and photos that reference or encourage family members or family support in the weight loss process were examined. Social support factors include words, phrases, and pictures that connote assistance from friends, buddies, community, associates, or the like in the weight-loss process.

*Similar identities*

Aldoory (2001) found that a strong identity to a woman’s race and ethnicity was “an important predictor of level of involvement with health messages” for the Black female.
participants (p. 174). Thus, the home page of each Web site was analyzed for photos of images that appear to be African American or of African descent.

Costs
References to program costs were analyzed on each Web site.

**Content Analysis Results**

The research question inquired if, and how, Jenny Craig uses weight-loss motivators for Black women on its Web site.

**Time Variable**

Jenny Craig’s home page contained no references to time-management or balancing weight-loss efforts with other responsibilities (Figures 1 and 2). Likewise, there were no references to time-management on the 50 Million Pound Challenge home page (Figures 3 and 4).

**Family and Social Support**

A “community” link is located at the top of Jenny Craig’s home page. A photo that shows a White male kissing a smiling White female on the cheek as the above caption reads “Jenny Craig Works!” is located at the bottom of the home page. To the right of that photo is a picture of two smiling females, one appears to be Hispanic and the other Black, standing side-by-side with the above caption asking, “Why Choose Jenny?” There is a quick link at the bottom entitled “corporate wellness.”

The 50 Million Pound Challenge Web site has a link entitled “community” and a link entitled “teams” at the top of its home page. A message stating, “The Support of over 1 million members in our online community” is scrolled across the page.

**Similar identities**

There are a total of nine images on Jenny Craig’s home page. Of the nine, one image appears to be a Black female, one appears to be a Hispanic female, three are of White males, and the other four images are of White females. On the 50 Million Pound Challenge home page, there is one image of a Black male.

**Costs**

Jenny Craig’s home page does not directly state the cost of its program. It does, however, make indirect references to costs. It states “FREE Instant Callback” at the top right of the page. At the top middle of the page, there is a graphic with the caption, “Is Jenny Craig affordable?” To the right of the graphic is a message stating, “Join now and lose 20 pounds for just $20*”, with the asterisk item stating “plus the cost of food.” “FREE Weight Loss Profile” is a message located in the middle of the page.

On the other hand, the 50 Million Pound Challenge home page has a message in the center of it stating, “Join the Challenge, it’s fast, easy and FREE!”

**Rhetorical Analysis Results**

**Jenny Craig**

One home page from a January 2010 Jenny Craig Web site shows an immediate corporate identification, with the Jenny Craig trademark logo in the upper left, along with the tagline, “We Change Lives.” The voice and authority are institutional, despite the feminine persona of the “Jenny Craig” name. “We Change Lives” reinforces the authority behind the site—unknown, invisible yet powerful. Navigational tabs just beneath this banner show viewers key options from which they can choose, including: *Our program, Success Stories, Food, Articles & Tips, Community & e-tools*. This information-driven header underscores a progression of data, organized in an approach that emphasizes the authority, or ethos, of the
Jenny Craig organization. From there, the testimonials of others, or success stories, work to build up the promise of the Jenny Craig program as expressed in its tagline: “We Change Lives.” With the success stories amplified, this promise moves from potential to proof. Finally, the last tabs on the home page guide viewers through suggestions about food the program provides, articles, physical locations for the program and ways to maintain an online connection to the weight-loss regimen. For visitors to this site, the message is that weight loss is a matter of informed yet individual discipline.

Graphically, the Jenny Craig site is busy, incorporating the bright realism of photographs against a subtle blue background. Three panels immediately under the opening banner showcase a food dish, a smiling white female, and another colorful food image. On the far right are bold announcements of company specials and membership incentives. Scrolling down to the bottom of the home page reveals an assortment of pictures of other people, ostensibly customers, whose role is to personalize the “Jenny Craig” experience. Presented in pairs or individual shots, these nameless persons are marked by their racial ambiguity, appearing darker in skin tones than the top photos, yet not decisively aligned with a racial group. Possible clues to cultural identity, such as clothing, names and geographic locations, are missing. Instead, these subjects float within the Jenny Craig space, anchored only to the program itself and its customers.

Although the person of “Jenny Craig” is absent from the Web site, the face of the product is shared and divided among many different representations, including celebrity endorsers. Actors Valerie Bertinelli and Jason Alexander were the featured notables during January 2010, with Alexander headlining a special outreach called “Jenny Craig for Men.”

Overall, the combined bold colors of the Web site and the array of individuals portrayed, including a decidedly multicultural set of portraits, underscore an ethos, or authority, of the “collective individual.” Jenny Craig’s tone, communicated through its messages and design, invites individuals to associate with its corporate persona and assures visitors and potential members that the organization has the tools and information needed to support change and success.

**50 Million Pound Challenge**

Dr. Ian Smith’s “50 Million Pound Challenge” uses a different approach in message, design and voice/authority to promote its weight-loss program, one that is anchored in a presentation reflecting afrocentric ideas and themes. The Afrocentrism paradigm asserts that there exists an experience of Africanness that defines core identity in common ways for those of African descent, or the African diaspora (Mazama, 2001). One of the paradigm’s values is an emphasis of community, or a communal identification over an individual identity. This priority leads to an elevation of family connectedness and spirituality as primary values, as well as recognition of holistic mind/body/spirit connections, plus a values system connected to service.

During January 2010, the home page for the Web site for the 50 Million Pound Challenge offered two parallel but complimentary designs that strikingly support the Afrocentric ideal. The concept of an African-centered design is one that is recognizable, but ill-defined one. Popular design articles describe this aesthetic as incorporating African artifacts, a balance of muted colors with bright ones, and motifs reminiscent of “natural” woods and fibers (Patterson, 1997). And while these facets can nominally create an Afrocentric design environment, more essential characteristics inherent to this aesthetic, one architectural practitioner/scholar argues, are “rhythm” of repetition and geometric shapes of “fractals” (Finch, 2008).

As do many Web site home pages, the 50 Million Pound Challenge site rotates images and graphics within a central framework (Figures 3 and 4). An ivory background stands as the
core space in which messages are carried, and the surrounding borders offer accent colors in such earth tones as deep brown, oranges, yellow and blue. These colors are repetitive throughout the site, and in their recurrences reflect a pattern of use that includes text, tabs and links. In the upper-left is the program’s logo, preceding the program’s name—also artistically rendered—“The 50 Million Pound Challenge.” The logo is a geometric arrangement of four brown arms clasping each other, set in a field of blue and green. Appearing as a square with round corners, the graphic tilts to form a diamond shape. The shape and colors suggest from a distance or with a quick glance, a quilting square or a woven texture. The modern sensibility of this site draws upon aspects suggesting the African sensibility without the overt use of identifiable artifacts from any specific African society or culture.

Instead of compiling many individual images and messages, the “Challenge” has one central theme, displayed in two different contexts. One view features a waist-length photograph of founder Dr. Ian Smith, smiling directly from the screen and into the faces of the site’s viewers. To the right of his image, in bold and enlarged letters, is the campaign’s key message: “Be Part of the Movement.” Subsequent messages tell viewers in economic fashion key facets of the program: signing up is free, easy and “supported by over 1 million members in our online community.” Another view features in the same colors a mountain against an unspecified horizon. To the left of the mountain, adjacent to the logo, is an enlarged quote, attributed to someone who is only identified by a name. “Attention All, You can do it!” the quote begins. “The best is yet to come. Stay encouraged and be blessed.”

To the right of this quote, at the mountain’s summit, are two silhouetted figures. They pause while two more figures appear to be climbing towards them. Embedded on the side of the mountain is a direct and simple invitational message: “Introducing the new Challenge Community. Join Today for free.” None of the figures pictured or quoted receive full photographic identity but their representations as part of a larger community are highlighted. The declarations of communal support, spiritual connectedness, and values evocative of family and service are clearly intertwined as core messages. Finally, the authority for the organization stems from its connection to community, emphasized by the use of such words as “community,” “movement,” and “us.”

Discussion

This study set out to determine if Jenny Craig’s Web site depicts culturally-sensitive messages that would inspire Black women to actively seek information about Jenny Craig’s online weight-loss program. The 50 Million Pound Challenge Web site was also analyzed for comparison purposes. Previous literature outlines several motivational factors for Black women to lose weight. However, for this particular study, the authors selected factors that are relevant to online programs and could be readily analyzed on a Web site. For example, childcare availability and transportation were not variables of interest in this study, as they do not apply to a virtual weight-loss program.

Overall, the analyses suggest that culturally-sensitive factors are minimally displayed in Jenny Craig’s Web site. A more thorough examination of the entire Web site may reveal different findings. Nevertheless, reviewing the most important page of Jenny Craig’s Web site indicated that the company should do more to tailor its message to Black women. There were a few messages on Jenny Craig’s home page that may appear to target Black women but contradicting evidence cancels out the company’s efforts. For example, there is one seemingly Black image on Jenny’s home page, but it is outnumbered by six White images on the page. Another contradicting point is the community support variable. Jenny’s site features a
“community” link as well as images of possible friends or family members on the page. However, there are two ads on the page that promote an individualistic approach to losing weight. An ad situated at the top left of the home page promotes the “Jenny Craig at Home” weight-loss option, stating that it is “Convenient and Private.” Another ad promoting “Jenny Craig at Home” says that it is “a convenient and private weight loss program.” Additionally, a link to the “Jenny Craig at Home Program” is located at the bottom. On the other hand, this may not appear as a contradiction but a marketing effort to reach a broader audience who may either be interested in a community or an individualistic weight-loss program.

Another interesting finding is the cost factor. Jenny Craig’s Web site never directly addresses the cost of its program. It only displays indirect messages about it. Interestingly enough, the word “free” is capitalized throughout the home page when there is a message about free program offerings. This may be an attempt to convey messages that will bring attention the free amenities and detract attention away from the expensive costs of the program. Tsai and Wadden (2005) found in their systematic study of major weight loss programs that Jenny Craig requires substantial up-front payment to the beat of $364 annually.

Surprisingly, the variables in question were not as prominently displayed on the 50 Million Pound Challenge Web site as results indicated from the content analysis. The home page neither displayed information about time-management nor depicted Black female images. However, the home page succeeded in addressing culturally-sensitive variables relative to cost and support. Additionally, the site succeeded in displaying Afrocentric graphics, patterns, and messages as revealed in the rhetorical analysis.

**Conclusion**

This study revealed that Jenny Craig, one of the largest commercial weight-loss Web sites in the United States, lacks messages that removes barriers and improves information-seeking habits among Black women that would motivate them to lose weight. Although this study analyzed the home pages of Jenny Craig and the 50 Million Pound Challenge program, further studies should delve further into the interlinks and intralinks of both sites. Furthermore, data that reveal the number of Black female participants in each program may (or may not) strengthen the argument of major weight-loss programs’ efforts in recruiting Black women. The authors also recognize that the study compares a commercial (Jenny Craig) and non-commercial (50 Million Pound Challenge) Web site. A comparison of the same type of Web sites may reveal different results.

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to the gap in the literature that analyze health messages online. Furthermore, this study moves theory from simply analyzing messages that move people to action to analyzing messages that may save lives.
References


PRSA (2008). Dr. Ian Smith’s 50 Million Pound Challenge – ‘Give up the pounds, not the fight’ Silver – Anvil Award Winner, 6BW-0815A09.


Figure 1. The top-half of Jenny Craig’s home page.
Figure 2. The bottom-half of Jenny Craig’s home page.
Figure 3. The 50 Million Pound Challenge’s home page (rotating image one).
Figure 4. The 50 Million Pound Challenge’s home page (rotating image two).
Blogs vs. Online Newspapers: Analyzing Different Emotions and Perceptions of Crisis Responsibility Displayed Online in the Samsung Oil Spill

Bokyung Kim¹ & Joonghwa Lee²
Missouri School of Journalism
University of Missouri
¹bk2mb@mail.missouri.edu
²Jhlk95@mail.missouri.edu

Abstract

This study applied the contingency theory and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to examine how general public and journalists show their emotions and perceptions of crisis responsibility differently during the Samsung oil spill crisis which occurred in Dec. 8th 2007. In order to compare general public’s and journalists’ perceptions of the crisis, a quantitative content analysis of 88 blogs (general public) and 96 online news articles (journalists) was conducted. This study revealed that general public (blogs) expressed more anger and alertness toward Samsung than journalists (online newspapers), and the anger and alertness were continuously demonstrated even after Samsung officially apologized. In examining Samsung’s perceived crisis responsibility, while journalists (online newspapers) reported more crisis responsibility toward other parties (e.g., Hebei Spirit and Korean government), general public (blogs) produced stronger crisis responsibility of Samsung as a main culprit of the crisis. Regarding contingent factors that influenced the organization’s stances and strategies, only external public characteristics and issue under consideration were significantly differentiated across the crisis phase, and journalists (online newspapers) contained more external contingent factors respectively than general public (blogs). Lastly, general public (blogs) assessed that Samsung chose more advocate strategies to each crisis phase. In accord with the essence of the contingency theory and the SCCT, the results suggest that general public (blogs) and journalists (online newspapers) assess crisis differently, thus public relations practitioners need to monitor general public’s dynamic evaluation of an organization, which can be completely dissimilar to journalists’ framing of news report.
Introduction

While contingency theory provides organizations with wide-ranging factors influencing organizations’ crisis communication and their moving stance (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2007), Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) explicates “how publics react to a crisis” by assessing reputational threats from empirical research and conceptual parsimony (Choi & Lin, 2009; Coombs, 2004, 2007a, 2007b; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). In terms of a contingency theory, since an organization’s stance shifts along the continuum—from advocacy to accommodation—anytime and to any point, assessing one’s crisis communication includes understanding dynamic contingent factors. However, SCCT posits that public relations function in post crisis communication for public relations practitioners to react to a crisis with respect to expected reputational threats posed by several situational factors. By assessing those factors focusing more on organizational side such as crisis type, past crisis history, and an organization’s prior reputation, the SCCT tends to give parsimony to crisis managers in choosing strategies or tactics. Previous studies regarding the SCCT have recently examined how publics’ emotions (Choi & Lin, 2009a; Choi & Lin, 2009b; Coombs, Fediuk, & Holladay, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2007) and negative word-of-mouth (Coombs et al., 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2007) affect an organization’s reputation and consumers’ purchase intention. Additionally, with respect to the contingency theory, several scholars have delved into the concept of public’s emotions in strategic crisis communication (Jin et al., 2007, 2008; Jin, 2009; Turner, 2007).

In spite of growing attention to either the understanding of those dynamics in strategic management of crises or the testing of situational factors in the SCCT, little is known about affected publics, especially how they produce their emotions in a real crisis situation. That is, how publics’ emotions and perceptions of crisis responsibility are displayed differently within each crisis phase. Additionally, given that blogs and social media are used as a news source for journalists as well as important communication channels during a crisis for an organization (Perry et al., 2003; Taylor & Perry, 2005; Wright & Hinson, 2008), we wonder whether or not general publics’ perceptions of a crisis (i.e., emotions, perceptions of crisis responsibility, contingent factors, and Samsung’s Crisis Response Strategy) displayed online are differed from those of journalists.

Therefore, the overarching aim of this research is to compare blogs and online newspapers in regard to various types of emotions (i.e., anger, alertness, sadness, fright, and anxiety) (RQ1); and perceptions of an organization’s crisis responsibility to each crisis phase (RQ2) for the 2007 Samsung oil spill crisis in South Korea. Moreover, this study explores an organization’s contingent factors (RQ3) and CRS (RQ4) to each crisis phase as different as evidenced by publics’ perceptions of a crisis and journalists’ framing of news reports.

On December 8th, 2007, Samsung, one of South Korea’s biggest and worldwide corporations, experienced the nation’s worst oil spill crisis caused by collision between its crane barge and a Hong Kong owned oil tanker. Because of the publics’ extreme blame on the corporation, Samsung was on the front lines in not only dealing with key publics and financial resources related to expected lawsuits, but also considering its social responsibility toward victims and communities. The crisis had three distinct phases of whether publics noticed Samsung’s possible cause of the crisis ending in lawsuits in April 2009. Within the three crisis phases, Samsung chose various CRS.

This study employs a content analysis of news stories related to this oil spill crisis in two national online newspapers, Chosun Ilbo (n = 49) and JoongAng Ilbo (n = 47), for analyzing
Speculation from this case study will provide important implications for public relations practitioners and scholars. This study helps them to understand how an organization’s contingent factors and its CRS were framed by publics and journalists during a given crisis. In considering factors driven from contingency theory and the SCCT, we hope that this study sheds light on understanding 1) the publics’ emotions and 2) journalists’ framing of a crisis in regard to an organization’s perceived crisis responsibility and its CRS.

**Literature review**

*General Public (Blogs) vs. Journalists (Online Newspapers)*

Previous literatures regarding publics’ emotions and perceptions of crisis responsibility tend to focus more on those reactions from “a public” rather than different publics. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding how a group of publics’ emotions and/or strong perceptions of crisis responsibility toward an organization are differed from other public groups. Are there any diverging perceptions of a crisis from each public group and within each crisis phase? In order to compare general public’s evaluation of a crisis to journalists’ views, we here propose to compare blogs and online newspapers. Given that blogs and social media are used as a news source for journalists as well as important communication channels during a crisis for an organization (Perry et al., 2003; Taylor & Perry, 2005; Wright & Hinson, 2008), we wonder about whether general public’s emotions and perceptions of crisis responsibility are different from journalists’ framing of news reports.

In crisis communication, a number of studies have found framing effects regarding crisis news reports. Given that journalists not only use their own sources for stories, but also use social media to find stories (Perry et al., 2003; Taylor & Perry, 2005), journalists’ news reports of a crisis might be affected by public-generated information online, or vice versa, thus news articles created by journalists may be similar or dissimilar to publics to some extent. Moreover, in accord with the essence of emotions in the SCCT and the contingency theory, it is assumed that publics’ and journalists’ emotions and perceptions of crisis responsibility affect the organization’s CRS within the post crisis communication phases, and in turn the organization’s CRS may intensify or decrease the publics’ negative emotions and its perceived crisis responsibility. All in all, the following research questions reflect negative emotions presented by not only general public but also journalists in order to come up with emotions from different publics.

*RQ1:* Are there differences in emotions related to crisis phases and different publics (general public/blogs vs. journalists/online newspaper)?

*RQ2:* Are there differences in perceptions of crisis responsibility related to crisis phases and different publics (general public/blogs vs. journalists/online newspaper)?

**Influential Contingent Factors in Contingency Theory**

In crisis situations, contingency theory provides organizations with ideas to explain what contingent factors influence organizations’ communication with key publics and their stance changes within a continuum from pure advocacy to pure accommodation (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2007; Shin et al., 2005). Advocacy means the degree of an organization’s strategic position in opposing to the public’s viewpoint, whereas accommodation implies the organization’s position in favor of its publics (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2007). Based on these two extreme conditions within the continuum, the contingency theory and a stance reflect more the dynamics of strategic
communication than merely strategies or tactics. From the contingency theory, an organization can place various stances on the continuum towards different key publics, and the dynamic stances further affect different strategies and tactics an organization may take (Cancel et al., 1997). For example, Jin et al. (2006) examined how the Singapore government managed a crisis of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in terms of its stance placed on the continuum and responding crisis communication strategies toward multiple publics. That is, Singapore’s government fashioned more advocacy toward the quarantined publics and general public in order to protect its citizens from infection, while at the same time these two publics more accommodated by the government (Jin et al., 2006).

In terms of contingent factors affecting one’s stance, prior literatures in the contingency theory suggests 87 contingent factors which are again categorized into predisposing and situational factors (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999). While predisposing factors predetermine an organization’s stance before it interacts with publics, the situational factors influence the organization’s stance on the continuum when it is faced with a conflict itself, and the situational factors ultimately change the predispositions of the organization’s position. From extensive interviews with public relations practitioners, Cancel, Mitrook and Cameron (1999) found well supported predisposing factors which reflected more organizational variables: a) the size of the organization, b) corporate culture, c) business exposure, d) public relations to dominant coalition, e) dominant coalition enlightenment, and f) individual characteristics of key individuals. Additionally, a) urgency of the situation, b) characteristics of the other public, c) potential or obvious threats, and d) potential costs or benefit for the organization from choosing the various stances were well supported situational factors (Cancel et al., 1999).

In regard to give parsimony to a number of contingent factors and their application in public relations practices, Reber and Cameron (2003) proposed five thematic variables: a) external threats (e.g., government regulations), b) external public characteristics (e.g., the size, credibility, commitment, and power of the external public), c) organizational characteristics (e.g., the past negative experiences and the presence of in-house counsel), d) public relations department characteristics (e.g., public relations practitioners’ membership in the dominant coalition), and e) dominant coalition characteristics.

For the current study, we do not intend to precisely capture different organizations’ stances in a given crisis. Although previous studies reflect stances through the coding of news stories and by using scales from advocacy to accommodation, we question the validity of those scales capturing organizations’ stances solely by coders. We propose instead to adopt 11 categories of contingent variables from Cancel et al. (1997), and their influence on an organization’s (Samsung) crisis response strategies. Cancel et al. (1997) categorized 87 contingent factors into 11 groups on internal and external dimensions. External variables include the following five dimensions: (a) external threats, (b) industry-specific environment, (c) general political/social environment, (d) external public characteristics, and (e) the issue under consideration. Internal variables comprise the six dimensions: (a) general corporate/organizational characteristics, (b) characteristics of the public relations department, (c) top management characteristics, (d) internal threats, (e) personality characteristics of involved organization members, and (f) relationship characteristics.

Among the factors regarding the current study, we adopt the five external contingent factors/categories. Given that the current case is a high-profile crisis with following lawsuits and strong attribution toward the organization, the external variables such as external threats and external public characteristics may be outweighed for the organization’s crisis communication.
Furthermore, in news articles or blogs an organization’s internal factors are hardly measurable. Based on the framework of the contingency theory, the following research question was proposed:

*RQ3a:* What contingent factors appeared to influence Samsung’s strategies during each crisis phases?
*RQ3b:* What contingent factors differently evidenced in blogs (general public) and online newspapers (journalists)?

Additionally, in order to see how the organization adopted various Crisis Response Strategies (CRS) within the crisis time frame, we need to briefly discuss typology of CRS. Coombs (2000) initially proposed seven crisis response strategies: attacking the accuser, denial, excuse, justification, ingratiation, corrective action, and full apology and mortification. Based on his work, Jin et al. (2006) modified the crisis communication strategies insofar as they added cooperation, which was operationalized as “making overtures to reach out to the public with the goal of resolving the problem.” In terms of the typology of CRS, the following research question was also submitted:

*RQ4a:* What kinds of Crisis Response Strategies (CRS) were used by Samsung during each crisis phases?
*RQ4b:* What kinds of Crisis Response Strategies (CRS) were differently evidenced in blogs (general public) and online newspapers (journalists)?

**Emotions as newly adopted situational factors in the SCCT and the Contingency theory**

While contingency theory explains “it depends” strategies corresponding to wide-ranging contingent factors, the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) has been introduced in focusing more on testable situational factors. From attribution theory, the SCCT illustrates reputational threats caused by situational factors in a given crisis (Coombs, 2004; Coombs & Holladay, 2002). The theory itself has explicated various situational factors (i.e., crisis type, severity of crisis, crisis history, and emotions) from either experimental methods or case studies (Coombs, 2004; Coombs, 2007a; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Choi & Lin, 2009a; Choi & Lin, 2009b). The methodological preference as well as the conceptual parsimony has offered empirical results to crisis managers in expecting how stakeholders react to a crisis with respect to the expected reputational threat.

In terms of the reputational threat, Coombs (2007b) explained that 1) initial crisis responsibility based upon three crisis types which are victim, accidental, and intentional cluster, having different level of attributions of crisis responsibility, 2) history of past crisis, and 3) relationship history/prior reputation, which is operationalized by “how well or poorly an organization has treated stakeholders in other contexts” are used to assess the threat. The SCCT demonstrates that the three crisis types firstly determine initial responsibility—from low attribution of crisis responsibility in victim cluster to strong attribution of crisis responsibility in intentional cluster. Then, if an organization has a crisis history or a negative relationship history/prior reputation, increased reputational threat plays a role in adjusting initial responsibility and further affecting organization’s crisis response strategies.

Besides one’s crisis history, prior reputation, and initial responsibility, literature regarding the SCCT has recently examined how publics’ different emotions such as anger, worry, fear, sympathy, and alertness affect an organization’s reputational threats (Coombs, Fediuk, & Holladay, 2007; Choi & Lin, 2009a; Choi & Lin, 2009b). Early research reveals
connections between perceptions of crisis responsibility and stakeholders’ anger; the more an organization’s perceived responsibility increases, the more stakeholders show anger toward the organization (Jorgensen, 1996). McDonald and Hartel (2000) also addressed the concept of emotions in crisis communication in that higher felt involvement may intensify publics’ emotions toward a given crisis, and further motivate their behaviors. Beyond the SCCT, in concerning emotions as powerful factors in strategic crisis communication, Turner (2007) suggested the Anger Activism Model and divided favorable audiences into four groups on the basis of anger and efficacy, which confirming anger as one of central factors to motivate audiences to act.

To test applicability of emotions in the SCCT, Choi and Lin (2009a) studied whether and how crisis responsibility is a predictor of attribution independent emotions and dependent emotions based on Weiner’s terminology (1986), and they revealed that anger was the most strongly related to crisis responsibility, and it was the only significant predictor of both crisis reputation and boycotts toward Mattel (consumers’ behaviors). In addition, alertness was the most frequently expressed emotion at the early crisis stage, and it was a significant predictor of crisis reputation (Choi & Lin, 2009a). Moreover, in their further research of how felt involvement affect consumers’ perceptions of crisis responsibility, reputation, and emotion manifested in 2007 Mattel product recalls (Choi & Lin, 2009b), the authors showed that anger was more frequently displayed toward Mattel compared to other parties involved with the crisis and the emotional response was increased over time, which supports the presence of emotional reactions in a given crisis.

On the other hand, for testing the potential impact of public’s emotions on their coping strategy preference and organizational crisis strategy acceptance with respect to the contingency theory, Jin (2009) examined participants’ various negative emotions (i.e., anger, sadness, fright, and anxiety) posed by different level of predictability and controllability of a crisis. She showed that there were significant differences in the public’s acceptance of different organizational crisis response strategies with respect to different negative emotions posed by differences in predictability and controllability: while when the primary negative emotion were anger, the public were likely to accept attacking the accuser, blame, and/or excuse as the strategy used by the organization, when the primary negative emotions were sadness, the public were likely to accept compensation and/or an apology as the strategy used by the organization involved in the crisis (Jin, 2009). These findings bolster that publics’ negative emotions play another key role in understanding affected publics.

Based on two significant emotions (i.e., anger and alertness) from Choi and Lin (2009a) and the proposed four primary negative emotions (Jin et al., 2007, 2008), this study suggests to use the five primary emotions (anger, alertness, sadness, fright/fear, and anxiety/worry) and examines how the five emotions are manifested toward different parties involved in the Samsung oil spill crisis within each crisis phase.

In terms of our focus on both of general public’s and journalists’ emotions and perceptions of crisis responsibility, we need to use high-profile crisis cases that generate higher levels of anger and concern for the crisis. In this concern, the Samsung oil spill case in South Korea was selected. On December 7th in 2007 a collision between a crane barge of Samsung and the Hong Kong-registered oil tanker off the coast of Taean, South Korea, earmarked one of the nation’s worst oil spill crises. The crisis itself has three distinctive crisis phases: 1) when first Samsung stayed out of the crisis (Dec. 07, 2007 – Dec. 09, 2007), 2) when publics noticed possible cause and involvement of Samsung with the crisis, but Samsung had no comments
about the crisis (Dec.10, 2007- Jan. 20, 2008), and 3) when Samsung took accommodative actions and officially apologized (Jan. 21, 2008 – Jan. 24, 2008). Within the three crisis phases, Samsung took several CRS in accordance with reputational threats posed publics and moving their stance from advocacy to accommodation. The crisis produced extensive publics’ blame toward Samsung within each crisis phase, and finally ended with lawsuits.

**Methods**

**Study Design**

In order to examine the proposed research questions, this study employed a quantitative content analysis of both of the major Korean newspapers’ and blogs’ crisis coverage regarding the Samsung oil spill crisis. Journalists’ framing of news report and individuals’ blogging may reflect dynamics of crisis situations and their reactions in times of crisis insofar as it includes contingent factors and Samsung’s CRS. Thus, the content analysis may be useful to examine the above concerns. Two national newspapers (i.e., *Chosun Ilbo* and *JoongAng Ilbo*) and blogs searched on www.naver.com, a leading Korean portal site, were selected.

**Data Collection**

The news articles were downloaded from each newspaper Database (e.g., *www.chosun.com* and *www.joins.com*) using the two search terms “Taean oil spill” and “Samsung oil spill,” because the two keywords reflected different levels of attributions and blame toward Samsung, and thus should be implemented. We use three timelines in accordance with the three crisis phases: 1) from 7 Dec. 2007 to 9 Dec. 2007 (i.e., the first crisis phase when Samsung “Stayed-out” of the crisis), 2) from 10 Dec. 2007 to 20 Jan. 2008 (i.e., the second crisis phase when Samsung has no action), and 3) from 21 Jan. 2008 to 24 Jan. 2008 (i.e., the third crisis phase when Samsung officially apologized). In terms of each timeline and the two keywords, 1) 29 articles were generated for the first phase (12 articles from *Chosun Ilbo* and 17 articles from *JoongAng Ilbo*), 2) 37 articles were generated for the second phase (17 articles from *Chosun Ilbo* and 20 articles from *JoongAng Ilbo*), and 3) 30 articles were generated for the third phase (20 articles from *Chosun Ilbo* and 10 articles from *JoongAng Ilbo*). Both editorials and feature news, including news briefings, were also included.

This study also collected blogs on the Samsung oil spill. To identify the target blogs, the same criterion of key words and time frames were used. We searched NAVER, a leading Korean portal site by using the above two key words, and generated 29 postings for the first phase, 29 postings for the second phase, and 30 postings for the third phase. Thus, the decision resulted in a total of 96 news articles and 88 blogs analyzed for this study.

**Coding Categories**

Each blog posting and news article germane to the Samsung oil spill was a unit of analysis. For both blogs and online news articles, the categories of analysis included the posted/issued date, the blog/newspaper, crisis time phases, perceptions of crisis responsibility, contingent factors, types and times of each public mentioned, and crisis response strategies of the Samsung. Additionally, emotion (i.e., anger, alertness, sad, fright, anxiety, others) was also coded by examining comments on blogs and news articles.

*Crisis phase.* The phase was identified by examining the critical events during the life-cycle of the crisis. As briefly discussed above, the “Stayed-out” phase (coded as 1) included contents from 7 Dec. 2007 (the first news report regarding the oil spill incident) to 9 Dec. 2007.
The “No-action” phase (coded as 2) included contents from 10 Dec. 2007 to 20 Jan. 2008, when news articles reported Samsung’s cause of the crisis, but Samsung employed no accommodative actions besides letting its employees volunteer for cleanup efforts. Finally, the “Apology” phase from 21 Jan. 2008 to 24 Jan. 2008 was defined as the aftermath of Korean government’s official blame toward Samsung and Samsung’s announcement of official apology (coded as 3).

**Contingent factors.** As mentioned above, due to limitation of news articles and blogs for reflecting internal contingent factors, only external factors were coded under six sub-categories. These factors included (a) threats (e.g., story addressed the oil spill of how serious it is and the Samsung’s reputational threats); (b) industry environment (e.g., story concerning impact of the oil spill on the nation’s economy); (c) general political/social environment/cultural environment, (e.g., political support for victims or publics’ support or opposition to Samsung); (d) external public (e.g., victims, fisheries of Taean, and leading shipping organizations); (e) issue under question (e.g., arguments about the possible sources of the oil spill); and (f) others.

**Crisis response strategies.** Crisis response strategies (CRS) were coded insofar as Samsung’s CRS for different public groups: Hebei Spirit (another cause of the collision), general public, victims (e.g. locals in Taean), environmental organizations, Korean government, local government, legal parties, other shipping organizations, and others. Based on Jin et al.’s modified typology of CRS (2006), the eight strategies were measured: (1) attack the accuser (e.g., if Samsung accuse the victims and/or media of exaggerating the damage of the crisis while defending itself against the oil spill), (2) denial (e.g., if asserting that the collision between its crane barge and Hebei Spirit’s oil tanker was not due to their fault, but due to bad weather), (3) excuse (e.g., avoiding or minimizing its responsibility by shifting the main blame toward Hebei Spirit), (4) justification (e.g., explaining why it took a long time to investigate the cause of the crisis), (5) corrective action (e.g., correcting the source of the problem and addressing the victim’s needs), (6) ingratiation (e.g., publicizing the organization’s unexceptional profits or great performances to shareholders during the crisis), (7) cooperation (e.g., working with Korean government to resolve the situation and helping the clean-up efforts), and (8) full apology (e.g., taking full responsibility the oil spill or releasing official apologies to publics).

**Crisis responsibility.** Crisis responsibility was coded, based on whether a specific organization was blamed for the Samsung oil spill in blogs/news items. Various attributional organizations were identified (e.g., Samsung, Hebei Spirit, Korean government, Local government, see above). Multiple options were used to code this category since there could be more than one organization blamed. Coders were asked to judge each parties’ crisis responsibility projected on blogs and news articles as being neutral (0), weak (+1), strong (+2), or no mention (9).

**Emotion.** The five primary emotions (i.e., anger, alertness, sadness, fright, and anxiety) were coded by referring to the previous literature (Choi & Lin, 2009a, 2009b; Jin, 2009) and by a careful examination of sample articles and postings. Based on previous typology of emotions (Choi & Lin, 2009a, 2009b; Jin, 2009), the five emotions were measured: (1) anger (e.g., censure an organization for the negligence of its cause of the oil spill), (2) alertness (e.g., warn an organization about following threats posed by publics), (3) sadness (e.g., express sympathy for victims), (4) fright (e.g., fear regarding whether and how an oil spill cause environmental devastation), (5) anxiety (e.g., worry about the clean-up operation or economy of Taean).

In operation, sentences involving those emotions associated with Samsung were coded by calculating the total number of emotion comments manifested in each blogs and/or news articles. The five emotions could be directed toward different organizations. Therefore, whenever
possible, emotions toward different parties — Samsung, Hebei Spirit, Korean government, local
government, and other — were coded separately.

Coding Procedure and Inter-coder Reliability
Two graduate students were trained to code the news articles and blogs. After training
sessions, two coders independently coded 15 percent of the news articles and blogs, which were
randomly selected from the samples. The test of inter-coder reliability showed a Scott’s Pi of .91
for CRS for blogs and .85 for the newspapers; Scott’s Pi of .90 for contingent factors for blogs,
and .75 for newspapers. Emotion was coded as repeated measures, and perception of crisis
responsibility was coded as continuous measures. Thus, instead of Scott’s Pi, assessing inter-
coder reliability of categorical variables, we used Krippendorf’s R: a Krippendorf’s R of .72 for
responsibility for blogs, and .83 for newspapers; a Krippendorf’s R of .87 for emotion for blogs,
and .91 for newspapers, indicating that the agreement between the coders was acceptable. Two
coders then coded the rest of the news articles and blogs independently.

Results
The first research question asked whether there are differences in emotions related to
crisis phases and different publics (general public/blogs vs. journalists/online newspapers). In
order to test the first research question, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was
conducted to reduce Type 1 error by conducting multiple ANOVAs because five emotions were
conceptually related (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). A two-way (2 × 3) MANOVA was
conducted to test the main and interaction effects of public types (general public/blogs vs.
journalists/online newspapers) and three crisis phases on five emotions (i.e., anger, alertness,
sadness, fright, and anxiety). The results indicated that public types [Wilks Λ = .832, F (5, 174) =
7.002, p < .001, ηp^2 = .168] and three crisis phases [Wilks Λ = .730, F (10, 348) = 5.936, p <
.001, ηp^2 = .146] had significant main effects on five emotions. In addition, the interaction
between public types and crisis phases showed significant difference in five emotions [Wilks Λ
= .872, F (10, 348) = 2.472, p < .01, ηp^2 = .066]. Table 1 shows the results of MANOVA.

| Table 1. Multivariate Analysis Results for Five Emotions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | Wilks’ Λ | F | H df | Error df | p-value |
| Public Types | .832 | 7.002 | 5 | 174 | .000 |
| Crisis Phases | .730 | 5.936 | 10 | 348 | .000 |
| Public Types × Crisis Phases | .872 | 2.472 | 10 | 348 | .007 |

According to univariate analyses (see Table 2-1), there was a significant difference
between two public types in anger [F (1, 178) = 33.053, p < .001, ηp^2 = .157] and alertness [F (1,
178) = 10.132, p < .01, ηp^2 = .054]. Similarly, there was a significant difference among three
crisis phases in anger [F (2, 178) = 19.057, p < .001, ηp^2 = .176], alertness [F (2, 178) = 9.716, p
< .001, ηp^2 = .098], and anxiety [F (2, 178) = 3.171, p < .05, ηp^2 = .034]. In the case of the
interaction between public types and crisis phases, the interaction had a significant difference in
anger [F (2, 178) = 4.575, p < .05, ηp^2 = .049] and alertness [F (2, 178) = 3.139, p < .05, ηp^2
= .034]; however, the interaction did not show a significant difference in other emotions.
Specifically, the interaction effects indicated that at the first phase, journalists did not express
anger while general public revealed little anger (M = .414, SE = .347). While journalists showed
little anger at the second phase (M = .194, SE = .311), general public showed more anger (M = 2.172, SE = .347). At the third phase, despite Samsung’s official apology, general public showed more anger (M = 3.500, SE = .341) than journalists (M = 1.133, SE = .341) (see Table 2-2). Figure 1 describes the interaction effects between public types and crisis phases on anger.

In regard to alertness, at the first phase, similar to anger, journalists did not express alertness while general public revealed little alertness (M = .069, SE = .204). At the second phase, the alertness that general public (M = 1.379, SE = .204) expressed was greater than that of journalists (M = .333, SE = .183). At the third phase, alertness of general public (M = .933, SE = .200) was slightly more than journalists (M = .500, SE = 200) (see Table 2-2). Figure 2 describes the interaction effects between public types and crisis phases on alertness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2-1. Univariate Analysis Results for Five Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Types x Crisis Phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2-2. Means and Standard Error for Anger and Alert

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Public Type</th>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>1.133</td>
<td>.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>.347</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>2.172</td>
<td>.347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>3.500</td>
<td>.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alertness</td>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>.333</td>
<td>.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td>.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>1.379</td>
<td>.204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>.933</td>
<td>.200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Interaction Effect between Public Type and Crisis Phase on Anger

Figure 2. Interaction Effect between Public Type and Crisis Phase on Alertness
The second research question asked whether there are differences in perceptions of crisis responsibility related to crisis phases and different publics (general public/blogs vs. journalists/online newspapers). Chi-square analysis was conducted to examine the second research question between crisis phases and perceived crisis responsibility, and between public types and perceived crisis responsibility. Perceptions of crisis responsibility toward Samsung $[\chi^2 (6) = 53.426, p < .001]$ and the Korean government $[\chi^2 (6) = 17.540, p < .01]$ showed significant differences. Specifically, the strong responsibility of Samsung was increased from the first phase ($n = 10, 16.9\%$) to the second phase ($n = 36, 55.4\%$) and the third phase ($n = 47, 78.3\%$) (see Table 3-1). However, the strong responsibility of the Korean government was decreased at the second phase ($n = 13, 20.0\%$) comparing to the first phase ($n = 28, 47.5\%$), which was in turn slightly increased at the third phase ($n = 18, 30.0\%$) (see Table 3-2).

**Table 3-1. Chi-square Results of Perceived Responsibility of Samsung by Crisis Phases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Perceived Responsibility of Samsung</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>2 (3.4%)</td>
<td>2 (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (7.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (5.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
\( \chi^2 (6) = 53.426, p < .001 \)

Table 3-2. Chi-square Results of Perceived Responsibility of Korean Government by Crisis Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Perceived Responsibility of Korean Government</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>2 (3.4%)</td>
<td>5 (8.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>12 (18.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>6 (10.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \chi^2 (6) = 17.540, p < .01 \)

Similar to the result of crisis phases, there was a significant difference about strong perceived responsibility of Samsung between journalists (n = 39, 40.6%) and general public (n = 54, 61.4%) \( [\chi^2 (3) = 9.058, p < .05] \) (see Table 4-1). However, journalists (n = 21, 21.9%) reported stronger responsibility toward Hebei Spirit than general public (n = 4, 4.5%) \( [\chi^2 (3) = 28.540, p < .001] \) (see Table 4-2). In the same vein, journalists (n = 47, 49.0%) reported stronger responsibility toward the Korean government than general public (n = 12, 13.6%) \( [\chi^2 (3) = 37.576, p < .001] \) (see Table 4-3).

Table 4-1. Chi-square Results of Perceived Responsibility of Samsung by Public Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Perceived Responsibility of Samsung</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>2 (2.1%)</td>
<td>6 (6.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \chi^2 (3) = 9.058, p < .05 \)

Table 4-2. Chi-square Results of Perceived Responsibility of Hebei Spirit by Public Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Perceived Responsibility of Hebei</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>11 (11.5%)</td>
<td>14 (14.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>1 (1.1%)</td>
<td>6 (6.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \chi^2 (3) = 28.540, p < .001 \)
Table 4-3. Chi-square Results of Perceived Responsibility of Korean Government by Public Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Perceived Responsibility of Korean Government</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mention</td>
<td>2 (2.1%)</td>
<td>15 (15.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>8 (9.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\chi^2 (3) = 37.576, \ p < .001

The third research questions addressed what contingent factors appeared during each crisis phases (RQ3a) and what contingent factors differently evidenced in online news coverage versus blogs (RQ3b). In order to test the research questions, chi-square analysis was first conducted between five contingent factors and crisis phases as well as public types. As a result, considering five contingent factors according to three crisis phases, external public characteristics \[\chi^2 (2) = 10.746, \ p < .01\] and issue under consideration \[\chi^2 (2) = 12.771, \ p < .01\] showed significant difference (see Table 5-1 and Table 5-2). In terms of external public characteristics factor, comparing to the second (n = 13, 20.0%) and the third (n = 13, 21.7%) phases, it appeared more often at the first phase (n = 26, 44.1%). While a few issue under consideration factor was appeared at the first phase (n = 4, 6.8%), it appeared more often at the second phase (n = 15, 23.1%) and the third phase (n = 20, 33.3%).

Table 5-1. Chi-square Results of External Public Characteristics Factor by Crisis Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Contingent Factor</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>33 (55.9%)</td>
<td>26 (44.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>52 (80.0%)</td>
<td>13 (20.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>47 (78.3%)</td>
<td>13 (21.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>132</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\chi^2 (2) = 10.746, \ p < .01

Table 5-2. Chi-square Results of Issue under Consideration Factor by Crisis Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Contingent Factor</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>55 (93.2%)</td>
<td>4 (6.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>50 (76.9%)</td>
<td>15 (23.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>40 (66.7%)</td>
<td>20 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>145</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\chi^2 (2) = 12.771, \ p < .01

Analyzing public types with industry-specific environment \[\chi^2 (1) = 11.397, \ p < .01\], general political/social environment \[\chi^2 (1) = 26.136, \ p < .001\], and external public \[\chi^2 (1) = 17.793, \ p < .001\] showed significant differences. In these three contingent factors, journalists reported them more than general public (see Table 6-1, 6-2, and 6-3).
### Table 6-1. Chi-square Results of Industry-Specific Environment Factor by Public Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Type</th>
<th>Contingent Factor</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>44 (45.8%)</td>
<td>52 (54.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>62 (70.5%)</td>
<td>26 (29.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>106</strong></td>
<td><strong>78</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2 (1) = 11.397, p < .01$

### Table 6-2. Chi-square Results of General Political/Social Environment Factor by Public Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Type</th>
<th>Contingent Factor</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>57 (59.4%)</td>
<td>39 (40.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>81 (92.0%)</td>
<td>7 (8.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>138</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2 (1) = 26.136, p < .001$

### Table 6-3. Chi-square Results of External Public Factor by Public Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Type</th>
<th>Contingent Factor</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>56 (58.3%)</td>
<td>40 (41.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>76 (86.4%)</td>
<td>12 (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>132</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2 (1) = 17.793, p < .001$

Lastly, in terms of CRS, chi-square analysis indicated only CRS of general public [$\chi^2 (10) = 37.619, p < .001$] and CRS of local in Taean [$\chi^2 (8) = 23.542, p < .01$] showed significant differences according to crisis phases (RQ4a). In the case of CRS for general public, there was only a few excuse (n = 3, 100%) CRS at the first phase, supporting our category of the three crisis phase. However, at the second phase, denial (n = 6, 33.3%), excuse (n = 7, 38.9%), justification (n = 2, 11.1%), corrective action (n = 2, 11.1%), and ingratiation (n = 1, 5.6%) appeared and at the third phase, excuse (n = 4, 16.7%), justification (n = 1, 4.2%), and full apology (n = 19, 42.2%) appeared (see Table 7-1). In the case of CRS for local in Taean, excuse (n = 3, 75%) and corrective action (n = 1, 25%) were found at the first phase. However, at the second phase, denial (n = 6, 30.0%), excuse (n = 6, 30.0%), justification (n = 2, 10.0%), and corrective action (n = 6, 30.0%) appeared; at the third phase, excuse (n = 9, 37.5%), justification (n = 3, 12.5%), corrective action (n = 2, 8.3%), and full apology (n = 10, 41.7%) appeared (see Table 7-2).
Table 7-1. Chi-square Results of CRS for General Public by Crisis Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>Corrective action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (100%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>6 (33.3%)</td>
<td>7 (38.9%)</td>
<td>2 (11.1%)</td>
<td>2 (11.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (16.7%)</td>
<td>1 (4.2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2 (10) = 37.619, p < .001$

Table 7-2. Chi-square Results of CRS for Local in Taean by Crisis Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Phase</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Excuse</td>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>Corrective action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (75.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>6 (30.0%)</td>
<td>6 (30.0%)</td>
<td>2 (10.0%)</td>
<td>6 (30.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>9 (37.5%)</td>
<td>3 (12.5%)</td>
<td>2 (8.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2 (8) = 23.542, p < .01$

Analyzing public types with CRS for local in Taean showed significant differences [\(\chi^2 (4) = 10.150, p < .05\)] (RQ4b). Specifically, while journalists perceived excuse (n = 5, 31.3%), justification (n = 3, 18.8%), corrective action (n = 6, 37.5%), and full apology (n = 2, 12.5%), general public perceived denial (n = 6, 18.8%), excuse (n = 13, 40.6%), justification (n = 2, 6.3%), corrective action (n = 3, 9.4%), and full apology (n = 8, 25.0%) (see Table 8).

Table 8. Chi-square Results of CRS for Local in Taean by Public Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Type</th>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Excuse</th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Corrective action</th>
<th>Full apology</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (31.3%)</td>
<td>3 (18.8%)</td>
<td>6 (37.5%)</td>
<td>2 (12.5%)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>6 (18.8%)</td>
<td>13 (40.6%)</td>
<td>2 (6.3%)</td>
<td>3 (9.4%)</td>
<td>8 (25.0%)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2 (4) = 10.150, p < .05$
Discussion

This study initially compared blogs and online newspapers in order to investigate both of general public’s and journalists’ emotions towards different public types and their perceptions of crisis responsibility within three crisis phase.

First, in testing RQ1, examining how the five emotions (i.e., anger, alertness, sadness, fright, and anxiety) were differently evidenced in blogs and online news coverage, the results suggested that the people’s emotion differed across journalists and general public as well as the time phases. More specifically, there was the main effect of public types and the three crisis phases on five emotions. That is, only anger and alertness were expressed differently between journalists and general public; and anger, alertness, and anxiety were produced differently across the crisis phases. From Choi and Lin’s study, which indicated that anger and alertness were the only significant emotions affecting an organization’s reputation and public’s boycott (2009a), our findings suggest that anger and alertness which differently expressed from crisis phases and public sources might pose various levels of reputational threats, which in turn affects Samsung’s crisis communication. It was interesting to see among the four primary emotions proposed by Jin (2009); anger and worry were produced differently across the three time phases.

In addition, there were only significant interaction effects between public types and crisis phases on anger and alertness. That is, while journalists showed little anger at the “No-action” phase when Samsung did not utilize accommodative strategies despite their direct cause of the crisis, general public produced more anger. At the “Apology” phase, even when Samsung officially apologized, general public produced more anger than journalists. These findings are inconsistent with previous literature. From previous literature, accepting apology (Jorgensen, 1996) and employing more accommodative strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2007) are most effective post-crisis tactics for reducing anger. However, it was intriguing to see in our case, not only that general public produced anger differently from journalists in each crisis phase, but also they showed greater anger toward Samsung after its official apology. For alertness, at the second phase, similar to anger, while journalists showed little alertness, general public produced more alertness and greater alertness than the third phase. It might be the fact that during the second phase, since the organization did not utilize any accommodative strategies in spite of its direct cause of the oil spill, general public tend to warn Samsung or force it to take any action, which was expressed as alertness.

It is worth noting that anger and alertness were differently expressed by general public and journalists within each crisis phase. This finding implies that the conflicting emotions during the “No-action” and “Apology” phases can pose threats to Samsung, thus significantly influence the organization’s reputation. Public relations managers are encouraged to monitor different types of emotions expressed on the Internet as well as main-stream media, and to develop post-crisis communication strategies for reducing the level of anger and alertness.

In testing RQ2, examining perceived responsibility of Samsung by crisis phases and by different publics (general public/blogs vs. journalists/online newspapers), before Samsung was revealed as a cause of the oil spill, there was little responsibility of Samsung; however, after Samsung was found as a cause, the perceived responsibility increased. Moreover, even after Samsung’s apology, there was greater perceived responsibility of Samsung than before. This finding may imply that Samsung’s late response caused more responsibility to be placed on Samsung. This study also revealed that Samsung’s perceived crisis responsibility increased as general public’s anger was continuously expressed. This study suggests that public relations
managers need to monitor people’s perceptions of crisis responsibility, which can be different from journalists’ framing of news coverage in post-crisis communication.

Regarding the Korean government’s perceived crisis responsibility, the perception of crisis responsibility was decreased at the second phase, while it was slightly increased at the third phase. This result shows that in the case of high-profile crisis such as the oil spill, the government has to manage the crisis situation, despite the fact that they are not the direct cause of the crisis. With regard to the journalists’ and general public’s perceptions of crisis responsibility, journalists reported more crisis responsibility toward Hebei Spirit, which was another cause of the oil spill, and toward the Korean government than general public. According to this result, it is assumed that journalists try to find various causes of a crisis rather than focusing on a main culprit of the crisis. On the other hand, on blogs, people tend to focus on the main public, who takes in charge of the crisis.

In examining what contingent factors (RQ3) were shown differently in blogs and online news coverage, among five external variables only external public characteristics factor and issue under consideration characteristics factor were significantly differentiated in terms of crisis phase. That is, public’s concern and argument about the possible cause of the oil spill was increased over time. This may be due to the fact that as the three crisis phases passed by from when Samsung’s possible source of the crisis was unrevealed to the time when Samsung actually shared its responsibility, general public’s discourse regarding the issue and concern for victims (e.g., fisheries of Taean) cannot be but increasing.

In terms of two different publics, industry specific environment, general political/social environment and external public factors were differently reflected between journalist and bloggers insofar as journalists contained more factors respectively than blogger. It is reasonably assumed that journalists’ distinctive role for delivering exact information let them include more contingent factors in writing their news articles. In other words, while on blogs, people tend to focus more on expressing their thoughts from their own viewpoint, journalists tend to balance the news story by considering more contingent factors.

Finally, in order to see how Samsung’s CRS were covered differently in regards to crisis phases (RQ4), as time goes by, both public’s and journalists’ perceived CRS of Samsung shifted from more advocate strategies to more accommodative strategies, which supported the division of three crisis phase. However, at the third phase, although Samsung accepted its responsibility and publicized their official apology in national newspapers, both general public and journalists perceived that Samsung utilized excuse or justification at the same time. This study implies that although Samsung officially apologized at the third crisis phase, Samsung’s perceived CRS toward general public and local residents were varied and even included more advocate strategies such as denial, excuse, or justification. That is, while journalists (online newspapers) perceived that Samsung employed more accommodative strategies, especially corrective action or full apology, general public (blogs) assessed Samsung chose more advocate strategies such as denial or excuse. This finding suggests that public’s attribution of CRS can be dissimilar to what an origination actually employed.

The public might contemplate that Samsung only accepted their ethical responsibility, not their legal responsibilities, thus public’s perceived CRS of Samsung could be less accommodative. It may be supported by the fact that Samsung only publicized a brief apology in the national newspaper without mentioning their compensations or actual plans for the victims.

In sum, this study emphasized the importance of understanding a novel factor in speculating the actual crisis, different public’s emotions by comparing blogs and online
newspapers. Moreover, this study indicated that general public and journalists produced different level of emotions and perceptions of crisis responsibility as well as reflected different contingent factors and an organization’s CRS in each crisis phase. These results provide meaningful insights to public relations practitioners. In times of a crisis, public relations practitioners should not overlook general publics’ emotions and perceptions toward an organization online by assuming that their emotions and attribution of the crisis could be identical to how media actually framed them.

Limitations and future research

By examining both of online news coverage and blogs regarding the Samsung oil spill crisis, this study shed light on understanding general public’s and journalists’ emotions and perceptions toward the organization’s CRS in a given crisis and within each crisis phases. However, this study has several limitations. This study only employed the quantitative content analysis of news articles and blogs of the Samsung oil spill crisis. Future study may contain 1) direct news releases of Samsung to better understand the organization’s responses to the crisis before they are reflected in the public’s eyes and journalists’ frame of news articles, and 2) online posting of more involved publics (e.g., online community for Taean residents or for shareholders of Samsung) to reflect much variation of other public groups and their similar/dissimilar reactions toward Samsung as well as the crisis itself. Additionally, as Taylor and Perry (2005) illustrated, many organizations cannot but be integrating the Internet into their crisis response. From our findings, further experimental research examining in a given crisis that can show how dissimilar emotions and perceived crisis responsibility pouring out from different publics affect an organization’s reputation, credibility, attitude, and even purchase intentions is needed to corroborate and develop the current study. The future empirical research will also contribute to advancing a theoretical framework for the application of either the contingency theory or the SCCT.
References


Technology: All the Talk, BUT Is It All the Use?

Eunseong Kim, Ph.D
&
Terri L. Johnson, ABC, APR

Eunseong Kim, Assistant Professor, Journalism Department, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL, USA.
ekim2@eiu.edu

Terri L. Johnson, Associate Professor, Journalism Department, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL, USA.
tljohnson@eiu.edu

Abstract

This study reports the uses of and attitudes toward new media technology among public relations practitioners. The online-based survey among the PRSA members conducted in 2009 found that the most frequently used technologies among respondents were e-mail, web browsing, and intranet. Social media technology tools were not yet frequently used, but their use is in an increasing trend. Respondents believed that new technology has had a positive impact on their work, and they viewed on-site technology support and on-site technology workshops most useful in helping them learn new technology. Suggestions for employers were discussed.
Introduction

New media technologies, especially social media technologies, have fundamentally changed the way we communicate and enabled everyone to become message creators. Government, business, and individual players of the new media environment are in constant search of the most effective ways to reach their audiences.

Public relations practitioners, as those who build and maintain relationships with key audiences, are at the center of this new media communication environment. Some of communication venues available to an average public relations practitioner today include: discussion forums, message boards, blogs, podcasts, vodcasts, Real Simple Syndication (RSS), photo sharing, audio and video sharing, search engine marketing, wikis, social networks, professional networks, and micro-blogging, to mention only a few. Sometimes, blogs, podcasts, and RSS seem to be widely adopted by public relations practitioners already, and other programs such as Facebook (social networking), LinkedIn (professional networking), and Twitter (micro-blogging) seem to be the next line of technologies that might help public relations practitioners reach their audiences most effectively.

Researchers have examined the adoption of new technologies among public relations practitioners (Curtis et al., 2010; Eyrich et al., 2008), the potential and current impact of new technology on public relations practice (Wright & Hinson, 2008, 2009), and challenges and new opportunities new technology brings (James, 2008). This study reports public relations practitioners’ technology adoption using one of the most current data and examines various factors associated with the adoption. This study intends to add further information to the literature explaining constantly changing new media environment and its impact on the public relations industry.

Related Studies

New media technology has transformed the communication environment in the past decade, and the ways we communicate have been transformed accordingly. With technological advances, audience members now actively generate their own content on the web and demand to participate as message creators. In particular, audience members have strongly responded to social media technologies, and online social network sites have grown nearly 6 times since 2005 (Smith, 2009). As use of social media technology increases rapidly, studies have also observed both attitudinal (e.g., high self-efficacy) and behavioral (e.g., civic and political participation) changes among social media users.

As audience members become content producers and publishers, public relations practitioners have gone through the process of transformation as well. Public relations practitioners today produce print news releases, newsletters, and brochures using InDesign and edit audio and visual materials with Avid. In addition, they seek out multiple communication venues using blogs, virtual worlds, wikis, and online social networks.

Recent developments including online social networks and PDAs expand the parameters of communication and provide public relations practitioners with a wide range of options for reaching the public. At the same time, Web 2.0 technologies enable audiences to become active participants in the communication process, and thus, challenge public relations practitioners to re-think their relationships with their audiences. More specifically, many public relations practitioners welcome the potential of new media as technological advances enable them to
directly communicate with their audiences without going through traditional media gatekeepers (Gillin, 2008). On the other hand, public relations practitioners have to give up control over their messages and allow audience feedback and participation while determining the most effective way of reaching their target audiences.

Whether public relations practitioners are ready to embrace new media technologies for their practices or not, technologies seem to be advancing at a faster rate than ever and these technologies are widely embraced by the industry. A survey of working public relations practitioners found that, although the rate of adoption varies, new communication tools are continuously being adopted by practitioners (Eyrich et al., 2008). Some of the more established tools such as e-mail and intranet, the study found, have been widely adopted, and the newer tools such as blogs and podcasts are adopted at an increasing speed. Practitioners, however, seem to be a little slow in adopting the more complicated and unfamiliar technologies such as virtual worlds and text messaging, the authors found.

This growing use of social media is not limited to the United States. A survey of European countries noted an increase in social media use in communication management from 2008 to 2009, with web videos and blogs growing the fastest. The most used social media, online communities (social networks) remained the same both years at 32.8%, while online videos increased from 24.6% to 28.9%. Weblogs increased 19.9% to 24.8%. Twitter was not measured in 2008, but commanded 14% use in 2009 (Zerfass et al., 2009).

With a wide spread interest in incorporating new technology in PR campaigns, practitioners’ attitudes towards new technology and its impacts on their work are also important to note. In a survey conducted recently, Wright and Hinson (2008) found that a large number of practitioners (61%) believed that the emergence of social media including blogs has changed the way their organizations communicated. About 66 percent of participants of this study also believed that blogs and social media have enhanced public relations practice. When the two researchers conducted a similar study in 2009 (Wright & Hinson, 2009a), an even higher percentage of respondents (73%) stated that social media technology has changed the way their organizations communicated.

Although the adoption of latest technology is clearly happening, it is too early to predict the implications of this adoption. As target audiences and mass media demand various ways to obtain required information, public relations practitioners need to prepare materials faster and more accurately in a newly demanded format (James, 2008). This means public relations practitioners should continue to possess the ability to determine the message content and the delivery methods most effective in reaching their target audiences (James, 2008; Weber, 2007).

The uses of and attitudes towards new technology among public relations practitioners are continuously changing as the media environment changes continuously. To update and chronicle the changes, this study asked:

RQ1. Which technology do public relations practitioners use in their work activities?
RQ2. Which technology are public relations practitioners familiar with?
RQ3. Do public relations practitioners view themselves competent to use new technology?
RQ4. Which technology do public relations practitioners view significant in their practice in the near future?
RQ5. Are there factors associated with frequent use of technology?
RQ6. What are public relations practitioners’ attitudes towards the impact of technology on their work?
RQ7. How do respondents’ companies handle new technology-related issues?

Methods

An online-based survey was conducted among working public relations professionals. A link to the survey site was sent via e-mail to the members of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and 186 usable responses were collected by the cut-off day in February 2009.

In order to determine the extent to which public relations practitioners are adopting new media technologies in their work activities, respondents were asked to rate their use, familiarity with, and perceived significance of 21 technological tools. Eighteen technology items used in Eyrich et al.’s study (2008) were adopted and additional three items were asked. They were E-mail, intranet, web browsing, videoconferencing, photo editing tools, audio/video editing tools, layout tools, web page production tools, text messaging, blogs, podcasts, video sharing, photo sharing, social networks, micro-blogging, wikis, social event, social bookmarking, RSS, gaming, virtual worlds. Common software names were provided when examples are needed (e.g., Twitter as a micro-blogging tool).

All three concepts (use, familiarity, and perceived significance of new technologies) were measured on a Likert scale. Technology use was measured on a 7-point Likert scale [1 (never), 2 (less than once a month), 3 (once a month), 4 (2-3 times a month), 5 (once a week), 6 (2-3 times a week), and 7 (daily)]. Respondents’ familiarity with each technology was measured on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 indicated “not at all familiar” and 5 indicated “extremely familiar.” Respondents’ perceived significance of each technological tool was measured by asking the question, “How common a public relations tool do you think this technology will become in 5 years?” Respondents were asked to indicate their perception on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 indicated “not at all common” and 5 indicated “ubiquitous.”

Respondents’ attitudes towards new technology were measured by asking them to indicate how much they agree with eight statements relating to the impact of new technology. Four statements explained positive impacts of new technology on their work and the other four statements were related to negative impacts.

In addition to these foundational questions to get a picture of technology adoption among PR practitioners, other questions regarding how their companies are coping with technology adoption, how their companies are distributing works involving the latest technology, and what type of technology-related support is provided in their companies.

Findings

Of those who reported gender (n=186), more females (n=101, 66.9%) than males (n=47, 31.1%) responded. Respondents who indicated their age (n=139) were on average 44.5 years old (S.D.=10.584). Those who reported the years they have been working in public relations industry (n=149) worked on average 16.88 years (S.D.=9.17). Less than a half (41.6%) of those who indicated whether they are accredited in the field (n=149) had such titles as APR or ABC. Respondents in the study were highly educated with 95 percent possessing university or graduate degrees. Of those, 43 percent had B.A. or B.S. degrees. Among those who reported their majors from university degrees, 75 percent had journalism or communication related majors such as public relations, journalism, communication, or journalism or communication with public relations concentration (sequence).
Which technology do PR practitioners use in their work activities?

The average frequency in respondents’ use of 21 technology tools was 3.28 (S.D.=1.77), which indicates that respondents used these technology tools a little more than once a month. More specifically, E-mail (99.4%), web browsing (95.8%), and Intranet (63.9%) were used daily by a large number of people in the survey. Text messaging, social networking, blog, and photo editing tools were other frequently used technologies. Although less than half of respondents reported that they used text messaging (43.5%), social networking (34.7%), blog (22.6%), and photo editing (9.5%) tools daily, many respondents said that they used these technologies at least once a month [social networking (68.3%), text messaging (67.9%), blog (63.6%), and photo editing (57.1%) tools].

On the other hand, such technologies as podcasting, video conferencing, wikis, web page production, social bookmarking, audio/video editing, gaming, and virtual world were used least frequently. Respondents reported that they used these eight technologies less frequently than once a month (\(M=1.99, \text{S.D.}=1.46\)). Respondents almost never used gaming and virtual world technologies in their work activities with over 95 percent of respondents answering that they used gaming or virtual world less frequently than once a month or never used them [gaming (95.8%), virtual world (96.4%)]. Closely following technology on this list was audio and video editing tools. More than eight out of 10 respondents said that they used the technology less frequently than once a month or never used it (82.1%).

Which technology are PR practitioners familiar with?

Respondents’ average familiarity with all of 21 technology tools was 3.30 (S.D.= 1.15) on a scale where 1 indicated “not at all familiar” and 5 indicated “extremely familiar.” Naturally, technologies frequently used by public relations practitioners were the technologies they are familiar with. Six of the seven technological tools respondents said they are familiar with were identical with the tools they use most frequently. The technologies were e-mail (\(M=4.98, \text{S.D.}=.135\)), web browsing (\(M=4.90, \text{S.D.}=.338\)), Intranet (\(M=4.59, \text{S.D.}=.825\)), text messaging (\(M=4.22, \text{S.D.}=.1135\)), Social networks (\(M=4.02, \text{S.D.}=.1136\)), blogs (\(M=3.99, \text{S.D.}=.1075\)), and video sharing tools (\(M=3.69, \text{S.D.}=.1208\)). Average familiarity with the seven technologies was 4.34 (S.D.=.84) on a scale where 4 indicated “quite familiar” and 5 indicated “extremely familiar.”

Again intuitively, the technologies with which public relations practitioners expressed their unfamiliarity were often the technologies they rarely use in their work activities. Respondents stated that they are not familiar with virtual world (\(M=1.70, \text{S.D.}=1.096\)), gaming (\(M=1.80, \text{S.D.}=1.07\)), audio/video editing tools (\(M=2.25, \text{S.D.}=1.31\)), social bookmarking (\(M=2.40, \text{S.D.}=1.35\)), web page production tools (\(M=2.52, \text{S.D.}=1.39\)), wikis (\(M=2.83, \text{S.D.}=1.40\)), and layout tools (\(M=2.76, \text{S.D.}=1.41\)). The overall familiarity with these seven technologies was 2.32 (S.D.=1.29) on a scale where 2 indicated “somewhat familiar” and 3 indicated “familiar.”
Competence to use new technology

Respondents were asked to assess their own competence in four different technology applications on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 indicated “not at all competent” and 5 indicated “completely competent.” The average score ($M= 3.44, S.D.= 0.97$) shows that respondents believed that they were more than “somewhat competent” but less than “quite competent.” Respondents felt the most competent was technology and visual literacy such as their competence to use the internet or manage desktop publishing. They felt the least competent to design and layout messages using new media such as updating websites. Table 1 shows respondents’ competence level for each area.

Table 1. Competence towards new media (n=170)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Technology Application</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology &amp; visual literacy (internet, desktop publishing)</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of new media message strategies</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design &amp; layout of messages using new media</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying latest media technology (blogs, podcasts) to public relations campaigns</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceived significance of new technologies among PR practitioners

Respondents reported the perceived significance of each technology tool by indicating how common of a public relations tool they believe each technology might be in 5 years. Respondents believed that all of the 21 technology tools would be “quite common” ($M= 3.96, S.D.= 1.05$) in 5 years. However, respondents foresaw that some technologies would be more common than others. Ten most common technology tools in their predictions: web browsing ($M =4.67, S.D.= .57$), e-mail ($M =4.59, S.D.= .74$), video sharing ($M =4.42, S.D.= .779$), text messaging ($M =4.40, S.D.= .94$), blogs ($M =4.39, S.D. = .82$), social networking ($M =4.37, S.D.= .88$), intranet ($M =.436, S.D.= .90$), RSS ($M =4.33, S.D.= .1.01$), podcast ($M =4.22, S.D.= .854$), and photo sharing ($M =4.19, S.D.= .98$) tools.

The technology tools ranked low on this question: virtual world ($M= 3.33, S.D.= 1.92$), gaming ($M= 3.38, S.D.= 1.87$), audio/video editing ($M= 3.97, S.D.= 1.08$), video conferencing ($M= 4.01, S.D.= .99$), wikis ($M= 4.04, S.D.= 1.22$), photo editing ($M= 4.08, S.D. = .92$), web page production ($M= 4.08, S.D.= 1.01$), social event ($M= 4.09, S.D.= 1.17$), layout tools ($M= 4.12, S.D.= .10$), social bookmarking ($M= 4.14, S.D.= 1.36$) tools.

The relationship between technology use and respondent characteristics

To determine the relationship between respondent characteristics such as age, gender, education, work experiences, and job titles and their technology use, statistics of association were utilized. Unlike other studies that found males tend to use new technologies more frequently than females (e.g., Eyrich et al., 2008), this study found that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and technology use. However, age mattered in the use of some technological tools. Younger practitioners used blogs (Pearson’s $r = -.31$, $p< .001$), video sharing (Pearson’s $r= -.20$, $p< .01$), micro-blogging (Pearson’s $r= -.28$, $p< .001$), social
bookmarking (Pearson’s r = -0.21, p < 0.05), and RSS (Pearson’s r = -0.22, p < 0.01) tools. Age was not statistically associated with either deeply adopted technologies such as e-mail and web browsing or the newest technologies such as gaming and virtual reality.

Years of experience were negatively associated with two technology tools: blogs (Pearson’s r = -0.22, p < 0.01) and micro-blogging (Pearson’s r = -0.18, p < 0.05). The level of education was also negatively associated with two technology tools: e-mail (Pearson’s r = -0.28, p < 0.001) and RSS (Pearson’s r = -0.18, p < 0.05). Negative association between technology use and the two variables above might be due to the negative association between age and technology use.

Whether respondents perceive their companies as innovators when it comes to the adoption of new technology was associated with several technology tool uses. Those who believed their companies to be innovators utilized new technology tools in their work activities more frequently. They used audio/video editing (Chi-square = 30.76, df = 18, p < 0.05), page production (Chi-square = 33.29, df = 18, p < 0.05), blogs (Chi-square = 50.32, df = 18, p < 0.001), podcast (Chi-square = 30.42, df = 18, p < 0.05), video sharing (Chi-square = 35.76, df = 18, p < 0.01), photo sharing (Chi-square = 32.45, df = 18, p < 0.05), social networks (Chi-square = 30.64, df = 18, p < 0.05), micro-blogging (Chi-square = 45.27, df = 18, p < 0.001), social bookmarking (Chi-square = 34.62, df = 18, p < 0.01), RSS (Chi-square = 29.10, df = 18, p < 0.05), and gaming (Chi-square = 30.23, df = 18, p < 0.05) more often than respondents who thought their companies adopt new technology slowly or very slowly.

**Attitude towards the impact of technology on work**

The study asked respondents to indicate on a five-point Likert scale how much they agree or disagree with eight statements that gauge the impact of technology on their work. Four statements mentioned positive impacts and the other four statements indicated negative impacts. Overall, respondents believed that technology has had more positive than negative impacts on their work. The average score on positive impacts was 3.70, and the average score on negative impacts was 3.17 (1 indicated “strongly disagree” and 5 indicated “strongly agree”). Table 1 shows scores on each statement.

*Table 2. Attitudes towards the Impact of New Technology on Work (n=152)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Technology</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Impacts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology has made my job easier.</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology allows me to spend more time on other tasks at work.</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of technology, I have more control over my work.</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of technology, the quality of my work has improved.</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Impacts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it hard to keep up with new technologies.</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find I spend too much time learning new technology at work.</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of technology, people expect me to get my job done faster.</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of technology, people expect me to be an expert in multiple areas.</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distribution of technology-related work and support for new technology use

Respondents’ companies or departments took various venues to stay at the front of the new technology wave. Among those who reported how their companies distribute technology-related work, a quarter of the respondents stated that it was too early to tell because their companies are just starting to use the latest technologies (n= 37, 24.7%). A little more than a quarter said that everyone was doing a little of everything in their companies (n= 41, 27.3%). In a little more than 10 percent of companies, personnel specialized in the area (n= 19, 12.7%). Another 10 percent of companies seemed to be incorporating more than one method to apply the latest technologies in their work (n= 18, 12.0%). Close to 20 percent of respondents (n= 26, 17.3%) stated that their companies do not use any of the latest technologies in their work.

In order to help them better incorporate the latest technologies to their work, respondents said on-site technology support (M= 3.73, S.D.= 1.31), at work technology training or workshop (M=3.72, S.D. = 1.17), and attending workshops or conferences (M=3.65, S.D. = 1.06) are more useful than taking university-level courses on-line (M= 3.18, S.D. = 1.37) or on-campus (M= 2.97, S.D. = 1.51).

Discussion/Conclusion

This study asked working public relations practitioners various foundational questions to diagnose their use of and attitude towards new technology in their work activities. While this study confirms some of the previous research findings, further findings in this study help us better understand how new technologies are changing public relations practitioners’ work activities. This study only measures use at the point in time it was done, early 2009. This use is rapidly changing as the Twitter use surge came in April 2009, for example.

We found that e-mail, web browsing, and intranet were most frequently utilized in public relations practitioners’ work as a majority of respondents incorporated these technologies into their work on a daily basis. Social media technologies such as text messaging, social networking, and blogs were not as widely used as e-mail or web browsing, but more than half of practitioners used them at least once a month.

While gender was not associated with technology use, two other factors were associated with how often one uses new technology. Younger respondents tended to use new technology, especially social media technology, more frequently than older practitioners. Also those people who believed their companies adopt technology early used new technology more often than those who thought their companies adopt new technology very slowly. Older practitioners often have more work experience, and they have further knowledge acquired through work experience. Employers need to help older practitioners utilize the knowledge they acquired through experience in today’s new communication environment by helping them learn and use new technologies.

When asked how competent they are in using new media technology, respondents were highly competent to use the well-established technology (e.g., internet use), but they were less competent to apply the latest technologies (e.g., blogs, podcasts) to public relations campaigns. As the web 2.0 media environment and its social media technology can extend and newly create venues for practitioners to build effective relationships with their public, practitioners need to work harder to actively adopt, learn about, and utilize the benefits of social media technology.
Social media technology rapidly changes the dynamics of the communication environment today, and audiences are becoming increasingly versatile in retrieving information in many different ways. No doubt that public relations practitioners who can determine the best ways to reach their publics and to deliver the messages in optimal ways would be most effective in communicating and building relationships with their audiences. This study found that technologies respondents used most frequently were almost identical with the technologies they were familiar with. A simple and intuitive finding it may seem, but it is a significant finding because it emphasizes the importance of training. In addition, a large number of respondents believed new technologies have made more positive than negative impacts on their work, and respondents believed that most of the new technology items used in this study would be quite commonly used in their work in five years. These findings give us more reasons to believe that public relations practitioners would use various technologies in their work if and when they are familiar with the technology. To help practitioners perform effectively in the new media environment, employers need to search for ways to help both young and older practitioners learn new technology applications.
References


The Role of Emotional Response during an H1N1 Influenza Pandemic on a College Campus

Hye Kyung Kim
Doctoral Student
Department of Communication
Cornell University
Email: hk646@cornell.edu

Jeff Niederdeppe
Assistant Professor
Department of Communication
Cornell University
Email: jdn56@cornell.edu

Abstract

This study investigates how both positive and negative emotions relate to stakeholders’ attributions of crisis responsibility, relational trust and intentions to seek crisis-related information. The primary purpose of this study is threefold: (a) to identify discrete emotions experienced in the context of an influenza pandemic, (b) to illuminate differential roles of positive and negative emotions in evaluating outcomes related to crisis management, and (c) to test a model predicting relationships between variables proposed to be involved in emotion-based interpretations of a crisis. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze data obtained from a survey of 429 students enrolled in a university that experienced a large H1N1 influenza outbreak. Results provide support for a theoretically derived causal path model that explains substantial variance in the relationships between crisis responsibility, trust and information seeking. Implications for crisis communication are discussed.

Keywords: college health crisis; influenza pandemic; emotional response; positive and negative emotions; crisis responsibility; relational trust; information seeking

The Role of Emotional Response during an H1N1 Influenza Pandemic on a College Campus
Introduction

An outbreak of pandemic influenza would represent a major crisis on a college campus by directly involving a large number of students and bringing severe consequences for student health, academic progress, and college operations. In the fall of 2009, many universities were faced with a major outbreak of H1N1 influenza (“swine flu”). College health centers responded by devoting resources to inform and assist students in response to the crisis. While trust between an organization and its stakeholders is important in every organizational situation, trust plays a particularly important role in delivering necessary information at an early stage of a crisis.

When a crisis strikes, stakeholders who are either directly or indirectly influenced by the situation generally experience emotional reactions. Functional Emotion Theory (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Jorgensen, 1998) suggests that these emotions could be a critical factor that changes the dynamics of a crisis situation by framing stakeholders’ view on the issue and the organization involved in the crisis. In light of these predictions, exploring the influence of stakeholders’ emotional response to a crisis is important for further understanding the dynamics of crisis management.

Research on emotional responses to crises have focused primarily on negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and anxiety due to these emotions’ relative intensity and impact on stakeholder’s behavior (Folkman, Moskowitz, Ozer, & Park, 1997). Yet, research in social psychology (e.g., Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003; Folkman & Moscovitz, 2000) emphasizes that positive emotions co-occur alongside negative emotions and play a meaningful role in the process of coping with stressful situations.

This study takes a first step toward illuminating the role of both positive and negative emotional responses to a crisis. To this end, we investigate the relationship between the experience of discrete emotions and the interpretation of crisis responsibility, relational trust, and intentions to seek flu-related information from a college health center. We examine these relationships in the context of an H1N1 influenza outbreak on a large college campus where over 1,600 students were infected with influenza-like illness in the fall of 2009. We focused on the college health center as the organization with primary responsibility for the health and well being of the campus community, and undergraduate students as their primary stakeholders.

Literature Review

Organizational Crisis Outcomes

Crisis communication research has evolved from cataloguing crisis-response strategies to examining how crisis situations can influence the selection and effectiveness of crisis-response strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). A model of situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) conceptualizes how stakeholders interpret a crisis to manage organizational reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). The central focus of SCCT is how to assess the crisis situation and select a crisis-response that fits the crisis situation (e.g., Barton, 2001; Fombrun, 1996).

The three primary outcome variables identified by the SCCT (Coombs & Holladay, 2002) include crisis responsibility, organizational reputation, and behavioral intention. For the purpose of this study, we focused on three related variables: crisis responsibility, relational trust, and intentions to seek crisis-related information. While organizational reputation is conceptualized as “the degree to which the source is concerned with the interests of others” (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, p. 174), relational trust was chosen instead of a broader measure of organizational reputation because (a) trustworthiness represents a major component of organizational reputation (Yang, 2007), (b) relational trust is directly associated with early stages
of crisis containment (Sturges, 1994), and (c) we assumed that a college health center with an explicit mission to support a healthy campus community would be perceived by stakeholders (students) as being concerned with the interests of others. Intention to seek crisis-related information from the college health center was chosen as the measure of behavioral intention because (a) information seeking is an important health-related behavior amid circumstances of uncertainty inherent in a disease outbreak (e.g., Niederdeppe et al., 2007) and (b) the college health center’s website and electronic resources were chosen by the university administration as the central clearinghouse for H1N1 influenza-related information on campus. Thus, students were expected to consistently monitor and seek new information about the status and response to the H1N1 influenza campus outbreak.

In a crisis, emotions are generally felt and expressed by stakeholders as fleeting experiences that change over time as the crisis develops (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007). Our decision to focus on the three outcome variables identified by the SCCT was designed to permit the study to identify practical implications about communication strategies appropriate at an acute stage of a crisis, in this case the immediate aftermath of an H1N1 influenza outbreak.

Crisis responsibility. Coombs (1998) defined crisis responsibility as “the degree to which stakeholders blame the organization for a crisis event (p.180)”. Based on the premise that people need to assign responsibility for an event, Attribution Theory posits that people look for the causes of events, especially unexpected and negative events (Weiner, 1986). Attribution of responsibility often takes place when there is (a) an identifiable source of an action, (b) a belief that a source should have been able to control or foresee the outcome, (c) the perception that the behaviors of the source are not justified by the situation, or (d) the perception that the source operated under conditions of free choice (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Weiner, 1996). While few would argue that a campus health center could be responsible for the existence of H1N1 influenza on campus, it is likely that the center would be considered an identifiable source of action with both free choice and ability to foresee and manage the consequences of an H1N1 influenza outbreak.

Using Attribution Theory, the threat of a crisis is largely a function of crisis responsibility, because attributions of responsibility have affective and behavioral consequences for an organization (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; McDonald & Hartel, 2000). Weiner (1996) also suggested that judgment of responsibility should precede other cognitive and affective reactions. Furthermore, according to the SCCT, crisis responsibility is the centerpiece of a crisis dynamic (Coombs, 2004). Attributions of crisis responsibility are directly related to threats to organizational reputation and relational trust posed by a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002).

Relational trust. Social psychologists define trust as an evaluation of whether another person or entity is competent in accomplishing what it is expected to do (Huang, 2001) or a state of subjective certainty that some other person or entity will not act in ways that might cause painful consequences (Lee, 2005). Trust in an organization can be conceptualized as stakeholders’ interpretation of the degree to which they believe the organization will fulfill its mission of supporting a healthy campus community or avoid acting in ways that lead to negative outcomes.

Trust in the organization is a valuable resource that should be protected from a crisis. The importance of public trust in an organizational crisis can be summarized in twofold: (a) increases the effectiveness of organizational communication during a crisis (e.g., Kim & Yang, 2009; Lyon & Cameron, 2004), and (b) minimizes the reputational and financial damage after a crisis.
Numerous researchers have treated trust as a multidimensional construct (e.g., Butler, 1991; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Yang, 2007). This study uses three dimensions of relational trust adopted from Yang (2007) and Yang and Lim (2009): competence, dependability, and integrity. Competence refers to the capability of a party to perform own obligations (Huang, 2001) and includes the consideration of expertise and timeliness in work performance (Yang & Lim, 2009). Dependability refers to the reliability of a party based on past performances whether the party showed consistent acts and words (Hon & Grunig, 1999, Yang & Lim, 2009). Integrity refers to the willingness to keep ethical standards rather than achieving organizational objectives (Hon & Grunig, 1999, White, 2005, Yang & Lim, 2009).

**Intention to seek crisis-related information.** Intention to seek information is conceptualized as stakeholders’ intentions to proactively search for more information about a crisis through visiting an organization’s website and joining social media. This concept views the public as an active entity because their role is not merely limited to passively receiving information distributed by an organization, but rather to actively search for relevant information and engage in a dialogue via social media channels.

Public relations scholars have suggested that communication and information seeking behavior is critical for the formation and quality of relationships between organizations and their stakeholders (e.g., Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000; Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Ferguson, 1984; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Yang, 2007). In the context of an organizational crisis, public engagement in information seeking can result in increased (a) dissemination of relevant information at an early stage of a crisis and (b) support for an organizational initiative to contain the crisis. Despite its implications for improving the efficiency of communication during a crisis, intention to seek crisis-related information has not been adequately examined in previous crisis communication research.

**Theoretical Framework Applying Emotions to Crisis Research**

Emotion is defined as “organized cognitive-motivational-relational configurations whose status changes with changes in the person–environment relationship as this is perceived and evaluated” (Lazarus, 1991, p. 38). Emotions are viewed as internal, mental states that that vary in intensity and represent evaluative and valenced reactions to events, agents, or objects (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). Emotions are thought to be specific, focused, and grounded in consciousness, in contrast to mood which is often viewed as a diffuse background affect of uncertain cause (Dillard & Peck, 2000). Emotional responses are thought to develop immediately following the interpretation of a crisis’s causes and attributions of responsibility (Choi & Lin, 2009; Weiner, 1986).

The persuasive effects of emotions have been the focus of burgeoning interest in communication research. Numerous scholars have expressed the need for understanding how emotions influence attitudes (e.g., Breckler, 1993; Dillard, 1993; Englis, 1990). Eagly and Chaiken (1993) and Jorgensen (1998) each suggested that emotions can play an important role in
shaping how individuals respond to a message and the position it advocates. Some theories and studies suggest that emotions are used as heuristics in making decisions because they provide accessible information about how to behave in response to a message (e.g., Dillard & Peck, 2000; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Functional Emotion Theory provides an explanatory framework for understanding how different emotions might affect stakeholders’ judgment of a crisis and relevant organizations.

**Functional Emotion Theory.** Functional Emotion Theory explains how different emotions influence the way people mobilize and allocate mental and physical resources in response to information or events (Izard, 1993). Generally, emotions operate as basic information processing systems designed to make sense of and respond to circumstances that people encounter (Lazarus, 1991). Emotions signal the brain to mobilize psychological and physiological resources (Dillard & Peck, 2000). Different emotions are associated with different “action tendencies” which predispose people to particular types of cognitions and behaviors (e.g., Arnold, 1960; Frijda, 1986; Frijda, Kuipers, & Schure, 1989; Izard, 1977; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 1984).

In other words, when an emotion is evoked, its associated action tendency guides how people attend to information, process it, and use it later (Nabi, 2003). Negative emotions, in particular, have been found to influence message processing and response. For instance, research has found that crime stories which place extensive blame on perpetrators and generate a feeling of anger lead to support for stronger penalties for criminal offenses (Nabi, 2003). Anger aroused by receiving harsh feedback (Weiss & Fine, 1956) or by viewing anger-arousing film clips (Lerner, Goldberg, & Tetlock, 1998) has been found to increase punitive judgments of others. Gault and Sabini (2000) also found that anger aroused by a story about toxic waste dumping was associated with greater support for goals related to punishment compared to goals relating to systemic change or helping victims.

Combined, these studies suggest that the experience of emotions in response to a message can lead to selective processing of emotion-relevant information, and, in turn, subsequent decision-making. Since different emotions are proposed to trigger different action tendencies (Frijda et al., 1989), it is important to identify whether discrete emotions that might be associated with a crisis have dissimilar influence on crisis dynamics.

**Discrete Emotions in Crises**

A “crisis type” is a frame used to guide interpretations of a situation that varies by how much responsibility stakeholders ascribe to an organization (Coombs, 2004). Since attributions are thought to produce a variety of emotional responses (Weiner, 1986), it is likely that different dominant emotions would be generated depending on the type of a crisis.

Jin et al. (2007, 2008) suggested that four primary negative emotions are associated with response to a crisis: anger, sadness, fright and anxiety. For instance, in response to a corporate transgression case, Mattel’s recall of a dangerous toy, anger (49%), alertness (11.3%), surprise (9.7%), worry (9.4%), fear (7.1%), and confusion (6.5%) were identified as the dominant emotions (Choi & Lin, 2009). In response to the September 11 attacks in the United States, a different set of frequent emotions were found: sympathy, grateful, interested, love and anger
(Saad, 2001, Fredrickson et al., 2003). While anger is clearly negative, sympathy, grateful, interested, and love might be considered to be more positive in nature. Combined, these studies suggest that a variety of emotions may occur in response to different types of crises.

**Negative emotions.** Based on Functional Emotion Theory, one would predict that negative emotions experienced in a crisis would promote selective processing of available information about the crisis and guide decision making, which in turn would influence attitudes toward the issue and the organization in crisis (Dillard & Peck, 2000; Kim & Yang, 2009). Jin (2009) noted that each negative emotion would be expected to differently influence on stakeholder’s interpretation of a crisis as well as their coping process.

Investigating the influence of discrete emotions on the dynamics of SCCT, Choi and Lin (2009) found anger, surprise, fear, worry, contempt and relief to be associated with the attribution of responsibility. Other emotions including alert, confusion, disgust, shame and sympathy were not drawn from attribution process (Choi & Lin, 2009). Particularly, anger was found to be most strongly related to crisis responsibility and was a significant predictor of organizational reputation (Choi & Lin, 2009). Kim and Yang (2009) have also suggested that negative emotions mediate the relationship between crisis responsibility and organizational reputation.

**Positive emotions.** Although negative emotions have been the primary focus of crisis research (e.g., Choi & Lin, 2009; Coombs, Fediuk, & Holladay, 2007; Jin et al., 2007; Kim & Yang, 2009), positive emotions have received far less attention in the literature. The role of positive emotions in a crisis has been largely neglected since they are believed to be less intense and less enduring compared to negative emotions (Folkman et al., 1997). However, growing number of researchers emphasize that people, even in the most difficult circumstances, experience positive emotions which play an important role mitigating negative impact of crises (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

Fredrickson et al. (2003) found that positive emotions indeed co-occurred alongside negative emotions. Gratitude, interest, and love were the three most frequent positive emotions drawn by the September 11 tragedy (Fredrickson et al., 2003). As described above, many people experienced a feeling of alertness after the first Mattel toy recall. This emotion was found to be a significant predictor of the company’s perceived reputation (Choi & Lin, 2009).

Positive emotions not only provide more pleasant subjective experiences than negative emotions, but they also help reduce an exclusive focus on negative emotions (Fredrickson et al., 2003). Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) suggested that positive emotions work as a “breather” by undoing physiological arousal and enhancing broadminded coping. In contrast to negative emotions, which narrow people’s attention to specific action tendencies (e.g., attack), positive emotions tends to broaden attention, thinking and behavioral responses (Fredrickson, 1998, 2000). Positive emotions can aid an organization by allowing stakeholders to be more flexible in interpreting a crisis situation and more open-minded in processing relevant information (Reed & Aspinwall, 1998; Trope & Pomerantz, 1998).
Our review of previous research on emotional responses to crisis situations leads to our first two research questions. First, building on studies demonstrating both negative and positive emotional responses to crises (e.g., Choi & Lin, 2009; Fredrickson et al., 2003), we ask:

*RQ1*: Which discrete emotions will students experience in response to an H1N1 influenza outbreak on a college campus?

Second, based on Kim and Yang’s (2009) proposition and the revised model of SCCT (Choi & Lin, 2009), we ask:

*RQ2*: Do positive and negative emotions mediate the relationship between crisis responsibility and both relational trust and intention to seek crisis-related information?

*A Model of Emotion-Based Interpretation of a Crisis*

Based on the literature review, this study proposes the model of emotion-based interpretation processes of a crisis to explain the linkages among the areas of both positive and negative emotions, judgment of crisis responsibility, relational trust, and intention to seek information. Figure 1 presents the hypothesized direct paths in the proposed model. Crisis responsibility and relational trust are at the center of the dynamic. Crisis responsibility shapes both positive and negative emotional reactions, and has direct and/or indirect influence on relational trust and intention to seek crisis-related information. Relational trust is posited as a mediator between emotional responses and information seeking intention.

*RQ3*: Will the proposed model achieve reasonable fit in explaining stakeholders’ interpretation of an H1N1 influenza crisis?

**Method**

An online survey was conducted at a large-sized private university in upstate New York to collect data used in this study. In the fall 2009 semester, cases of H1N1 influenza increased rapidly across the campus and even caused the death of a student, producing widespread media coverage and campus concern. At the time of the survey being conducted, more than 500 students had been suspected of being infected by the H1N1 influenza virus and the story was reported in the local and national news media. The university and its health center established a website to provide relevant information about flu prevention and shut down several campus social events.

**Participants**

The sampling frame consisted of 25% of total undergraduate students (n=3,495) randomly selected from a list of student email addresses provided by the university registrar’s office. To make sure that the sample has representation from various student groups, participants were randomly chosen in proportion to the share of each school year group (i.e., 25% Freshmen, 25% Juniors, 25% Sophomores, 25% Seniors). Each sampled email address was sent an email invitation on October 23, 2009, which linked to a survey questionnaire on the Web. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that included items about demographics, their perception of crisis responsibility and relational trust toward a college health center, and intention to engage in crisis-related information seeking. A reminder email was sent on October 29, and the survey was closed on November 2, 2009. Among a total of 429 questionnaires that were initiated (12.2%), 327 participants completed the entire questionnaire (a 9.4% response rate).

Respondents consisted of 70% women (n=231) and 30% (n=100) men. Age of respondent varied from 17 to 40, with an average age of 20. Of the respondents, 23% (n=77) were Freshmen, 26% (n=88) were Juniors, 21% (n=70) were Sophomores, and 29% (n=98) were
Seniors. Two out of three ($n = 225; 68\%$) were White, $20\%$ ($n = 67$) were Asian/Asian-American, and $11\%$ ($n = 36$) were Black, Hispanic or multiple races. The study was approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Measurement Instrument**

Four theoretical constructs were measured to test research questions and the proposed model. One variable was considered exogenous (i.e., crisis responsibility) while others were treated as endogenous variables (i.e., negative and positive emotions, relational trust, and intention to seek crisis-related information) in the proposed model.

**Positive and negative emotions.** Modified Izard’s (1977) Differential Emotions Scale (DES) was used to assess discrete emotions that students experienced during the influenza pandemic on a campus. Four discrete negative emotions and four positive emotions were measured: (a) negative: anger, fear, sad, and anxious; (b) positive: grateful, interested, hopeful, and love. These emotions were selected because they were found to be most frequently experienced emotions in crisis cases (e.g., Fredrickson et al., 2003; Jin et al., 2007, 2008). Referencing Fredrickson et al. (2003), we also added an item to measure sympathy. On a 5-point scale from 1 never to 5 most of the time, participants were asked to “think back to the beginning of this semester when cases of H1N1 influenza (“the swine flu”) were increasing rapidly across campus” and report on how often they had felt each of 9 different emotions (e.g., “I have felt grateful, appreciative or thankful”).

We examined the discriminant validity of the two groups of emotions (i.e., negative and positive emotions) using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. Based on the Kaiser’s rule (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), any component with an eigenvalue greater than or equal to 1 was extracted. Two components were extracted for the nine discrete emotions. Each of the extracted components clearly corresponds to the theoretical categorization of emotions: The first factor is positive emotion (eigenvalue=2.97; 32.9% variance explained) and the second is negative emotion (eigenvalue=2.57; 28.5% variance explained). While sympathy was correlated with the composite score of negative emotions in a previous study (Fredrickson et al., 2003), our analyses revealed that sympathy is more closely related to positive emotion in the context of an influenza outbreak case (See Table 1).

Accordingly, subscales for positive and negative emotions were created. The Positive Emotions subscale is a composite of 5 positive emotions (including sympathy), with coefficient .82. The Negative Emotions subscale is a composite of four negative emotions, with coefficient .78.

**Crisis responsibility.** On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means not at all responsible and 7 means totally responsible, crisis responsibility was measured with the following three items: how much responsibility should (a) the university health center, (b) other organizations on campus (for example, Campus Life, Administration, or Facilities), and (c) students themselves bear for reducing transmission of H1N1 influenza (“the swine flu”) among students? Items (a) and (b) were used to measure organizational attribution and (c) was to assess personal attribution towards the issue. Cronbach’s alpha of the item (a) and (b) was .82 ($n=330; 2$ items).

**Relational trust.** Referencing previous studies (e.g., Yang, 2007; Yang & Lim, 2009), six 5-point scale items were used to measure three dimensions of relational trust: competence, dependability, and integrity. The measurement items were slightly modified to make them more relevant to the organization being studied (i.e., a college health center). Two items were used for
each dimension (e.g., competence, “I feel very confident about [the health center’s] expertise in the health needs of college students”; dependability, “[The health center] can be relied upon to provide the health information and resources I need”; and integrity, “Whenever [the health center] makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about students like me”). Cronbach’s alpha of the items were .92 (n=328; 6 items).

Intentions to seek crisis-related information. To measure intentions to seek information, three items were developed modifying items from Grunig and Hung’s (2002) questionnaire. While original item includes information searching only on the websites of organizations, this study added two social media platforms (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) considering participants’ media usage tendency. The three items are (a) I would join a Facebook group of [The health center] that provides information about the flu on campus, (b) I would follow [The health center] on Twitter to learn about the flu on campus, and (c) I am interested in learning more information about influenza on [The health center’s] website. Cronbach’s alpha of the items was .64 (n=327; 3 items).

Results

Dominant Emotions Experienced During an Influenza Pandemic: Test of Research Question 1

The first research question was posed to identify dominant emotions felt during an influenza outbreak on a college campus. The most frequently experienced emotion was the feeling of “interest” (M=3.22, SD=1.06) which was grouped with “alert” and “curious,” followed by “sympathy or compassion” (M=3.14, SD=1.0), and “anxious, worried or concerned” (M=2.80, SD=1.15). Table 1 presents the result of descriptive statistics for each emotion.

As for the latent variables of positive and negative emotions, “scared, fearful or afraid” (β=.82, p<.001) and “anxious, worried or concerned” (β=.84, p<.001) were the strongest indicators of negative emotions, while “grateful, appreciative or thankful” (β=.80, p<.001) was the strongest indicator of positive emotion followed by “love, closeness or trust” (β=.79, p<.001), “hopeful, optimistic or encouraged” (β=.75, p<.001) (See Table 3).

Structural Equation Modeling: Test of Hypotheses and Research Question 2 & 3

To empirically test theoretically derived paths in the model, structural equation modeling (AMOS 6.0) was used. Parameters were estimated by maximum likelihood method and a two-step process of latent path modeling was followed. Imposing all factors in the proposed model to covary, an initial confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. The initial measurement model fitted satisfactorily, we did not revise the model.

A model can be retained as a valid model when (a) the value of χ²/df is less than 3, (b) the value of CFI is equal to or greater than .90, and (c) the value of RMSEA is equal to or less than .08 (Byrne, 1994, 2001; Kline, 1998). Following this guideline, the proposed CFA model is a valid model indicating good measurement reliability and validity of the variables: χ²/df = 2.57, CFI = .92, and RMSEA = .06.

All latent variables were significantly correlated with each other except for the correlation between relational trust and crisis responsibility. Other latent variables were correlated at least at .05 level ranging from r = -.112 between negative emotion and relational trust, as the lowest correlation, and r = .415 between positive and negative emotions, as the highest correlation. Table 2 reports correlation and descriptive statistic results.

Regarding RQ3, structural relations were constructed among four variables based on research hypotheses proposed in this study (See Figure 1). The proposed structural equation model yielded the following data-model fits: χ²/df = 2.81, CFI = .904, and RMSEA = .065.
Thus, we concluded that the proposed model was a valid model that explained patterns of association between variables involved in the interpretation process of a crisis.

Direct effects in the proposed model. Among nine paths that explain the mediators (i.e., positive and negative emotions and relational trust) and the dependent variable (i.e., intention to seek crisis-related information), six significant paths \((p < .05)\) were found. Crisis responsibility was a significant predictor for both negative \((H1a, \beta = .37, B = .43, S.E. = .06)\) and positive emotions \((H1b, \beta = .25, B = .29, S.E. = .06, \text{both at } p < .001)\). Only positive emotion was a significant predictor for relational trust \((H2b, \beta = .17, B = .19, S.E. = .06, p = .003)\). Negative emotion was found to predict information seeking intention \((H3a, \beta = .14, B = .17, S.E. = .06, p = .03)\). Contrary to our expectation, crisis responsibility was not a significant predictor for relational trust \((H4, \beta = -.04, B = -.05, S.E. = .06, p = ns)\). Both relational trust \((H5, \beta = .39, B = .41, S.E. = .07, p < .001)\) and crisis responsibility \((H6, \beta = .19, B = .26, S.E. = .06, p = .002)\) were significant predictors for intention to seek crisis-related information (See Table 4).

Based on the above results, we examined the data-model fits of a model that excluded the non-significant paths between (a) crisis responsibility and relational trust \((H4)\), (b) negative emotion and relational trust \((H2a)\), and (c) positive emotion and information seeking intention \((H3b)\). The model without non-significant paths had similar data-model fits to the proposed model \((\chi^2/df = 2.79, CFI = .903, \text{and RMSEA} = .065)\), thus we did not revise the proposed model.

Mediation effects of emotions. Examining RQ 2 about the role of discrete emotions in the interpretation of outcome variables (i.e., relational trust and information seeking intention), mediation tests were used following Baron and Kenny Steps (1986). Sobel z scores were used for statistical decisions. In the proposed model, negative and positive emotions mediate the effects of crisis responsibility on relational trust and intention to seek information. Negative emotion partially mediated the relationship between crisis responsibility and information seeking intention \((Sobel z \text{ statistic} = 2.05, p = .04)\). Positive emotions fully mediated the effect of crisis responsibility on relational trust \((Sobel z \text{ statistic} = 2.44, p = .01)\). Table 5 shows the mediation test results.

Discussion

This study investigates the role of both positive and negative emotions to a crisis in the context of an influenza outbreak on a college campus. We aimed to extend situation-based approaches to understanding crisis dynamics (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2002) by introducing emotion-driven interpretations of a crisis into a theoretical model. We report four major findings that have both theoretical and practical implications in the field of public relations:

1. A variety of discrete emotions were experienced during an influenza outbreak.
2. Crisis responsibility was associated with both positive and negative emotions.
3. Positive and negative emotions mediated the relationships between crisis responsibility and among crisis outcome variables.
4. Relational trust was strongly and positively associated with intention to seek information.

First, students not only felt both negative and positive emotions during a flu pandemic, but they experienced some of positive emotions more frequently than negative emotions. That is, “interest, alert or curious” and “sympathy or compassion” were the most frequent emotional responses (followed by “anxious, worried or concerned”). It is noteworthy that similar emotions (i.e., sympathy, grateful, and interested) were primarily drawn by the September 11 attacks
(Fredrickson et al., 2003), but not by a corporate transgression case (Choi & Lin, 2009). This could be explained by the common characteristics between an influenza pandemic and terrorism: both crises (a) create identifiable victims, (b) can directly impact anyone with random probability, and (c) receive relatively low organizational responsibility due to the lack of intentionality and controllability from the organization side (in case of terrorism, people attributed responsibility to an external entity who actually committed the crime). Intentionality and organizational involvement to an issue have been used to categorize crisis types (e.g., Coombs, 1995; Jin et al., 2007). It is possible that crisis emotions are closely related to the type of crisis because characteristics of the crisis itself play a major role in shaping attributions of responsibility (Coombs, 2004).

Discrete emotions were grouped into two categories based on previous theoretical models (e.g., Izard, 1977, Fredrickson et al., 2003) and empirical evidence provided by this study. Consistent with previous categorizations used in psychology (Izard, 1977), anger, sadness, anxiety and fear were grouped as negative emotions and interested, love, grateful, hopeful and sympathy were grouped as positive emotions. For negative emotions, fear and anxiety were the primary indicators supporting Pang, Jin and Cameron’s (2009) notion that fear and anxiety dominates human emotion in crises, especially when uncertainty pervades in crisis situations. It has been argued that anxiety is the “default” emotion that stakeholders experience in any type of crises (e.g., Jin, 2009; Jin et al., 2007, 2008; Pang et al., 2009), while fright is predominantly induced by unpredictable and uncontrollable crises (Jin, 2009). Combined with these propositions, this study proposes anxiety and fear (or fright) as the primary negative emotions that should be addressed in facilitating emotional coping of stakeholders during an influenza outbreak.

Secondly, crisis responsibility was associated with both negative and positive emotions with a stronger association for negative emotion. These direct paths are consistent with Weiner’s (1985) notion that causal attributions affect emotions generated by such events. While negative emotional responses to corporate transgression cases have been found to be positively correlated with or influenced by the blame and responsibility directed toward an organization (e.g., Cho & Gower, 2006; Choi & Lin, 2009; Kim & Yang, 2009), no association was found for positive emotions. Alert, which is categorized as positive emotion in this study, was not associated with crisis responsibility in the Mattel product recall case either (Choi & Lin, 2009). For an influenza outbreak case, students might have associated crisis responsibility with the severity of a crisis and felt “grateful, appreciative or thankful” of not being infected by the flu. In previous research, crisis severity has been suggested to be a predictor of crisis responsibility (e.g., Coombs, 1998; Lee, 2005).

While alert was negatively associated with reputation in a corporate transgression case (Choi & Lin, 2009), positive emotions (including “interested, alert or curious”) were positively associated with relational trust in this study. The more students felt positive emotions, the more they trusted the college health center. Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1995) might predict that positive emotions would influence relational trust if the student health center was viewed as a provider of aid in response to a crisis with external causes. Combined with Choi and Lin’s (2009) study, the same emotion could have different influence on crisis dynamics depending on the type of a crisis (e.g., locus of crisis responsibility). Further research would be needed to
unpack the relationship between crisis responsibility and positive emotions in a variety of crisis contexts.

Third, both negative and positive emotions were significant mediators between crisis responsibility and crisis-related outcome variables. Specifically, negative emotion partially mediated the relationship between crisis responsibility and intention to seek crisis-relevant information. This finding reinforces Weiner’s (1995) proposition that emotions mediate between responsibility and behavioral intentions. This mediation path could indicate a desirable effect of negative emotions drawn by a crisis that stimulate stakeholders to search for more information about the issue. Providing sufficient information to stakeholders is especially important at an early stage of a crisis for two reasons (e.g., Coombs, 1999; Sturges, 1994): to (a) reduce fear and anxiety caused by the uncertainty of impact that a negative incident have on each stakeholder, and (b) prevent further spread of similar incidents (e.g., as for an influenza outbreak, relevant information would aid in reducing future influenza transmission). Although negative emotions have been mostly associated with negative impact on an organization in a crisis (e.g., Choi & Lim, 2009; Coombs et al., 2007), negative emotions could also provide an organization with chances to provide important information about a crisis and engage stakeholders in crisis communication.

In addition, positive emotion was a significant mediator between crisis responsibility and relational trust. Reinforcing Fredrickson and Joiner’s (2002) proposition that positive emotions work as a “breather” by enhancing broadminded coping, positive emotion was found to play a meaningful role in retaining public trust on an organization in a crisis. When mediated by positive emotions, the influence of negative evaluation about an organization (i.e., perceived crisis responsibility) on relational trust could be minimized by allowing stakeholders to be more flexible in interpreting crisis situations (Reed & Aspinwall, 1998; Trope & Pomerantz, 1998).

Fourth, a strong direct path was found between relational trust and intention to seek information. This suggests that trust is a valuable organizational asset that should be protected during a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Supportive intention is believed to be a function of reputation (e.g., Coombs, 1998, 1999). Lee (2005) also found that participants' degree of trust in the organization has a significant direct effect on purchase intention. Addition to these behavioral intentions, we found a similar relationship also holds for stakeholder’s intention to seek crisis-related information. Considering the strong path coefficient between relational trust and intention to seek information, a particular emphasis should be also paid to the role of positive emotion in shaping relational trust in crisis management.

Implications

Combining the results from this study with others affords the opportunity to refine our understanding of emotion-based interpretations of a crisis. This study attempted to measure discrete emotions during an actual crisis event to collect data that best represent what stakeholders experienced in a real crisis. Study findings emphasize the importance of understanding individual emotional reactions to a crisis in effective crisis management. The theoretical implications of this study are threefold: (a) the identification of discrete emotions in the context of an influenza pandemic, (b) the categorization of crisis emotions based on both theoretical models and empirical evidence, and (c) the evaluation of differential roles of positive and negative emotions in crisis dynamics.
The results of this study have practical implications for dealing with health crises that involve disease transmission and share similar crisis profiles with an influenza outbreak, including lack of intentionality and limited organizational control. Crisis managers should factor stakeholders’ emotional reactions into their evaluation of the crisis situation and subsequent selection of a crisis response strategy. For instance, when “anger” is the dominant reaction, an organization might focus on explaining its position about the accusation to reduce the level of responsibility. Yet, for managing a crisis that primarily evokes “fear” or “anxiety,” providing relevant information and showing its commitment to reducing the impact of a crisis would be more important. A direct path from negative emotion (“fear” and “anxiety” were the primary indicators) to information seeking intention might indicate what types of emotions catalyze information seeking in this particular type of a crisis.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies**

Caution should be used when interpreting relationships between study variables. Cross-sectional survey data cannot provide definitive information about causal ordering between variables. The use of SEM does permit the test of a theoretical model that assumes a particular order of variables and, in doing so, assesses the plausibility of that causal order. Furthermore, surveys provide a useful methodology for studying emotions in a real crisis case due to the time sensitive nature of the topic. Future studies should consider longitudinal and/or experimental designs to confirm the temporal ordering of the variables studied here.

In the crisis communication literature, crisis responsibility has been found to be a significant predictor of organizational reputation or trust (e.g., Choi & Lin, 2009; Kim & Yang, 2009; Lee, 2005). However, this study didn’t support a direct relationship between these variables and only a small indirect path via positive emotion (indirect $B = .29 \times .19$, or .06) was found. While the unique characteristics of the chosen crisis case could partly explain the lack of support (e.g., an organization’s role as a care provider than a crisis creator), it might be meaningful to further investigate the variables associated with the attribution of responsibility, including locus of attribution (personal vs. organizational), risk susceptibility or risk severity, to better understand the nature of the relationship between crisis responsibility and trust. Another topic for future work would involve the identification of factors that predict positive emotions in response to a crisis, considering its positive association with information seeking within crisis communication.

**Conclusions**

There is a great deal to learn about conditions that govern the impact of emotions in the crisis context. It is our hope that this study’s focus on the role of positive and negative emotions in shaping crisis responsibility, relational trust and intentions to seek crisis-related information move us closer to this goal.
References

Barton, L. (2001). *Crisis in organizations II (2nd ed.)*. Cincinnati, OH: College Divisions South-Western.


### Table 1. Factor Loadings and Descriptive Statistics of Crisis Emotions (N = 330)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1: Positive Emotion</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt hopeful, optimistic or encouraged</td>
<td>.841</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>1.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt grateful, appreciative or thankful</td>
<td>.833</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt love, closeness or trust</td>
<td>.822</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt interested, alert or curious</td>
<td>.629</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>1.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt sympathy or compassion</td>
<td>.568</td>
<td>.394</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>.998</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 2: Negative Emotion</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I felt scared, fearful or afraid</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>.850</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt anxious, worried or concerned</td>
<td>.252</td>
<td>.823</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt sad, downhearted or unhappy</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.716</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt angry, irritated or annoyed</td>
<td>-.038</td>
<td>.620</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>1.049</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Eigenvalue** | 2.97 | 2.57

**Notes.** Cells present factor loadings for a Varimax-rotated, 2-factor solution. All factors with an eigenvalue > 1 are shown. Each item is measured on a 5-point scale, with higher values indicating more frequent feeling of each emotion.

### Table 2. Correlation and Descriptive Statistics of Latent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. PE (5 items)</td>
<td>.415**</td>
<td>.247**</td>
<td>.144**</td>
<td>.216**</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. NE (4 items)</td>
<td>.327**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.112*</td>
<td>.185**</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CR (2 items)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>.234**</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RT (6 items)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.290**</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. IS (3 items)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** CR = Crisis responsibility; NE = Negative emotion; PE: Positive emotion; RT: Relational trust; IS: Information seeking; **p < .01, *p < .05. All items are measured on a 5-point scale except for the crisis responsibility (7-point scale).

### Table 3. Standardized Solutions by CFA for the Measurement Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion (PE) (5 items)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE1: I felt hopeful, optimistic or encouraged</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE2: I felt grateful, appreciative or thankful</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE3: I felt love, closeness or trust</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE4: I felt interested, alert or curious</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE5: I felt sympathy or compassion</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Emotion (4 items)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE1: I felt scared, fearful or afraid</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE2: I felt anxious, worried or concerned</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE3: I felt sad, downhearted or unhappy</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE4: I felt angry, irritated or annoyed</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Responsibility (CR) (2 items)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CR1: Responsibility of college health center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR2: Responsibility of other college offices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relational Trust (ER) (6 items)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RT1: Treats students like me with respect and discretion (Integrity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT2: Concerned about students like me in making decisions (Integrity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT3: Can be relied upon to provide information (Dependability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT4: Takes the opinions of students like me (Dependability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT5: Confident about expertise in the health needs (Compatibility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT6: Has the ability to provide quality health services (Compatibility)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Seeking (IS) (3 items)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IS1: Join a facebook group of the college health center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS2: Follow the college health center on Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS3: Visit a website of the college health center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Direct Effects of the Proposed Model (N = 426)

<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>CR</td>
<td>NE</td>
<td>H1a</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>H1b</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>RT</td>
<td>H2a</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>-1.88</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>RT</td>
<td>H2b</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>IS</td>
<td>H3a</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>IS</td>
<td>H3b</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.946</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>RT</td>
<td>H4</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>-.669</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT</td>
<td>IS</td>
<td>H5</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>5.398</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CR = Crisis responsibility; NE = Negative emotion; PE = Positive emotion; RT = Relational trust; IS = Information seeking; ***p < .001.

Table 5. Mediation Effects of Crisis Emotions

<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>CR</td>
<td>→ NE</td>
<td>.431</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.370</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>NE</td>
<td>→ IS</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>→ NE</td>
<td>→ IS</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>→ PE</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.246</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>→ RT</td>
<td>.197</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CR</td>
<td>→ PE</td>
<td>→ RT</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Formulae for the test was drawn from MacKinnon and Dwyer (1993): z-value = a*b/SQRT(b^2*S_a^2 + a^2*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.

Note. CR = Crisis responsibility; NE = Negative emotion; PE = Positive emotion; RT = Relational trust; IS = Information seeking
H1: The more students attribute organizational responsibility, the more frequently they would experience both (a) negative and (b) positive emotions.
H2: Students who report a more frequent feeling of (a) negative emotion will show lower relational trust, while those who report a more frequent feeling of (b) positive emotion will show higher relational trust.
H3: Students who report a more frequent feeling of (a) negative or (b) positive emotion will show higher intentions to seek crisis-related information.
H4: Students who attribute a greater amount of organizational responsibility will show a lower relational trust toward the organization.
H5: Students who report a higher relational trust toward an organization will show a higher intention to seek crisis-related information.
H6: Students who attribute a greater amount of organizational responsibility will show a higher intention to seek crisis-related information.
Figure 2. A model of emotion-based interpretation process of a crisis

Note. Paths of p value stronger than .05 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.
Students Explore Ethics and CSR: Analyzing *A Priori* Frameworks and *De Facto* Responses to Organizational Challenges

Rachel Kovacs  
Adjunct Associate Professor  
Department of Media Culture  
College of Staten Island, CUNY

Phone: (718) 982-2541  
Fax: (718) 982-2710  
Email: rkovacs@mail.csi.cuny.edu

Abstract

This paper explores the first-hand processes by which one professor, over the course of 12 years, taught ethics and corporate social responsibility as part of the public relations and corporate communication curricula at several four-year institutions. It focuses on how students interpreted and applied text and classroom-based theories to real-world situations and standards for ethical practice and CSR. Contemporary case studies were used as exemplars for CSR; speakers and public relations professionals who evaluated student work affirmed that theories taught were indeed practiced in the workplace. Student evaluations suggested that even hypothetical class projects reinforced the need for careful research and provided insight into the complex demands facing them as future practitioners. Based on these outcomes, the author discusses the need to increase students' analyses of case studies and their exposure to a range of frameworks for CSR. She also proposes that varying approaches to the study of ethics and CSR can enhance and strengthen those foci within the public relations and corporate communication curricula. It can also help students with limited worldviews and life experience to extrapolate and segue from the classroom to the public relations workforce.

This paper traces student how students identified, evaluated, extrapolated, and applied norms for ethics and corporate social responsibility issues in public relations and corporate communication courses at several institutions over more than a decade. It explicates the curricula taught by the professor and focuses on how students integrated these norms into their planning of real and hypothetical campaigns. It will discuss class exercises and homework assignments meant to strengthen students' understanding of ethics, review term projects and the guidelines that drove them, and consider student project evaluations. It begins with a review of academic and professional writings about the place of ethics and CSR in the curriculum. It also refers to professional and industry bars for ethics and CSR, some of which were tapped for her teaching.

Problem: Helping Students Identify Ethical and Socially Responsible Behaviors

The environment for public relations has changed greatly since 1999, when Coombs and Rybacki noted that public relations as a field had not put sufficient emphasis on pedagogy. There is more emphasis on new technologies, which was one of these authors' concerns. Yet once of the most crucial issues raised in the Commission on Public Relations Education report (1999),
which emerged from the same 1998 NCA Summer Conference, explicitly recommended
teaching ethics in the public relations curriculum. Recommendations included "that a
consideration of ethics pervade all content of public relations professional education..., the
Commission urges that every public relations course begin its syllabus and its first class with the
statement that every true profession recognizes that a fundamental priority of any profession is
its responsibility toward society at large." (Commission on Public Relations Education, 1999).
Of the four core competencies recommended by Van Leuven (1999) and the others at the 1998
NCA Summer Conference, ethics topped the list. Hutchison (2002) noted that a separate course
in ethics may not be feasible, given pressures on lone professors of public relations who may
have advising and other responsibilities. The bigger issue for this professor is: What would lead
us as educators to think that even a dedicated course in ethics would be an adequate immersion
for a lifetime of challenges?

Academics and practitioners across disciplines stressed the need to shift professional
emphases and recalibrate what students need to learn. As Wooldridge (2009) aptly noted:
THIS has been a year of sackcloth and ashes for the world's business schools.
Critics have accused them of churning out jargon-spewing economic vandals.
Many professors have accepted at least some of the blame for the global
catastrophe. Deans have drawn up blueprints for reform...The result? Precious
little....The giants of management education have laboured mightily to bring forth
a molehill...That is too bad. You cannot both claim that your mission is "to
educate leaders who make a difference in the world", as HBS does, and then wash
your hands of your alumni when the difference they make is malign.
Wooldridge's heavy-duty rebuke stopped short of decrying a lack of ethics and CSR education.
This author will not deny the existence of such an education or a consensus among academics
and professionals as to its importance—but ethics and CSR should top the teaching agenda.
What follows tracks one professor's attempt to give such agenda a higher classroom profile,
hoping that students will critically evaluate companies' practices and act according to norms.
Public relations courses in which ethics have been taught. The author has taught introduction to
public relations (which she taught, in other institution, as principles of public relations), public
relations campaigns, public relations cases, research methods (focused on public relations
projects), managing public relations for the modern corporation, corporate communications,
organizational communication, team-based independent studies (one graduate [research] and one
undergraduate [Bateman Competition]) and a professional communication class in which
applying the PRSA Code and ethics scenarios played a significant role.
How ethics fit into the larger public relations curriculum. In my upper-level classes, the first few
weeks, and in introductory public relations, the first half of the semester, are spent reviewing the
evolution of excellent, ethical communication behaviors during the last 150-plus years. In our
contemporary media-saturated environment, the organizational exemplars most frequently
recalled by students, and thus, those that become front-of-mind realities for them, reflect
misdeed, obfuscation, deceit, and abuse of power. Negative examples thus often become a
starting point for any conversation about ethics and CSR. While few of these reach the nadir of
the Enron/Arthur Andersen debacle, most students can recall a multitude of scandals.

The Tylenol case seems to be the rare positive model to which students consistently refer.
So I have learned that one acceptable, though not ideal, way to help students identify the
positives is by analyzing and extrapolating the good from amidst abundantly negative corporate
behaviors, the ones for which there is never a shortage of media coverage. Thus, case studies,
even some of the abbreviated studies available in the undergraduate textbooks (see below for citations), serve a valuable purpose in helping students identify those organizational behaviors worth emulating. The chapter case studies, supplemented by those in handouts (e.g., PR Reporter on the Hyundai case, often catalyzed students' choices of semester projects and papers.

Sources illustrating ethical and CSR behaviors

Theoretical frameworks explicated in texts used in and to prepare for my classes and for professional development from 1998 onwards (e.g., Center & Jackson, 2008; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 1992, 2006). MacElreath, 1992, Newsom, Turk, & Kruckeberg, 2004) provided grounding and case studies in ethics). Texts were supplemented by handouts on generic and specific principles of excellent public relations practices (Grunig & Grunig, 1993), the PRSA Code of Practice (2009), PRSA ethics scenarios and case studies. Also included were other relevant files, standards, and global bars for corporate behaviors, as set by professional associations such as the Global Alliance (2010), global CSR reporting agencies such as Business for Social Responsibility (2010) and organizations such as the Global Compact (2010), whose members agree to comply with basic principles of CSR. In addition, guest speakers (i.e., several public information officers from a foreign consulate and the National Guard, a former senior partner at Ketchum, a vice president for investor relations of a top public relations firm, PRSA public relations practitioners from the Connecticut Valley Chapter, PRSA, the head of an online advertising sales agency and others, shared their perspectives on appropriate and ethically-sound communication strategies with students.

Applied Classroom Exercises and Projects in Ethics and CSR

The first weeks' grounding in ethical principles and social responsibility supported and set the bar for public relations and corporate communication for the remainder of the semester. Students analyzed the PRSA Code of Practice, worked out solutions to ethics scenarios, and reviewed case studies in social responsibility or lack of it. They honed critical skills by means of individual assignments, small group in-class and take-home exercises, journal responses to audiovisual materials, listening to and questioning guest speakers, and undertaking term projects that they critically evaluated. One example of a class exercise follows.

Conceptualizing and articulating ethics and CSR. This was one of the most recent classroom exercises, initiated systematically for the first time in spring 2010. I asked my class to type answers to five questions that conceptualized and articulated, through synonyms, relevant organizations, and/or behavioral patterns, ethics and corporate social responsibility. I was trying to see if students could "connect" ethics and CSR as highly significant for study and practice.

Teasing out ethical dilemmas and social responsibility from news stories.

Early in the semester, in order to challenge students to identify situations faced by organizations or individuals who required effective public relations, I often divided The New York Times or other major daily newspaper, literally page by page, distributed it among students, whom I separated into groups, and asked each group to pick out one story that 1) demonstrated a compelling need for public relations and 2) contained a strong ethical or social responsibility component or issue. Sometimes, I would cut out a variety of stories and put them into a box, hat, or other receptacle and ask students to pick out stories with viable public relations, public interest, and ethical issues at their core. If students doubted whether a story truly involved public relations problems, they could select another story from the receptacle or from another source.

Following their selection of stories, each group would assess and present to the class as a whole the public relations and ethical issues involved. Members of other groups were free to
contribute to the discussions. Nevertheless, as the exercise was to jog students' thinking about public relations' role, the public interest, and ethics, we did not always delve, in depth, into all possible solutions. It made sense, at that point in the semester, to stress problem recognition/situation analysis. More of the curriculum, particularly the research module, needed to be covered before students would have the requisite planning skills to be prepared to effective responses to the ethics and CSR problems inherent in each of their project topics.

Some, but not all, of the stories chosen were later developed more fully as term project topics. My pedagogical goals at that time were that: 1) students could recognize situations that posed clear ethical dilemmas, for which public relations was imperative and 2) they could extrapolate from these more clear cut cases and navigate through ethically ambiguous situations. This introductory exercise gave students some control over case study/project content (they could select a topic of interest to them) and developed critical and creative thinking skills. They also saw how public relations problems were manifest even in "ordinary news," plucked "straight from the headlines." Below, I discuss the Bridgestone Firestone ethics exercise used in my classes, in conjunction with the PRSA Code.

**Bridgestone-Firestone Exercise**

Students had already reviewed and discussed in small groups the PRSA Code (2000) and worked through a number of PRSA's ethics scenarios (PRSA, 2010). Subsequent classes broke into small groups and PRSA-generated case studies (PRSA, 2010) and discussed James Lucaczewski's (2000) piece on ethics. The Bridgestone-Firestone (BF) exercise, which I created, reads as follows: "Based on our discussions concerning ethics and the principles upon which ethical, excellent public relations is practices, decide a strategy that will best help you communicate effectively and develop relationships with your publics."

The exercise listed eight publics, including Ford Motors, and other fictitious entities, a national consumer safety organization and a grassroots advocacy group. Students were to first decide which core values/principles of the PRSA Code directly related to the BF case from the group's perspective and to write a short statement that outlined the group's position. Referring to core values in the Code, one student (representing Ford) cited the Code's Advocacy, Independence, and Honesty values, and noted that public relations practitioners must be responsible advocates for those they represent. They must provide a "voice for the marketplace of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to aid informed public debate"(Ford, 2010) She said:

Ford did not act in the interest of the public, instead acted in their own financial interest...(Re:) Independence (is another value of the Code which) states, "We are accountable..." Ford did not want to take responsibility for their actions. They, as well as Bridgestone Firestone, were too busy pointing fingers to see the damage they were doing...Last but not least...you must at all times, be honest. Honesty is defined as such "...highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of those we represent"... Withholding any information that may be ...public interest is detrimental to public relations professionals.

Similar comments were made by others working on this BF exercise. Term projects follow. **Term Projects: Public Relations Campaigns and Corporate Communication Case Studies**

The most substantive vehicle to assess students' grasp of ethics and CSR was clearly through their term projects. Although the project guidelines varied somewhat from semester to semester and the corporate communication projects demanded the most careful analysis of organizational frameworks for ethics and CSR, all the projects explored diverse organizations' responses to significant internal or external challenges. In most of the public relations classes, students
constructed hypothetical campaigns for a range of organizations faced with potential consequences from latent, aware, and active publics.

**Bateman Competition and Amistad Campaign**

The exceptions to this were the PRSA Bateman Competition and Amistad campaigns, for which the students, on behalf of a client, actually implemented campaigns on and off campus. The three Bateman campaigns were for the following (clients): Solobiz.com, a Web site designed to help 18-32 year olds acquire the skills needed to open their own businesses; Visa, to increase financial literacy and responsible financial behavior among high school and college students; and Contiki Travel, an organization specializing in custom, affordable bus tours for young people. These three campaigns were constructed by teams of upper-level public relations students, with support from other students who were not on the teams but who also had already been grounded in ethics and CSR and had previously undertaken such campaigns. The Bateman work was evaluated on a variety of criteria by a national panel of judges (the Visa financial literacy campaign placed nationally). One of the campaign's messages was that financial responsibility cannot be seen as detached from a greater sense of social responsibility, and financial solvency has ethical implications. This is clear from the financial meltdown and current economic crisis.

The Amistad campaign's goal was to raise awareness on campus and in local high schools of the *Amistad*, the reconstructed ship whose original captives had mutinied and were ultimately tried, and then freed, by U.S. Courts. At the time of the campaign (2000), the Connecticut Valley PRSA chapter had volunteered to assist in publicizing the ship and its mission. It undertook, pro bono, Amistad America's (2000) public relations, including its involvement in part as one ship in the OpSail 2000 (Willens, 2000) events. In tandem with and sometimes directly supportive of the PRSA Chapter's work, students created programs and activities that underscored the ship's, and its captives', significance for U.S. history and laws and for human rights. Human rights is a fundamental tenet of CSR. Once my students knew this, it was not difficult to find creative ways to disseminate *Amistad's* message to relevant publics, in moving and thought-provoking ways.

**Global Norms and Cultural Relativism**

About midway through the semester, students in both public relations and corporate communication classes were exposed to cultural and other variables in global venues that can have impact on professionals and practice. They reviewed both specific adaptations of generic variables (Grunig & Grunig, 1998) and a template I created with political, social, and economic factors. We began with class discussions that documented corporate linguistic faux pas (e.g., Chevy Nova in Latin America, Coca Cola in China) and cultural no-nos (wearing white in India).

The major exercise in this unit was a series of group country studies. These studies (which I called scavenger hunts) were built on research conducted by students, who were divided into groups, assigned a country, and then subdivided themselves to investigate the most significant factors in working for a public relations agency abroad or for a global corporation.

Inevitably, the class would be confronted with ethical issues (issues for Americans but not for some of their global counterparts) that ran counter to accepted norms; looming large among them were bribery, graft, the sale of column space by journalists, all of which were more obvious flagrant violations of the PRSA Code than the thinly veiled infomercials so common in the U.S. Then, of course, when measured against fertilizer in pet foods and antifreeze in toothpaste, the former infractions appeared to be relatively "minor".

In retrospect, more could have been done to elicit a deeper understanding among students of cross-cultural norms; a cultural promenade with students could include a face-to-face, or barring that, a webcam interview with an English-speaking native of that country. Certainly, an
individual's "ethnographic journey" would provide a much richer tapestry for understanding that even the most subtle cultural markers can be highly significant, with respect as paramount. Given that my students are required to conduct interviews as part of their term projects, there is no reason why they cannot interview a foreign subject and analyze his or her perspective.

*The projects writ large*

In all the projects, students carefully assessed each situation, the affected publics, and the real and potential repercussions from those publics. Students ran hypothetical campaigns, consistent with ethical and excellence public relations and corporate communication practices, to address external and internal challenges. Their evaluations critically analyzed the choices they had made.

The corporate communication projects were designed to help students, as future corporate communicators, to keep CSR as a front-of-mind experience. They looked at organizations' own CSR frameworks and those of independent, umbrella organizations (e.g., Global Compact, Business for Social Responsibility, Global Alliance). These comparative frameworks assisted them in identifying benchmarks for socially-responsible behavior in a world where corporations are primarily known for their misdeeds and where public confidence in both private and public sector institutions is at an all-time low. Adherence in "the real world" to such frameworks has enhanced and sometimes repaired organizations' reputation, while promoting the public interest.

*Choices of topics for "hypothetical" public relations projects*

Students were asked to preliminarily choose three organizations—one government agency, one not-for-profit, and one private sector organization facing a major issue(s) or challenges and to write a short assessment of that situation and its significance. A majority of students, chose, of their own volition, to concentrate on not-for-profit organizations or public interest issues. Sometimes students chose current public relations problems; more often, they chose to revisit past cases (e.g., NASA's dilemma after the Challenger explosion) and to run their own campaigns based on them. Sometimes, they created their own fictitious scenarios, such as community opposition to a center, in their midst, for HIV-positive patients. Students fleshed them out over a six-to-eight-week campaign and many were reviewed by PR professionals.

*Examples of public relations term projects*

These included sports-related issues, primarily cheating in various forms (academic improprieties, attempted bribing of judges, using anabolic steroids and other illegal drugs) to give an unfair competitive edge to players, consumer safety faux pas (for example, glass shards in Gerber baby foods, antifreeze in imported knockoff toothpaste, Martha Stewart's Omnimedia's woes after her perjury conviction, Merck's credibility after the Vioxx disclosures, the Hale House charity financial mismanagement scandal, and the above threat to close an HIV-centered facility.

The public relations projects in the Fall 2001 semester, as noted below, centered on civil, commercial, and government institutions post 9/11. The safety and integrity the recovery of New York, in particular, and American civil society as a whole, depended on the police, the fire department, the New York Stock Exchange, the airlines industry, Amtrak (as an alternative to the airlines), and NYC and Company (the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau). The entertainment industry was also important to the morale of the public and to the continuity of creative production. The specific institutions and campaign details were the students' choices.

In the graduate seminar (Managing Public Relations for the Modern Corporation), there were an even greater number of projects focused on not-for-profit issues. Among these issues were welfare to work and the problems created for women trying to balance motherhood, school, and work, rehabilitation programs for released convicts, alcohol and drug abuse programs, and other public policy issues. In addition, one excellent student project focused on the controversy
surrounding the distribution of funds by the Red Cross, supposedly earmarked, but not appropriated, for victims of September 11. Another public relations campaign, on behalf of the U.S. Figure Skating Association, centered on accusations of competition-fixing by the judges at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics. Certainly the latter campaigns were replete with ethics overtones. What follows is an overview of some of the feedback on these projects. To preserve the authenticity of student comments, I have retained the original spelling, phrasing, and grammatical/structural choices, even where it has been incorrect.

**Student Feedback**

Student feedback on the projects did not primarily focus on ethics and CSR. Much of it centered on the specific skill set students acquired through the projects, the dynamics of working as a team (where relevant), the challenges students faced in meeting deadlines, the value of engaging in thorough research, the importance of relationship building, and post-mortems on what students would have changed about their projects. Nevertheless, even with these specific foci, many student comments reflected a value orientation. Sometimes, this was grounded in theme-based public relations, as was the case with projects that followed on the heels of 9/11 (see below). Sometimes it was an overarching statement, for example: "In running a pr campaign, you need to be very truthful accurate and ethical at the same time. In some circumstances it becomes difficult at times."

*Students on ethics and CSR-- public relations projects.* One student commented:

I realize that as a public relations practitioner, I may often represent clients who have acted very unethically and my job is to find the most ethical way to fix their public image….I am thankful that in the field of public relations, there is an emphasis to form solutions that are moral and are in the interests of the public.

This clearly relates to the importance of helping students to grasp concepts of public interest (Martinson, 2001), above. Also, as indicated above, students may not have clearly defined or articulated the public interest but gravitated towards those issues and institutions. Their evaluations often demonstrated an innate understanding of the centrality of these institutions—for example, hospitals’ and schools’ relation to public welfare and the role they play in positive social interaction and in pre-empting criminal activity. As one student put it,

The hospital is a major part of the community not only a place where residence (sic) of the inner city can come for medical aid. It is also a place that promotes social interaction. A place for kids to come as a day-care type system to keep them off the streets with the drugs and everything.

Although this is, again, not strictly an ethical issue, it reflects a sense of social responsibility.

Another student articulated a similar social responsibility agenda.

The point of my project was to bring this grief-stricken community together and celebrate the life they have. By inviting other members from surrounding communities I found it as a way to stop isolating this community and actually embracing its assets.

Often, the scenarios reflected fewer pro-social behaviors. Then from within organizations or due to external pressure, publics demanded an accounting and clear communication changes. Kovacs (2006, 2008) proposed that the higher level of CSR stems from a push from within. Nevertheless, barring that, students were quick to grasp that once a need for disclosure is identified, organizations must respond in a fully transparent way in order to retain the trust of their constituent publics.
Trust and transparency as ethical foundations and as essential to CSR

Over the years, student projects have often dealt with organizational crises or challenges that have involved corruption, fraud, and other kinds of deceit, including cheating among athletes, many of whom ostensibly serve as role models. As per one student, "Overcoming the problem of corruption takes much more than just trying to fix the hockey team. First you must regain the trust of your publics." A student undertaking a public relations project for a prominent mayor indicted on corruption charges expressed her desire to represent his city, which was inextricably tainted by the mayoral scandal itself. Such topics call for public relations responses that aim to restore publics' trust in the private sector and in not-for-profit and government institutions.

One interviewee (for a student campaign dealing with an athletic scandal at University of Michigan) commented that strategies used in the student's public relations response would have been useful when the scandal broke. Communication with the student body at that time was inadequate. Just the mere act of keeping publics informed is an act of good faith meriting trust.

One student's campaign to restore a non-profit's reputation after its chief embezzled money said, "The experience of this project taught me that…being honest with your publics is first and foremost during a crisis. Even when a scandal breaks…management should admit their wrongdoing." Another student dealt with Merck's difficulties with Vioxx. He said:

"I see how using a transparent methodology when it comes to dealing with a public that may potentially feel violated by a corporation's actions is very helpful in regaining the trust of the consumer base…their (Merck's) withdrawal of the drug from the marketplace without an FDA mandate, although late, helps their appearance in the public eye.

To this student, Merck's admission of the drug's potential for cardiovascular illness was the right thing to do. In many students' minds, truth and transparency went hand-in-hand with ethics. At the same time, students were highly critical of organizations that ignored the public interest. For example, one student, who constructed a campaign after glass shards were found in Gerber baby food, criticized Gerber for neither proactively issuing a recall within the first 24 hours nor updating its publics as to the problem and any solutions. She said, "A company may make its decision thinking money wise, but…it should be made with the concern of the people...although it may save them money now, in the long run it will cost them."

A graduate student, whose campaign represented the Red Cross after it had allegedly mismanaged/misappropriated 9/11 funds, regretted not conducting more extensive research, particularly a survey, to measure the level of public trust in the Red Cross. If there had been sufficient evidence of a lack of trust, she said, she would have intensified efforts to rebuild trust.

Public relations students respond to extreme crises.

We have seen above that students recognize the need for trust and truthfulness. This relates also to the above-mentioned 9/11 projects, which centered on entities affected by the terrorist attacks and reinforced "public relations' crucial role in restoring confidence in the institutions of civil society" (Kovacs, 2005, p. 305). In these projects, "students saw that relationship building and the implementation of measures to increase public comfort and trust went hand-in-hand and were a precondition of success in other areas (p. 307). One said: "The trust of the public is what the airline industry needs at this point in time. Another offered, "I learned…that trust is the most important thing…if you are truthful…it is very hard for them to have a negative view of your organization." His group represented the NYPD post 9/11:

We knew that the NYPD needed to establish more trust between them and the people of NYC. We also knew that in order to keep a good relationship with the
people the NYPD needed to be friendly to the children of the city… We wanted to create an open trusting relationship with everyone in the city, while bringing in the amount of officers needed to keep the streets safe. We wanted to portray the NYPD as a friendly but effective force that without bias will work to keep the streets safe for New Your residents and travelers.

So, inherently, the 9/11 projects were based on an inherent commitment to social responsibility, although some students expressed this as a need to be flexible in the face of the unpredictable: …I also learned that running a public relations campaign depends widely on the situations… thrown at you. Things change on a daily basis, and you have to be able to change with the world. If another attack had happened…we would have had to find a whole new way of looking at our project, without any notice.

Student comments, above, demonstrated an awareness of communal responsibility and the need to protect both public and private sector institutions that serve the community. They also conveyed a sense of the urgent need for disclosure and transparency in times of crisis. In general, the more severe the crisis, the clearer the student recognition that truth (defined as "what is known at that time")—or specifically, truthful communication and open disclosure, are essential. 

**Student comments about ethics and CSR: Corporate communication case studies**

I anticipated that many of the corporate communication students would have some initial difficulty working with some of CSR concepts and so, there were multiple methods used to reinforce the CSR's central role in corporate communication. First, each semester, the class was divided into groups. Each group's chapter presentation highlighted corporate communication principles and functions, as illustrated by one case study per chapter. Although these were not specifically ethics or CSR-oriented, the chapter case studies presented an opportunity to discuss both effective and ineffective communication strategies. For example, Argenti (2009) cited an executive's indirect engagement with employees and failure to communicate critical information directly, on-site, at each Carson container plant, as working against organizational goals.

In addition, guest speakers, handouts, and audiovisual aids further drove home the need for ethical corporate behaviors that support sustainable development, respect human rights, and communicate transparently. An advertising executive and a public information officer from the Australian consulate (which not long before, had to publicly confront its government's role in the oppression of aboriginal children (The Stolen Generations) had contrasting outlooks on CSR. I referred students to a number of Web sites that supported corporate citizenship, CSR, and sustainable development. They included Ethisphere (2010), The Global Compact (2010), The Global Alliance (2010), and Business for Social Responsibility (2010). The visits of representatives from the Global Compact and Ethisphere had to be deferred but we reviewed both organizations' sustainability and human rights goals and discussed the concepts on Ethisphere's Web sites as supplementary perspectives.

More broadly, the corporate communication term projects were grounded in the notion that CSR should be at the core of all corporate decision making. Students chose a substantive challenge to a corporation and analyzed it. They identified the mission statement and looked for corporate codes of conduct or CSR frameworks. They also looked for an external framework for CSR and compared how the organization's response measured up to both the company's standards and that of the external bar, in terms of CSR.

**Student choices for case study topics.** The case studies for the corporate communication projects ran the gamut of notable mishaps. Among them, notably, were: Mattel's problems with lead paint toys, allegation of Haliburton's corruption and other breaches, Nestle and the baby formula...
Coors Brewing Company after allegations of discrimination; Coca Cola's use of contaminated water in its Indian plant, Pepsi and the syringe crisis, Delta and its crib recalls, accusations against Sony regarding alleged unfair practices Bausch and Lomb after contaminated eye solution; the American Red Cross after the 9/11 funds controversy; the United Way Scandal; McDonalds after animal activist challenges; Nike and labor issues; contamination in Gerber baby foods (again!); multiple problems faced by Sony Corporation; contamination of water in Indian Coca Cola plants; Pepsi and its syringe crisis; the Nestle infant formula crisis; the recall of Mattel toys -manufactured in China, the Ford Explorer debacle. There were also a number of cases of lower-profile organization, such as Delta Corporation, which experienced a crib recall. In addition, one case study explored a lobbying effort by an industrial coalition, i.e., members of the UK airline industry, to reduce emissions. Of those students who identified corporations' frameworks for ethics and CSR, only a few critically evaluated whether the norms set forth were genuinely integrated into the companies' operations. In some case (e.g., Merck, below), some quotes taken from company literature appear more rhetoric than a call to CSR action.

**Student identification of guidelines and frameworks for ethics and CSR.** There was no consistent definition of CSR. Most students identified some tangible declaration of values, ethics, or CSR, from their chosen case study organization, whether as part of a mission statement, code of conduct, or other document. Most of these references were vague; only a few provided citations referencing these values, ethical guidelines, or aspects of CSR. One student explored Merck and its mixed CSR record in the Vioxx debacle:

Merck's corporate responsibility is rooted in listening, responding and working towards a healthier future. George W. Merck's philosophy remains the foundation of Merck's approach to corporate responsibility today. Merck recognizes its responsibility to each and every customer. Ensuring confidence is crucial…The Merck Code of Conduct encapsulates Merck's mission and commitment to scientific excellence, ethics, and integrity.

Without further explication, these sounded like empty platitudes, and yet this student was able to objectively review the Vioxx case and differentiate between its lack of transparency in keeping Vioxx on the market (when initial studies indicated dangers for patients) and the company's ultimate transparency in recalling the drug and urging consumers to seek medical attention.

She was also able to relate Merck's framework to specific criteria in that of the Global Compact's, although she conceded that "...the principles concerning human rights and protecting the environment are the most prevalent in Merck's business practices." She recommended that Merck incorporate a COP (Communication on Progress), which is a disclosure required of Global Compact members, made to all stakeholders (e.g., investors, consumers, civil society, , progress made in implementing the ten principles of the UN Global Compact, and supporting broad UN development goals..." (Global Compact, 2009)

Only some students referred to external frameworks as points of comparison, yet the frameworks added significant weight to CSR and ethical norms. The external frameworks chosen were: Goodcorporation.com, Johnson &Johnson (for the Bausch and Lomb Company), Business for Social Responsibility, and the PRSA Code, and the Global Compact. The Global Compact was chosen by three students. According to one who chose Goodcorporation.com as its bar: (it) says (and rightfully so) that a company should think about the consumer during the entire product lifecycle and that the company acknowledges and uses consumer input…The website also goes on to say that companies should consider
the impact of their decision on their suppliers as well as making sure that their suppliers engage in safe practices.

Some of the students did not choose an external CSR framework to compare with that of their chosen organization, which was disappointing and something worth investigating. I had explained the project format, given them guidelines, posted relevant materials on Blackboard and directed students to other sites for assistance, yet few attempted to extrapolate how such frameworks might set a higher bar for organizations. This was a sticking point, given the frameworks' pedagogical importance and their use in critical assessment of CSR. In the discussion section, I consider why this occurred and possible ways to address the problem. 

Student observations on case studies: CSR Definitions and Assessment. 
Most students neither attempted nor clearly defined CSR. Many settled for saying that it was important to have. Here a student of the Nestle infant formula attempts to identify CSR.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has played a dominant role in business practices. It's a form of self regulation and policy. Companies and organizations set up ethical standards and norms for themselves. The business then does its best to live up to its own expectations. CSR also helps to govern a company's decision-making process.

She related this notion of CSR to Nestle's cultural process of "Creating Shared Value," which extends to the larger communities in the countries where it operates.

The student researching the highly controversial Nike case tried to describe CSR:
A company's Corporate Social Responsibility is a way for the company to ensure that they adhere to labor laws and... remain righteous... By following ...CSR... a company remains open and honest with the public and therefore abides to a certain code of ethics. By being... accountable for their actions, companies are less likely to evade their duties to their workers and the environment.

An international student of the Bausch and Lomb contamination case, commented about CSR: "CSR has become an important objective in our society. The point of CSR is focus on how to communicate with society and customers." Finally, another international student, who research Coca Cola's use of contaminated water in its products, said, "Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept aimed at determining the ...responsibilities to be taken into consideration by private business towards its stakeholders and the society..." Below, we will see how these students evaluated what they learned from the projects and the larger significance of the cases.

Student Evaluations and Case Significance
The student of the Ford Explorer case was quite articulate, saying, "This case is important to me as a corporate communicator because it shows how to handle a crisis and what not to do to destroy a partnership. If your company is involved, you should accept some blame...The significance of all this to corporate communicators is that the public must come first, and communicating that (as well as acting upon it) can either make or break a company's image. Student evaluations and CSR (e.g., Merck) were direct and concise:

This case brought to light the importance of transparency... Truth, honesty, and disclosure should be incorporated...every organization. Next time, they should....read over its mission statement, corporate responsibility approach, and Code of Conduct...and then decide how to handle the situation.

The researcher of Aviation Global, held this contrasting, positive view of its CSR and ethics:
I am very happy with the over all outcome of my research project… I had a strong feeling I found an organization that would be the flipside of the usual CSR story… I felt so many case studies show a major blunder on the part of an organization or a tragedy and how they're communication skills either bailed them out or helped them right a wrong. The notion of…just doing the right thing because its what they believe in is truly inspiring.

In studying the United Way embezzlement case, this student said:

I thought that… presidents of these corporations were volunteers who were morally conscious. I also assumed they had committees that would develop a checks and balances within the organization…The basis of a charity is to have social responsibility. This case is very important to study if you work for a nonprofit because it can prepare you for the worst thing possible: the loss of public trust.

Building on this, the student covering allegations of McDonald's cruelty to animals said:

Transparency and trust are big issues that can be a downfall for a corporation. It is usually the things we need to know that are hidden from us, and that is what ends up having a negative effect on everyone.

The student who analyzed the Pepsi syringe case indicted the media in creating the (false) crisis:

One thing I want for people to take away from my paper is do not believe everything you hear about in the media!

A company's code of ethics may not necessarily be practiced. In the case of Haliburton, said one student, such a code "makes them out to be a truly trustworthy…company, when their actions were doing more to prove that they…were more concerned with profiteering and capital gains."

Similarly, the Ford Explorer case is significant to the student as a corporate communicator "because it shows how to handle a crisis and what not to do to destroy a partnership…

The significance of this to all corporate communicators is that the public must come first…communicating that (as well as acting upon it) can…make or break a company's image.

One student focused on the controversy surrounding the misappropriation by the Red Cross of funds donated specifically for 9/11 victims. This young man noted that:

A significance in this case can be a lesson for others is just to be honest. Without honesty in your organization/company, you really won't go far at all. ...you must also share whatever information you have…

Mattel's problem stemming from lead poisoning in toys prompted this student to comment: "An important concept I learned from this case is always to be up front and honest with the publics about what the situation is no matter how bad it is and how you are going to fix it."

Some students, were clearly able to tease out, from their cases, implications for them as future professionals, as seen below.

Other student comments on pedagogy and professionalism

"Having the public relations (society [PRSA] members look over our work was an excellent idea because they picked out stuff that we might have glanced over. All our choices were good, but it did help to get the outside advice also."

The same student also said "I learned that to be a good public relations worker…you need to be able to see everybody's perspectives…you also need to be able to understand where they are coming from…so that you are able to address them in a way that (they) will listen to and understand."

One of the corporate communication students said, "If I take anything from this course, it will be that corporate social responsibility can play a major role in shaping the future when exercised appropriately with the best of intentions."
Most recent student responses regarding CSR and ethics. As indicated above, the Spring 2009 CSR-related papers from the corporate communication class suggested that students had difficulty identifying, comparing, and critically assessing organizations' CSR frameworks and norms and evaluating their compliance with these norms. They did not fully grasp the term CSR's significance. The class had reviewed the PRSA Code of Ethics at the beginning of the semester, as a frame of reference for compliance by corporate communication professionals, but did not meticulously review ethics scenarios, as was the case with the public relations students. Based on these difficulties, and because I wanted the students to be able to extrapolate more from their case studies and evaluate them more carefully, I modified my corporate communication curriculum. In Spring 2010, I gave a short assignment to students in the same class. The majority had neither taken my public relations or media-writing courses. They were about to begin their fifth week into the semester. I had made it clear in class and in the guidelines to their final projects that the foci of the class, and the projects, would be ethics and CSR.

Therefore, I asked them to discuss what is meant by ethical behavior for an organization and its employees and executives, and also corporate social responsibility. Most students said that organizations should practice such behavior and CSR but beyond that they had difficulty pinpointing what this meant. I also probed for synonymous or even similar terms for both concepts and for examples of organizations and/or persons associated with those organizations who were or were unethical or did or did not practice CSR in the workplace. As anticipated, very few students could explain either term without resorting to tautology. Below is a sample of more thoughtful responses.

Spring 2010 conceptualizations of ethics and CSR.
Among those students who were able to at least attach some attribute or trait to ethical behavior, respect was most frequently cited. Students associated ethical behavior with being successful in business and the ability to sell products, which merely reflects a frequent confusion of marketing and public relations functions,"Corporations have the obligation to report to their employees as well as the public on any information that they need to know," was one of the rarer views, below. This same student said that CSR "stands for and represents obligation for one as well as reputation." Some students associated ethics with morals; one student said:

What comes to mind for me is the Golden Rule...Sad to say...the business world is extremely corrupt. We have all these terms about being ethical, responsible, or moral, yet in this economy it's hard to see if things like this actually exist.

Another student's response about ethics echoed some of the terms used in the PRSA Code: "...behavior that exemplifies "core values and traditions." Another cited, "an open, honest, and transparent business mode and/or code of conduct." The same student emphasized that CSR goes beyond "the bottom line on a quarterly report," and that the company should "think of the greater good for the community they operate in and the consumers they serve."

Yet another student, who could not explicate an "ethical code," was articulate about CSR: Before making decisions that may benefit the company, they must ask themselves: Will this decision be favorable to the public interest? If the decision does not take into consideration the public's welfare, it should not be administered.

Similarly, "The idea of corporate social responsibility...involves organizations taking into consideration how decisions they make will not only affect the organization but the community and society as well," The same student said, "...a professional may gain certain access to certain information in order to get their job done, and the ethics of this involves the professional
correctly using this information for the better of society and not themselves." This was a rare insight. Another student talked about (reactively) "taking responsibility of its actions if harm is done socially or environmentally," yet "the sole purpose of these practices is to maintain a positive image and remain in good standing with its consumers? Is the notion of CSR as most closely linked to consumers (so as to maximize profit) a notion want our students to internalize? Significant, students tended to see CSR and ethics as important to employees and consumers (customers) but stopped short of associating CSR with accountability to a full range of stakeholders, which is a key focus in management and other literatures (Clarkson, 1995). A few paused to consider the environment, but clearly a mistaken association was between CSR and marketing outcomes, rather than a focus on addressing a range of stakeholders and the public interest. Overall, few students viewed CSR more comprehensively.

Many students extrapolated CSR only from its absence, as in Toyota's, and secondarily, Walmart's, woes. Multiple references to Toyota are understandable, given the degree of coverage on the recalls, the belated communication by its chief executive, and the public hearings. We can be grateful for this front-of mind experience, but students should be able to identify a range of organizations that exhibit positive (albeit, at times, conflicted) manifestations of CSR. I was frustrated that student responses did not reflect positive, professional ethics and CSR norms.

A pedagogical experiment in process: Corporate Communications Spring 2010

Given that the majority of students had great difficulty expressing the essence of ethics and CSR, I knew a different approach was needed. During the next class, I returned the above assignments to the students, whom I then divided into groups. I asked each group to consider deeply the meanings of ethics (including its origins), the possible stakeholders for whom ethics and CSR were consequential, and to jot down notes on the backs of their assignments. When they were given this second opportunity to explain ethics, more students referred to morality. One student who associated ethics with family and religious values, and as differing with different cultures, had a harder time pinpointing CSR. She said, "CSR are values and beliefs a company has," but like many students, did not specify how those values and beliefs should be operationalized.

These recent classroom experiences and the inconsistency and misconceptions in student understandings of ethics and CSR underscore the need to continually reinforce these concepts and find ways to adjust them pedagogically so that they are as tangible as possible to students. For next week's class, I have asked the corporate communication class to study the PRSA Code and will provide students scenarios for group exercises, as I did for the public relations classes. I will now discuss the limitations and implications of the research and explore what pedagogical modifications might facilitate increased understanding of ethics and CSR and their implications not only individual transactions but for all sectors and all stakeholders, across societies.

Discussion and Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the above data and the empirical realities of classroom teaching, my unequivocal response to Hutchison's (2002) question about where ethics should be situated in the public relations curriculum is that it should be taught everywhere. There is no such thing as too much reinforcement of ethics and CSR; "in your face" as a concept does not apply here. The prevailing workplace environment of obfuscation and outright greed in business, and yes, sadly, even in not-for profits and governments, has caused our country's economy, and that of many others, to spiral out of control. It produced the chaos that turned so many lives upside down.

Such a reality calls for equally strong or stronger countervailing measures. The public relations profession cannot afford a "next generation" of practitioners who have become jaded or
indifferent to breaches of ethics and social responsibility. Given the extent of impropriety, the lack of disclosure, and the negative environment that has mushroomed in the last decade, a thorough and consistent diet of ethics and CSR throughout the curriculum is clearly demanded.

**Evaluating pedagogical approaches for reinforcing ethics and CSR**

As an educator, I am ambivalent as to whether this infusion of ethics and CSR awareness should be merely be subtly woven into the fabric of every class or it should also be offered as a required class (required because many students would not elect an ethics class). In retrospect, I would, minimally, assign sections of a public relations ethics text, such as that Fitzpatrick and Bronstein (2006), create more ethics and CSR-based group and individual assignments, and provide more audiovisual excerpts, both for homework and in-class use. I would also integrate articles from other disciplines, such as Bhattacharya, Korschun, and Sen's (2008) work on CSR initiatives that strengthen stakeholder-company relationships, and requiring a nominal number of hours committed to service-learning or an equivalent commitment to a shadow experience.

**As we speak: A CSR postscript.**

This semester, through journal entries and the above activities, I have begun to reinforce the CSR component earlier and more intensively. I am also cognizant that unless students can themselves clearly articulate the meanings of CSR and ethical behaviors, and operationalize their meanings, it will be difficult to get them to appreciate and apply those practices in the workplace. They need to understand the value of CSR frameworks and the utility of external benchmarks or bars in maintaining standards. The fact that most students did not compare their organizations' adherence to both internal and external CSR bars is unsettling.

Perhaps more class time and more careful planning should have been allocated to this section of the project; it could have been that many students were at a loss as to how to select and compare external and in-house CSR frameworks. On the other hand, students are known to often navigate around unfamiliar and more time consuming topics. Nevertheless, as an educator, I have to assume that I could conceivably have done more to make this aspect of the project more comprehensible to the students. This semester, I have included more in-class explication of frameworks that set the bar for and benchmark CSR and ethical behaviors. I have screened DVDs and videos, not only of dramatized real-life whistleblowing cases, but also documentaries. I had students visit Web sites (e.g., Ethisphere. PRSA, Global Compact, Global Alliance) where expectations for CSR and ethics, in some cases, as manifest in fair trade or human rights practices, are made explicit. This coming week, the Global Compact is sending a representative to talk with my students about CSR issues and the voluntary compliance with 10 basic principles that the Compact expects of its members.

Is this overkill? I hardly think so but perhaps my students do. Yet, if I can't get them to appreciate that ethics and CSR should drive their professional decision making, perhaps I can at least get them to appreciate a spin on the Hippocratic Oath that their physicians should be prepared to honor: If you cannot do good, then at least aim to do no harm.

When I think about my limited capacity to influence my students, or when I see them thinking and performing in ways that I consider antithetical to what I would hope they would do, I try not to get discouraged. Nevertheless, sometimes I do, and when it happens I have to remind myself that I can plant the seed, but have no control over whether it will bear fruit or how that fruit may turn out. I just keep planting and sowing and turning the soil and hoping that at least some of my students will have an "Aha" moment when it comes to ethics and CSR.

This paper describes but my personal attempt to increase student engagement in critical thinking about ethics and CSR and the internalization of such norms. Surely others educators are
trying on their end to do the same. What is really needed is both a comprehensive effort by educators to rework ethics and CSR into the fabric of every class and collaboration between educators and practitioners to facilitate student exercises integrating ethical and CSR norms into day-to-day routines and issues management, in a forum that could be modeled after the 1998 NCA Summer Conference, at which this author was a participant. After all, according to the Commission on Public Relations Education's (1999) report, "students should be able to understand the parameters and frameworks utilized in ethical reasoning of professional issues. Discussions and coursework should increase knowledge, professional skills and a sense of true professionalism."

If the Commission's goals are to be realized, then educators must be cognizant of the severity of the "real world" problem and act, in unison, to bring creative and innovative methods to incorporate ethics and CSR frameworks and case studies into public relations curricula, and significantly, to help students apply what they learn in making ethical, responsible decisions.

There are many ways in which this might transpire. For instance, given the availability of new technologies, educators might consider capitalizing on students' affinity for everything online and fuse the Internet self-efficacy described by O'Malley and Kelleher (2002) with ethics and CSR content. They might even pair students with mentors. Students could network with in-house or agency practitioners, and use social media and other technologies to chat or correspond about cases that present ethical questions or to query practitioners about ways of implementing CSR. Certainly there is creative latitude for using new technologies for such pro-social purposes. The first step is a consensus among academics and practitioners that CSR and ethics are sufficiently important to warrant use of such media, and others, for such pedagogical purposes.

**Limitations of this research**

The most obvious limitation of this "teaching as laboratory" experience is the difficulty in assessing the impact of teaching normative ethics and frameworks for CSR to which they were exposed. To what extent, if at all, were core ethical values and CSR standards inculcated in the classroom internalized by students, and would they be able to apply them beyond the "abstractions" of academia to workplace situations? Students feedback, as illustrated in the excerpts above, seem to suggest the value of "front-loading" core ethical values and principles of transparency and CSR, into the curriculum.

Students also seemed to understand that good relationships, which hinge on ethical and socially responsible behaviors, are crucial to successful public relations. They conducted their own research and, in the case of the public relations classes, engaged in strategic planning and hypothetical implementation of their campaigns. Students were able to see how ethics and CSR built stakeholder trust and goodwill or reflected unfavorably on organizations as corporate citizens.

As one student said, "Corporate Social Responsibility is the behavior of a company to act in a manner that is law abiding and in the public interest." In public relations, the press kits and other media that students created provided them with an opportunity to frame and define issues and disclose information in ways that were transparent but responsible. They understood that the power of words must be harnessed to reassure, not panic, to clarify, not obfuscate, and to serve multiple publics, rather than being self serving.

Yet despite multiple efforts to few had any "capstone" experience in which this knowledge was reinforced via a job, an internship, or service learning experience concurrent with or following a public relations class. From those who did have such an experience, I received positive feedback about the practical value of the public relations curriculum. This
feedback primarily related, though, to the research, analysis, and skill sets learned in class, rather than on any professional practices guided by ethics and CSR.

There are ways to reinforce principles that students learn during their undergraduate years. To capitalize on their willingness to abide by ethics and CSR, public relations programs could require all graduating students to sign a pledge that they agree to abide by ethical principles and perhaps even the PRSA Code of Ethics. Such an idea is not unprecedented, according to one colleague, who teaches at a faith-based institution and described how all graduating students must sign a pledge to behave ethically. Why shouldn't our public relations students be prompted to do the same?

Nevertheless, because as it stands now, we do not have such a requirement, I can only try to get students to appreciate the value of ethics and CSR and assess their knowledge of those projects evaluations, case studies, and other class submissions. Until mentoring of some kind is established between practitioners and students, or some relationships with alumni yield the kind of data that will tell us if and how students applied their CSR and ethics knowledge in their workplaces, or whether their knowledge is deeply ingrained enough to influence professional behaviors over the long haul, it will be difficult to know where classroom efforts to this end are successful or need to be rethought and restructured.

On the positive side, when self-reporting, the students quoted above appeared cognizant of the centrality of ethical and socially responsible practices to excellent public relations and corporate communication. It is unclear whether they truly believe these views or if those that do are really representative of the hundreds of students I have taught. When queried in class or in their papers and projects about choices public relations practitioners have made or should made, and what represents the public interest, most students are able to identify and choose to pursue appropriate, ethical, socially-responsible behaviors. The problem is that sometimes the students who do this are the same ones who get caught plagiarizing in other assignments in my classes.

This, in itself, is an indicator that students need conceptual reinforcement and ongoing practical drilling in how to make choices, particularly in more challenging and morally-gray situations. As long as students do not see a contradiction between analyzing a case or running a public relations campaign that is transparent, consistent with principles of CSR, and engaging in unethical practices in their own work, there is a critical moral vacuum that educators need to fill.

The need for longitudinal research

If a practicable way to track down public relations alumni existed, I could elicit feedback about the impact, if any, of my ethics and CSR assignments and exercises. Where necessary, I could adjust my curricula to further reinforce these concepts and their attendant norms. Thus, the notion of longitudinally sampling public relations students in the years after graduation has some merit, and could be a potential auxiliary in maximizing the impact of teaching ethics and CSR. I urge other educators to find ways to locate and reach out to alumni, so that we can know whether, and to what extent, ethics and CSR appear on their workplace "radar screen" and if and how they strike a professional balance between advancing their organizations' needs and advancing the greater good. This information, once tapped, would be a boon to the academy and to professional organizations as well. I am working on a paper, together with an internationally-based academic, that will explore how senior managers conceptualize CSR.

Ongoing Challenges: Augmenting Students' Practice of Ethical, Socially-Responsible Behaviors

Unless, we, as public relations teachers and professionals redouble our efforts and make CSR and ethics top priorities at academic venues and in professional settings, these fundamentals are likely to be overshadowed by buzz about social media and other new public relations "darlings."
These technologies are no doubt amazing, but they are vehicles for communication and only as good or bad as what filters through them. And as novel as new media are, they should not preempt a sorely-needed ethics and social responsibility agenda.

These extra-curricular networking opportunities are not a substitute for classroom instruction and online supplementation (such as that of Blackboard, which I use regularly to post relevant course materials and links to other online resources). Certainly, any resources that are available out of class need to be followed up in class with consistent reinforcement through ethics and CSR case studies, group exercises, scenarios, and other practical examples of dilemmas and challenges in which organizational or individual self-interest must take a back seat to transparency and public interest.

I choose to be an optimist. I believe that students ultimately want to do the right thing, both in the classroom and the work world. I also think that as new grads, they may feel enormous pressure to prove themselves (particularly given the current economic climate) and may look for ways to do so by circumventing ethical norms and CSR. So I suggest that given the strength of countervailing forces on students as new professionals, we, as educators/mentors, need to drill more, question more, challenge more.

This analysis of one educator's experience cannot presume to have definitive answers. This work can only offer a narrow window into students' cognition and a set of questions about their ability to develop and carry, from academia to the marketplace, a life perspective that will be of benefit to their employers and to civil society as well.
References


Identifying Key Influencers of Chinese PR Practitioners’ Strategic Conflict Management Practice: A Survey on Contingent Variables in Chinese Context

Chunxiao Li, M.A.
Assistant Professor
College of Arts and Humanities
Southwest Finance University, China
c Chunxiao@gmail.com

Fritz Cropp*, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Missouri School of Journalism
University of Missouri-Columbia
CroppF@missouri.edu

Yan Jin, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
School of Mass Communications
Virginia Commonwealth University
yjin@vcu.edu

Abstract

As the first quantitative test of contingency theory in China using an online survey, this study examined the influence of each of the over 80 individual contingent variables as perceived by Chinese public relations practitioners. Individual characteristics as related to conflict management as well as political-social factors were identified as the most influential variables. By forming influential contingent factors and exploring the dimensionality of these factors using factor analysis, the results of this study suggested structural stability of the contingency matrix. Further, the effects of gender and types of organizations were tested on how Chinese practitioners perceive these influences in their public relations practice. The findings provide insights for both practitioners and researchers on how to strategically identify and combine the most influential factors in effective and ethical conflict management in China.
Introduction


While most of the public relations theoretical frameworks have been tested in multicultural contexts, the contingency theory of strategic conflict management has yet to be fully explored (except for Shin, Park, & Cameron (2006)’s study using contingent factors to model PR practice in South Korea) in terms of 1) whether the contingency factor matrix holds in a Chinese PR practice context and 2) how the situational factors and predispositional factors influence conflict stance movements in dealing with a given Chinese public at a given time. In addition, based on Xue and Yu’s (2009) review of Chinese PR literature, the perspective of viewing public relations as strategic conflict management is still uncharted territory, although research has suggested the challenges and complexities in managing conflicts in China.

Therefore, to apply the conflict management theoretical framework to Chinese PR practice modeling and advance the knowledge of key PR practice issues in a multicultural setting, this study focuses on testing the contingency theory on Chinese PR practitioners’ strategic conflict management decision-making processes, using a survey of public relations practitioners across China. By identifying which contingent factors Chinese PR practitioners perceive as influential in their practice, this study aims at quantitatively testing the validity of the contingency theory. The results will facilitate researchers and practitioners with new perspectives for examining Chinese PR practice and provide practical insights about how to strategically identify and combine the most influential factors in effective and ethical conflict management in China.

Literature Review

The Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management

The contingency theory of strategic conflict management argues that strategic communication could be examined through a continuum whereby organizations practice a variety of stances at a given time for a given public depending on the circumstance, which is a “sense-making effort to ground a theory of accommodation in practitioner experience, to challenge certain aspects of the excellence theory…”(Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998, p. 53) and an attempt to provide as realistic and grounded a description of how intuitive, nuanced, and textured public relations have been practiced (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999; Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008).

Cameron and his colleagues examined how organizations practiced a variety of strategic communication stances at one point in time, how those stances changed, sometimes almost
instantaneously, and what influenced the change in stance (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997). The organizational response to the strategic communication dilemma at hand, according to the contingency theory, which has, at one end of the continuum, pure advocacy, and at the other end, pure accommodation, was, thus, “It Depends”. The theory offered a matrix of 87 contingent variables, arranged thematically, that the organization could draw on to determine their stance. Between advocacy, which means arguing for one’s own case, and accommodation, which means giving in, was a wide range of operational stances that influenced strategic communication strategies and these entailed “different degrees of advocacy and accommodation.” (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997, p. 37). Along this continuum, the theory argued that any of the 87 variables could affect the location of an organization on that continuum “at a given time regarding a given public” (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999, p. 172; Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998, p. 40).

Among the 87 variables, practitioners argued that there were some that featured more prominently than the others. There were factors that influenced the organization’s position on the continuum before it interacts with a public; and there were variables that influenced the organization’s position on the continuum during interaction with its publics. The former have been categorized as predisposing variables, while the latter, situational variables. Some of the well-supported predisposing factors Cancel, Mitrook and Cameron (1999) found included: (1) The size of the organization; (2) Corporate culture; (3) Business exposure; (4) Strategic communication to dominant coalition; (5) Dominant coalition enlightenment; (6) Individual characteristics of key individuals, like the CEO. Situational variables were factors that were most likely to influence how an organization related to a public by effecting shifts from a predisposed accommodative or adversarial stance along the continuum during an interaction. Some of the supported situational factors included: (1) Urgency of the situation; (2) Characteristics of the other public; (3) Potential or obvious threats; (4) Potential costs or benefit for the organization from choosing the various stances (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999).

The classification of the factors into two categories was by no means an attempt to order the importance of one over the other in a given situation. The situational variables could determine the eventual degree of accommodation an organization takes by “effecting shifts from a predisposed accommodative or adversarial stance along the continuum during an interaction with the external public” (Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998, p. 43). At the same time, an organization may not move from its predisposed stance if the situational variables are not compelling nor powerful enough to influence the position or if the opportunity costs of the situational variables do not lead to any visible benefits (Cameron, Cropp & Reber, 2001). Consequently, both predisposing and situational factors could move the organization toward increased accommodation or advocacy. What was important in determining where the organization situates on the continuum involved the “weighing of many factors found in the theory” (Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot & McWilliams, 1998, p. 50). Notably, the factors explain movement either way along the continuum.

**Understanding the Influences of Contingent Factors**

With over 80 distinct factors identified in the contingency theory, Cameron, Cropp & Reber (2001) acknowledged that to manage them in “any useful way” (p. 247), parsimony was further needed. While the proscriptive variables had been found to limit dialogue and accommodation, further delineation of the relative influences of factors was needed. Reber and
Cameron (2003) further set out to test the construct of five thematic variables through scale building on 91 top public relations practitioners. The five thematic variables were external threats, external public characteristics, organizational characteristics, public relations department characteristics, and dominant coalition characteristics. The authors found that the scales supported “the theoretical soundness of contingency and the previous qualitative testing of contingency constructs” (p. 443).

To further understand the contingent factors that impact stance. Shin, Cameron and Cropp (2006) conducted a national survey of public relations practitioners on the perceived importance of contingent factors and the influence in their daily public relations practice. Practitioners agreed that contingency theory did reflect their reality and organization-related characteristics were found to be most influential. Shin, Cameron and Cropp (2006) quantitatively tested all contingent variables and grouped them into 12 factors on two dimensions: 1) internal factors, including organization’s characteristics, PR department characteristics, management characteristics and individual characteristics; and 2) external factors, comprised of external threats, industry environment, political/social/cultural environment, and external publics.

To model generic public relations practice in South Korea, Shin, Park and Cameron (2006) conducted a survey to identify which contingent variables Korean public relations practitioners perceived as influential to their practice. Individual-level variables related to the abilities or characteristics of individual professionals were reported as most influential to their practice, such as practitioners’ predisposition towards altruism, ability to handle complex problems, communication competency, information use, and personal ethics. The degree of top management’s support for public relations was also reported as influential. Potentially damaging publicity was rated as critical to the public relations function. Shin, Park and Cameron (2006) further found that practitioners at the management level perceived organizational level variables as influential while the staff level indicated PR department variables as dominant to their practice. Also, practitioners mainly functions in government relations tended to acknowledge more influence of organizational variables.

To further test the validity and reliability of the contingency theory in Chinese context, this study aims to explore whether the contingency factor matrix holds in public relations in China and how the influences of contingent variables and their dimensionality might vary accordingly. In addition, based on Xue and Yu’s (2009) review of Chinese public relations literature, the perspective of viewing public relations as strategic conflict management is still uncharted territory, although research has suggested the challenges and complexities in managing conflicts in China. To apply the conflict management theoretical framework to Chinese PR practice modeling and advance the knowledge of key practice issues in a multicultural setting, this study focuses on testing the contingency theory on Chinese public relations practitioners’ strategic conflict management decision-making processes, using a survey of public relations practitioners across China. Also, factors such as gender (Aldoory & Toth, 2004) and whether practitioners working for a PR department or PR firm can also impact their public relations practice (Wilcox et al., 2004), which suggests that it would be theoretically meaningful to gauge their effects on how Chinese practitioners might perceive the contingent factors’ influence differently. Thus, the following research questions are posited:

**RQ1:** Which of the contingent variables are perceived as most influential by Chinese public relations practitioners?
RQ2: Which contingent variables are combined as influential contingent factors in public relations practice in China?
RQ3: Are there any differences of the influences of these contingent factors as a function of practitioners’ gender and whether they work in PR departments or in PR firms?

Method

The survey instrument was adapted from the survey Shin, Cameron and Cropp (2006) conducted on U.S. practitioners. More than 80 contingent factors identified by Cameron and his colleagues were listed and respondents were asked to evaluate how influential each factor is to their PR practice, using a 1-7 scale, with 1 as not influential and 7 as very influential. The original English version of the questionnaire was translated and pilot-tested by Chinese practitioners. The online survey was launched on www.nquestion.com, a Chinese professional online survey service provider.

Practitioners were recruited using snowball sampling technique, due to the difficulty of obtaining access to existing practitioner membership directory. According to Katz (2006), snowball sampling is “nonprobability method for developing a research sample where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances.” As Katz (2006) mentioned, snowball sampling technique is often used “in cases where a sampling frame is hard to establish and it is assumed that cases are affiliated through links that can be exploited to locate other respondents based on existing ones.” In this study, without any sampling frame to draw random sample from, the first author emailed her Chinese public relations contacts and invite them to recruit their acquaintances and further share the survey link to other practitioners they know.

This online survey was conducted among Chinese public relations practitioners from November to December 2009, which yielded 94 total usable responses. Of the 94 Chinese practitioners participating in the online survey, 60% were female (n = 56), and 40% were male (n = 38). The range of the respondents’ age was 22-45, with an average age of 30. About 52% of the respondents had bachelor’s degrees and 26% had master’s degree. Half of them (51%) majored in areas other than journalism, public relations, advertising and business/marketing (n = 51), while 11% majored in journalism (n = 10), 9% majored in advertising (n = 8), 4% majored in public relations (n = 4), and 22 % majored in business or marketing (n = 21).

Most (40%) of the respondents worked for Chinese corporations (n = 38), 9% worked for PR agency or firm (headquarters in China) (n = 8), 16% worked for PR agency of firm (headquarters overseas) (n = 15), 10% worked for multinational corporations (n = 9), 7% worked for non-profit organization (n = 7), 10% worked for government (n = 9), 3% worked for university or other higher education institute (n = 3), and 5% worked for other types of organization (n = 5). In terms of the current main public relations practice area, 14% of the respondents worked in media relations (n = 13), 15% worked in consumer relations (n = 14), 25% worked in investor relations (n = 23), 21% worked in government relations (n = 20), 5% worked in community relations (n = 5), 15% worked in interest groups relations (n = 14), and 5% worked in other areas (n = 5). The range of the respondents’ public relations experience was 1-
16, with an average 3 years of experience in public relations. About 40% of the respondents (n = 37) frequently involved in organization’s policy- and decision-making processes.

For the first research question, descriptive statistics suggested which of the over 80 contingent variables were perceived as most influential in the public relations practice in China. For the second research question, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to combine the contingent variables into a matrix of influential factors and to further explore the dimensionality of the contingency matrix. For the third research question, MONOVA was used to gauge the difference in perceived influences of these contingent factors as a function of practitioners’ gender and whether they work in public relations department or in public relations firm.

Results

Most Influential Contingent Variables on Chinese public relations practice

All the contingent variables were indicated as influential (see Table 1), except for “physical placement of department in building” (M = 3.88, SD = 1.70), “gender (percentage of female upper-level staff/managers)” (M = 3.76, SD = 1.43), which were indicated as not influential. “Gender (whether the practitioner is a female or male)” was reported as neutral (M = 4.00, SD = 1.62).

Internally, the most influential contingent variables indicated by Chinese practitioners in our survey are individual-level variables as related to conflict management, such as: 1) “predisposition toward negotiations” (M = 5.09, SD = 1.16), “cognitive complexity: ability to handle complex problems” (M = 5.07, SD = 1.26), “communication competency” (M = 5.06, SD = 1.37), and “comfort level with conflict or dissonance” (M = 5.00, SD = 1.21). Other more influential internal variables were: “corporate culture” (M = 4.80, SD = 1.34), “general communication competency of PR department” (M = 4.88, SD = 1.36), potential of PR department to practice various models of public relations” (M = 4.80, SD = 1.36), and individual practitioners’ “tolerance or ability to deal with uncertainty” (M = 4.88, SD = 1.25), “comfort level with change” (M = 4.81, SD = 1.46) as well as “extent to openness to innovation” (M = 4.86, SD = 1.26).

Externally, the most influential contingent variables were those government regulation related ones, such as: 1) “government regulation” (M = 4.99, SD = 1.62), “degree of political support of business” (M = 4.99, SD = 1.55), and “degree of social support of business” (M = 4.90, SD = 1.44). Other more influential external variables included: “potentially damaging publicity” (M = 4.88, SD = 1.57), “scarring of company’s reputation in business community and in the general public” (m = 4.88, SD = 1.70), and “degree of source credibility/powerful members or connections of the external public” (M = 4.85, SD = 1.71).

Dimensionality of Influential Contingency Factors in Chinese Context

The over-80 contingent variables were grouped into ten factors on two dimensions (see Table 1) through an exploratory factor analysis. Initial data reduction with Varimax provided a solution with eigen values above 1.0 and accounted for 63.49% of the variance, which offered a two-factor solution of internal dimension and external dimension. The Cronbach alpha coefficients of both internal dimension (.80) and external dimension (.86) suggested a high reliability. Under external dimension, there were five factors (see Table 1): external threats (M = 4.78, SD = 1.07; alpha = .66), industry environment (M = 4.36, SD = 1.36; alpha = .78), general political/social/environment/external culture (M = 4.90, SD = 1.29; alpha = .65), the external
public (M = 4.43, SD = .85; alpha = .81). Under internal dimension (see Table 1), there were six factors: organization characteristics (M = 4.44, SD = .77; alpha = .85), PR department characteristics (M = 4.49, SD = .78; alpha = .79), characteristics of dominant coalition (M = 4.64, SD = .81; alpha = .76), internal threats (M = 4.52, SD = .98; alpha = .54), and individual characteristics (M = 4.72, SD = .77; alpha = .87). Cronbach alpha coefficients suggested high reliability, accordingly. Issue under question (M = 4.53, SD = 1.08; alpha = .63) was cross-listed under both internal and external dimensions, which suggested the issue itself needs to be further divided into internal and external issues under question for further specifications.

**Differences in Perceived Influences of Contingent Factors**

MANOVA revealed significant main effects of gender and whether the practitioner works for PR department or PR firm. In terms of gender (F[1, 89] = 9.67, p < .01, par. \( \eta^2 = .098 \)), male practitioners (M = 4.78, SD = .75) tended to perceive more influence from the external public in their PR practice than female practitioners did (M = 4.22, SD = .85). Gender was also associated with the differences in the perceived influence of organization’s characteristics in public relations practice (F[1, 89] = 5.72, p < .05, par. \( \eta^2 = .060 \)): Male practitioners (M = 4.68, SD = .85) tended to perceive more influence of the organization’s characteristics than female practitioners did (M = 4.28, SD = .68).

In terms of the effects of whether a practitioners works for the PR department of an organization or works for a PR firm, the only main effects lies in the perceived influence of organization’s characteristics in public relations practice (F[1, 89] = 4.31, p < .05, par. \( \eta^2 = .046 \)): Practitioners working for the PR department of an organization (M = 4.54, SD = .87) tended to perceive more influence of the organization’s characteristics than practitioners working in a PR firm did (M = 4.31, SD = .62).

Interactions of the above two factors were also evident. First, there was significant interaction effects on the perceived influence of organization’s characteristics in public relations practice (F[1, 89] = 6.17, p < .05, par. \( \eta^2 = .065 \)) (see Figure 1): Male practitioners working in the PR department of an organization indicated the highest influence from the organization’s characteristics on their PR practice, while practitioners of different gender perceived the influence of the client’s organization as similarly low.

Second, there was significant interaction effects on the perceived influence of organization’s characteristics in public relations practice (F[1, 89] = 8.64, p < .01, par. \( \eta^2 = .088 \)) (see Figure 2): Male practitioners working in the PR department of an organization indicated the highest influence from their individual characteristics on their PR practice, while female practitioners working in a PR firm perceived higher influence of their individual characteristics on their PR practice than the male practitioners did.

**Discussion**

Heath and Coombs (2006) argued that theories are developed from best practices. Contingency theory was developed to reflect the reality of practice. Its insights can be used to describe and inform public relations practice in the United States but also in other countries and regions. Results from Shin, Cameron and Cropp (2006)’s study among U.S. practitioners, Shin, Park and Cameron (2006)’s test of contingency theory in South Korea, as well as this current study in China indicate the validity and reliability of the contingency theory of strategic conflict management in different cultural contexts.
As the first quantitative test of contingency theory in China, this study provides practical and theoretical insights on the influence of each individual contingent variable perceived by Chinese public relations practitioners. By forming influential contingent factors and exploring the dimensionality of these factors using factor analysis, the results of this study suggested structural stability of the contingency matrix. Further, we tested the effects of gender and types of organizations on how practitioners perceive these influences in their public relations practice.

**Dominant Influences of Individual Characteristics and Political-Social Support**

First, almost all the contingent variables identified by Cameron and his colleagues are influential in Chinese public relations practice. Similar to Shin, Cameron and Cropp (2006)’s findings, our survey results also indicate little influence of physical placement of PR department and gender issues such as the gender of PR managers and the surveyed individuals themselves.

Second, according to our survey respondents, among the over 80 contingent variables, the most influential ones are individual-level variables as related to conflict management. It shows Chinese practitioners’ tendency to emphasize individual contribution and influence on public relations practice. They tend to pay more attention to whether individual practitioners have the predisposition toward negotiations, whether they process the ability to handle complex problems using highly competent communication skills, as well as whether they are comfortable with conflict or dissonance. This is similar to Shin, Park and Cameron (2006)’s findings among South Korean practitioners, who also reported “individual-level variables related to the abilities or characteristics of individual professionals as most influential to their practice” (p. 184). U.S. practitioners also indicated this “dominant influences of individual-level variables” (Shin, Cameron, & Cropp, 2006), especially the items on communication competency and the ability to handle complex problems.

Third, political and social influences seem to be very important in Chinese practitioners’ daily practice. The most influential contingent variables, according to our survey respondents, are government regulation and degree of political and social support of business. This is a unique important influence to Chinese practitioners, as these variables have not been reported as dominant influencers among U.S. or South Korean practitioners. This might be due to China’s political, economic and social systems and media frameworks, which play an important role on how public relations should be and can be conducted in China.

Fourth, there is another set of important contingent variables mixing organizational factors (i.e. related to corporate culture, general communication competency of PR department, and potential of PR department to practice various models of public relations) with individual factors (i.e. individual practitioner’s tolerance or ability to deal with uncertainty, their comfort level with change as well as extent to openness to innovation), which were also reported in Shin and her colleagues’ contingency theory studies in the U.S. and South Korea. External threats and the power of external publics are also found to be critical factors when it comes to Chinese practitioners’ decision-making.

**Structural Stability of the Contingency Theory across Cultural Contexts**

Our findings indicate that the contingency theory of strategic conflict management serves a valuable role in continually reflecting the complex reality of public relations practice in different countries and regions as well as informing practitioners on effective strategic conflict management based on a solid understanding of internal and external influences. On one hand, as its core “It Depends” suggests, depending on the specific cultural context, there might be
variances in terms of which contingent variables might be most influential, which also impacts the relative power of different contingent factors. One the other hand, the general dimensionality, factors and components of the contingency theory seems to holds firm and tight based on existing survey results. The two dimensions (internal and external) as well as their factors demonstrate high reliability with the similar thematic categories rendered by Shin and her colleagues’ previous studies.

Noticeably, among the ten contingent factors, the most influential external factor is, again, general political/social/environment/external culture, followed by external threats. The most influential internal factor is individual characteristics, similar to the pattern revealed at the contingent variable level.

Interestingly, issue under question, a factor previously under “external dimension,” is cross-listed under both internal and external dimensions in this current study. Future research might consider dividing this factor into internal and external issues, which could be more specifically assigned to internal and external dimension, accordingly.

**Different Contingent Factors Influence Chinese Practitioners Differently**

Although individual practitioners’ gender is not indicated as an influential contingent variable itself, according to our survey respondents, gender as a demographic factor has demonstrated significant effects on how male and female practitioners perceive differently the influence of the contingent factors. The power and characteristics of the external public exert more influence on male practitioners than on female practitioners. Organizational and individual characteristics are also more influential on how male practitioners practice public relations than on female practitioners. Female practitioners, on the other hand, tend to indicate less variance or change according to who they are, whom they work for, and who they need to deal with. This opens an interesting research direction to further explore how Chinese female practitioners handle public relations situations differently than male practitioners due to their different level of influence.

Whether a practitioner works for the PR department of an organization or works for a PR firm also impacts the influences of influence of an organization’s characteristics in public relations practice. It seems that practitioners working in a PR department are influenced more by the organization’s characteristics than those working in a PR firm, due to the different environment, nature of clients, and the work style, etc. (Wilcox et al., 2004). Further, this factor interacts with gender factor to provide more details of the influence picture: On one hand, male practitioners working in the PR department of an organization indicated the highest influence from both the organization’s characteristics and their individual characteristics; on the other hand, female practitioners working in a PR firm are more likely to be influenced by their individual characteristics. These findings provide important insights on future public relations professional training and research topics on further understanding the sources and processes of these relevant influences on public relations practice in China.

**Future Directions and Conclusion**

There are several limitations in this study that need to be further addressed in future research. First of all, due to the difficulty of having access to any professional association membership directory, we were not able to conduct systematic random sampling. Although a snowball sampling technique helped us identify qualified participants, its non-probability nature does not allow any generalization of our findings to the population of Chinese public relations practitioners.
practitioners. Researchers should continue exploring this area and improve the quality of the sampling process to minimize biases. Second, as an initial quantitative research testing the validity of existing contingency matrix, questions remain such as what could be the unique and/or new factors that need to be identified so as to provide more insights about Chinese PR practitioners. In-depth interviews of Chinese practitioners as well as follow-up practitioner surveys need to be conducted to triangulate the new findings.

Interestingly, personal ethics, as a dominant variable identified by Shin and her colleagues in studying practitioners in the U.S. and South Korea, was not indicated by our respondents as one of most influential variables of their practice. Future research on ethical communications, especially in the conflict management context, needs to further explore how Chinese practitioners define personal ethics and how the impact of their personal ethics is influenced by other factors.

In conclusion, by understanding the dynamic influences of contingent variables and factors at the organizational and individual levels, and along the internal and external dimensions, our study provides insights on how Chinese practitioners make strategic decisions for their organizations and clients. The contingency theory of strategic conflict management can be effectively applied to Chinese public relations practice to help practitioners understand and improve their involvement of strategic communication practitioners with a more sophisticated understanding of the complex communication environment, which will eventually equip Chinese practitioners with higher communication competency in handling different conflict situations.
References


Table 1: Contingency Matrix in Chinese Public Relations Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Contingent Factor</th>
<th>Contingent Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha = .86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha = .66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litigation</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government regulation</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potentially damaging publicity</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarring of company’s reputation in business community and in the general public</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimizing activists’ claims</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha = .781</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing (dynamic) or static</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of competitors/level of competition</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richness or leanness of resources in the environment</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General political/social environment/external culture</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha = .645</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of political support of business</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of social support of business</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The external public (group, individual, etc)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha = .805</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size and/or number of members</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of source credibility/powerful</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>factors</td>
<td>scores</td>
<td>weights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>members or connections members or connections</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past successes or failures of groups to evoke change</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of advocacy practiced by the organization</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of commitment/involvement of members</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether the group has public relations counselors or not</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public’s perception of group: reasonable or radical</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of media coverage the public has received in past</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether representatives of the public know or like representatives of the organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public’s willingness to dilute its cause/request/claim</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moves and countermoves</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative power of organization</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Internal**  
*Alpha = .86*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>factors</th>
<th>scores</th>
<th>weights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open or closed culture</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersed widely geographically or centralized</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of technology the organization uses to produce its product or service</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogeneity or heterogeneity of officials</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Alpha = .847*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Relations department characteristics</th>
<th>Alpha = .789</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<p>| Number of practitioners total and number of college degrees | 4.28 | 1.47 |
| Type of past training: Trained in PR or ex-journalists, marketing, etc | 4.59 | 1.34 |
| Location of PR department in hierarchy: Independent or under Marketing umbrella/experiencing encroachment of marketing/persuasive mentality | 4.62 | 1.26 |
| Representation in the Dominant Coalition | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Dominant Coalition (top management)</th>
<th>Alpha = .757</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Political values: Conservative or liberal/open or closed to change</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Management style: Domineering or laid-back</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• General altruism level</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support and understanding of PR</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frequency of external contact with publics</td>
<td>4.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Departmental perception of the organization’s external environment</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Calculation of potential</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Experience level of PR practitioners in dealing with crisis
- General communication competency of department
- Autonomy of department
- Physical placement of department in building (near CEO and other decision makers or not)
- Staff trained in research methods
- Amount of funding available for dealing with external publics
- Gender: percentage of female upper-level staff/managers
- Potential of department to practice various models of public relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Alpha = .757</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha = .757</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rewards or losses using different strategies with external publics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degree of line manager involvement in external affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal threats</td>
<td>Alpha = .541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(How much is at</td>
<td>Economic loss or gain from implementing various stances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stake in the situation)</td>
<td>Marring of employees’ or stockholder’s perception of the company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marring of the personal reputations of the company decision makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Alpha = .867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>characteristics</td>
<td>Training in diplomacy, marketing, journalism, engineering, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(public relations</td>
<td>Personal ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practitioners,</td>
<td>Tolerance or ability to deal with uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>domestic coalition,</td>
<td>Comfort level with conflict or dissonance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and line managers)</td>
<td>Comfort level with change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to recognize potential and existing problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extent to openness to innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extent to which individual can grasp other’s worldview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personality: Dogmatic, authoritarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue under question</td>
<td>Alpha = .625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **competency**
  - Cognitive complexity: Ability to handle complex problems
  - Predisposition toward negotiations
  - Predisposition toward 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5.06</th>
<th>1.37</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Estimated Marginal Means of Organization's Characteristics

Gender
- male
- female

PR Department
PR Firm
Figure 2

Estimated Marginal Means of Individual Characteristics

Gender
- male
- female

Organizations

Estimated Marginal Means

PR Department

PR Firm
The T-Mobile Crisis Response to Accusations of Disclosure of Confidential Data and Spying on its Top Management: Developing a Paradigm of Global Crisis Management Response Strategies

Roxana Maiorescu
Purdue University

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to propose and test the applicability of a global crisis response model drawn from Benoit (1995), Coombs & Holladay (2004), as well as Frandsen & Johansen (2007). The model that emphasizes the importance of the context in which a crisis takes place is tested on the T-Mobile Germany crisis response regarding accusations of stolen data of 17 million customers as well as of spying on employees and members of the board of directors.
Crisis Overview

“Stick together” is the slogan that has been undergirding T-Mobile, one of the most important GSM providers in the world. Also known in Germany as the “Pink Giant” due to the color of its logo, T-Mobile is part of the largest phone company in Europe, Deutsche Telekom, and currently operates in countries such as Austria, Croatia, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, UK, and The United States. With a profit of € 42.8 billion in 2008 (“Konzern-Zwischbericht,” 2009, pag.3) T-Mobile’s and Deutsche Telekom’s success seemed unshakable.

Yet, “stick together” became harder in May 2008 when the German magazine Der Spiegel revealed serious issues within T-Mobile that triggered the telecom giant to face a crisis that engulfed the entire country into a national fervor (“Phone Company under Fire,” 2008, para. 3). Der Spiegel announced that confidential information of 17 million T-Mobile customers was being sold on the internet. The data included email addresses, telephone numbers, as well as permanent addresses of VIPs, Members of Parliament, and government officials. Der Spiegel investigated the matter further and found out that T-Mobile’s top management was aware that confidential data had been stolen between 2005-2006, but decided at that time to perform internal investigations and not to go public (“Spy Scandal Grows,” 2008, para.3). Further on, T-Mobile reacted to the negative media coverage at the beginning of May 2008 and assured publics that the data available on the internet had not yet been misused and that, internal investigations were being conducted in order to see who or what had led to the information disclosure.

At the end of May 2008, Der Spiegel published further information that deepened the T-Mobile confidential data crisis. Journalists from Der Spiegel wrote that the internal investigation conducted by the GSM giant to determine how the information had been disclosed, involved spying on top level management, supervisory board members, and journalists who covered Deutsche Telekom. The news regarding the fact that the company hired the detective company Desa spurred enormous stir. Additionally, Der Spiegel revealed that Desa was comprised of former members of the Security Service of former Eastern Germany, called Stasi (Staatssicherheit). Being a subsidiary of DT, T-Mobile is controlled by the German government through a 32 percent stake. As a result, the German Government demanded an exigent investigation and described the spying operation as a “serious breach of trust” (“Phone Giant in Germany Stirs a Furor,” 2008, para. 4).

Due to its development, the T-Mobile crisis echoed the corporate spying scandal that Hewlett-Packard (HP) faced in 2006 in California, when HP hired investigators in order to obtain the phone records of journalists who covered the corporation (“Phone Giant in Germany Stirs a Furor,” 2008, para.6). Yet, the T-Mobile scandal differs from the one of HP since it carries particular resonance in Germany, where people are cautious of private information ever since the state-sanctioned snooping of the Nazi and Communist regimes (“Phone Giant in Germany Stirs a Furor,” 2008, para.9). In this respect, Lutz Hachmeister, director of the Institute for Media Policy in Berlin, asserted:

No one likes to hear that people are using their mobile phone records. It gives one the sense that Big Brother can watch you and hear you (“Phone Giant in Germany Stirs a Furor,” 2008, para 11).
As the scandal evolved, more information became available to the public. For example, the *Financial Times Deutschland* operations of spying within DT date back to 2000, when Tasso Enzweiler, a journalist who was reporting for the same paper had been spied on with hidden cameras (“Spy Scandal Grows, 2008, para. 5”).

Yet, the T-Mobile spying scandal was not one of the kind in Germany. In 2006, a parliament report accused the German Federal Intelligence Agency (the *Bundesnachrichtendienst*) of systematic surveillance on some reporters. The crisis ended when the government of Angela Merkel ordered the agency to stop. Additionally, the T-Mobile scandal occurred on a background dominated in Germany by crises of other corporate giants such as Siemens, the industrial and engineering electronics company based in Munich, accused of bribery, and Volkswagen whose reputation was tarnished by payoffs to union representatives (“Phone Giant in Germany Stirs a Furor,”2008, para. 15).

For T-Mobile and DT, the scandal can have a tremendous impact on their reputation at an international level. For example, the American media revealed that U.S. Federal Communications Commission could enter the investigation into Deutsche Telekom to see if the latter had been also spying in the U.S. Joe Nordgaard, director of the consulting firm Spectral Advantage asserted with regard to Deutsche Telekom’s spying scandal:

Pre-texting is clearly against the law in the U.S. That was made clear in the HP scandal, but there are other complications stemming from the fact that Deutsche Telekom is part owed by the German government (Deutsche Telekom Scandal Could Spread to U.S., 2008, para. 3).

As a result, what first started as a crisis threatening the relationship of the company with the customers whose expectations with regard to confidential data had not been met, extended over a few weeks to a scandal between DT and its internal publics on one hand (the employees whose trust was betrayed by pre-texting) and a political one at an international level on the other hand.

To this time the crisis is far from being over and will probably come to an end when the decision of the German court will have been made. Up to that time, Deutsche Telekom adopts different strategies to prove its responsibility and regain the trust of its internal and external publics. Interviewed by *The New York Times* in May 2008, Mark Nierwetberg, the company’s spokesman asserted:

By handling over the information to the prosecutor, we are using the sharpest knife we have to solve the problem. We are not trying to hide anything.

The scandal that emerged compelled DT’s top management to face not only the internal and external publics that became suspicious of the telecom provider, but also the reluctant media to which it had to respond quickly in order to restore its image.

The T-Mobile’s crisis developed as a result of issues from within the system, i.e. from the frustration and the discontent of the employees. According to the chaos theory that was studied by McKie (2005) systems are characterized by instability and nonlinearity which makes it hard if not impossible to predict any possible issue that might rise and develop into a crisis. There is evidence that the management intentionally ignored the frustrations caused by the Deutsche Telekom’s plan to eliminate 45,000 jobs by the end of 2007. The service workers’ union, Ver.di
strongly disagreed by calling the Telekom’s plans “clear-cutting” and “an outrage scandal to employment policy (“Did Deutsche Telekom Spy on Journalists and Board Members,” 2008, para.2).

In 2006 the crisis became more acute as a result of the tensions between the member of the executive board Rene Obermann, head of the mobile division of Deutsche Telekom on one hand and Walter Raizner, head of the landline division on the other hand. While the two were deeply suspicious of one another and treated each other more like rivals than colleagues, information from within the company was slowly leaking to the press, revealing the discord within the corporation. At the same time, the environment in which the corporation was operating had started to change dramatically and landline business was facing growing competition from small upstart providers which declined the prices and sales. Additionally, the mobile telephony business was no longer achieving the growth rates. Yet, while competition was trying to come up with a strategic plan to face the new challenges of the business environment, the management of Deutsche Telekom was unable to agree on a strategy (“Did Deutsche Telekom Spy on Journalists and Board Members,” 2008, para.2).

As noted earlier, in May 2008 the German newsmagazine Der Spiegel revealed that data about 17 million customers was available for sale online (Data on 17m Mobile Phone Users Stolen, 2008, para1.). The T-Mobile’s response was that, although the company had known about the information leak since 2006, they were using internal investigations to make sure that they would further prevent such situations. However, less than two weeks later, Der Spiegel published details with regard to the way Deutsche Telekom and T-Mobile had been coping with the information leak.

Further on, German Journalists from Der Spiegel managed to procure a fax that was sent to Deutsche Telekom and was addressed to the Head of Telekom’s legal department. The three-page document ended in a threatening tone: “you should not underestimate my aggressive potential and my staying power. “The fax came from the chief executive of a consulting firm in Berlin who had been allegedly hired to spy on the top management of Deutsche Telekom as well as the media that covered the corporation. The goal was not only to determine how internal information with regard to 17 million customers could have been disclosed but also how informational and strategic plans with regard to T-Mobile’s future actions that could affect the stock reached the press. The surveillance programs were called “Clipper” and “Rheingold” and the fax made it clear that the program involved monitoring phone calls of hundreds of thousands landline and mobile connection data sets of German journalists and their private contacts. The fax also stated that the same procedure was repeated with several board members on the employee side. The frustration of the chief executive of the consulting firm had stemmed from the fact that Deutsche Telekom had not paid for all the services his firm offered. The fax also included information with regard to spying on one of the Deutsche Telekom’s shareholders called Blackstone, headquartered in New York (“Germany Rocked by Telekom Spying Scandal,” 2008, para.7).

Der Spiegel newsmagazine classified the crisis as “an absurd concoction of economic spying, power-hungry megalomania, paranoia, and a complete disregard for the freedom of the press”, adding that “had it not been for the money, there is a good chance that the entire unsavory story would have never come to light” (“Germany Rocked by Telekom Spying Scandal,” 2008, para.2).

It is important to note that Der Spiegel was the media outlet that triggered and defined the
crisis first, therefore compelling T-Mobile to provide a crisis response and face a situation that would damage its image and reputation both at an external and an internal level.

**Literature Review**

William L. Benoit’s *theory of image restoration* (1995) states that organizations and individuals employ the same limited repertoire of image restoration strategies:

Despite differences in how image restoration strategies might be selected, combined, or employed, however, the basic image restoration options are the same for both individual and corporate image repair efforts.

Benoit’s perspective on crisis communication is rhetorical and focuses on verbal strategies, more precisely on what people or organizational spokespersons say when they have been attacked. Therefore, the theory lays more emphasis on the sender of the message and does not take into consideration other factors. The key words of Benoit’s theory are: verbal defense, ethos, reputation, and image restoration discourse. For Benoit (1995) communication is goal oriented. Moreover, as soon as individuals establish goals and realize they are capable of achieving them, they engage in communication that would make them fulfill their aims. Analogously, organizations engage in crisis communication with the goal of maintaining or restoring a good reputation.

According to the theory proposed by Benoit, an image is threatened: 1) when an undesirable or offensive act has occurred and 2) someone is holding the accused accountable.

The degree to which the act is offensive and the accuser is responsible plays a paramount role in how much the reputation of the accuser will be affected. On the other hand, whether the accused is responsible or not for the wrong doing is not important: so long as he is held accountable by publics he has to defend his reputation.

Furthermore, Benoit identified five strategies that help restore the image of an individual or organizations, each of them being characterized by diverse tactics as follows:
Benoit’s (1995) theory shows that companies will engage in employing several strategies during one single crisis. For example, an organization could make use of both denial and bolstering to protect its image.

In contrast to Benoit, Coombs’s contribution to the crisis communication scholarship brought in a public relations perspective. Coombs and Holloday (2004) developed the *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* which, contrary to Benoit’s perspective, takes into account the role of the stakeholders during a crisis. Consequently, crisis communication is goal- oriented just as Benoit suggested, yet stakeholders play an active role in the crisis discourse and the rhetorical strategies become subtler when trying to reach the target audience.

Thus Coombs considered that the strategies a rhetor employs in dealing with a crisis should be a continuum, changing from *defensive strategies* that are used when he denies either that a crisis has occurred or that it has a great significance, to *accommodating strategies* that he uses when he has to take full responsibility for the act, ask for forgiveness and try to renew/restore his image.

The following chart provides the seven crisis communication strategies proposed by Coombs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Strategy</th>
<th>Explanation of Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Denial</em></td>
<td>- Simple denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Shift the blame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- did not perform act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- another performed act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Evasion of responsibility</em></td>
<td>- responded to act of another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- lack of information or ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- mishap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- meant well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Reducing Offensiveness of Event</em></td>
<td>- stress good traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- act not serious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- act less offensive than similar ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- more important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- reduce credibility of accuser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- reimburse victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Corrective Action</em></td>
<td>- plan to solve problem/prevent recurrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mortification</em></td>
<td>- apologize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Coombs, “The symbolic approach to crisis communication moves beyond the basic list of crisis response strategies to an examination of how the crisis situation can influence the selection and effectiveness of crisis response strategies” (Coombs & Holladay, 2001).

Coombs also introduces the notion of *conceptualization* which he considers to incorporate three perspectives: *the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders, the*
organizational legitimacy, and the causal attribution. For Coombs, the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders is determined by a structural and a temporal dimension. The structural dimension defines the interdependence that characterizes the relationship between an organization who needs resources from the macrosystem in order to survive and the stakeholders who need the products or the services that the former provides them with. When he discusses the temporal dimension, Coombs introduces the notion of relational history by which he understands the actions taken by the organization in the past that are perceived by stakeholders as defining the values and characteristics of the organization. Therefore, a crisis is an unpredictable event, a relational damage or a phase in the ongoing relationship between the organization and its stakeholders.

Taking into account elements from the theories of Coombs and Benoit’s mentioned above, Finn Frandsen & Winni Johansen (2007) developed a model that makes allowances for all the publics that are either affected or affect a crisis. In the researchers’ view, once a crisis arises, “an arena opens with the public sphere of the society and/or the organization where various actors communicate with or against each other, to or past each other” (Frandsen & Johansen, 2007). The theory which they entitled Rhetorical Arena uses the notion of interdependence different than Coombs, more precisely it borrows the concept as used by Pompper (2005) when describing The Game Theory. Thus, interdependence transcends the meaning Coombs offered to the term and implies the fact that, before reaching a decision, organizations have to take into account what other persons and organizations do. Additionally, in the view of Frandsen and Johansen (2007), organizations are unpredictable systems whose behavior does not unfold in a linear cause-effect way. Therefore, at any time, organizations could face severe disruption and chaos may arise at any time. Consequently, the evolution of crises comes in contradiction to the Newtonian view according to which the universe is governed by predictable and stable laws.

In sum, the researchers make use of the game theory and the chaotic theory to develop the following model:
Contrary to the model of Frandsen and Johansen (2007), who consider that context and media influence the image recreation discourse, the model proposed in this paper assumes that context and media can themselves be influenced by the corporate crisis discourse and undergo considerable modifications. The model dovetails with those analyzed by Benoit, Coombs, and Frandsen and Johansen. However, the model provides an in depth overview of the circumstances that determine a specific type of discourse and assumes that any speech delivered by organizational representatives before, during, and after a crisis is delivered with the intent of image restoration. In other words, the goal of the communication is image-oriented.

The fulcrum of the model is a relationship of interdependence between speaker, media, and publics. Yet the degree of interdependence and mutual influence is established by the context.

The model can be reduced to the following schemata:

```
CONTEXT

Speaker

Discourse Type

Media

Publics
```

The Speaker

When designating a person who would be in charge of media relations during a crisis, top management should take into consideration his or her training as well as the experience this person has in dealing with past crises. Choosing the right person who would face media could be a tough decision and should be made not only by considering his or her abilities and skills, but also by being sure that the person is representative of the organization, i.e. that he or she shares the values and the goals promoted by the company. Furthermore, a crisis can create “heroes” and the context might necessitate that the “hero” of the crisis should be the one to step forward and talk to the publics.

On the other hand, when appointing a speaker, the management has to make allowances for public segmentation. A certain type of organizational representative might be more effective when talking to a specific ethnic group by appealing to the latter's values and beliefs, thus increasing persuasion. In the last two instances mentioned a company might be constrained to be represented by an employee who may not have the necessary training in dealing with crisis communication but who would still be able to reach the audiences through his or her appeal, charisma, or past experience publics are aware of.
The Media

It is important for top management to adapt their strategies of response in accord with the type of media they would use for message delivery. Media could be divided into controlled and uncontrolled or traditional and new. Therefore, the response to a crisis is a PR campaign in which one has to do research before responding. Research would include public segmentation and the use of appropriate media to reach a specific target group.

Public Types

As mentioned earlier, without proper knowledge of the public segment it should address, the effect of the discourse might be minimal.

According to Wilcox and Cameron (2008), publics should be divided according to: age (youth and young adults, baby boomers, and seniors), race and ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Wilcox and Cameron (2008) provide an insight into the latest research, according to which there are characteristics of each group that help an organization reach them. For example, radio has a great impact on minority groups, especially the Hispanics, people from the GLBT community are very loyal to brands, and seniors can be reached by messages delivered via traditional media such as the newspapers.

Yet groups are not monolithic. Although common values are the pivot around which a community performs its activity and develops itself, different people within each group share extra and various values and goals. Therefore, one could talk about a group within a group and additional segmentation is needed.

Looking into past experiences and events that took place within a specific community or group appears to be of paramount importance. It could be impossible to predict an exact reaction for each member within a specific group, yet by looking into past events that affected a certain region and a community one can draw a general line to predict reactions and therefore adopt a response strategy.

In sum, there has to be a match between the discourse during/after a crisis, the group or community it addresses, as well as the medium used to reach the target audience. Crises require exigent action and response and, consequently, it is paramount that thorough and minute research with regard to public segmentation should be conducted for each crisis.

The Context

The context in which a crisis takes place is crucial to the way in which the rhetor chooses the type of discourse that would reach the audience. Context is an integral part of the macrosystem in which an organization functions and on which its failure and success depends.

The political system of a specific country in which a corporation performs its activity, the democratic system, the degree of freedom that media has, as well as the cultures and traditions exert influence on the way in which a crisis emerges and develops along with the type of discourse the organization should employ. Additionally, the context also involves the reputation the organization has gained at the time of the crisis, as well as its relationship with various stakeholders. The reputation of a company stems from the way in which it has proved to be social responsible but also its response and strategies during past crises. Before providing media
with a crisis response, the management should take into consideration who defined the issue and the crisis first as well as the implications the crisis may have.

For example, top management can use corrective action, full apology, and ingratiation for a crisis that has been first defined by the media or by any other external group, depending on the severity of the crisis. On the other hand, in a crisis whose repercussions do not include casualties, the organization could employ excuse and justification provided that the crisis has been defined by internal stakeholders.

In the early stages of a crisis the control is exerted by the group or the person who first defines it. Yet, as the crisis develops control can switch into the hands of the group who is able to dominate the issues that arise from the crisis by predicting future developments.

Monopoly in the market is also a factor that should be taken in consideration in crisis response and part of the context. Etymologically, the term monopoly is derived from Greek monos- alone and polein- to sell. Monopolies are characterized by a lack of competition for good service or practice. Yet monopolies could also be imposed by governmental decisions in countries where democracy and fair market competition are not a tradition. On the other hand, companies could lead a market where the quality of their services and products has no rival. Additionally, there are corporations that dominate not necessarily due to unavailability of products that provide better quality than theirs, but because they have previously established an utter powerful brand and their products define a specific lifestyle. An example would be brands that address specific elite groups such as Rolls Royce.

In the case of a corporation that faces a crisis while having monopoly, the crisis response could differ from the one provided by an organization that struggles to impose itself on the market. Furthermore, the strategies of crisis discourse used by a company that has gained arbitrary monopoly could vary from the ones employed by one that has imposed on the market through outstanding products and services.

Media relationships are another factor of the context in which the response is delivered. Companies with contacts in the media and good relationships with journalists may not face negative coverage. Journalists are themselves a type of public and thus can inadvertently be undergoing a process of framing. Moreover, there are countries in which free media is not a tradition as it is the case of Russia where companies pay for the journalists to cover them. In such countries, the response to a crisis is influenced by black PR which is considered legal (Wilcox and Cameron, 2008).

The context also determines the level of secrecy in which an organization should engage. Organizational secrecy refers to any piece of information purposefully withheld and not made public by an organization. (Bok, 1983). According to Grunig & Grunig (1996) publics expect an organization to be transparent. However, there are circumstances in which secrecy cannot be shunned lest organizational strategies made accessible to public should spur unprofit and turmoil (Bok, 1983). Nevertheless, secrecy is inevitable for organizations to function effectively in some occasions.

In sum, apart from the type of crisis and the type of organization that faces it, (non-profit versus profit, public versus private) the context in which the crisis response is exigently demanded determines the type of discourse. In the process of response preparation there is the need of making use of data that have been previously collected with regard to: publics, media, and culture along with choosing the right person who would constantly keep the publics up to date with the developments.

The elements in the model exert mutual influence on one another: the context
influences the speaker, the media, and the publics. Yet as the crisis develops, a group of publics can change the context and the media coverage. On the other hand, media can shift the crisis into a different direction just as the speaker or the crisis itself could modify the entire context. But, most importantly, the context, either the political or the social one along with its values can be altered by the crisis as the latter is defined and handled by the media, the organization, or the publics.

**Discourse Analysis**

The item of analysis is the first crisis response provided by T-Mobile for the newsmagazine *Der Spiegel*. The importance of this discourse lies in the fact that it is the first response, under the form of an interview, provided by the CEO of DT, Rene Obermann, to the newsmagazine that triggered the crisis first.

T-Mobile’s crisis was first defined by *Der Spiegel* on May 8, 2008 when the magazine revealed details about the loss of confidential data regarding 17 million customers, half of the T-Mobile customers (“Data on 17m Mobile Phone Users Stolen,” 2008, para. 1). Further on, the same magazine made public the fax received by Deutsche Telekom with regard to the “Clipper” and “Rheingold” spying operations performed on top management and journalists.

T-Mobile responded to media immediately and on June 30, 2008 *Der Spiegel* newsmagazine published an exclusive interview with Rene Obermann the CEO of Deutsche Telekom (“I Stand by the Approach That Was Taken”, 2008).

The choice of having the CEO speak during times of crisis is meant to denote the availability of the company’s management to reveal the current state of affairs and also to demonstrate transparency and cooperation with media and external stakeholders. In the case of T-Mobile the availability of the chief of Deutsche Telekom also proved that the company is taking responsibility especially since the matter had political resonance and could have led to new regulation for the entire telecom industry in Germany.

However Obermann’s answers to the journalists’ questions seem evasive and his responses are terse at times. For example, the CEO avoids talking directly about the spying issue until a court decision has been reached in this regard: “Until there is exact evidence no one should be treated as guilty.” Consequently. Obermann engages in what Coombs (1995) calls the nonexistence strategies and makes use of denial until a judicial decision has been reached. However, the use of this strategy in the crisis is premature and risky. If DT is found guilty of spying by the court the CEO’s evasive denial will preclude the image restoration of the company. Further on, when the journalist asks why T-Mobile didn’t go public in 2006 as the company first found out that confidential data of 17 million customers had been disclosed, Obermann responds that the company considered that solving the matter internally was the best choice and he did not regret any measure the company took in the matter. In this case the CEO fails to meet the publics’ expectations both internally and externally.

Obermann asserts that until the court reaches a decision, the spying issue shouldn’t be a matter of emotion, but a matter of facts.

I do not get involved in premature judgments. A person is considered innocent until proven guilty. And what is at issue in this case is not my emotions but the need to clear up the matter.
He further engages into remediation (Coombs, 1995) and provides a solution for the customers whose confidential data is being sold online: the 17 million could change their phone numbers for free in case they feared illegal acts or felt threatened. But Obermann’s solution is not accompanied by an apology and neither is it a good decision in solving the matter. Customers among which government officials, VIPs, and business men would rarely accept changing their phone numbers since their daily activities involve the high use of telecommunications and it is important to have their phone numbers known by their contacts.

The CEO of Deutsche Telekom provides Der Spiegel with the measures taken by his company as a result of the data stealth:

We changed all our security procedures. We modified the code of ethics and we replaced the management of the security department. We now make sure that all our folders containing customer data are locked.

He further on asserts:

Yes, I stand by the approach that was taken, based on the information available at the time. The fact is that we have made many changes in the security area since then -- changes that we would not have been able to implement as quickly if there had been an investigation by the public prosecutor's office and a public debate.

We completely restructured the security area, divided up responsibilities and developed a new code of behavior for that department. We brought new people on board, including Reinhard Rupprecht, the former deputy head of the German Federal Office of Criminal Investigation (BKA). From our standpoint, it was the appropriate reaction.

Thus, T-Mobile took corrective action and Obermann tries to re-establish the image of his company by making use of rectification strategies (Benoit, 1992). Yet, his speech lacks a full apology and he is only willing to provide one once the court reaches a decision:

I have already told the supervisory board that I consider the incident to be highly deplorable and that it shouldn't have happened. Of course, I will apologize -- also on behalf of the company -- to other journalists, members of the supervisory board or others who were affected as soon as reliable conclusions have been reached. Simply issuing general niceties at this point without knowing who else may have been affected doesn't make any sense to me.

Furthermore, the CEO asserts that his company acted as quickly as it could after receiving the threatening fax. Yet, the manner in which Obermann talks about the swift decision of taking the matter to court is rather sharp under the circumstances faced by DT:
Oh, come on! Where was there a delay? We received the fax from the Berlin company on April 28 and launched an internal investigation right away. The head of the supervisory board was notified two days later. We went to the public prosecutor's office with the first documents on May 14. It's hard to imagine how we could have done this any faster.

Obermann also admits it would be difficult to build trust again with his employees and further engages into *corrective action* by asserting that he plans to change the values of both management and the subordinating departments.

We have no concept of the enemy. But it is certainly true that the tradition of trust still needs further development. This is probably due in part to the extended period of time in which there was tension among divisions. This cannot simply be ignored… It will certainly become more difficult to develop a trusting relationship.

He considers that the crisis arose from within DT due to the negligence of the management to take into consideration the employees’ dissatisfaction and that, in the future, employees should engage into constructive criticism of the management and should not take for granted all information provided by their superiors.

Everyone could use more civil courage. Employees must know that questioning instructions from supervisors and even rejecting them if necessary is the right thing to do -- with justification, of course. I'm not looking to establish some sort of general culture of disobedience. But everyone needs to know that just because something is coming from above, it isn't automatically correct. Questionable or illegal instructions must be reported.

In his interview with Der Spiegel (“Spiegel Interview with Deutsche Telekom,” 2008) the CEO also makes use of the rhetorical strategy of *transcendence* (Coombs, 1995) by placing the spying and the data disclosure scandal into a broader context. Yet, contrary to Coomb’s theory, in this case transcendence is not defined by appeal to higher values, but rather by the use of a broader context in which the crisis took place.

According to Hearit (1997) in “organizational communication, transcendence is a form of symbolic action whereby a corporation [or other organization] redefines its acts so that they are viewed from a larger context, one that customarily features an ethical dimension.”

In this interview Obermann asserts that in these times there are higher chances for telecom companies to face crises since, apart from their multinational characteristics, the technology of both landline and mobile telecommunication is continuously evolving and thus leads to increase efforts to incessantly restructure the telecomm companies:

I believe that there are similar problems in many companies. But Telekom is a very large business with a unique history and developments moving in opposite directions. We have both the growing mobile communications and the traditional landline business, which continues to lose ground. This is why there is tremendous pressure to restructure the company. Because we still have three times as many employees in Germany as all of our competitors combined, the pressure to restructure personnel and reduce costs will continue. This, of course, leads to a lot of dissatisfaction, and not just from the personnel affected by reforms but also from some executives.
At the end of the interview, Obermann reassures customers that their data is safe with T-Mobile and DT and says that the systems used by Deutsche Telekom are constantly checked by government agencies. By resorting to a higher authority, in this case the government, the CEO intention is to boost credibility and rebuild trust.

We have a high standard of security and are constantly working to improve it. Our systems and procedures are regularly monitored by government regulatory agencies.

The response of T-Mobile in the interview with Der Spiegel seems evasive at times, thus leading to the impression that the corporation is still reluctant to speak openly with the journalists from Der Spiegel, who were the ones that first defined the crisis. Obermann’s speech seems to fail to openly address the types of audience whose support T-Mobile and DT need in order to continue their activity: its employees and its customers.

The context in which the T-Mobile crisis takes place is a period dominated by corruption at Siemens as well as conflicts between works council on one hand and top management on the other hand at Volkswagen. Therefore, Obermann should have taken into account the fact that, on a market dominated by crises, an evasive response without concrete apology may render low efficacy and increase public skepticism both at an internal and an external level. According to the crisis response model proposed earlier, the period of corporate conflicts that was facing Germany at the time DT was struck by crisis is part of the context and should have been taken into account in the strategies of response employed by DT. In times of corporate turmoil, publics become more skeptical of profit organizations and therefore it is recommended to engage into an apologetic discourse. Furthermore, the historical context should be taken into account when organizations respond to crisis. What impact does spying have in a country like Germany, judging by the past Communist and Nazi regimes in which citizens were constantly monitored. How will such past events affect the way in which DT’s customers perceive the spying scandal?

The CEO’s responses seem to be terse. Yet, the cultural values in Germany could be different and the type of terse and concise discourse without direct apologia and emotional display could appeal to the typical German customer. Therefore, for a better analysis of T-Mobile’s response several other media responses should be taken into account so as to analyze whether T-Mobile’s image restoration discourse in other media outlets differed from the one provided for Der Spiegel.

According to the model of response provided above, Obermann’s interview in Der Spiegel should have acknowledged the importance of the publics and should have included prior preparation for addressing and reaching the target audiences by bolstering and emphasis on values and previous good will. The terse and rough response could be part of the context factor mentioned in the model. Since T-Mobile is by far the leader of the German telecommunications market, the management could have chosen a distant attitude without feeling the need for a justification until a final court decision has been reached. On the other hand, the concise response provided in the interview for Der Spiegel could have been caused by the antagonism between the two parties.

Moreover, DT could have looked into better strategies that could influence the context. Since spying is a sensitive issue, the company could have engaged into a strategy of full apology and use the crisis to exert influence on the context. More precisely, since the matter was taken to court it could have led to new litigation and regulation. Therefore, the CEO could have pointed
out at the issues that would arise from the crisis and that would lead to a better telecom industry, all of which would be directed toward the customers’ needs.

**Conclusion**

The DT crisis is still in development and much can be learned about the response strategies in the months to come. The purpose of this paper was to develop a paradigm of crisis management response and to test its applicability by using the crisis management response provided in the context of one of the biggest scandals in the European corporate world.

In order to better determine the applicability of the paradigm proposed in this paper, the whole media coverage should be analyzed starting with the moment the crisis was first defined until the crisis comes to an end. Once the T-Mobile crisis draws to an end, the image restoration discourses along with the changes the crisis brings about in legislation and politics should be analyzed by comparing the German media of high circulation *Deutsche Zeitung*, *Die Welt*, and *Die Tageszeitung* on one hand and *Der Spiegel* on the other hand. The purpose of such an analysis is to determine if coverage discrepancies occur since *Der Spiegel* was the newsmagazine that first revealed information about the crisis.

Furthermore, internal documents from T-Mobile would be useful so as to determine the steps the corporation took in trying to re-establish trust with its own employees. The press releases on the T-Mobile website could be compared to media coverage to determine if the company managed to set the media’s agenda and to control the crisis.

Since the T-Mobile crisis is still in development and possibly will not come to an end when the Court reaches a decision, such a study would be interesting to conduct if also the internal documents were available. Internal documents could also prove useful in order to determine if the crisis response was effective. More precisely, the number of the employees that left the company or the number of customers who switched to competition, as well as the sales result, would be paramount in measuring DT’s crisis rhetoric.
References


“Germany rocked by telecom spying scandal” (May 27, 2008). Retrieved December 25, 2009 from http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/may2008/gb20080527_623124.hm


“I stand by the approach that was taken” (June 30, 2008). Retrieved January 10, 2010 from http://www.spiegel.de/international/business/0,1518,562984-2,00.html.


Revisiting the Continuum of Types of Organization-Public Relationships: From a Resource-based View

Rita Linjuan Men
Graduate Student
University of Miami
**Introduction**


Ni (2006) first adopted the resource based theory from strategic management literature and built the links between relationships and organizational resources. Following Ni’s (2006) study, Men and Hung (2009) further demonstrated that relationships are perceived as organizational resources because relationship cultivation is an organizational capability that can generate quality relationships as intangible assets. Both of their studies examined the value of quality relationships from a resource based view.

As an extensive study of examining organization-public relationships from a resource based approach, this study is designed to explore the different types of relationships existing in Mainland China and build the links between types of relationships and organizational resources. Specifically, this study intends to find out whether the eight types of organization-public relationships (one-sided communal, mutual communal, covenantal, exchange, symbiotic, contractual, manipulative, and exploitive relationships, see Hung, 2002) still exist in the fast developing Chinese business setting considering the dynamic nature of relationships. It also tries to examine which types of relationships are perceived by companies to be strategic resources that can contribute to organizational competitive advantages. The continuum of types of organization-public relationships developed by Hung (2002, 2005) is adopted as the theoretical base of this study which will be reexamined and further developed from a resources based view in Mainland China context.

**Conceptualization**

*Definition of Organization-Public Relationships*

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) first defined relationship by linking it with the impact based on interpersonal relationship principles: “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity” (p. 62). Then based on the system theory, Broom, Casey, and Richey (2000) defined OPRs from an exchange perspective, which points out the dynamic nature of relationship:

Organization-public relationships are represented by the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics. These relationships have properties that are distinct from the identities, attributes, and perceptions of the individuals and social collectivities in the relationships. Through dynamic in nature, relationships can be described at a single point in time and tracked over time (p.18).
Hon and J. E. Grunig (1999) stated that a relationship begins when there are consequences created by an organization which affect publics or when the behavior of publics has consequences on an organization. Adopting this notion, Hung (2005a) suggested another definition based on the system theory: “OPRs arise 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). According to Ki and Shin (2005), there is no consistent definition of relationship. However, although from different perspectives, these interpretations of organization-public relationships seem to agree that relationship is not only an output but a dynamic process that needs to be constantly managed which has an impact on organizations.

Types of Organization-Public Relationships

Early research has found two basic relationship types: exchange and communal (Clark & Mills, 1993; Mills & Clark, 1994). In an exchange relationship, each party gives benefits to the other only if the other has provided benefits in the past or will do so in future. In a communal relationship, both parties provide benefits not for something in return but for the welfare of the other.

Hung (2002, 2005) identified six additional types of relationships through 40 interviews with 36 multinational companies in Mainland China and Taiwan: exploitive relationships, manipulative relationships, symbiotic relationships, contractual relationships, covenantal relationships and mutual communal relationships (for detail, see Hung, 2005).

Exploitive relationships. Explorative relationships means that one party takes advantage of the other when the other intends to be communal or that one doesn’t fulfill its responsibilities in an exchange relationship (Clark & Mills, 1993; Hung, 2002).

Manipulative relationships. According to Hung (2005), manipulative relationship appears when an organization knows what the publics want, and still applies “asymmetrical or pseudo-symmetrical approaches to communicate with publics to serve its own interest” (Hung, 2005, p. 408).

Symbiotic relationships. Symbiotic relationships mean that different parties depend on each other for their common interests of surviving or goal attainment. It is not necessarily a specific relationship. In Hung (2005)’s study, symbiotic relationship happens when different departments of an organizations interact just for job requirements.

Contractual relationships. Contractual relationships means both parties agree on what they should do in the relationships at the beginning just like making a contract (Hung, 2002). However, as Hung (2005) pointed out, contractual relationships can not guarantee equal relationships as there are power imbalance.

Covenantal relationships. Covenantal relationships mean both parties “commit to a common good by their open exchanges and the norm of reciprocity” (Hung, 2005, p. 398). It can be realized through one party providing suggestions, criticisms and insights while the other party is always to listen and provide responses (Hung, 2005).

Mutual communal relationships. Hung (2002) developed two categories of communal relationships, one-side communal relationships and mutual communal relationships. According to Hung (2002, 2005), one-side communal relationships refer to relationships in which only one party expects the relationship to be communal and shows concern for the other’s interests. Mutual communal relationships refer to relationships in which both parties expect the relationships to be communal and both parties show concern to welfares of each other.
Continuum of Types of Organization-Public Relationships

These eight types of relationship developed by Hung (2002, 2005): exploitive relationships, manipulative relationships, contractual relationships, symbiotic relationships, exchange relationships, covenantal relationships, mutual communal relationships and one-sided communal relationships are continuous on a continuum (see Figure 1) swinging from one side “concern for self interest” to the other side “concern for other’s interests” (Hung, 2005, p. 416).

Figure 1: Continuum of Types of OPRs. Note. From “Exploring types of organizational-public relationships and their implications for relationship management in public relations,” by C. J. F. Hung, 2005a, Journal of Public Relations Research, 17(4), 393-426.

Resource-based View of OPRs

Resource-based Theory

The resource-based view is one of the most widely accepted theoretical perspectives in strategic management (Newbert, 2007). The central focus of resource-based theory is the exploration of organizational resources to gain a sustainable competitive advantage that affords the accrual of superior performance (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993).

Resources include three categories, tangible assets, intangible assets and organizational capabilities (Dess, Lumpkin & Eisner, 2007; Pearce & Robinson, 2000). Tangible assets include production facilities, raw materials, financial resources and real estate. They are the physical and financial means that a company uses to provide values to its customers (Dess, Lumpkin & Eisner, 2007; Grant, 1991; Pearce & Robinson, 2000). Intangible assets include those factors that are non-physical in nature and are rarely included in the companies’ balance sheet such as information and knowledge (Galbreath, 2005). According to Fernandez, Montes and Vazquez (2000), there are people dependent assets like human capital which refers to the knowledge acquired by a person, personal contacts and relations, as well as individual qualities. People independent assets include organizational capital (norms and guidelines, databases, corporate culture, strategic alliances, etc.), technological capital (the access, use and innovation of production techniques) and relational capital (reputation, brand loyalty, long-term customer relationship, commercial name, etc.). Organizational capabilities are intangible bundles of skills and accumulated knowledge exercised through organizational routines (Nelson & Winter, 1982; Teece et al., 1997).

However, not all resources are of equal importance or possess the potential to be a source of sustainable competitive advantage. According to Barney (1991) and Dess et al. (2007), only resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (known as VRIN
framework) are strategic resources for companies and can help companies gain sustainable competitive advantages facing competition.

**Research on OPRs from the Resource-based View**

IABC’s Excellence study provided strong evidence for the value of OPRs, and found that OPRs are intangible assets that can help save money by preventing costly issues, crises, regulation, litigation, and bad publicity, and make money by generating good reputation, publicity, and attracting investments (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). Adopting the resource-based perspective, Ni (2006) found that quality relationships are organizational strategic resources because they are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable. Men (2009) and Men and Hung (2009) provided more evidence supporting Ni (2006)’s findings and found that quality relationships can help companies achieve sustainable competitive advantage. They also noted that OPRs are organizational resources because relationship cultivation is perceived as an organizational capability that can generate quality relationships/relationship outcomes (i.e. trust, satisfaction, commitment, control mutuality, support, information sharing) as intangible assets (Men, 2009; Men & Hung, 2009).

Little research has been done to examine the links between different types of relationships and organizational strategic resources. Based on the literature review, the following two research questions are proposed:

**RQ1:** What types of OPRs do companies develop with different publics in Mainland China?

**RQ2:** What types of OPRs are perceived as strategic resources by public relations managers and other strategic managers in Mainland China?

**Methodology**

Qualitative interviewing was used to explore these issues. According to Kvale (1996), interviewing is an interpersonal interaction during which the interviewees’ live meanings can be communicated not only by words, but by tone of voices, expressions, and gestures in a natural setting. Through qualitative interviews, researchers can obtain descriptions of the world as interviewees perceive it and reconstruct events without participating in them. According to L. A. Grunig (2008), interviews are perhaps the most commonly-applied qualitative research technique in the public relations field. Researchers can analyze interview data to “…explain what critical stakeholders think and do on their own terms” (L. A. Grunig, 2008, p.130). As in studies by Chen (2006), Hung (2002), and Ni (2006), this study exploited long interviews, elite interviews, in-depth interviews and active interviews in the data collection process. Long face

---

10 Valuable: Resources that can enable an organization to formulate and implement strategy that can improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

Rare: Resources which are not easily accessible to competitors.

Inimitable: Resources which are not easily accessible to competitors. Inimitable resources usually have the characteristics of path dependency, causal ambiguity, and social complexity (for detail, see Men, 2009).

Non-substitutable: Competitors have no equivalent resources to substitute.

11 Long interviews can expose the contexts of people’s behavior, providing researchers a fuller understanding of meaning (Seidman, 1991). In-depth interviews intend to combine structure with flexibility. A range of probes and techniques can be used to elicit answers deep in terms of penetration, exploration and explanation (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003). Active interview situations rely on interactions and dialogues between the interviewer and the interviewee to create meaning. They allow the subjects’ interpretive capabilities to be activated, stimulated and cultivated (Holstein & Gubrum, 1995). Elite interviews refer to interviews with those who are influential, prominent and well-informed in their field and will not subject themselves to standardized questioning (Dexter, 1970; Marshall & Rossman, 1999)
to face interactions and dialogues were conducted with strategic managers, including public relations directors from different industries. In order to have in-depth understanding of the context, we also did some field observation in connection with conducting the interviews in the interviewee’s offices. Active dialogues were attempted with some interviewees, in which joint efforts were made to construct meaning and search for answers.

**Sampling**

Theoretical sampling and snowball sampling were the main tactics for recruiting organizations and interviewees to participate. According to the theme of the study and the nature of the research questions, companies for interview were initially selected from the Fortune 500 list (available at [http://www.fortune500s.net/fortune500-list.php](http://www.fortune500s.net/fortune500-list.php)) and Forbes’ China 100 top companies list for 2007 (available at [http://www.forbeschina.com/inc1/200708.htm](http://www.forbeschina.com/inc1/200708.htm)) with branch offices in cities of Shanghai and Hangzhou. After initial contacts with the 35 selected multinational companies and domestic companies via e-mail and telephone, 14 companies agreed to participate in the study. Interviewees include vice presidents, general managers, and public relations directors. These interviewees were then asked for further referrals.

Every Effort was made to avoid convenience sampling in recruiting as we agree with Patton (1990) that convenience sampling is neither purposeful nor strategic and therefore should be the last consideration. Finally, 15 interviews were held with strategic managers from 14 participating companies in the Chinese cities of Shanghai and Hangzhou in August 2008, during the summer breaks of school. Most of the participating organizations requested that their identities to be kept confidential.

**Data Analysis**

Three stages of data analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusions and verification (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Berg, 2007) were followed in this study. To get a whole picture, the interview data was reserved with the original language in transcription as much as possible. Then as the project continues, the raw data was simplified and transformed into a more manageable form through written summaries, coding, and identification of analytic themes. To display the data, we first divided the responses of each question into different categories. Then conceptual mapping (Grich, 2007) was used to display the relationships between themes. Finally, after the data had been collected, reduced and displayed, analytical conclusions defined themselves more clearly and definitively (Berg, 2007). Then we verified the findings by reading the transcripts and field notes again to make sure the conclusions were real and not just the wishful thinking. During the data analysis process, to ensure the objectivity some interviewees were contacted for clarification and confirmation of our interpretations through e-mail. Triangulation was also used to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, translations and interpretation of the interview data.

**Ethical Concerns**

During the initial contacts with the interviewees, the purposes of studies, how the data would be used, and the time required for interviews were clearly explained. If a potential interviewee was reluctant to participate, he was never persuaded. At the beginning of each interview, the aim was restated and permission for tape recording was obtained. Interviewees were assured that no information about their identities or those of their organizations would be disclosed in any form without their permission. A small souvenir was given to each interviewee.
to show our appreciation, and an executive summary of the report was promised to be given to
them upon completion of the study.

Results

New Characteristics of Publics in China: Getting Connected and Empowered

Nowadays companies are not facing different independent publics, but public networks. Publics such as the government, media, community, employees, customers, investors may have
influences on each other, and relationships with one particular public may affect others. Public
communication is changing from point communication to network communication. Just as the
participant from a Fortune 500 chemical company put it,

The media can affect the community, employees and their family members. NGO and
customers can also reflect information and even problems to the media, and the media
can expose and exaggerate it. Suppliers can affect customers…They are all interlocked,
connected, and it’s just how much they connect.

Another participant from a multinational business software company also showed the same
concern. In her opinion, the media can connect with the government; the government can
connect with the competitors and business partners. Sometimes it only “‘takes one hair affecting
the whole body’ （牵一发而动全身）, you must take all these relationships into consideration
when you make decisions. You need to balance the interests.” One participant from a Chinese
Internet company made such a comparison: “Relationships with all publics are like an ecological
chain, when there are problems…with any party, there will be influences on others, and vice
versa.”

Besides, the strategic publics can also connect one another in another way. There are
multiple roles of each public, and there can be overlapping and exchanges of roles. For example,
according to one participant, media members can also be consumers and community members;
competitors or business partners may become customers or investors one day.

When publics are connected, they become empowered. With the fast development of
internet in China, it provides more opportunities for publics to connect. As one participant from
a Chinese internet company stated, “from website, BBS, to blog, instant messenger, more and
more convenient channels are provided to different publics. Publics can access to the media very
easily.” During the year 2008, China had the world’s second largest base of internet users in the
world according to the recent report of CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center).
Most companies in China realized this new rising force, wangmin (the net public). One
participant, who is a general manager of a renowned Japanese consumer electronics company
showed his concern with an example:

In the past, when consumers have problems about our products, they would not think
about to complain it in public and they also didn’t have this channel. Even if they said
our products were not good, it was just limited in a small circle. Few people would know
it. But nowadays, everything is different. Consumers are directly connected to the
media. They can post their experiences in product BBS, community BBS, or their blogs,
a small problem may be exposed, or enlarged in a short second! This may have big
damage to our image and reputation.

Besides technologies, there were also social reasons causing the empowerment of publics.
Since the economic revolution and opening to the world by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China has
greatly changed in the economy system, social culture and every dimension of social life in the
past thirty years. With the growth of the market economy and social change, Chinese consumers
are gradually enlightened and empowered. Consumerism is developing in the Chinese market. One participant from a multinational chemical company, who has more than ten years’ experience in practicing marketing and public relations remarked,

If we say it was companies dominant and publics [consumers] dominated in the past, then I think...the situation is different in recent years. Consumers are having an increasingly strong sense of individualization. The government made policies that favor those “minorities” (弱势群体). Besides, with the participation of the third parties, such as NGOs and the media, I feel it’s hard to see one side dominating and the other side passively receiving.

RQ1: Types of OPRs in China

According to the interviewees, most of the types of relationships commonly exist between companies and their strategic publics except for manipulative and exploitive relationships. Most of the participants (13 out of 15) alleged that they do not have exploitive or manipulative relationships with their publics. As one participant from a Chinese internet company remarked, “Publics are no fool. You can not manipulate or exploit them. Once so, no one will trust you for a second time.” Some participants thought that in the past, there might be manipulative relationships and exploitive relationships because companies were more powerful in those days. Publics had fewer choices. But, with the development of consumerism, the empowerment of publics, the emerging third parties’ communication, and increasingly fierce market competition, it is hard for one party to manipulate the other one.

However, among the participants, two interviewees asserted that they had all types of OPRs including manipulative and exploitive relationships. One of them further explained:

What type of relationships to develop and what strategies to use depend on different characteristics of publics, different situations, and the most important criterion, the benefits. No matter what type of OPRs to develop, for companies, they want to get benefits.

Another participant from a multinational energy company gave an example of manipulative relationship with the media:

Several years ago, I worked for a sports company. This company invited Liu Xiang as its spokesperson. Every time after the games, we would hold the press conference for him. Outside of the games, this was the only window through which the media could contact Liu Xiang. For me, I had the negotiation power at that time. I had to ensure the positive image of the spokesperson on the media. Therefore, I would arrange those friendly media into the press conference and exclude the unfriendly ones from the list.

Then she further explained her logic:

Perhaps this is kind of a manipulative relationship. But from the perspective of the company, this is just a communication skill. Sometimes you need to have a strong attitude, and to be aggressive. Perhaps the tactics or skills are manipulative, but it’s for the good of the company. However, if you always manipulate or exploit the publics, the relationships will not last long.

“Different types of relationships are at different levels of companies. Some are at the strategic level, some are at the basic level and some are at the tactical level. They are situational,” the participant, a general manager from a multinational auto company also remarked.

RQ2: Types of OPRs and Strategic Resources
When talking about different types of OPRs as strategic organizational resource, most participants thought that communal relationships, exchange relationships and covenantal relationships are strategic resources that can generate tangible and intangible benefits for companies. These types of OPRs also fall into the win-win zone of OPRs developed by Hung (2002, 2005).

**Communal relationships**

According to the interviewees, most participants asserted that they had communal relationships with the publics, and they can bring them long term benefits. One participant from a Japanese consumer electronic company said:

> Sometimes we don’t expect any return, such as what we did to help the victims in the Wenchuan\(^{12}\) earthquake in May, 2008. We donated money to help those who were suffering. This is the social responsibility for us….But although we don’t ask for any return, this (communal relationship) can still help improve our reputation …and benefit our brands.

Another participant from a multinational energy company also agreed:

> Our relationships with the community are communal. We can not expect any return from them in a short time. This is just like doing CSR. You can not say that you did communal service today, and tomorrow they will buy your products. Communal relationships are to build the positive images. For example, we are an energy source company, and the publics usually think we are detrimental to the environment. Then we promote the concept of “carbon release.” Do you think this will benefit our own business? Maybe. But what we are trying to do here is to blazon a sense of environment protection. The public will think that we are a responsible and friendly company.

Although most participants acknowledged that they had communal relationships, some of them thought that one-sided communal relationships seldom existed in the business world. As one participant from a multinational chemical company said,

> Every company has its purposes when communicating with each public, some salient and some hidden. Even if they are the NGOs, like Green Peace, they need the recognition from the publics and the social donations to live on. For companies, they need the revenue to return to shareholders. Communication or Relationships with each public are built on the basis of benefits. Tangible benefits are like selling products and earning money. Intangible benefits are like the survival right, competitive advantage, etc. If you are against by the publics, you can not stand, not to say develop. Therefore, I don’t think there are pure communal relationships.

Another participant from a Chinese internet company showed the similar opinion. In his opinion, building relationships with each public has its different purposes. Government relations are to get the product approval from the government. Building Relationships with the media is to disseminate the corporate voices and reduce negative media coverage. Good relationships with employees are to get good performance. Then he concluded, “I don’t think pure communal relationships exist.”

---

\(^{12}\) The Wenchuan earthquake, also known as the Great Sichuan earthquake was a deadly earthquake that measured at 8.0 Ms and 7.9 Mw occurred at 14:28:01.42 CST (06:28:01.42 UTC) on May 12, 2008 in Sichuan province of China and killed at least 68,000.
relationships exist in companies; I think they do exist in the human society, for example, between friends.”

There seemed to be some conflicts among different interviewees’ opinions on communal relationships. However, similar to Hung’s (2002) findings, almost all participants thought that gaining benefits was the ultimate goal for companies to develop OPRs. Communal relationships, realized or not, can bring benefits for companies and contribute to their survival in future, thus are organizational resources.

**Exchange relationships**

Exchange relationships were acclaimed to be the most common relationships between companies and different publics from the interviews. Some companies directly described them as win-win OPRs as suggested in Hung (2005). They thought exchange relationships are the most dependable and lasting OPRs because they go with the benefit-oriented nature of enterprises. “Every company wants to earn money. If they are not mutual beneficial, the relationships can not be continued,” one participant from a Chinese internet company remarked.

Several participants gave sufficient evidence on why they thought exchange relationships were strategic organizational resources for companies. For example, one participant from a multinational telecommunications company talked about how both parties benefited from the exchange relationship between the government and the company:

At the beginning, we don’t have the research center built in Hangzhou. But the Hangzhou government gave us many favorable benefits on policies and other aspects, such as helping us furnish our offices, tax refund, and low renting. Then our company built the research center here. Over the past years, our research center continued to expand, from 60 employees to 500 employees. We provided job opportunities, led the local industry, and helped local economic development. This is how we both benefitted.

Another participant from a Chinese top telecommunication company (Hong Kong) described the exchange relationships with the media. She said:

For the media, they need to write story or a report, so they need to get the information from us. For financial analysts, they need information to write their own analysts report. Also, we need them to pass our voices and to make our company look good to the publics. Basically, we need each other.

Therefore, as long as the exchange relationships are going on, there must be exchange of benefits and satisfaction of mutual needs. “It must be a win-win relationship,” concluded a participant from a multinational chemical company.

**Covenantal relationships**

As discussed earlier, covenantal relationships mean both sides commit to a common good by open exchanges and the norm of reciprocity. The two parties may discuss on a common issue and one side is always to listen and provide responses. According to the interviewees, covenantal relationships do exist, and were also recognized as win-win OPRs (Hung, 2005). Companies can benefit from covenantal relationships which are regarded as strategic resources.

One participant, a general manager from a multinational auto company gave an example illustrating the covenantal relationships with the publics in China when this auto company first entered China in 1996:

Before we built the joint-venture company in China, customers could only buy very old style cars in the Chinese market. When XX (this company’s name) entered China, it brought the newest design and the newest technology. Then the old cars were not
competitive any more and were gradually replaced. More and more new cars were developed. It’s XX that changed the situation of the auto market and improved the industry capability in China. Therefore, in these what you call…covenantal relationships, the Chinese auto industry was benefitted, the Chinese government was benefitted, and our partners and suppliers were all benefitted. Meanwhile, we gained trust from these publics. The governments gave us more support when making policies. Other competitors respected us and we had a say in the auto industry. Every party won from the improvement and development of the Chinese auto industry.

Another participant from a multinational chemical company believed that in covenantal relationships, usually, one party had more expertise or experiences than the other one and therefore was more powerful. Then this party can influence the other in a positive way. One interviewee from a Hong Kong limited company gave a concrete example about how they benefited from such covenantal relationships. According to her, they had this covenantal relationship with the Hong Kong Council of Social Services (HKCSS). Sometimes when they had proposals of community services, they would contact with the HKCSS for discussion. Then they could get valuable suggestions for improving the services.

Therefore, it can be seen that in covenantal relationships as long as they have the common good and are open for discussion, both parties can benefit from this resource.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The eight types of OPRs from the literature, communal (one-sided communal and mutual communal), exchange, covenantal, symbiotic, contractual, manipulative, and exploitative relationships were all explored during the interviews. Exchange relationships were found to be the most common type of relationship as it fits into the nature of business operation. This also echoed Mill and Clark (1994) and Hung (2002) that participants in business settings are more involved in exchange relationships. Mutual communal, covenantal, symbiotic, contractual relationships were all reported to commonly exist by most of the participant companies in Mainland China. Few differences were found between the types of relationships developed by multinational companies and local Chinese companies.

Exploitative and manipulative relationships are not common in the business world today according to the interviewees. Even if companies are able to get benefits from exploitative or manipulative relationships temporarily, these relationships can not last long because publics can not be fooled more than once. In addition, with the marketization process in China, the consumers have more choices than ever, which gets them empowered. The development of consumerism and arising of *Wangmin* (the net public) also contributes to the empowerment of publics in China. However, sometimes, as communication tactics or skills, manipulative and exploitative relationships can exist in some occasions in certain ways. Pure (one-sided) communal relationships were found hardly commonly exist between companies and publics in the business world because the nature of companies is to ultimately gain benefits.

Among all types of OPRs, communal relationships, exchange relationships and covenantal relationships were regarded as strategic organizational resources that could bring benefits for companies and help companies compete in the market. In communal relationships, which appear more in CSR and community relations, companies give without the expectation of getting returns in the short term. But in the long run, companies can get intangible benefits that can also contribute to the corporate bottom line, such as word-of-mouth, good reputation and image. In exchange relationships, mutual needs are satisfied and the companies can directly get tangible
and intangible benefits. In covenantal relationships, both parties engage in discussions on the common good. No matter which side is more powerful, covenantal relationships generate mutual reciprocity from which companies can benefit. Consistent with Hung’s (2002, 2005) studies, communal relationships, exchange relationships and covenantal relationships were regarded as win-win OPRs and more symmetrical than other types of OPRs. Besides, they were perceived as strategic resources and are preferred by companies in developing different types of relationships with Chinese publics. On one hand, companies generally strive for a mutual beneficial situation in doing business. On the other, I believe the people-oriented nature of Chinese culture which emphasizes reciprocity and relational harmony (Hung, 2002; Luo, 2002) cultivates a win-win mindset.

The conclusions echoes Hung’s (2002, 2005) findings on the types of OPRs and provide new indications. My data suggests that along this continuum of types of OPRs, the two extremes, exploitative or manipulative and one-sided communal relationships are not common in companies’ business operation nowadays in China. There is a trend toward the middle range of the continuum for companies’ types of OPRs, especially toward the win–win zone. Companies as well as the publics can benefit more from the exchange, covenantal and mutual communal relationships, because there is a balance of interest important for long-term relationship development. Besides, these relationships are regarded as strategic resources for companies that can contribute to sustainable competitive advantage. The preference of the win-win relationships by companies in China indicates a symmetrical climate and mindset in corporate relationship building with strategic publics. Based on the findings and discussions, the continuum of type of OPRs from a resource-based view can be drawn as follows:

![Figure 7: Continuum of Types of OPRs from a Resource-based View](image)
Following Hung (2002, 2005)’s study and Ni’s (2006) study, this research explores the types of relationships developed between companies in China and strategic publics and built the links between types of OPRs and strategic resources. It tested the continuum of types of OPRs developed by Hung (2002) in the social setting of Mainland China and further developed it from a resource-based view. In addition, beyond exploration of what types of OPRs exist between companies and their strategic publics, this study also implies the preferences of types of OPRs to be developed by companies in China. The findings expanded the literature on types of relationships and relationship cultivation study in Chinese social cultural setting.

This study also encountered some limitations. Although types of OPRs as antecedents and outcomes of relationship cultivation have some implications for relationship cultivation strategies (Hung, 2006), this study did not examine what strategies companies in China use to develop the win-win relationships (communal, exchange, and covenantal relationships) which are regarded as strategic resources. The interviews were conducted with both multinational companies and Chinese local companies. However, the number of Chinese local companies (3/14) was not big enough for a comprehensive comparison study. Future studies can be designed and conducted to overcome these limitations. In addition, considering the dynamic nature of types of OPRs, more future studies can be done to test the continuum of types of OPRs across cultures beyond the Chinese cultural setting.
References


How Top Business Communicators Measure the Return on Investment (ROI) of Organization’s Internal Communication Efforts

Juan Meng
University of Dayton

Bruce K. Berger
University of Alabama

Abstract

Organizational research in the past decade has shown that communication effectiveness has been one of the leading indicators of an organization’s financial performance. However, measurement of the positive causal relationship has not been well established in terms of how top communicators link their organization’s internal communication efforts with business performance, or how they create a solid business case to influence organizational leaders to support and participate in communication practices. Therefore, to advance knowledge in this area, this paper addressed findings from two research projects related to how top business communicators measure the effectiveness of their organization’s internal communications. The results of an international survey of 265 experienced business communicators worldwide were reported, followed by insights gained through in-depth interviews with 13 diverse and experienced business communicators. Findings suggest that internal communications effectiveness has not been widely assessed despite its avowed importance. At the same time, some aspects of internal communication initiatives (e.g., improved job performance, changed employee behaviors, and concentrated employee engagement) have been given special attention in measurement efforts. Findings from the international survey and the in-depth interviews are discussed and implications for communication professionals are suggested.
Introduction

As a crucial feature to the success of organizational sustainable development and financial performance, communication effectiveness has been a promising topic in the fields of organizational behaviors, business management, and communication consulting in recent years. Organizations and institutional communication professions have explored the return on investment (ROI) measurement of their communication initiatives. As the leader in Communication ROI study, Watson Wyatt Worldwide has consistently contributed to investigating how communication practices are effectively linked to improved financial performance at the organizational level. Such research seems especially important today, given the turmoil in global financial markets in which organizations and their communication professionals operate.

Though studies have suggested that communication effectiveness is one of the leading indicators of an organization’s business performance, how and to what extent communicators measure the relationship between communication and performance is unclear. We also know relatively little about the specific approaches or metrics that communicators use to demonstrate the ROI for their organization’s internal communication initiatives. Thus, the anticipated influence on organizational senior leaders’ support, contribution and participation in communication efforts remains unpredictable.

To better understand how top business communicators measure the ROI of their organization’s internal communications efforts, the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation and the Watson Wyatt Worldwide launched several significant research projects during 2007-2008. In this paper, the researchers analyzed and reported key research findings from two studies relevant to the measurement of internal communication effectiveness.

The first study analyzed an international survey of 265 experienced communication professionals worldwide. The results indicated their perceptions about communication effectiveness and the importance of effective measurement in improving the values of internal communication initiatives. The second study involved in-depth interviews with 13 IABC Gold Quill award recipients in the field. The results revealed participants’ experiences and stories about measurement issues in internal communication practices. The interviews also captured some approaches and metrics those business communicators have used to develop award-winning business cases and to ensure relevant communication practices have the highest ROI. Results from the two projects were synthesized to identify and generalize themes and trends in measuring the business outcomes that internal communication practices can bring to the organization.

Background

Research intended to demonstrate the relationship between an organization’s internal communication practices and its business performance has never generated just one clear solution. Some studies have indicated that effective internal communication is a leading indicator of an organization’s financial performance (e.g., Ehling, White, & Grunig, 1992) and is associated with a higher level of employee engagement, which leads to an increased market value of that specific organization (e.g., Morris, 2010).
The 2007/2008 Communication ROI Study conducted by Watson Wyatt Worldwide, an international business research firm, highlighted six crucial actions top business communicators need to take to ensure that superior internal communications help drive robust financial performance for the organization. Other than keeping customers centered, the six crucial actions focus more on internal communications and reveal the importance of engaging employees in organizational business and maximizing employees’ experience in internal communication programs (“Secrets of Top Performers,” 2008). These crucial actions, along with innovative ways to achieve excellence in communication, place even greater emphasis on the importance of finding the most effective business metrics to evaluate the impact of internal communication on an organization’s business performance.

The ROI of internal communications has also been an issue of importance in the public relations and communication management literature since the 1980s (e.g., Broom & Dozier, 1983, 1990; Dozier, 1984, 1990; Dozier & Ehling, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Although there is considerable uncertainty about what metrics to use to gauge the effectiveness of internal communication programs, the research suggests that mixed research approaches (informal and/or scientific) and diverse perspectives (quantitative and/or qualitative) have often been used to facilitate the success of the two-way symmetrical communication model (see Dozier, 1990) and to maximize the success of such communication programs and the long-term development of the organization.

According to Moorman et al. (1994), communication effectiveness refers to the formal as well as informal sharing of meaningful and timely information between a client and the advisor in an empathetic manner. The effectiveness of communication efforts at all levels is critical because it has been “a major cause of investor complaints resolution unit” (Bland, 1997, p. 1). To better educate and keep clients informed about their investments in a language that they can understand, Morgan and Hunt (1994) suggested that an easy flow of communication is an important characteristic of a strong relationship. In addition, effective communication skills are instrumentally important in generating client trust. Moorman et al. (1994) emphasized that timely communication fosters trust by helping resolve disputes and aligning perceptions and expectations. It assists clients and key publics to appreciate the latest developments in the organization or the market and helps resolve problems and misconceptions.

The linkage between communication effectiveness and relationship commitment is likely to be even stronger for organizational financial performance than other contexts because of the recurring interaction between the strategic communication team and key publics, the risks and uncertainties involved, and the complex nature of the services or business environment. Furthermore, due to the high involvement nature of internal communication initiatives, the strategic communication team has to be effective in communicating with all levels of audiences to instill confidence and engagement while reducing risk perceptions. In Berger & Reber’s (2006) survey of the most important issues facing public relations practitioners, measuring the value of public relations was ranked as the second most important issue in gaining influence in the organization.

Importantly, the dynamic nature of the communication profession has created a competitive incentive among many organizations to consolidate and reconcile their communication programs or assets as a means of creating value that is sustainable over time. To achieve competitive sustainability, many organizations are launching extensive internal communication initiatives. Recent industry research indicated that organizations with the most
effective employee communication programs provided a 91% total return to shareholders, compared to companies that communicated least effectively (“Secrets of Top Performers,” 2008).

However, organizations may not be equally predisposed for successfully launching and maintaining communication management initiatives. Therefore, a key to understand the success and failure of communication effectiveness within organizations is the identification and assessment of the business metrics or evaluation approaches. The major goal of this article is to identify how and to what extent top business communicators try to measure the ROI of their internal communications initiatives.

**Research Questions**

To help understand the importance and process of measuring internal communication effectiveness, the following research questions were developed:

1. Do top business communicators demonstrate a causal relationship between effective internal communications and an organization’s business performance?
2. If so, which measurement procedures/approaches do they use to demonstrate the connection?
3. Are there any major aspects in internal communication initiatives that have been measured on a regular basis?
4. If so, what are they?

**Research Methods**

To answer these research questions, two related studies were designed and carried out. The first study involved the execution and analysis of an international online survey. The second study used in-depth interviews as a supplementary method.

*Study 1: The International Survey*

The international survey was designed and administered by the International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation and Watson Wyatt Worldwide during 2007-2008. Since 2003, Watson Wyatt has carried out a global research project examining the trends and actions in organization’s employee communication practices and its business performance. Over 740 companies representing more than 12 million employees worldwide have been surveyed during the past six years. As a continuous investigation, the international survey reported in this study was part of the Communication ROI Study designed by Watson Wyatt. The specific purposes of the international survey were to: 1) identify different aspects of internal communication programs that organizations have measured on a regular basis to assess the effectiveness, 2) determine which internal communication efforts are deemed most important by communication practitioners and organization leaders, and 3) demonstrate a causal relationship and/or correlation between effective internal communication and organization’s business results.

*Sample and Descriptive Statistics of the International Survey*

The data collection of the international survey was accomplished by Watson Wyatt during 2007-2008 as part of the Watson Wyatt Communication ROI Study. However, the researchers were not involved in the questionnaire design and the data collection process. Therefore, detailed description about the sample profile and survey procedure is missing in the article. Based on limited access to the online survey, the researchers confirmed that 264 senior...
communication executives representing different regions and diverse industries participated in the ROI study and shared their opinions. The majority of the survey participants were from North America, with 182 in the U.S. (68.94%) and 44 in Canada (16.67%). Other participating regions included Europe (n=19, 7.20%) and Asia (n=19, 7.20%). The sizes of participants’ firms varied, ranging from medium-sized (1,000-2,500) to large corporations with more than 25,000 employees. Their range of services included financial advising/planning, health services, manufacturing, utility and transportation, wholesale, and others. Table 1 summarizes some demographic information of the participants by region, industry, and organization size.

Table 1. Categorical Demographic Profiles for the International Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical Variables</th>
<th>Total Sample Size (N=264)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq. (n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Industry</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance/Insurance</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Services</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utility/Transportation/Communication</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale/Retail Trade</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company Size (number of employees)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000-2,500</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,500-5,000</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000-10,000</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-25,000</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000 or more</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study 2: In-depth Interviews

During the second stage of the research project, a series of in-depth interviews were carried out with senior communication executives. With the support of the IABC Research Foundation, an electronic email invitation to participate in the in-depth interview was sent to IABC Gold Quill award recipients in the past five years (2004-2008). Of the 65 invitations that were sent out, 18 communication professionals responded and indicated their interest in participating in the study. Eventually, five respondents dropped from the study due to changed schedule. Thus, final in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 senior business communicators who were Gold Quill award recipients.

Sample Profiles of Participants

The research sample for the second project included 13 senior business communicators (7 women and 6 men) in different regions: six from the U.S., five in Canada, one from Mexico, and
one from Brazil. Although they are from different regions, they represented senior communication professionals in their region, with an average of 15 years of communications working experiences. Their job responsibilities ranged from public affairs, corporate communication, and strategic employee communications, to corporate reputation management and independent consulting.

All 13 interviews were finished via telephone. The interviews averaged 35.4 minute in length; the shortest lasted 26 minutes, and the longest was 57-minute in length. A qualitative research analytical technique—thematic analysis—was used to analyze the transcripts (Goulding, 2005). Because the objective of the in-depth interviews was to identify patterns and trends of the best practices and metrics that award-winning business communicators have used to address communication effectiveness and to gain support from senior organizational leaders, the researchers argued that the application of thematic interpretation is appropriate in this case. Along with the results that have been generated in the survey data analysis, the research efforts from a qualitative perspective continue contributing to the exploration of effective business metrics in communication measurement.

Findings and Results

Finding #1: Though communication effectiveness has been an important concern for organizational leaders, the assessment of communication effectiveness has not been widely applied by using business outcome metrics in organizations.

Analysis of the international survey revealed that nearly 46.6% (n=123) of respondents indicated that their company has used no formal assessment to measure the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives. Almost 36% of respondents in the survey indicated that less than 50% of their internal communication initiatives are assessed by business outcome metrics. Only 17.2% reported that more than 50% of their internal communication initiatives are measured by business outcome metrics.

Similarly, the percentage of communication initiatives that have been measured by using business outcome metrics varied by organizational size. As the organization’s size increases, the percentage of formal measurement of communication effectiveness increases. For instance, due to the resources and financial advantages, organizations with more than 25,000 employees are more likely to develop business outcome metrics to measure communication effectiveness, and the percentage of no formal measurement/assessment of internal communication initiatives is 32%. On the other hand, organizations of small to medium size (1,000-5,000) showed a high percentage (60.9%-73.1%) of internal communication initiatives that are not measured.

Analysis of the in-depth interviews revealed that almost every participant agreed that measuring communication effectiveness was valued by senior leaders in their organizations. They also indicated that evaluation is “a daily job” and “a challenging job” for them. Participants commented:

“I have to do a lot of research with internal audiences, and something that is challenging is when people in the organization, especially the management group, are not convinced of the benefits communication strategies can bring to them. When you have to make some research and they are not convinced of the value of doing that, you have to go with
every one of them and sell the function and demonstrate that what you are doing can really bring benefits and changes with people internally."

“I think the biggest challenge in measurement continues to be convincing clients to spend, not so much the money, but to spend the time. As the industry develops, I don’t have a hard time in convincing them about the validity of measurement, but they are reluctant to actually take the time away from business to actually administer surveys or focus groups or some other measurement tools.”

“We have to use different approaches to prove everyday that we are important and that we give results to the organization. So it has become a daily job for us to make sure they [senior organization leaders] understand that.”

As a consequence, participants agreed that “seeing things built up and seeing the results” have been the most rewarding part of their efforts in measurement.

Previously, Watson Wyatt had grouped participating companies into two broader categories (high-effectiveness vs. low-effectiveness companies) based on its six years of communication ROI studies. The differences in perceptions and execution of measurement efforts between the two categories are also reflected in this study. Overall, high-effectiveness organizations are always willing to measure the effectiveness of the internal communication initiatives by using business outcome metrics (n=70, 26.8%) when compared to those low-effectiveness organizations (n=25, 9.8%). In addition, the majority of low-effectiveness organizations do not have a formal measurement to use to assess the effectiveness of communication initiatives (n=158, 59.8%).

Finding #2: Though most respondents agreed that measuring the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives should be part of standard operating practice in the organization, other factors such as scorecard balance, practice justification, and leadership direction also contribute to the use of business outcome metrics to the measurement process.

Almost half of the respondents indicated that the application of business metrics to the measurement of communication effectiveness is part of the standard operating practice within the organization (n=120, 45.5%). This feature is heavily reflected in organizations based in Europe (n=205, 77.8%) and those organizations in the finance/insurance industry (n=171, 65.0%). However, respondents also indicated other reasons that drive them to put metrics in place to measure the effectiveness of communication initiatives. For instance, achieving a balanced scorecard was the second most frequently mentioned reason for measuring communication initiatives (n=44, 16.8%), followed by current practice and budget justification (n=42, 16.1%), and CEO/leadership directives (n=35, 13.3%).

It is clear that using measurement efforts as part of standard operating practice in the organization is often a strategy to demonstrate the value of public relations/communication practices to achieving business results. Participants in the in-depth interviews explained:
“It is both a proof point of our value and also a challenge to us, because we are not as proficient in all of those areas as we probably need to be as a best profession. Clients are looking for value; they are looking for support; and they are looking for, I think, ways in which they can stay connected to all those important stakeholders.”

“It is challenging that we have to explain sometimes once, sometimes more than once; but the key thing is to make sure they understand the importance of those communication programs and strategies. It is really important to see us communicators helping the company to understand how stakeholders see them and what the best ways of relating with them are.”

The survey results also indicated that low-effectiveness organizations had different reasons for putting metrics in place to measure the communication effectiveness. For instance, in high-effectiveness organizations, the measurement of communication effectiveness was validated as a standard operating practice and is used for creating a balanced scorecard. In low-effectiveness organizations, however, measurement of communication effectiveness has been used as an approach to acquire additional budget and/or staff, or it is a result of personal interest. See Figure 1.1 for the graphic presentation of the percentages.

**Figure 1.1: High- and Low-Effectiveness organizations using metrics for different reasons**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>High-Effectiveness Organization</th>
<th>Low-Effectiveness Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For a Balanced Scorecard</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Seek Additional Budget/Staff</td>
<td>48.30%</td>
<td>41.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Operating Practice</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>20.70%</td>
<td>16.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings #3: Though many organizations use metrics to measure communication effectiveness in general, five aspects of internal communication initiatives have been measured on a regular basis. They are: 1) increased awareness or understanding, 2) concentrated engagement among employees, 3) improved job performance, 4) changed employee behaviors, and 5) improved business performance at the organizational level.
Respondents indicated that, although organizations use metrics to measure different aspects of internal communication efforts, five aspects or areas are measured more frequently. These include: (1) increased employee awareness or understanding after the information has been delivered (80.5%, n=213); (2) whether delivered information helps employees do their job better (73.2%, n=193); (3) the extent to which internal communication initiatives impact employee behaviors (55.0%, n=145); (4) the affect of internal communication efforts on employee engagement (49.7%, n=131); and (5) the relationships between communication effectiveness and business performance, such as the revenue growth and customer satisfaction (33.6%, n=89). These five measurement areas are reflected most often in high-effectiveness organizations (see Figure 1.2 for details).

Survey results also indicated that geographic location and organizational size didn’t affect use of these measures. Thus, at the present time, these areas appear to be the core for measurement efforts in organizations. This is especially true for the areas of increased employee awareness or understanding, the effect of communication on employee engagement, and improved job performance.

Similar results were reflected in the interviews. Participants agreed that there is no one perfect approach to measure communication effectiveness. The situations for applying relevant business metrics to assess communication effectiveness are often multidimensional. Most participants said they focused on measuring employee participation, increased awareness and understanding of new programs or policies, increased workforce productivity, and higher levels of employee engagement. One participant commented:
“I think the profession has gotten much more sophisticated over the years. We have evolved in the measuring process. Look at how we have moved: comprehension, attitude, behavior; all of those things are now measured. [Measurement] is part of what we do now.”

Participants emphasized that for any communication project, the first important thing is to understand the client’s performance goals before adopting communication measures. They also mentioned the possibility of using outside resources or existing tools and metrics developed by other professional firms, though they were leery of using templates:

“In terms of formalizing a metric, we don’t suggest using a template. The template or the training that someone developed would reflect more on his work. What we do is we start from our clients with goal setting and make sense of whatever budget they may carry for the project. From there, then we develop our measurements based upon their goals. What it does for us is to align us in accomplishing not what we want to accomplish but what our clients are trying to accomplish. These are two different things in measurement.”

“What’s the most effective way? There’s no one way. You really need to bring in both quantitative and qualitative aspects because some clients are very much science-based and evidence-based or the other way. So what we do here is very heavily invested in research. We don’t generally go forward on anything significant unless we’ve got a good baseline of research.”

Most participants also addressed the importance of conducting measurement at different levels. They mentioned that, to measure the effectiveness of internal communications, all involved groups have to be examined, e.g., top leaders, VPs and above, director-level employees, and employees in general.

Findings #4: The study highlighted a number of potential barriers to measurement initiatives in organizations. The three potential issues or barriers cited most often were: 1) insufficient resources (e.g., money and staff), 2) difficulties determining a specific cause-and-effect relationship between communication initiatives and business results, and 3) time constraints.

Respondents said that lack of resources was the most important barrier to measuring internal communication efforts. More than half (65.2%, n=172) of the respondents ranked “resource constraints” as their first choice, followed by the inability of determining a specific cause-and-effect relationship between communication initiatives and business results (57.1%, n=151), and time constraints (40.1%, n=106). Though surveyed practitioners said that all listed reasons in the questionnaire could be reasons for not measuring communication effectiveness, lack of resources and inability of determining a specific cause-and-effect relationship have been the leading ones. These two aspects involve factors that are crucial to effectively assess the value of internal communication initiatives and its contribution to organization’s business performance. Moreover, the two reasons also indirectly reflect a lack of support and leadership across the organization, as well as professionals’ inability to use research to develop appropriate evaluation measures.
“I think for most time it was like we were all chasing those numbers and we were all getting those numbers. And now I think it is very much about making sure that you understand how you want to be perceived and how you are perceived now. I still haven’t really seen it [measurement] done in a cost-effective-enough way that can be used consistently for all clients.”

In view of the changes that have been experienced in their organizations, some participants said that improving the understanding of public relations functions and roles was very important in getting support from senior organizational leaders regarding measurement practices:

“The thing about measurement is that historically they only measured advertising because of the big ad budgets. As people started recognizing the need to measure public relations, they started looking at it with an advertising mind. They looked at it and they replicated what has been done in advertising to public relations. And it didn’t work. So, the thing is you really have to set up your measurement goals around your project and do it in a PR way.”

“When I just started working with public relations agencies, I have been kind of disappointed because most of the time they continued to measure their work only with media clippings compared to advertising. I don’t think that’s an effective and comprehensive way of measuring. I know there are many other sophisticated ways of measuring and I insist that we need to develop a better formula to measure not just the messages included in the clippings but also the position of the article in the media and the perceptions of the audiences.”

In addition, the survey data indicated that differences between low-effectiveness and high-effectiveness organizations existed in the following three aspects: (1) not knowing how to measure, (2) not getting internal assistance to gather the data, and (3) concerned with setting performance targets for communication initiatives and being held accountable. Low-effectiveness organizations recognize the difficulty for them is to learn how to develop reliable measurement metrics and to be able to get the internal support for data collection. The concerns of high-effectiveness organizations, on the other hand, are the reliability and accountability of business outcome metrics.
Finding #5: Communicators rely especially on three measurement approaches to assess internal communication efforts: (1) employee feedback gathered by surveys, (2) employee participation in related communication initiatives, and (3) managerial feedback collected via surveys.

Respondents were asked to indicate what outcome measurement approaches they used to determine the effectiveness of organization’s internal communication efforts. Though diverse outcome measures were mentioned, e.g., employee feedback, managerial feedback, increased employee participation, decreased turnover, and financial and customer measures were mentioned, three specific approaches were mentioned by 30% or more of participants. They are: (1) employee feedback gathered by surveys (55.5%, n=147); (2) increased employee participation related to an initiative (34.5%, n=91); and (3) managerial feedback gathered via surveys (30.1%, n=80). The three outcome measures were used by organizations in different geographic regions and of different sizes.

More importantly, high-effectiveness organizations and low-effectiveness organizations exhibited important differences in the selection and use of measurement approaches. See Figure 1.4 for detailed information.
A far greater number of high-effectiveness organizations (20.3%) use objective measures of behavior change to assess communication initiatives than do low-effectiveness ones (2.5%). Conducting focus groups to collect feedback from both employees and managers is another effective method. Here, low-effectiveness organizations said they lacked knowledge and expertise in using this particular research method compared to high-effectiveness organizations (6.2% vs. 28.0% in terms of employee feedback; 5.0% vs. 22.0% in terms of manager feedback). Operational and customer measures are two other areas where at low-effectiveness organizations need to improve in the future. In addition, more efforts could be put into areas such as customer satisfaction, employee productivity, and sales growth to assess how effective communication initiatives have contributed to the organization’s business performance.

For participants in in-depth interviews, the researchers asked them to briefly review the Gold Quill Award-winning cases with a focus on measurement and evaluation. Not surprisingly, almost all award-winning cases implemented several approaches to measure the achievements in
goals and objectives of that specific case. Approaches mentioned most often were pre- and post-surveys among employees, focus groups with selected participants, tracking of employee productivity, engagement and retention rates, and other market value measures.

**Finding #6:** Though the purposes of developing internal communication initiatives could be diverse, four primary reasons for implementing internal communication programs were mentioned most often. They are: (1) explaining and promoting new programs and policies; (2) educating employees about organizational culture and values; (3) providing information on organizational performance and financial objectives; and (4) helping employees understand the business.

Survey respondents said that well designed internal communication initiatives can help organization explain and promote new programs and policies (70.2%, n=186), educate employees about organizational culture and values (62.8%, n=166), provide information on organizational performance and business objectives (62.6%, n=165), and help employees better understand their organization’s business (62.3%, n=164).

Respondents from high-effectiveness organizations gave even stronger support to these four goals. Almost all respondents (97.6%) from high-effectiveness organizations indicated that their organizations have used internal communication programs to explain and promote new programs and policies to employees and other internal publics. However, only 32.9% low-effectiveness organizations have valued this informational function. Educating function is another major point that distinguished low- and high-effectiveness organizations. In addition, 88% of respondents from high-effectiveness organizations said their organization has used internal communication programs to educate employees about organizational culture and values, compared to 29.6% among low-effectiveness organizations. Similarly, 85.7% high-effectiveness organizations used internal communications to provide information on organizational performance and financial objectives, while only 29.3% low-effectiveness organizations have applied so.

Finally, low-effectiveness organizations indicated that they seldom use internal communication programs to communicate with employees on how their actions would affect customers (4.9%). In contrast, 76.3% of high-effectiveness organizations have communicated with employees in such an approach.
Conclusions and Implications

This study focused on how and to what communicators attempt to measure the ROI of internal communications, or other aspects of strategic employee communications. Perhaps the most important finding is that there is a long way to go. Virtually all communicators in the study emphasized the importance of linking internal communication to business performance. However, the effectiveness of many employee communication programs is not assessed, whether due to lack of resources, research knowledge or time. This is discouraging if not surprising.

Coupled with increasing demands for effectiveness from senior organizational leaders, communication professionals have found themselves faced with a quickly changing business environment in which they must make a direct and strong link between their communication efforts and the organization’s business performance. The results suggested that communication effectiveness is complex not only in the way of interpretation, but also in operationalization. The level of applying business outcome metrics to measure communication effectiveness varied across organizations, and the approaches used at the operational level must be adapted in different situations.

**Figure 1.5: Top 4 most effective internal communication programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. explaining and promoting new programs and policies</th>
<th>2. educating employees about organizational culture and values</th>
<th>3. providing information on organizational performance and financial objectives</th>
<th>4. helping employees understand the business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-effectiveness Organizations</td>
<td>94.0%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-effectiveness Organizations</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. explaining and promoting new programs and policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>97.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The measurement issue and its contribution to an organization’s business performance have been given an increasing emphasis in the selection of approaches and with regard to enhancing the level of integrity among employees. In particular, several aspects of internal communication initiatives were mentioned as having the utmost importance. As a consequence, measurement efforts have been distributed to aspects like increased awareness or understanding, concentrated engagement among employees, and improved employee productivity or job performance. However, respondents admitted that there is no single approach or template that can be applied to all situations and clients. Diverse formal and informal research methods have been widely used to collect intended audience’s feedback on communication programs. Business metrics developed by independent research firms have also been used to assess the success of communication programs.

Even though communication executives believed that measurement should be part of standard operating practice in the organization, they also believe that a consultative leadership direction was important for them to enhance the importance of communication effectiveness to the organization. This has implications for communication practitioners to develop reliable and consistent measurement approaches in addition to being competent in their job and consistent in handling different communication programs. The level of resources available for communication practitioners influences the outcomes, no matter at the credibility level or the financial level. This implies that communication outcomes should be reinforced by the way an organization allocates its resources.

Though there has been research on communication effectiveness and measurement issues, and how reliable measures can leverage the value internal communication, our research continues the discussion by demonstrating the trends or patterns successful communication executives have used in their practices. Given the changing organizational environment and the need for organizations and clients to have a committed investment, there is a need for continued research into the link between communication effectiveness and organization’s business performance.

The issue of effective metrics and measurement addressed in this article is sufficiently important to suggest alternative research methods that enable the business communicators to better understand and prove whether any of the internal communication programs are “effective” in terms of adding market value. With the perceived prevalence of using social media in the marketing world, respondents in this study also expressed their concerns about how measurement and metric issues will be associated with the new digital media environment. The increased number of new media has been driven largely by improvements in technology and the ability to enable customers interacting with the technology. These new approaches have been used by marketers as well as business communicator to create experiences for their key publics to differentiate their products and services from competitors.

Limitations

Care must be exercised in interpreting the research findings in this article for several reasons. First, data from the international online survey is partial. Though the analysis of the data revealed several important trends in measurement issues, lack of a comprehensive view of the survey data renders the interpretation incomplete. Second, even though the majority of the participants in the online survey as well as in the in-depth interviews agreed that internal communication programs could contribute significantly to business outcomes, an advanced
statistical testing is missing from the quantitative perspective to make the conclusions generalizable. Future research could focus on designing specific studies to test the causal relationships by using a quantitative method. Finally, though this article analyzed data from a global project, the in-depth interview sample heavily focused on respondents and their opinions from North America, with one participant from South America (e.g., Brazil). Future research can extend the framework and analysis to include more participants in different geographic regions to discover measurement challenges they have been facing.
References


The message as the center of the relationship network in a Digital Communication World

Paulo Nassar is on the faculty of the undergraduate and graduate programs at the School of Communications and Arts at the University of Sao Paulo – Brazil.

paulonassar@usp.br
Introduction

The history of companies is also a history of major impacts of entrepreneurial activities on the environment, cultures and the people involved in them. International organizations and events, like the Club of Rome (1968), the Brundtland Commission (1983), Rio-92, and the Johannesburg Summit (Rio +10), among others, have alerted the global society to these impacts, particularly the environmental impacts. Giddens (1997, 2000), Beck (1997), Lash (1997), Dupas (2005) and other authors highlight the fact that contrary to the thinking of the Enlightenment period, the development of science and technology led to new and diverse situations of risk, including global warming, changes in the ways of relating in society, and impacts that has broken down traditions, particularly those represented by the family and religion.

Today – faced with worsening air, water and soil pollution, deforestation and the extinction of the biodiversity, particularly in areas like the Amazon rainforest and the Brazilian native Atlantic forest, as well as the risk of accidents generated by activities in the fields of atomic energy and genetics (such as the major accident that occurred in Chernobyl, in 1986), among others, and their digital, potentially instantaneous global divulgation -, business policies and actions need to undergo processes of legitimation, produced through participatory processes that need to involve a high number of key players. The legitimation of business activity, before society, is a fundamental condition for sustaining this activity.

Without acceptan ce of their activities, and without an understanding of their value for society, it will be difficult for a company to effectively carry out its proposals. Thus, it is in communication and its social relationships that these organizations have the main social processes that legitimize and consolidate them in the society and markets in which they operate. To understand the value of communication and relationships within organizational action, we need to observe the relationships companies have, over time, with the society around them.

For most of the 20th Century, large companies operated in environments in which economic protectionism and political silencing were prevalent. Until the 1990s, Latin American business activity adapted to this context, in which companies, often state-owned, were able to minimize and control their communication and relationships with society, particularly in terms of the scope, structure of the messages and speed of this communication.

In Latin America, from 1960 to 1990, part of this communication control by the majority of companies was based on the restriction of access to the available means of communication used by companies and society in their relationships. Among these media were actions of business communication and public relations, newspapers, magazines and audiovisual materials, characterized, in that period, as unilateral means of communication with low interactivity, little scope and slow speed, administered and operated exclusively by specialists (journalists, public relations and advertising experts) belonging to the company’s staff.

In this environment, the goal of the business media was to disseminate companies’ messages without causing controversies or encouraging other points of view on the messages conveyed by the organizations. The political and technological reasons given, as well as their high cost, prevented the uses of these media by non-specialists, as producers of content.

From the end of the 1980s this situation began to change, under the influence of the advent of democracy in Brazil and in the majority of Latin American countries, and also due to the emergence of new communication technologies, which changed the status of the audience from a simple passive receptor to an active producer of contents, and many of which were detrimental for companies.
From the 1990s, business communication has increasingly occurred through digital technological platforms, like the Internet. These new digital media have been characterized, from then to now, by their wide scope, high interactivity and speed of intervention in the social debate, as well as by their use by non-specialists as producers of content and media events. Among the new users of digital media, producers of content are members of non-government organizations, communities and employers, among others.

This use of digital media, in their numerous forms of use, by new users who are not communication specialists, as well as the changes in communicational and relational behavior, have weakened company-focused business communication, with the creation of new protagonists in the communication processes, which became what Castells (2005, p. 53) termed the “appropriation [by society] of the capacity for interconnection by social networks of all types” and which “led to the formation of on-line communities, which reinvented society and, in this process, spectacularly expanded the interconnection of computers, in terms of their scope and uses”.

These new social players were included in the new technologies of digital communication, created interconnections, generated and gave social visibility to their contents and to themselves, questioned and negotiated with the State and with companies, with other organizations, with other individuals and groups segmented by their identities, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and other possibilities. This context of interaction between social players in the digital network, as highlighted by Fuentes (2006, p. 119), leaves exposed

Many emperors, previously hidden behind the fig leaves of the Asian, African and Latin American jungles. The universalization of the concept of human rights and the indefeasible nature of crimes against humanity: the case of Pinochet, the Chilean assassin and torturer, taking the law into his own hands, during his dictatorship regime.

Among these new protagonists, who submit their points of view and realities on the digital network of relationships, are the Brazilian indigenous peoples, many of whom come from basically oral cultures, and who have created an *ethnosphere*¹³, where they disseminate and

---

¹³ As Nassar (2006) emphasizes, “the Brazilian native Indian is now less of a picture postcard figure. He has already begun to lose that idyllic image, packaged in exoticism, which prevents him from affirming his interests in modern society, and consequently, in the market. The phenomenon of the Internet, which has interconnected the world, has created, by means of a neology, what we call the ethnosphere: the virtual space in which the minority groups, particularly Native Indians, have expressed themselves. Many, for the first time, now have the chance to publicize their ancient histories, their messages, sounds, claims and products (there is a global market for ethnic goods and services), twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and from any place on the planet. The ethnosphere enables contact with the peoples of the forest, like the Terena, the Guarani, the Potiguara, the Tucana, and the Caiapós, among others. Today, they are also connected with the world, therefore we can learn about their productions, videos and radios, and their representatives, who are writers, journalists, video-makers, without having to leave our homes and travel to the nearest village. In *São* Paulo, from 17 to 19 October 2006, the “1st Seminar on Native Medias” – an event conceived by the Centro de Pesquisa sobre Opinião Publica na Epoca Digital (Research Center on Public Opinion in the Digital Era) (Cepop) and the History Department of the University of *São* Paulo, through its Center for
transmit messages related to their interests and identities as peoples. Likewise, the new digital media are also used by young people in the urban ghettos of the large Brazilian cities, by countless non-governmental organizations, and by groups belonging to communities organized by gender, ethnic and productive origin, among others.

These changes and technological creations that are influencing organizations are seen in a large number of historical examples, which are notable for the fact that the traditional protagonism of organizations operating in the day-to-day reality of our world has lost its strength, particularly in the implementation of their political thinking. In relation to this traditional protagonism of organizations, Bordenave and Martins de Carvalho (1979, p. 47) present an interesting scenario in which they highlight the prevalence of certain social roles of organizational members over others, that have been weakened today:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the family</th>
<th>The parents</th>
<th>Over the children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the school</td>
<td>The teacher</td>
<td>Over the pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the church</td>
<td>The priest</td>
<td>Over the faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the government</td>
<td>The technocrat</td>
<td>Over the citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In agriculture</td>
<td>The extensionist</td>
<td>Over the farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In industry</td>
<td>The boss</td>
<td>Over the workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the military</td>
<td>The officer</td>
<td>Over the soldiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In society</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Over woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In planning</td>
<td>The planner</td>
<td>Over the target client</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proof of the presence of the new protagonisms, which no longer accept the traditional social roles, is the fact that the contemporary State cannot do everything, and in the environment of democracy, negotiates its projects with other elements of society. Due to availability of sources presented in the digital environment, the University is no longer the sole accredited source of production of knowledge. And even in the West, the Catholic Church shares its religious life involving billions of human beings with other religious persuasions. Even in the restricted field of companies, decisions cannot consider only the thinking that takes place within their production lines and offices.

In the digital environment, these new positionings and organizational players – among those coming from the clients, communities, ethnic groups and numerous possibilities – are organized in digital communication networks which, due to their dynamism and possibilities of participation (dynamic of entry and exit of their participants), represent a major challenge for organizations and for their areas and thoughts geared towards organizational communication and public relations.

---

Studies in Ethnicity, Racism and Discrimination, was organized and coordinated by professors Massimo Di Felice, of the School of Communication and Arts, and Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, of the Faculty of Philosophy, Languages and Literature and Human Sciences, and included the participation of indigenous authors and video-makers. During the event, part of this indigenous communication in the ethnosphere was presented and discussed. The Seminar showed an indigenous concern with the issues of economic, social, and environmental sustainability, and also citizenship.
As D. Williams and Tapscott (2007, p. 32) emphasize, the participation of companies in networks of digital relationships is based on the idea of opening up to a sharing of knowledge. Alvin and Heidi Toffler (2007, p. 142-142) reinforce the idea of sharing, stating that:

Knowledge is inherently non-rival. You and a million other people can use the same knowledge, without diminishing it or wasting it. In fact, the more people use it, the more likely it is that someone will generate more knowledge based on the ‘original knowledge’.

Based on the digital communication platforms and the society organized in networks, the traditional concepts and tools and professional attitudes applied to communication and relationships have become ineffective. Many of these concepts come from the social sciences and were originally devised to meet the demands of a socially and economically stable environment. Their ineffectiveness was due to the fact that society thought in a mechanist way, its members taking on a single social role, that of passive, watertight receptor (the most traditional) within its function of employee, client, shareholder, unionist, and member of the community, among others.

In the current democratic environment, with its opportunities for social mobility for its members and access to digital medias and unlimited flows of information (Castells, 1999), it is difficult for an organization, in a determined situation, to indicate what is the most relevant social role assumed by a protagonist in its chain of relationships. Digital information and communication technologists pay more attention to the mix of their members than to separating them, creating the potential for a racial and cultural melting pot that is so prevalent in Brazilian daily life.

Faced with this digital mixing, what then is important for the policies and planning of organizations in terms of communicational and relational protagonism in digital networks? In this environment, which is more important to classify from the company’s perspective: the profile of the one generating the message, or the characteristics of the message that is circulating in the digital network?

On the Internet, separating people according to criteria of origin, function and essentiality, among other forms of segmentation, is not a guarantee that their public actions will be understood. In the network of organizational networks, more important than identifying publics, it is (fundamental) to identify the messages, whether good or bad, creative or destructive of value, that involve organizations.

D. Williams and Tapscott (2077, p.21) describe the strength of these networks in which companies can be included:

The growing access to information technology places at our fingertips all the tools necessary to collaborate, create value and compete. This frees people to take part in the innovation and creation of wealth in every sector of the economy. Millions of people are joining forces in self-organized collaborations to produce new goods and dynamic services that rival those of the biggest and best financed companies in the world. This new model of innovation and creation of value is called peer production, or peering – a description of what happens when groups of people and companies collaborate openly to promote the innovation and growth of their fields.
Faced with new models of social and productive organization in which the company becomes a co-participant, there is a need to rethink, in the field of public relations and organizational communication, the concepts that separate people from the construction of relationships and communication of the company and the institution. One of these is the concept of public, in its schematic forms, which, based on the point of view of the organization, separates individuals by geographical markers, essentialities, functions, and informational meanings, among other aspects.

In the network vision, the company does not separate the chain of people who jointly share with it experiences that go far beyond their own limits. In the digital network, the company is part of the system. And faced with other participants, thinkers and media operators, and producers of content, the role of mediator loses strength. All are transformed into mediators, causing a rethinking of the institutional role of public relations and organizational communication. In the digital order, all are public relations experts; all are communicators.

It can be affirmed that companies and institutions – in the digital environment where operators (...) “are deterritorialized, more disconnected from a precise spatial-temporal foundation”, as described by Lévy (2003, p. 21) – have lost their capacity to hinder or regulate those taking part in the process of organizational communication.

Therefore, more important than looking for representations that do not make sense in the network, it is essential, for those participating in the system, to produce contents that continually feed the digital plot. These are the messages, the stories that comprise the networks of relationships, and it is through analysis, interpretation and opinion on these contents that it is possible to understand the network.

Therefore, increasingly, the participants of the network, including companies, should tell their stories and ideas by means of the numerous opportunities of digital divulgation, such as search tools, blogs, podcasting and other online media. The event, the story, the question, the content and the keyword available, which produce and give meaning to the network, become the focus of attention of the fields of public relations and organizational communication.
References


When old rules don’t apply and standard measures fail – Defining new ways to measure investor relations.

Katie Delahaye Paine, CEO, KDPaine & Partners, Publisher, The Measurement Standard
Introduction

Somewhere around the latter half of 2008, many of the tried and true traditional measures of communications success began to disappear. Crisis communicators realized that having a “timely” response meant having a cogent statement up on Twitter in minutes rather than hours and that a crisis could come and go in a matter of days. Media relations professionals had to figure out how to communicate an entire positioning statement in 140 characters and then evaluate results in a mix of tweets, blog posts & comments, YouTube videos, social bookmarks and Facebook threads. For Investor Relations (IR) professionals, the change was even more dramatic since they no longer could judge the success of their efforts by stock price. (Whether or not that was ever a valid metric I will leave to others to debate.) In these tumultuous times, a single word from Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke or Barack Obama might influence their stock price far more than any relationships they may have had with individual analyst.

It was in that environment that the communications professionals at a leading semiconductor company (which we’ll call Iris) decided that they needed to know whether their efforts were in any way shaping what analysts thought, or wrote or more importantly recommended that investors do about the company. Standard content analysis wasn’t nearly granular enough to be of any use to Iris’ IR department. It was easy enough to determine whether an analyst was giving a buy, sell or hold recommendation, but what they needed to know was if any of the elements or activities provided by their department were having any impact on those recommendations.

Given that assignment, KDPaine & Partners designed an analytical methodology that broke down each report into four discrete elements;

1. Analyst Metadata – information about the research analyst(s) who produced the report.
3. Concept Metadata – information about specific concepts rated in this study. For example, the relevance of Iris’ themes to the overall investment thesis.
4. Product Metadata – information about what specific lines of business or products are mentioned in the report.

We further categorized each element as to its relevancy to the final thesis or recommendation.

Individual company messages were also tracked for their prominence (i.e. where and how they appeared in the report) and further categorized as to their integrity. Each message was rated as full, partial, incorrect or inverse. We also looked for references to specific Iris lines of business, initiatives and competitive battles, and rated each for its influence on the analysts recommendations, specifically if it was perceived as a Benefit, Benefit and Risk, neither Benefit nor Risk or pure Risk.

As a result of these efforts, Iris’ IR team was able to better tailor their efforts to align with corporate goals and strategies, ultimately improving the ratio of buy-to-sell recommendations.
Methodology

Step 1: Identify the Goal:

As always in any measurement program, the program started with a clear definition of what Iris’ IR department was trying to achieve. Specifically, they wanted to decrease sell-recommendations and increase buy-recommendations. Within that framework, they wanted to determine what specific programs, initiatives and messages were impacting financial analysts recommendations.

Step 2: Define the desired outputs, outtakes and outcomes

For IR professionals, the outputs are typically Analysts Days, briefings, and other outreach efforts to the Financial Analyst community. The outtake was that the investor audience perceived Iris as a good investment for these times and preferable to the competition. The desired outcomes are that Financial Analysts recommend investors buy the stock. Therefore, while the exact wording of the recommendation may change from analyst to analyst, the fundamental thesis of the analyst reports can act as an outcome metric for IR.

What the IR team at Iris wanted to know was:

- What specific themes or issues are impacting the analyst perceptions?
- To what extent is inventory, or time to market, or a battle over market share relevant to that ultimate thesis?
- Does the information and briefings provided by the IR team have any impact on that thesis?
- To what extent do the battles high up Iris’ internal priority list spill over into the financial analyst community?

These and other questions can be answered via a detailed content analysis of Financial Analysts reports. By analyzing the individual components of a financial analyst's reports, IR professionals can determine how effective they have been in getting key messages and concepts across to the analyst community. More importantly, they can look at prior results to determine what strategies and tactics might be more effective in the future, continuously improving their programs.

Step 2: Content Analysis of Financial Analyst Reports

We first divided the information in the report into four categories:

1. Analyst Metadata – information about the research analyst(s) who produced the report.
3. Concept Metadata – information about specific concepts rated in this study (For example, the salience of Iris’ themes to the overall investment thesis).
4. Product Metadata – information about what specific lines of business or products are mentioned in the report.
We treated the analyst firm very much as we would a major media outlet, recording the name of the firm, the specific analyst authoring the report, and any other relevant information about the firm that was making the recommendations.

The report itself was analyzed for tone, the relative importance and salience of a subject or theme to the conclusion the analyst draws, and where in the report (chart, graph, table or summary) the subject or theme is mentioned.

At the concept level, we conducted a detailed search for key message content, looking not just at whether the message exists in the report, but whether the message is fully communicated, partially communicated or erroneously communicated. We then looked again to see the degree to which the message is salient and/or important to the thesis and how prominently it was mentioned.

At the product level, we analyzed each report to see which specific products or lines of business were mentioned. Then we examined whether the analyst considered the product line, theme or battle a risk or a benefit to the company, further examining the extent to which that product, theme or battle was impacting the overall conclusion of the report.

We prepared detailed coding instructions and tested them on several coders to ensure we met our internal intercoder reliability standard of 90%.

Specifically, coders were instructed to record the following:

**Rating Salience**

The importance of the rating to the overall thesis. (leading to a buy recommendation)

- [ ] (4) Very Important
- [ ] (3) Somewhat Important
- [ ] (2) Somewhat Unimportant
- [ ] (1) Not Very Important

**Thesis**

An overall evaluation of the thesis:

- [ ] (4) Positive
- [ ] (3) Neutral
- [ ] (2) Mixed
(1) Negative

**Exhibit**

The name of the exhibit and the exhibit type was recorded:

- Chart/Graph
- Table
- Financial Summary
- Other Infographic

**Exhibit Source**

The source of the exhibit was recorded

- Iris
- Analyst Firm

**Key Messages**

We were provided with a list of strategic messages that Iris desired to communicate to its stakeholders via analyst reports. There could be more than one per report. We also coded for the degree to which messages were communicated.

Each key message was rated for the segment within the report in which it was communicated. For numerical calculations we used the numbers represented in parentheses. A message could be in more than one part of the report. The segments were:

- (6) Synopsis
- (5) Full Report
- (4) Chart/Table
- (3) Caption/Disclaimer
- (2) Financial Summary (e.g. Balance Sheet, Cash Flow)
- (1) Appendix
Message Integrity

Each key message was rated for the integrity of the message after communication within the analyst report. This will be rated for the report, overall, rather than for each instance of the message.

- (3) Amplified
- (2) Full
- (1) Partial
- (0) None
- (-2) Incorrect
- (-3) Opposite/negative

Subjects

We recorded each line of business that was mentioned in the report, even if briefly. We further coded for the prominence that each topic received in the report.

Salience of Subject to Thesis

Each Iris Topic was rated for the salience of the topic to the investment thesis.

- (4) Very Important
- (3) Somewhat Important
- (2) Somewhat Unimportant
- (1) Not Very Important

Evaluation of Subject

Each Iris Topic was rated for the net evaluation of the topic by the analyst(s). For numerical calculations we used the numbers represented in parentheses.

- (2) Benefit
- (1) Both Benefit and Risk
- (0) Neither Benefit nor Risk
Analyst Topics

Analyst Topics were also recorded, no matter how briefly they were mentioned. Specific topics were:

- Cost of Goods Sold
- Demand
- Dividends
- Growth
- Inventories
- Margins
- Pricing—Average Sales Price
- Spending
- Start-Up Costs
- Stock Buybacks
- Unit Costs
- Utilization Rate
- Yields

As we did for subjects, we also coded each topic for prominence and salience and how the analyst perceived the topic.

Competitive Battles

Competitors mentioned in regard to Iris within a specific technological, market or other industry battle were also recorded. Specifically the coder recorded whether the competitive battle was:

- (2) Favorable Toward Iris
- (1) Favorable Toward Both
- (0) Neither Favorable nor Unfavorable to Either (Draw)
Favorable Toward Competitor

The analysis then determined which product lines, lines of business, initiatives and messages were most likely to result in a Buy, Hold or Sell recommendation.

**Conclusions**
Perhaps the biggest learning of the research was how little the competition impacted the recommendations, despite concerns from the client. Since Iris was the market leader, the competition was seldom mentioned in the report, and when it was, the competitive mention had little impact on the overall recommendation.

Key messages and analyst topics had the greatest impact on the resulting recommendations, with Iris-specific topics having little visibility or impact. The visuals in the reports had the least bearing on the results, and in fact after several months they were no longer coded.

This led to a significant redirection in effort away from graphics and visuals, and towards a greater emphasis on ensuring that key messages were being communicated by Iris’s thought leader experts.
Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management: Unearthing factors that influence ethical elocution in crisis communication

Augustine Pang, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
Augustine.Pang@ntu.edu.sg

Yan Jin, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
School of Mass Communications
Virginia Commonwealth University
yjin@vcu.edu

Glen T. Cameron, Ph.D.
Professor and Maxine Wilson Gregory Chair in Journalism Research
Missouri School of Journalism
University of Missouri-Columbia
camerong@missouri.edu

Abstract

Despite the advances made offering a viable perspective in strategic conflict management, the contingency theory has not addressed a prevailing question: How can the theory inform organizations to communicate ethically with its publics, especially during crisis? The only guidance the theory offers is through its prescriptive variables, which prohibit either communication or more accommodative communication. However, given the exigency and dynamism of many situations along the life cycle of an issue, non-communicating may not be an alternative offered to organizations. This study aims to unearth a new set of factors called ethical variables that influence the organization’s stance by reviewing corporate social responsibility and conflict communication literature to propose drivers that influence ethical elocution in crisis communication. Responsibility is ethics manifested (Joyner & Payne, 2002). Six factors, some not addressed by the theory, were found, namely the role of public relations practitioners; role of dominant coalition; exposure of organizational business and to diversity of cultures; government influence and intervention; nature of crisis; and activism. Though the study is exploratory, it represents a major theoretical breakthrough in theory building with the aim of offering a practical approach – rather than a philosophical argument and persuasion – for practitioners to begin engaging in ethical elocation.
Introduction

The contingency theory of strategic conflict management, which began as an elaboration, qualification, and extension of the value of symmetry propounded in the excellence theory, has come into its own and emerged as an empirically tested perspective. It is grounded on the premise that complexity in strategic communication is best represented by enactment of stance on a continuum, which has, at one end of the continuum, advocacy, and at the other end, accommodation. At the poles of the continuum, advocacy means arguing exclusively for one’s own case, and accommodation, means entirely giving in to the other. The organization’s stance usually lies somewhere in between “at a given time regarding a given public” (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008, p. 136). Over the last 12 years since its inception, to add structure to the matrix of 87 factors that the organization could draw on to determine its stance, contingency theorists have unearthed three sets of variables. Factors that influence the organization’s stance on the continuum before it interacts with its publics are called predisposing variables (Cancel, Mitrook & Cameron, 1999). Factors that influence the organization’s position on the continuum during interaction with its publics are called situational (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999). Factors that prohibit organizations being accommodative with its publics are called proscriptive variables (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001).

Despite the advances made, the theory has not addressed a prevailing question: How can the theory inform organizations to communicate ethically with its publics, especially during crisis? Even though the contingency theory is a positive rather than normative theory (Pang, Jin, & Cameron, in press), hence it’s non-prescriptive stance, there is still a need to, as Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams (1998) argued, explicate and elaborate “the efficacy and ethical implications” (p. 41) of the adoption of a given stance in practice. Thus far, the only guidance the theory offers is through its proscriptive variables, which prohibit either communication or more accommodative communication when the issue at hand violates the individual’s moral conviction or the organization’s fundamental principles. However, given the exigency and dynamism of many situations along the life cycle of an issue, non-communicating may not be an alternative offered to organizations.

This study, thus, aims to unearth a new set of factors called ethical variables that influence the organization’s stance on the continuum before it interacts with its publics. To do so, this study reviews conflict communication and corporate social responsibility literature to propose exploratory factors that influence ethical elocution in crisis communication. It is argued that insights from CSR literature could provide the initial roadmap on what constitutes ethical decision making. CSR can inform ethics as one manifestation of being responsible is being ethical. Responsibility is ethics manifested (Joyner & Payne, 2002). Velasquez (1999) argued that having an ethical bearing enables an organization to act responsibly. Crandall, Parnell and Spillan (2010) argued that CSR was closely related to ethical management of crises. Insights from conflict literature would provide a moral bearing to ethical elocution, i.e., how does one manage conflict in a manner that leads to a morally acceptable resolution? Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman (2006) argued that individual, organizational, and contextual influencers all play its roles communicating ethically in moral conflicts.

The significance of this paper is three fold. First, this represents a breakthrough – albeit exploratory in nature – attempt to further develop the theory. The contingency theory has emerged as a dominant theory in crisis communication and conflict management (Pang, 2006;
Pang, Jin, & Cameron, in press) and attempts to enhance its explanatory powers would further our understanding of how ethical elocution can take place between the organization and its diverse publics. Second, the theory’s initial postulations of 87 factors influencing stance movements may have been more complex than imagined. This paper aims to streamline and understand the influence of pertinent factors in ethical crisis communication. Third, given the theory’s ability to generate new insights and expand the range of knowledge through its application and rootedness in the practical world (Pang, Cropp, & Cameron, 2006), this paper seeks to add to the dialogue and provide guidance to practitioners on what factors facilitate ethical elocution during crisis particularly when practitioners should be positioned as the “ethics counsel” (Bowen, 2008, p. 271). Unlike other conceptual work that explores moral philosophies in ethics (for instance, see Bowen, 2008a), this paper aims to offer a practical approach – rather than a philosophical argument and persuasion – for practitioners to begin engaging in ethical elocution.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first chronicles its origins, its theoretical platform, and the development of the theory into clusters of variables. The second reviews the CSR and conflict literature with a view of unearthing key factors that influence ethical and moral decision making and communication. The third and final section distills the key factors from the literature by relating to the contingency theory and identifies the ethical variables are derived.

**A Viable Perspective: Development of the Contingency theory**

*From Models of practice to practicing dynamic Stances*

Much of the literature on effective strategic communication had been built on Grunig and Grunig’s (1992) and Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) excellence theory. Four models of excellence have been posited:

- **Press Agentry/Publicity model**: Here, the organization is only interested in making its ethos and products known, even at the expense of half-truths;
- **Public Information model**: Predominantly characterized by one-way transfer of information from the organization to the publics, the aim is to provide information in a journalistic form;
- **Two-way asymmetric model**: Instead of a rigid transference of information, the organization uses surveys and polls to persuade the publics to accept its point of view;
- **Two-way symmetric model**: Here, the organization is more amenable to developing a dialogue with the publics. Communication flows both ways between the organization and the public and both sides are prepared to change their stances, with the aims of resolving the crisis in a professional, ethical and effective way.

The two-way symmetrical model has been positioned as normative theory, which stated how organizations should be practicing strategic communication that was regarded as the most ethical and effective manner (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig, 1996).

The contingency theory, however, saw a different reality. Cancel, Cameron, Sallot and Mitrook (1997) argued that strategic communication was more accurately portrayed along a continuum. Because strategic communication, particularly conflict management, was so complex and subtle, understanding it from any of the four models, particularly the two-way symmetrical model, would be far too limiting and rigid (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001, p. 245).
The organizational response to the strategic communication dilemma at hand, according to the contingency theory, which has, at one end of the continuum, advocacy, and at the other end, accommodation, was, thus, “It Depends”. The theory offered a matrix of 87 factors (see appendix 1), arranged thematically, that the organization could draw on to determine their stance. Between advocacy, which means arguing for one’s own case, and accommodation, which means giving in, was a wide range of operational stances that influenced strategic communication strategies and these entailed “different degrees of advocacy and accommodation.” (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997, p. 37). Along this continuum, the theory argued that any of the 87 factors, culled from strategic communication literature, excellence theory, observations, and grounded theory (Cameron, 1999, p. 31), could affect the location of an organization on that continuum “at a given time regarding a given public” (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999 p. 172; Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998, p. 40).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pure</th>
<th>Advocacy</th>
<th>Pure</th>
<th>Accommodation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The theory sought to understand the dynamics, within and without the organization that could affect an organization’s stance. By understanding these dynamics, it elaborated, specified the conditions, factors, and forces that under-girded such a stance.

**Identifying Factors that influence adoption of Stance**

Among the 87 variables, practitioners argued that there were some that featured more prominently than the others. There were factors that influenced the organization’s position on the continuum before it interacts with a public; and there were variables that influenced the organization’s position on the continuum during interaction with its publics. The former have been categorized as predisposing variables, while the latter, situational variables. Some of the well-supported predisposing factors Cancel, Mitrook and Cameron (1999) found included: (1) The size of the organization; (2) Corporate culture; (3) Business exposure; (4) Public relations access to dominant coalition; (5) Dominant coalition enlightenment; (6) Individual characteristics of key individuals, like the CEO. These factors were supported in the conflict literature. For instance, organizational culture had been found to be a key factor in ensuring the formulation of a sound crisis plan and excellent crisis management (Marra, 1998). Situational variables were factors that were most likely to influence how an organization related to a public by effecting shifts from a predisposed accommodative or adversarial stance along the continuum during an interaction. Some of the supported situational factors included: (1) Urgency of the situation; (2) Characteristics of the other public; (3) Potential or obvious threats; (4) Potential costs or benefit for the organization from choosing the various stances (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999).

The classification of the factors into two categories was by no means an attempt to order the importance of one over the other in a given situation. The situational variables could determine the eventual degree of accommodation an organization takes by “effecting shifts from a predisposed accommodative or adversarial stance along the continuum during an interaction with the external public” (Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998, p. 43). At the same time, an organization may not move from its predisposed stance if the situational variables are not compelling nor powerful enough to influence the position or if the opportunity costs of the situational variables do not lead to any visible benefits (Cameron, Cropp & Reber, 2001).
Consequently, both predisposing and situational factors could move the organization toward increased accommodation or advocacy. What was important in determining where the organization situates on the continuum involved the “weighing of many factors found in the theory” (Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot & McWilliams, 1998, p. 50). Notably, the factors explain movement either way along the continuum.

**Ethical and Moral Parameters: Need to identify a New Set of Ethical Variables**

Even as the contingency theorists were able to explain the complexity, contextual, and even the conundrum of a dialogic process, they had yet to answer one central question, which was whether communication could still take place with a morally repugnant public. In a subsequent test of the theory, Cameron, Cropp and Reber (2001) found that there were occasions when accommodation was not possible at all, due to moral, legal, and regulatory reasons. These were labeled proscriptive variables. Six were identified: (1) When there was moral conviction that an accommodative or dialogic stance towards a public may be inherently unethical; (2) when there was a need to maintain moral neutrality in the face of contending publics; (3) when legal constraints curtailed accommodation; (4) when there were regulatory restraints; (5) when senior management prohibited an accommodative stance; and lastly, (6) when the issue became a jurisdictional concern within the organization and resolution of the issue took on a constrained and complex process of negotiation. The proscriptive variables “did not necessarily drive increased or extreme advocacy, but did preclude compromise or even communication with a given public” (p. 253), argued Cameron, Cropp and Reber (2001).

The proscriptive variables remain the only guidance offered by the theory to explain why no communication is possible with a morally repugnant public, or why the organization cannot move towards greater accommodation with a public when the issue at hand violates the individual’s moral conviction or the organization’s fundamental principles. However, given the exigency and dynamism of a crisis, non-communicating may not be an alternative offered to organizations. It is thus critical to go beyond the proscriptives variables to identify a set of variables that address specifically what factors influence stance movement in ethical elocution during crises.

**Identifying factors that drive ethical elocution in crisis communication:**

**Insights from Corporate Social Responsibility**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (Dahlsrud, 2008, p. 7). In other words, CSR is a way in which ethics can be manifested in business. The level of CSR engagement within an organization is contingent on several internal and external factors. Insights from the literature consistently show the predominance of several factors.

**Internal factor: Dominant Coalition’s Values**

One of the factors that drive CSR in an organization is the values of the dominant coalition because they have the most control over the organization’s strategies and actions. As a result, their belief in operating their business ethically translates into support for ethical decision making and subsequent CSR programs (Trevino, 1986). Top management drives CSR programs
as they bring their beliefs and values to bear (Kim & Reber, 2008). The internal motivations of dominant coalition appear to stem from two avenues. Logsdon and Yuthas (1997) argued that the interaction of individual and environmental factors culminate in the dominant coalition’s ethical values which in turn determines the organization’s morality. Individual factors refer to personal character traits of the dominant coalition as well as their personal values. Environmental factors refer to stakeholder’s demands, industry standards and laws. These two factors allow the dominant coalition to determine the ethical rules guiding the organization which ultimately translates into how the organization does its business.

Similarly, Joyner and Payne (2002) posit two motivations behind businesses engaging in CSR, “ethical” and “Machiavellian”. The ethical motivation stems from the decision maker’s personal belief in doing the right thing, the individual’s values translate to his way of doing business and as a result, he believes his organization should act ethically as well. The Machiavellian motivation arises from the need to garner support from stakeholders by presenting the organization in a good light with the purpose of avoiding litigation or show that the organization is not only concerned about profit-making but also cares for its stakeholders. The Machiavellian motivation is similar to the environmental factor in Logsdon and Yuthas’s (1997) analysis as they both revolve around how factors external to the individual affect his ethical decision making. The ethical motivation is similar to the individual factor as they posit that the dominant coalition’s individual values affect their way of doing business.

**Internal factor: Shareholder Influence**

The values of shareholders also influence the stance of an organization regarding CSR (O’Rourke, 2003). In recent years, the rise of shareholder activism has changed the way organizations respond to activist demands because shareholders themselves are turning into activists. Shareholders’ ability to withdraw their investments from an organization should there not be active stakeholder dialogue that attempts to incorporate stakeholders demands for reporting and responsible behavior gives them a greater say in effecting changes within an organization. O’Rourke (2003) studied two cases of shareholder activism in the UK to gauge shareholder success in encouraging organizations to be socially responsible and found that it presents several opportunities for shareholders to convince organizations to be more receptive of CSR. First, shareholder activism makes the organization more aware of CSR issues as it garners attention from more than just the sustainability perspective. This is in contrast with external activists who are usually monitoring the sustainability of these activities. Second, shareholder activism almost always comprises demand for greater transparency which will allow them access to information previously denied. They can further their cause by understanding the CSR issues plaguing the organization and working towards solving the issues. Third, through the process of engagement between shareholders and the organization, CSR prerogatives gradually become prioritized in the organization. This is posited as a process which builds trust and makes CSR appear less of a threat. Four, it brings greater media coverage for CSR beyond just the environmental pages. All the above also have the cumulative effect of ensuring top management response. At this point, shareholder activism is limited in scope and influence as some organizations have restricted or even curtailed dialogue with shareholder activists.

**Internal factor: Organization Resources**
The amount of resources an organization has affects its ability to engage in CSR. Smaller organizations, for example, may lack the time, financial resources, skills and knowledge to engage in CSR activities (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Vives, 2006). Despite that, the difference is argued to lie in the extensiveness of CSR engagement whereby smaller organizations may choose to engage in CSR activities that pertain to their definitive stakeholders such as employees and customers instead of engaging in environmental CSR (Lee, et al., 2009).

Udayasankar (2008) proposed a more specific way of examining how an organization’s size affects its CSR engagement by identifying three factors. First, more visible firms are hypothesized to be more supportive of CSR activities as the high amount of stakeholder scrutiny they are under forces them to engage in activities that heighten their legitimacy and bolsters their reputation. At the same time, smaller firms with lesser visibility may also engage in CSR to gain legitimacy and enhance their reputation. Second, firms with a bounty of resources are hypothesized to be more adept in allocating resources to meeting stakeholder demands through CSR activities. At the same time, smaller firms with access to less resources may engage in CSR with the aim of reaping benefits such as gaining greater access to environmental, human (appeal to employees), social resources (be part of social networks). Third, the organizational structure allows bigger firms to tap on their well-established issues management system and expertise to handle external issues. Economies of scale also allows them respond to CSR demands at a lower cost while at the same time affecting greater social change and achieving better corporate social performance. At the same time, smaller firms can leverage on CSR’s ability to differentiate their products from competitors to improve sales. However, the effects of these three factors on an organization’s stance towards CSR have still not been empirically tested. From the above analysis, it can be surmized that organizations base their decisions of engaging or not engaging in CSR by weighing their internal capability with the advantages CSR brings.

**Internal factor: Public Relations’ Role in CSR function**

For an organization’s CSR engagement to be sustainable, a proper structure should be put in place designed to handle CSR related issues (Sumner, 2005). Despite discussions that CSR should be part of PR, it is conceivable that that PR plays no role in CSR at all (Kim & Reber, 2008). However, if public relations practitioners are willing to step up and include this as part of their functions, as some organizations have done (Wilcox & Cameron, 2009), it would help elevate CSR substantially. Kim and Reber (2008) identified four roles practitioners could assume. First, one where they play a significantly substantive role; second, one where they promote philanthropic acts vigorously; third, one where they play guardian to the organization adhering to high ethical standards and serving as a “corporate role model” 9 (p. 339); four, one where they play the communicator’s role and engage the stakeholders.

**Internal factor: Exposure to Global Business**

Chapple and Moon (2005) in their study of CSR reporting on the corporate websites of seven Asian countries found that organizations that operated beyond their national shores tended to report their CSR engagement. The authors concluded that organizations exposed to the international economy were more likely to engage in CSR lending support to Porter and Van der Linde’s (1995) assertion that organizations facing global competition tended to comply with stricter environmental standards. Chapple and Moon (2005) also argued that MNCs engage in
CSR because they are answerable to a wider range of stakeholders. Therefore, it is in their advantage to be socially responsible and proactive in communicating their CSR efforts.

Birch and Moon (2004) also examined small medium enterprises’ (SME) engagement in CSR and found that it may be due to the analogous effect brought forth by globalization, as MNCs may have proliferated CSR standards to SMEs. A ripple effect is created when large organizations, facing pressure from social activists abroad, transfer the need to be socially responsible to the local SMEs, who are part of their supply chain. SMEs will then be required to engage in CSR and even be CSR-certified (Kashinath, 2007). The increasing impetus for SMEs to engage in CSR to be in line with the demands of their larger business partners may have resulted in involuntary engagement in CSR (Kashinath, 2007).

External factor: Governmental Influence and Interference

Whitley (1992) argued that the complexities of examining CSR across global business systems were highly dependent on the level of governmental influences and interferences. Albareda, Lozano and Ysa (2007) also argued that although CSR started out as a concept borne by organization’s voluntary commitment, it is now under the purview of governments which are actively pushing for it through public policies. Welford (2005) elaborated on this by maintaining that the institutional laws and policies governing stakeholders, labor, and local communities were almost always present in an economically developed country, and this enabled a country to fare well with regards to CSR in these particular social areas. This is very evident in Singapore where the government collaborate with other organizations to facilitate CSR within organizations (Fox, Ward and Howard, 2002). To promote and advance CSR in Singapore, Singapore Compact was set up by the National Tripartite Initiative (NTI) (Singapore Compact, 2005). Its key objectives are based on the capabilities of CSR to foster competitive business advantages. On top of this, government agencies and industry associations collaborate with SMEs to implement various CSR activities.

Albareda, Lozano and Ysa (2007) proposed a “four ideal’ typology model” to categorize the government’s role in CSR in Europe. First, partnership. The government sets the framework by facilitating partnerships between businesses, NGOs and public organizations. Second, business in the community. This is when the government collaborates with businesses and provides incentives for them to work with the government to solve social problems. Third, sustainability and citizenship. Organizations assume the role of good corporate citizens and with the encouragement and incentives given by the government, they have to fulfill their responsibility to the community in which they operate. Four, through CSR policies where governments acknowledge the importance of CSR and actively engage the public and businesses on CSR issues.

External factor: Activism

Since the 1980s, the influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been increasing and their voices have been heard in many important public discussions. According to Naim (2000), NGO are seen as ballast to capitalism. Besides NGOs, governments, the community, and the media are the other actors that pressure organizations to take up what they feel are socially responsible practices (Doh & Guay, 2006; Garriga & Melé, 2004). In response, some organizations try to engage a wide spectrum of stakeholders in dialogue with the two-prong
aim of getting a clearer sense of stakeholders’ demands and eliciting empathy from stakeholders on the limitations of the organizations (Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003) which give rise to CSR activities.

According to Doh and Guay (2006), the institutional environments in a given society shape the meaning of CSR as well as how it is carried out by influencing government policy, organizational strategy and NGO activism targeted at organizations’ behavior. The authors examined the institutional environments and political history of Europe and US and found significant differences that led to varying power accrued to NGOs in effecting policy changes which ultimately resulted in greater support for NGOs and CSR. These institutional changes stemmed from social, political and economic factors as well as cultural factors such as religion and individualism. As a result, NGOs have risen in prominence as an important stakeholder based on Mitchell’s (1997) three attributes – power, legitimacy and urgency – that determine the relevance of stakeholders.

External factor: Exposure to Diverse Societal Culture

The meaning of sustainability and what it entails varies among countries as different societal cultures lead to individuals having different views with regards to CSR (Signitzer & Prexl, 2008). As a result, scholars have proclaimed culture as one of the most important influence in business decision making. For example, in a society largely defined as collectivistic and having long-term orientation such as India, the idea of having sustainable growth for the future generation is given higher priority than in individualistic society that are more present-oriented.

A recent study that examined the corporate social orientation of Japanese and Americans found (Smith, Singal, & Lamb, 2007) significant differences in the way people from these two nations view the responsibilities of businesses as delineated by Carroll (1991). College students from Japan and America (N = 806) were surveyed and it was found that Japanese placed greater emphasis on the ethical responsibilities of the firm. On a national level, this concern translated into many anti-corruption laws. American respondents, on the contrary, favored economic responsibilities, perhaps explaining why American organizations placed more emphasis on profitability as opposed to CSR engagement. American respondents were also found to place more emphasis on organization’s legal responsibilities which may be accrued to the comprehensiveness of American laws. However, the Japanese’s belief in social agreement, accommodation and conflict avoidance could also explain their lower priority on organization’s legal responsibilities. While respondents from both nations ranked the discretionary responsibilities of an organization last, Japanese respondents placed more emphasis on it because they view organizations as corporate citizens and hence they had to be responsible to society.

On another level, societal culture also affects the organization’s culture “because the human resources of an organization are acculturated into the culture of their societies” (Sriramesh, Kim, & Tagasaki, 1999, p. 273). A study was conducted among top managers of 15 countries and found that cultural factors affected the extent to which the dominant coalition supported CSR or the aspects of CSR they were more attuned to (Waldman et al., 2006). The authors examined CSR as comprising of responsibility towards shareholders, stakeholders and the community and found that the societal culture and the ‘firm-level leadership’ affected the dominant coalitions view of CSR. Top managers in poorer countries were found to be more concerned with societal welfare. A probable explanation given by the authors was that
governments of poorer countries were usually less capable of providing for the welfare of its citizens, hence managers might feel more personally responsible for their welfare. On the other hand, managers from prosperous nations tend to leave societal welfare in the hands of the government or other institutions. Managers operating in collectivistic cultures were found to be more supportive of CSR as the long term impact of managerial decision on the society is considered. Cultures with great power distance were also found to lack support for CSR due to an inclination towards self-centeredness and the use of power to benefit oneself as opposed to stakeholders.

Identifying factors that drive ethical elocution in crisis communication: Insights from Conflict Literature

Conflict scholars have studied public moral conflicts and provided insights on how to communicate in moral conflicts both in content and in process. These recommendations shed lights on what ethical variables might drive the organizational stances in communicating with conflicting publics.

External factor: The Nature of Conflict

A moral conflict is one in which groups in conflict have “incommensurate moral orders… a moral order is the theory by which a group understands its experience and makes judgments about proper and improper actions” (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 51). Moral conflicts are typically intractable, which in public relations context, can “occur within or between groups (as evidence in the antiabortion-prochoice conflict)” and “persist for long periods of time and resist every attempt to resolve them constructively” (Coleman, 2006; p. 533). Moral conflicts are typically “interminable” (having no endpoint or resolution), “morally attenuated” (the tendency of those who engage in conflict to become just what they are fighting), and “rhetorically attenuated” (the tendency of groups in conflict to speak of the other group in negative terms and to have a limited understanding of the other group’s moral order) (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 68). It is a daunting task for any communicator to decide whether and how to use ethical and effective communication to facilitate conflict resolution by addressing the moral order bipolarity and identifying opportunities for win-win situation and constructive negotiation.

According to Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman (2006), public moral conflicts, “sometimes termed cultural wars, ethnic conflicts, ideological conflicts, and intractable conflicts, are created when people publicly take opposing sides of a values-laden issue” (p. 561). Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) further cited that “the greatest problem of all is that each side is compelled by its highest and best motives to act in ways that are repugnant to the other” (p. 7). As Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman (2006) summarized, the challenge of moral conflict communication lies in two ways. First, to find a way to bring people representing seemingly irreconcilable differences together; and second, to create a process in which people are both interested and willing to find a path that allows acknowledgment and expression of the other’s view point. Therefore, if an organization chooses to engage in communication, taking either more accommodative or advocating stance, it must decide the content, format and process of communication that would be strategically beneficial to the organization as well as constructive and meaningful in the eyes of the morally opposing public. Practitioners need to identify the way to bring representatives of both parties together and choose the most appropriate stance to allow both parties’ values and interests acknowledged and expressed.
Internal factor: Role of Practitioners in Engaging the Other

As Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman (2006) candidly pointed out, holding seemingly disparate perspectives is difficult, as different moral orders of different groups are an expression of a set of complex obligations, prohibitions, duties, rights, and aspirations rooted deeply in the cultural, historical and organizational soil. Therefore, “[r]evolving moral conflicts, minimizing moral conflicts, or at least trying to bring polarized parties to the same table to communicate with one another can be difficult. There are so many levels of complexity to consider and the struggle against the negative influences that may want to perpetuate the conflict can be very difficult” (Fisher-Yoshida & Wasserman, 2006; p. 564).

To tackle the complexity and understand the different levels of conflict, practitioners can learn from the lessons from conflict resolution and take a more proactive approach to engaging in more ethical communication while standing firmly by the organizational principles and moral standards. First, practitioners need to clearly perceive and help the organization to perceive the views of the opposing side in a moral conflict. This perception clarification “involves the capacity to see beyond one’s own viewpoint and to correctly represent as well as to respectfully engage with those of the other” (Fisher-Yoshida & Wasserman, 2006; p. 563). As Buber (1955) mentioned, in moral conflict communication, “experiencing the other side” (p. 96) is crucial, which is a quality of being in relationship by being open to the beliefs of the other side while staying true to one’s own beliefs. Second, the moral conflict itself could be further dissected and dealt with differently at different levels. Practitioners need to further analyze the issue under conflict, separating the elements that are completely against the organizational moral standard from those that might not be conflicting with the other party’s demand diametrically. Third, in handling moral conflicts, practitioners should keep the vision of building sustainable ethical communication process, which might lead to possible relationship transcendence. To transcend moral conflict, a shift is required in the pattern of “logic, commitment and obligations” (Fisher-Yoshida & Wasserman, 2006; p. 564).

Relevance of insights to Contingency theory: What we can distill and infer

From the review, it is evident some factors were more prominent than others.

In this section, we would divide these factors into two sets of thematically consolidated and categorized variable: Those that found greater and consistent support, and those that found lesser support. The factors that found greater support were the role of public relations practitioners; role of dominant coalition; exposure of organizational business and to diversity of cultures; government influence and intervention; nature of crisis; and activism. The factors that found lesser support were shareholder influence and organizational resources.

Role of Public Relations Practitioners

The CSR literature found that the more involved practitioners were, the more entrenched and engaging would the CSR work be while the conflict literature showed that if practitioners took a more proactive approach to engaging in more ethical communication, the organization would abide by its principles and moral standards. We may be preaching to the choir, but what is evident is that if practitioners are highly involved and empowered to play the role of “ethical conscience” (Bowen, 2008, p. 290) as well as performing the role of “ethics
counsel to the dominant coalition” (p. 290) who would act in the “best of interests of both their organizations and their publics” (p. 290), the organization is likely to practice ethical elocution in crisis communication. The contingency theory, which characterized the PR access to dominant coalition as a predisposing factor (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008), may not have given justice to the critical role PR plays.

What this means: A clearer description comes from Pang’s (2006) conflict positioning conceptualization, which termed it involvement, autonomy and influence of PR practitioners. Borrowing insights from Pang (2006), it may mean that when the public relations practitioners have more influence and autonomy in crisis communication, the organization is likely to adopt a more accommodative stance with the aim of positioning the organization in a good light. It is therefore likely to mount a consistent defense based on the use of more accommodative repair strategies such as corrective action, and mortification. On the contrary, when public relations practitioners have less influence and autonomy in crisis communication, the organization is likely to employ a less accommodative stance. It is likely to utilize less accommodative repair strategies such as denial, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness.

Role of Dominant Coalition

The CSR literature found that the values of the dominant coalition were important as it had the most control over an organization’s strategies and actions. Indeed, the dominant coalition dominates organizational life. Nothing happens in the organization without its sanction. The contingency theory characterized this as a predisposing factor and examined whether the dominant coalition is enlightened (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008). Related contingency studies found similar insights. Shin, Park and Cameron (2006) reinforced found that the involvement of the dominant coalition played a dominant role in defining the release of negative information and in the handling of conflict situations. Pang, Cropp and Cameron (2006) found that the most important public was the dominant coalition. Crandall, Parnell and Spillan (2010) argued that the dominant coalition is instrumental in establishing an “ethical environment” (p. 200) within the organization. Pang (2006) went a step further and argued that the dominant coalition should be highly involved during crisis.

What this means: Drawing insights from Pang’s (2006) conflict positioning conceptualization, it may mean that when the dominant coalition is more involved in crisis communication, the organization is likely to adopt a less accommodative stance if it is bounded by moral, legal, regulatory and jurisdictional constraints. The repair strategies used are likely to be less accommodative strategies such as denial, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness. On the contrary, when the dominant coalition is more involved in crisis communication, the organization is likely to practice a more accommodative stance if the moral, regulatory, legal, and jurisdictional constraints do not prohibit it from entering into communication with its publics. The repair strategies used are likely to be more “accommodative” strategies such as corrective action, and mortification.

Exposure of Organizational Business and to Diversity of Cultures

The CSR literature found that organizations that had global operations, particularly MNCs, tended to support and report their CSR activities. The contingency theory, which characterized this as a predisposing factor, termed it business exposure (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008). A logical inference would be that the more exposed to a diversity of contexts an organization is in its CSR activities, the more enlightened the organization would be in appreciating – even tolerant – of the nuances, demands and contradictions placed on it. This
would certainly have a strong impact on the stance it adopts in its ethical elocution during crisis. Corollary to the above factor, the CSR literature also found that exposure to diverse societal culture had an impact on how organizations adapted their CSR programs to meet specific needs in different contextual settings. The contingency theory characterized this as the general political/social environment/external culture that the organization operates in (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008).

What this means: Crandall, Parnell and Spillan (2010) argued that greater exposure to the global environment can leave the organization vulnerable. Coupled with the vulnerability faced by specific industries, these could present formidable “ethical boulders” (p. 199). A logical trajectory would then mean that organizations that have global operations may adopt a less accommodative stance when confronted with crises. On the contrary, this may not be the case. In their study of how MNCs managed conflicts in South Korea, Choi and Cameron (2005) found that these organizations tended to adopt more accommodative stances because they were fearful of the South Korean media and the local culture. Even if the MNCs were to adopt less accommodative stances at the beginning of the conflict, they would move towards accommodation once the powerful Korean media covered the story or when “an issue is related to national sentiment” (p. 185).

Government Influence and Intervention

The CSR literature found that governments play a pervasive role in encouraging and regulating CSR activities through implementation of CSR-friendly policies, establishment of CSR-focused institutions and by enacting laws to ensure organizations observe and practice minimum levels of engagement with the community. Despite the importance of the government, it is not a factor in the contingency theory and is often subsumed under the characteristics of the external public. However, studies employing the theory have highlighted the critical roles governments play in managing crises (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2006/2007; Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2004). Pang (2006) also elaborated the facilitating role the Singapore government played in dealing with two air crashes in 1997 and 2000 even though it involved the aircraft belonged to a commercial entity, Singapore Airlines.

What this means: Previous studies (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2006/2007; Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2004) found that organizations facing crisis would often have to follow the lead when the government intervenes in a crisis. Even if the organization may have adopted a less accommodative stance initially, the government, by virtue of its moral, legal and regulatory prerogatives, can sway the organization to move towards accommodation if the government deems it to be the “right” thing to do. For instance, Lee, Lee, and Pang (2009) in their study of how the Singapore government restored confidence in the charity sector in the wake of a massive charity scandal, found that swift government intervention exerted pressure on executives of an NGO (National Kidney Foundation) to back down from their advocacy stance. Further interventions like insisting on immediate public accountability forced the organization to eventuate on an accommodative stance.

Nature of Crisis

The conflict literature found that conflicts that border on moral issues involving the organization present the greatest challenge in ethical elocution during crises. Though every crisis can have a moral component – for instance, a factory fire that wiped out the economy in Lawrence, Massachusetts just before Christmas moved the CEO to continue paying the workers
because it was the morally right thing to do (see Ulmer, 2001) – it is important for organizations to differentiate crises that can be managed in a straightforward manner and those in shades of gray. The contingency theory did not specifically address this and subsumed under urgency of situation as a situational variable.

What this means: First, it is possible to manage organization-public conflict through ethical communication via appropriate conflict positioning. An organization should always strive to communicate with its publics whenever possible, but it does not necessarily always have to accommodate all the time. With a solid understanding of the issue under conflict, practitioners should further assess the moral conflict as a threat according to the situational demands and organizational resource to handle the conflict as well as whether ethically there is any room to accommodate or to negotiate (and at what level) with the opponent. In addition, the understanding of the terms such as accommodation and advocacy should not be termed too rigidly. For example, the gesture of listening to all aspects of the other party’s issue arguments is a stance of accommodation. On the other hand, practitioners should communicate to reflect authentically the organization’s moral standard and beliefs.

Second, practitioners should recommend the organization to only take different stances toward different publics but also toward different levels of the conflict issue. An organization could take an advocating stance on the core of a moral issue and prohibit further communication on a given issue aspect, but in the meanwhile it could be open for further discussion on possible accommodation on other aspects of the issue under conflict.

Third, in ethical communication with the opponent public, the organization should strategically position itself in appropriate level of emotional engagement and, if possible, facilitate the conflict coping process of the other party. Research showed that the level of emotional engagement with the story of the other side affected “the capacity to hear it, especially when it conflicted deeply with an alternative existing story they held” (Fisher-Yoshida & Wasserman, 2006; p. 577). By providing a forum for both parties to cope with conflict stress via emotional venting and emotional support, the organization might pave smoother way for future communication competitive advantage while cultivating a less hostile external environment.

Activism

The CSR literature found that activism, particularly by NGOs, could influence the level of CSR engagements by organizations. Conceivably, activists have different levels of influence on different issues in different societies. For instance, environmentalist group Sierra Club whose members were vegetarians certainly had much manifest influence in determining ranching issues in Montana (Cameron, 1999) than, for instance, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty towards Animals (SPCA) in Singapore. The contingency theory did not address activism specifically and subsumed it under external threats.

What this means: Borrowing from Pang’s (2006) conflict positioning conceptualization, it may mean that when the threats posed by activists appear to be high, organizations may be more likely to adopt a more accommodative stance in crisis communications to resolve the crisis. The repair strategies used are likely to be corrective action and mortification. On the contrary, when the threats posed by activists appear to be low, the organization is more likely to adopt a less accommodative stance. The repair strategies used are more likely to be denial, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness.

The factors that found lesser support were shareholder influence and organizational resources. These are discussed briefly as the CSR literature found their impact minimal. For
instance, for shareholder influence, this remains limited in scope as organizations have imposed restricted or even curtailed dialogue with shareholder activists. For organizational resources, the closest association would be the contingency theory’s predisposing factor (size of the organization), it is argued that literature found that size need not necessarily matter in ethical elocution during crisis. One would expect more in responsible and ethical communication from a large organization like Enron (see Seeger and Ulmer, 2003). However, it was a comparatively smaller outfit, Malden Mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts, that was heralded as the epitome of ethical elocution (Ulmer, 2001).

**Conclusion**

This conceptual paper had set out to unearth a new set of factors called ethical variables in the contingency theory that influence the organization’s stance on the continuum before it interacts with its publics. It is premised on the basis that if the contingency theory of strategic conflict management had offered a viable perspective in portraying a realistic description of how organizations manage conflicts (Pang, Jin, & Cameron, in press), then strengthening the theory’s explanatory power, generating new factors, and expanding its range of potential knowledge would be a consequent trajectory in the development of the theory. Chaffee and Berger (1987) argued these were characteristics of a theory’s rigor.

To engage in this task, this study has reviewed conflict communication and corporate social responsibility literature to identify the key factors that would influence ethical elocution. CSR literature has provided the initial roadmap on what constitutes ethical decision making, and consequently ethical elocution during crises while the conflict literature has provided a moral bearing to ethical elocution, i.e., how does one manage conflict in a manner that leads to a morally acceptable resolution? From the literature, the study has unearthed six factors that influence ethical elocution, namely the role of public relations practitioners; role of dominant coalition; exposure of organizational business and to diversity of cultures; government influence and intervention; nature of crisis; and activism. These factors are exploratory and far from exhaustive. However, they present a starting point for further discussions to take place and a practical approach for practitioners to engage in. Future research needs to be developed to test the validity and reliability of this new set of ethical factors using qualitative methods (such as indepth interviews with senior practitioners) and quantitative methods (i.e. practitioner surveys in different contexts and situations) to further explore the structure and dimensionality of the ethical aspect of organizational conflict stance. In addition, consideration should be given to how these factors might be associated with other contingency factors in contributing to different degrees of accommodation the organization could effectively and ethically take toward different publics and different aspects of a given conflict issue.

Not since the last cluster of variables, the proscriptive variables (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001), has the theory made a major theoretical breakthrough. Besides theory building, the authors believe that organizations which strive to be ethical can benefit from understanding the factors that can impact its stances and concomitant strategies/tactics as it enters into communication. Our motivation to do this is closely tied to Albert Einstein’s call for organizations to engage in ethical elocution. In an address to CALTECH in 1931, he said, “Concern for man himself and his fate must always form the chief interest of all technical endeavors, concern for the great unsolved problems of the organization of labor and the distribution of goods – in order that the creations of our mind shall be a blessing (italics added) and not a curse to mankind. Never forget this in the midst of your diagrams and equations” (cited in Bartlett, 1992, p. 635).
That is our humble endeavor.
References


Abstract

The purpose of this study was to test an integrated model of corporate social responsibility (CSR) for relationship management in public relations. A two-step approach to structural equation modeling was used to examine hypothesized associations among CSR, organization-public relationships (OPRs), company evaluations, and behavioral intentions. The results revealed that CSR initiatives were positively associated with OPRs and had even more of a positive influence on the relationships than did corporate ability. CSR also appeared to have an indirect effect on company evaluations through OPRs, as well as both direct and indirect effects on behavioral intentions (purchase, employment, and investment). The findings of this study point to the need for an organization to incorporate CSR aspects into its business activities and maintain its commitment to CSR. The adoption of CSR helps an organization promote its sustainable competitive edge while serving societal needs.
Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives have become more common in recent years due to various programs, including philanthropy, employee volunteerism, and other innovative endeavors. Recent examples of CSR initiatives include Ben & Jerry’s sustainability efforts, The Body Shop’s campaign for a ban on animal testing, and Starbucks RED and Shared Planet campaigns. In academic terms, CSR is defined as “voluntary corporate commitment to exceed the explicit and implicit obligations imposed on a company by society’s expectations of conventional corporate behavior” (Falck & Heblich, 2007, p. 247). CSR is one of the two dimensions of corporate associations by which the public identify and evaluate companies (Brown & Dacin, 1997). The other type is corporate ability (CA), which refers to a company’s skill in terms of producing quality products and services. Although both CA and CSR influence the public’s evaluation of a company, the company’s character, as reflected by its CSR actions, may have more enduring values and provide more distinctive advantages than other CA-based aspects of the corporate identity (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Maintaining CSR can be conceived as an investment in a company’s future. Through practicing CSR activities, corporations can improve their images and reputations, as well as generate greater profits, while making a positive impact on society (Marin & Ruiz, 2007; Wigley, 2008). Recognizing the potential impact of CSR initiatives, many companies have recently attempted to leverage CSR in order to develop and enhance strategic advantages over their competitors (Sen, Bhattacharya, & Korschun, 2006). More importantly, the fundamental idea behind CSR further suggests its importance in building and maintaining organization-public relationships (OPRs) since the quality and longevity of such relationships are determined by the extent to which those expectations are met (Ledingham, 2003). In Ledingham and Bruning’s (2000) study, consumers reported experiencing a stronger relationship with and loyalty to an organization when they were aware of the organization’s investment and involvement in their community. Therefore, CSR can serve as the cornerstone for organizations’ facilitating long-term relationships with the public. Organizations’ efforts to build satisfying relationships with the public will, in turn, improve the public’s attitudes toward the organizations and encourage the public to purchase more of their products and take supportive actions for them (Ki & Hon, 2007).

Although increasing attention has been accorded to CSR and relationship management as prominent themes in the field of public relations, very little is known about the linkages among CSR, OPRs, and attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Given the need for an integrated model of CSR for relationship management, the purpose of this study was to explore the role of CSR in promoting well-developed OPRs and positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Therefore, this study attempted to explore two main questions: (a) How do CSR and CA affect relationships between an organization and its publics? and (b) Does CSR directly affect the publics’ evaluations of an organization and their behavioral intentions (i.e., purchase, employment, and investment), or does it affect those outcomes through OPRs? This study provides valuable insights into how CSR works for enhancing OPRs and other desirable outcomes and thereby contributes to the growing body of knowledge on CSR in public relations. For the practice of public relations, this study reinforces the importance of CSR as a viable and robust strategy that can bring long-term benefits both to organizations and society in general.
Literature Review

CSR Initiatives and Relationship Building

In broad terms, CSR basically benefits society and is often viewed as interrelated and interdependent with business ethics (Joyner & Payne, 2002; Valentine & Fleischman, 2008). CSR can be defined as a “voluntary corporate commitment to exceed the explicit and implicit obligations imposed on a company by society’s expectations of conventional corporate behavior” (Falck & Heblich, 2007, p. 247). Understood as ethical behaviors derived from organizational values and culture, CSR initiatives assist an organization in establishing a desirable corporate identity that enhances its credibility and legitimacy (David, Kline, & Dai, 2005). In terms of corporate identity, CSR can be described as an important aspect of corporate associations, which is “a generic label for all the information about a company that a person holds” (Brown & Dacin, 1997, p. 69).

Brown and Dacin (1997) propose two types of corporate associations, namely corporate ability and corporate social responsibility. While CA involves a company’s ability to provide quality products and services, CSR associations reflect a company’s commitment to its perceived moral, ethical, and social obligations. Even though both CA and CSR influence assorted publics’ perceptions of an organization, the organization’s character as reflected by its CSR actions may have more enduring value and provide more distinctive advantages than other CA-based aspects of corporate associations (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

The CSR orientations of organizations encompass economic benefits, conformance to legal and ethical expectations, and philanthropic involvement (Uhlaner, Goor-Balk, & Masurel, 2004). Carroll (1979, 1991) proposes that CSR be classified into four categories, including economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary (or philanthropic) responsibilities. Economic responsibilities pertain to obligations companies should meet as the basic economic unit of society (Carroll, 1991). In other words, while companies need to produce goods and services for members of society, they also aspire to increase their profits for their owners and shareholders. Legal responsibilities, on the other hand, pertain to the legal framework, rules, and regulations imposed by the society in which they operate that must be obeyed and within which companies are to achieve their economic goals (Carroll, 1991). Beyond complying with codified laws, ethical responsibilities embrace business decisions and activities that are acceptable to the society (Carroll, 1991). Thus, ethical components of CSR include behaviors and activities that are not necessarily forced on companies by the law but that are expected by society. For example, companies may choose to act in environmentally friendly ways in accordance with ethical responsibilities even if they are not legally obliged. The final category of CSR, discretionary (or philanthropic) responsibilities, is purely voluntary in nature. Business practices and activities derived from philanthropy can show an organization’s good will or desire to make contributions to improving welfare in the society (Carroll, 1991). As the highest criterion of CSR, discretionary responsibilities include such activities as generous donations to charities and significant efforts to solve problems in the community, actions that go beyond societal expectations.

CSR dimensions can also be classified in terms of targeted public groups, including customers, employees, and community (Sotorrio & Sanchez, 2008). Although specific aspects of CSR programs are designed to meet the expectations of investors or employees, customers may evaluate those CSR programs from a more holistic viewpoint (Pirsch, Gupta, & Grau, 2007). This idea suggests that CSR activities tailored to a specific group of publics may not only satisfy the targeted group, but may also enhance other groups’ or individuals’ perceptions of the
company and its behaviors by virtue of the good will underlying those programs. Thus, a company’s commitment to CSR may cultivate a positive public image of the company, thereby motivating several of its publics to engage in a relationship with it (Marin & Ruiz, 2007). A number of previous studies suggest that CSR initiatives provide competitive benefits for an organization in terms of financial gains and intangible outcomes, such as public good will and favorable corporate image (e.g., Murray & Vogel, 1997; Wigley, 2008). Publics’ awareness of an organization’s CSR performances may lead to positive company evaluations. This evaluation is processed and incorporated into the information of consumers’ attitudes toward an organization (Brown & Dacin, 1997). In addition, CSR initiatives may play an important role in increasing intent to purchase products, seek employment, and invest resources in a company (Sen et al., 2006). CSR may represent a company’s attempt to “incorporate common sense policies into corporate strategy, culture, and day-to-day decision making to meet stakeholders’ needs” (Werther & Chandler, 2005, p. 324). Meeting social norms and expectations often determines success or failure in managing long-term relationships (Ledingham, 2003). In this vein, if an organization conforms to legal and ethical expectations, it creates organizational legitimacy and credibility (David et al., 2005), which in turn may help the organization build trust and long-term relationships with its various publics. From this perspective, an organization’s commitment to CSR may actually serve as a company’s cornerstone to the promotion of long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with its publics. Based on this line of reasoning, Hypothesis 1 posits the following:  

**H1**: The perceptions of CSR initiatives are positively associated with favorable relationships between an organization and its publics.  

Even though CA and CSR are considered to have equivalent roles in generating organizational legitimacy and credibility (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006), a company’s good deeds may provide a distinctive competitive edge over CA in developing positive, long-term OPRs. This tendency may arise if CSR performances are viewed as ethical behaviors derived from organizational values and culture, which often motivate people to identify themselves with the organization (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is as follows:  

**H2**: CSR perceptions have a more positive influence on OPRs than do CA perceptions.

### Relationship Management in Public Relations

The concept of relationship management has been an important topic in public relations for recent decades, suggesting that the main function of public relations is to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ki & Hon, 2007; Ledingham, 2003). A relationship in public relations, often referred as OPR, is defined as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political, and/or cultural well-being of the other entity” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 62). From a relational perspective, public relations can contribute to enhancing mutual understanding and benefits between organizations and their publics through the management of OPRs (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Proposing relationship management as a general theory in public relations, Ledingham (2003) noted that evaluations of relationship dimensions can demonstrate the state of ongoing OPRs and further predict publics’ perceptions and intended behaviors. Corresponding to this notion, public relations researchers have paid considerable attention to developing scales for measuring the dimensions of OPR (e.g., Bruning & Galloway, 2003; Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Kim, 2001), as well as to examining the linkage between well-developed...
relationships and positive outcomes (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Hong & Yang, 2009; Ki & Hon, 2007; Yang, 2007). Among those relationship scales, this study adopted Hon and Grunig’s (1999) because several studies have used and tested their indicators for measuring OPRs (e.g., Huang, 2001; Ki & Hon, 2007; Yang, 2007). Hon and Grunig’s measurement of OPRs involves six relational dimensions: trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, and communal relationship. However, only the first four indicators are considered to reflect the state of ongoing OPRs because exchange and communal relationships represent types of OPRs rather than underlying dimensions (Hung, 2005).

Trust is defined as “one’s party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 3). Trust builds on the belief that one’s future needs will be satisfied by another’s actions (Anderson & Weitz, 1989). As one of the fundamental factors in facilitating positive relational outcomes, trust requires confidence in an exchange party’s reliability and integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In this respect, Hon and Grunig (1999) identified three underlying dimensions of trust: integrity, dependability, and competence. Integrity refers to the belief in an organization’s fairness. Dependability is the belief that an organization will comply with its promises, while competence is the belief in an organization’s ability to keep its promises (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

Control mutuality refers to “the degree to which parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence one another” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 3). Power differences are inevitable in the social context because resources are limited, and various parties desire those resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). However, when such an imbalance of power shifts excessively toward organizations, they may abuse the power over their publics solely for their own benefit. Thus, an appropriate restriction on each party is necessary to maintain a good relationship.

Satisfaction is defined as the degree of positive feelings that one has about another (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Satisfaction occurs in a relationship when positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced (Hecht, 1978). A favorable relationship can be maintained if parties in the relationship provide sufficient benefits to each other and both parties feel satisfied with the relationship (Roloff, 1981). Commitment is the degree to which both parties invest their resources in maintaining a relationship (Hon & Grunig, 1999). As the degree of commitment to a partner in a relationship increases, the desire to end the relationship decreases (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thus, commitment is considered a core factor in promoting a continuous, long-term relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Supporting the importance of cultivating good OPRs, several studies have demonstrated that well-managed OPRs enhance publics’ attitudes toward an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Ki & Hon, 2007), perceptions of organizational reputation (Hong & Yang, 2009; Yang, 2007), and behavioral intentions (Bruning & Ralston, 2000; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) and even lead to actual behavior (Bruning, 2002). For example, Ki and Hon (2007) found that perceptions of OPRs influence attitudes and behavioral intentions toward an organization among members of a key public. In their study, satisfaction and control mutuality appeared to be strong influential factors in inducing positive attitudes and supportive behaviors toward the organization. Hong and Yang (2009) also showed that relational satisfaction was positively associated with strong customer-company identification and favorable word-of-mouth recommendations. In Coombs and Holladay’s (2001) study, well-managed OPRs served as a buffer protecting an organization’s image. Specifically, people having a favorable (or neutral) relationship were more likely to evaluate an organization’s reputation positively than were those having an unfavorable relationship.
All of these research findings have supported the notion that OPRs play a key role in influencing publics’ perceptions, evaluations, and behavioral intentions. In other words, favorable relationships between an organization and its publics may lead to positive evaluations of the organization and its products, promote product purchase, and increase supportive behaviors toward the organization (Hong & Yang, 2009; Ki & Hon, 2007). Thus, Hypotheses 3 and 4 predict the following:

**H3**: Favorable OPRs are positively associated with positive evaluations of an organization.

**H4**: Favorable OPRs are positively associated with behavioral intentions (purchase, employment, and investment) toward an organization.

This study also attempted to explore the role of OPRs in the relationships between CSR performances and the intended outcomes (i.e., positive evaluations and behavioral intentions). Focusing on the mediating role of OPR, Research Question 1 asks how CSR initiatives affect evaluative and behavioral outcomes.

**RQ1**: Does CSR have a direct effect on publics’ evaluations of an organization and their behavioral intentions, or does it affect these outcomes through OPRs?

**Methods**

This study used an online survey with a sample of undergraduate students to collect data. Six companies from different industrial categories were selected for this study: Hewlett-Packard and Dell in Technology, Nike and Adidas in Consumer Products, and Haagen-Dazs and Ben & Jerry’s in Dairy Food. These pairs of companies were chosen because one in each category is perceived as being actively involved in CSR activities, while the other company is seen as being an industry competitor (Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, Burson-Marsteller, & Landor, 2009). The companies are also relevant to the survey sample. Rather than using a single corporation, the use of multiple corporations for testing the hypothesized associations may help to increase the generalizability of the proposed model across companies. To avoid sensitizing participants to measurement instruments, each participant was randomly given a questionnaire asking about one of the six companies (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

**Participants**

Participants were recruited from undergraduate communication courses at two large research universities, and extra credit was given to students for their participation. A total of 500 students participated in the study, but responses from 15 students were dropped from the data because they failed to complete the survey. Thus, the total sample size used for data analysis was 485. A larger percentage of participants were females (79.2%, n = 384) than males (20.8%, n = 101). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 37, with a mean age of 20. The class standings of participants were as follows: 3.3% (n = 16) were first-year students, 39.8% (n = 193) were second-year students, 33.2% (n = 161) were third-year students, 18.4% (n = 89) were fourth-year students, and 5.4% (n = 26) were fifth-year and graduate students. The majority of participants were Caucasian (82.5%, n = 400), while 5.6% (n = 27) were African American, 4.3% (n = 21) were Hispanic or Latino, 3.5% (n = 17) were Asian, and 4.1% (n = 20) were in other racial categories.
Data Collection Procedure
This study used an Internet-based survey, and students who signed up for the survey received an e-mail inviting them to participate in the experiment. The e-mail cover letter included the Web address for an informed consent form and questionnaire. Each participant was randomly assigned to a questionnaire asking about one of the six companies. As a result, participants were fairly evenly distributed to the sampled companies: 17.3% (n = 84) for Hewlett-Packard, 19.2% (n = 93) for Dell, 15.7% (n = 76) for Nike, 15.5% (n = 75) for Adidas, 16.7% (n = 81) for Haagen-Dazs, and 15.7% (n = 76) for Ben & Jerry’s. Participants were first asked about their perceptions of CA, CSR, and OPRs regarding the company. Then, they responded to questions measuring their evaluations of the company and their behavioral intentions toward it. At the end of the questionnaire, there were questions about demographic information, such as gender, age, school year, and race.

Measures
Corporate ability. Five items taken from Marin and Ruiz (2007) were used to assess participants’ perceptions of CA. These items included the following: “[Company name] is a leader in the industry,” “[Company name] offers a high quality product,” and “[Company name] offers good customer service” (α = .847). These items used a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree.”

Corporate social responsibility. CSR was measured by 22 items adapted from previous research (Carroll, 1991; David et al., 2005). This CSR scale consisted of four sub-dimensions: economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities. Economic responsibilities were measured using four items, such as “[Company name] maintains a high level of operating efficiency” and “[Company name] strives to continuously improve the quality of its products” (α = .802). Legal responsibilities were assessed with four items, such as “[Company name] ensures that products meet all legal standards” and “[Company name] meets all environmental regulations” (α = .808). Five items were used to measure ethical responsibility: “[Company name] provides full product information to customers” and “[Company name] acts responsibly toward the environment” (α = .841). Discretionary responsibilities were measured by four items, such as “[Company name] contributes resources to not-for-profit organizations” and “[Company name] contributes resources to the local economy (businesses and schools)” (α = .799). All of these items were measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree.”

Organization-public relationships. Relationships were measured in terms of trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction. To measure these relationship constructs, Hon and Grunig’s (1999) relationship items were adopted because this scale has been widely used to assess OPRs (Ki & Hon, 2007). Trust was measured using six items, such as “[Company name] treats people like me fairly and justly” and “[Company name] can be relied on to keep its promises” (α = 896). Control mutuality was assessed with four items, such as “[Company name] believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate” and “[Company name] really listens to what people like me have to say” (α = .785). Commitment was measured by four items, such as “I can see that [company name] wants to maintain a relationship with people like me” and “There is a long-lasting bond between [company name] and people like me” (α = .855). Four items assessing satisfaction included “I am happy with [company name]” and “Both [company name] and people like me benefit from the relationship” (α = .909). All of these items were rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree.”
Company evaluation. Company evaluation was measured by four items on a 7-point scale adopted from Marin and Ruiz (2007). These items included “[Company name] is an organization with a good reputation” and “I think [company name] is a well-established organization” (α = .905).

Behavioral intentions. Behavioral intentions were assessed in terms of purchase, employment, and investment intentions (Sen et al., 2006). Purchase intention was measured by asking participants to indicate their agreement with the following statement: “I would buy products from [company name].” Employment intention was assessed using four items, such as “I would like to seek information about jobs at [company name] in the future” and “I would very much like to work for [company name]” (α = .944). Regarding investment intention, participants were asked to rate their agreement with the following statement: “If I had money to invest, I would invest in [company name].” Responses were made on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree.”

Composites for CSR and OPR Scales
Since both CSR and OPR consisted of four indicators, each of which was measured by multiple items, principle component analysis was conducted to obtain composites for those indicators. Principle component analysis is commonly used to extract a small number of components that account for maximum variance in a set of observed variables, whereas factor analysis is used to identify dimensional structures in the observed variables and relationships among those underlying dimensions (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Principle component analysis creates a composite score for each component by summing observed variables with weights (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Using this method, composites for CSR and OPR indicators were calculated as weighted sums of the observed items rather than using arithmetic means. Each indicator appears to have a unidimensional structure meeting the criterion of eigenvalues exceeding 1.0 (see Tables 1 and 2). The total variance explained by the observed items in each indicator was at least 61%, higher than the rule of thumb percentage (at least 50% or more) for determining the number of factors retained (Harlow, 2005). Within each indicator, all factor loadings of observed items were greater than a loading criterion of .40 (Meyers et al., 2006).

See Tables 1 and 2

Results
A two-step approach to structural equation modeling was employed to test the proposed model. In the two-step modeling approach, a confirmatory factor analysis measurement model is first estimated, and then a structural model is tested, whereas measurement and structural models are tested simultaneously in the one-step modeling approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1998; Kline, 2005). Thus, compared to the one-step approach, the two-step process makes it easier to identify misspecification of a measurement model, which causes poor model fit, and to build a well-defined measurement model prior to testing the structural model (Kline, 2005). In this study, AMOS 18.0 was used to test the measurement model and to estimate the hypothesized structural relationships. Parameters in both models were obtained by maximum likelihood estimation.
**Measurement Model**

First, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with an initial measurement model where all latent variables are allowed to covary. According to Hu and Bentler (1999), structural equation models can be considered acceptable when the value of the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) equals or exceeds .95, the value of the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is less than or equal to .08, and the value of the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is less than or equal to .06. These goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement model indicate that it fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 393.839$, df = 146, $p < .05$; CFI = .966, SRMR = .0417, RMSEA = .059).

Since the model fit of the initial measurement model appeared to be satisfactory, there was no need to respecify the model; thus, the hypothesized structural relations were imposed on the latent variables (i.e., CA, CSR, OPR, company evaluation, and behavioral intentions) in this measurement model to test the proposed structural model.

**Structural Model**

The proposed structural model appeared to fit the data satisfactorily ($\chi^2 = 409.051$, df = 147, $p < .05$; CFI = .964, SRMR = .0399, RMSEA = .061) based on the following model fit criteria: CFI ≥ .95, SRMR ≤ .08, and RMSEA ≤ .06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). However, an examination of the paths in the proposed structural model revealed that a path from CSR to company evaluation was not statistically significant ($B = .050$, SE = .056, $\beta = .049$, $p = .380$). Thus, this structural model (structural model I) was revised by eliminating the path between CSR and company evaluation. The revised structural model (structural model II) was tested, and as a result, it also appeared to be an acceptable model ($\chi^2 = 409.785$, df = 148, $p < .05$; CFI = .964, SRMR = .0400, RMSEA = .060) (see Table 3). Since the revised model was more parsimonious than the initial structural model and believed to be good enough to analyze the parameter estimates, hypothesis testing was conducted within the context of the revised structural model.

--------------------

**Testing of Hypotheses and Research Question**

The hypotheses and research question were examined by confirming the presence of statistically significant associations in the predicted directions based on standardized parameter estimates. H1 posited that the perceptions of CSR initiatives are positively associated with favorable relationships between an organization and its publics. The results showed that the participants’ perceptions of CSR had a positive influence on their relationships with the company ($B = .498$, SE = .043, $\beta = .520$, $p < .05$). Thus, H1 was supported.

H2 predicted that CSR perceptions have a more positive influence on OPRs than do CA perceptions. Like the perceptions of CSR initiatives, CA perceptions were identified to have a significant positive relationship with OPRs ($B = .357$, SE = .042, $\beta = .372$, $p < .05$). Consistent with H2, CSR perceptions ($\beta = .520$) appear to have a more positive effect on OPRs than do CA perceptions ($\beta = .372$). Based on these results, H2 was supported.

H3 posited that favorable OPRs are positively associated with positive evaluations of an organization. To test this hypothesis, a standardized path from OPR to company evaluation was examined. As a result, favorable OPRs turned out to have a positive influence on the evaluations of a company ($B = .332$, SE = .052, $\beta = .313$, $p < .05$). Thus, H3 was supported.
H4 examined whether favorable OPRs are positively associated with behavioral intentions toward an organization. The results revealed that favorable OPRs had a positive effect on behavior intentions ($B = .686, SE = .091, \beta = .512, p < .05$). In other words, as a company maintains more favorable relationships with its publics, the publics are more likely to purchase its products, seek job opportunities there, and invest their resources in the company. Therefore, H4 was supported.

RQ1 asked whether CSR has a direct effect on the publics’ evaluations of an organization and their behavior intentions or if it affects these outcomes through OPRs. Regarding the evaluations of the company, CSR appears to have only an indirect effect on company evaluation through relationships between the company and its publics (see Table 4). This standardized indirect effect was estimated to be .163. As noted before, the direct path from CSR to company evaluation was deleted in the final structural model (structural model II) due to its statistical insignificance ($B = .050, SE = .056, \beta = .049, p = .380$). Regarding behavioral intentions, however, the results indicate that CSR had both direct and indirect effects on behavioral intentions. A path between CSR and behavioral intentions was found to be statistically significant, but not in the predicted direction ($B = -.214, SE = .078, \beta = -.167, p < .05$). Despite this negative direct effect ($\beta = -.167$), the standardized indirect effect of CSR on behavioral intentions through OPRs appears to be positive (.293), resulting in the positive total effect of .126. Figure 2 describes graphically the relationships among the latent variables and observed indicators, presenting the standardized estimates of paths in the tested model.

**Discussion**

Since CSR is now considered to be a viable corporate strategy, this study sought to shed light on the role of CSR in relationship management in public relations, using a conceptual framework linking CSR initiatives to well-developed relationships and positive responses to an organization. In this link through which CSR influences evaluative and behavioral outcomes, OPR may serve as an important mediator. Thus, another purpose of this study was to examine whether CSR performances affect evaluative and behavioral outcomes directly or indirectly through OPRs. Structural equation modeling was used to test linkages proposed in the conceptual framework. This study supports the notion that CSR initiatives play an important role in developing positive relationships between an organization and its publics (Marin & Ruiz, 2007). The overall results suggest that the perceptions of a company’s active engagement in CSR are positively related to favorable OPRs, positive evaluations of a company, and positive behavioral intentions, such as purchasing, employment, and investment. These results point to the value of CSR activities as a vital factor in building intangible corporate assets and boosting economic benefits. Through the implementation of distinctive CSR programs, a company can be perceived as a good corporate citizen that is concerned about society’s and its publics’ well-being. Such perceptions may motivate its publics to engage in a relationship with the company, consume its products, seek employment there, and invest in the company. These findings are consistent with those of Sen et al. (2006) who found that a company’s socially responsible behaviors can enhance not only attitudes and identification but also intentions to purchase its products, commit personal efforts (labor) to, and share resources (money) with the company.
Since the main function of business is to sustain and increase economic gains, it may not be prudent for corporations to devote all of their discretionary resources to serving societal needs and expectations. However, given the potential of CSR to generate intangible benefits, companies may need to implement CSR activities to promote their good citizenship without hurting their bottom line. Knowing that the primary goal of business is the pursuit of financial success, people may also accept and incorporate both firm-serving and public-serving motives underlying CSR activities. Thus, regardless of whether a company’s commitment to CSR is viewed as stemming from sincere social concerns or profit-generating motives, good CSR performances can be effective in maintaining positive OPRs.

Another noteworthy finding is that CSR’s influence is more positive than CA in developing positive OPRs. In other words, perceptions of a company’s CSR initiatives may be a more influential factor to stimulate the publics’ interest in the company and their desire to develop a long-term relationship with the company. Even though CSR does not compensate for shortcomings in business practices, a company’s devotion to CSR activities may help facilitate OPRs even when its business is suffering. It is notable, that while CSR has a stronger influence on OPR than does CA, CA does have a direct and positive effect on OPR, company evaluation, and behavioral intent.

Perhaps even more importantly, this study found that CSR had only an indirect effect on company evaluation through OPRs, while both directly and indirectly affecting behavioral intentions (i.e., purchase, employment, and investment). This finding highlights an important mediating role of well-managed relationships in the link between CSR initiatives and a company’s evaluation. In other words, perceptions of CSR may lead to increasing positive evaluations of a company only by developing favorable OPRs. Even with regard to the direct and indirect effects of CSR on behavioral outcomes, OPRs appear to be a critical factor that determines the degree to which CSR performances are beneficial to a company. Thus, relationship building is an essential step in maximizing the positive impact of CSR and producing its intended outcomes.

OPR needs to also be recognized for its stand-alone value. The research showed that OPR has a strong positive effect on the holy grail of public relations – behavioral intent. While substantial and well-justified attention has been paid to CSR, this study unveils the synergistic relationship between CSR and OPR. It also shows the importance of OPR on company evaluation and behavioral intent. This research puts a face on the maxim that organizations that do good (CSR) and make friends (OPR) will thrive.

This study is important because it built and tested an integrated model of CSR to help those in public relations understand how CSR works to improve relationship management. For those practicing public relations, the findings of this study point to the need for an organization to adopt societal needs and expectations into its daily business and maintain its CSR activities as a long-term strategy. In addition to promoting a company’s sustainable competitive edge, adoption of CSR in public relations practice contributes to enhancing the value of public relations in society.

The model offers scholars a means of comparing CSR practices and OPR between industries and among practices. For example, would CSR programs that focus on “green” initiatives perform better than CSR programs that focus primarily on community or employee needs? How would the model hold up if the organization was faced with a product recall that might shake the important OPR mediator?
This study also provides educators a means of explaining, as models do, the interaction of public relations activities. Why is it important to have both strong CSR programs and OPR? What variables influence behavioral intent?

In short, the value of this research is to both help us understand the interactions of these variables, but perhaps more importantly, it lays a foundation for understanding elements of public relations programs and for future research.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Despite its important findings and implications, there are some limitations to this study that should be considered. First, sampling of participants may limit the interpretations of the findings of this study. This study used only a sample of undergraduate students recruited from communications courses at two universities. Although this study assumed that the study companies value them as consumers, the sampled students may not be representative of the population that those organizations are targeting. Another limitation pertains to the selection of companies. Even though several companies from different industries were chosen, this study used only well-known, profitable corporations in their industries. It is plausible that they may invest more money and effort in developing and implementing CSR programs than other companies do. Thus, it may be difficult to generalize the findings from this study without cross-validating the proposed model with different companies. However, this study is meaningful in that it adds empirical evidence that bolsters the significance of CSR in relationship management. The findings of this study also provide important insight into the role of well-developed OPRs in optimizing the effect of CSR on its intended outcomes. Future studies can attempt to replicate this study’s findings with samples from various groups and consider selecting companies with different standings in business. Data triangulation using both quantitative and qualitative approaches would provide more in-depth knowledge about the role of CSR in relationship management in public relations.
References


## Appendix

### Tables and Figures

**Table 1**

*Means, Standard Deviations, Factor Loadings for indicators of CSR*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Measurement Item</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Loading</th>
<th>Eigenvalue (Variance %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td>Incorporating satisfaction into evaluations</td>
<td>4.80 (1.163)</td>
<td>.875</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintaining high efficiency</td>
<td>4.92 (1.249)</td>
<td>.852</td>
<td>2.52 (62.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improving product quality</td>
<td>4.95 (1.179)</td>
<td>.825</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Committed to no-lay-off policies</td>
<td>4.09 (.814)</td>
<td>.585</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td>Avoiding discrimination</td>
<td>4.52 (.972)</td>
<td>.838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting all legal standards</td>
<td>4.71 (1.116)</td>
<td>.832</td>
<td>2.54 (63.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting all environmental regulations</td>
<td>4.39 (.981)</td>
<td>.792</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing an accurate business report</td>
<td>4.36 (.876)</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethical Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td>Respecting moral norms in society</td>
<td>4.64 (1.062)</td>
<td>.802</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing full product information</td>
<td>4.86 (1.211)</td>
<td>.801</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acting responsibly toward the environment</td>
<td>4.53 (1.049)</td>
<td>.787</td>
<td>3.07 (61.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competing fairly with its competitors</td>
<td>5.09 (1.132)</td>
<td>.765</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporating integrity into evaluations</td>
<td>4.58 (1.002)</td>
<td>.761</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discretionary Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td>Contributing resources to the community</td>
<td>4.55 (1.093)</td>
<td>.841</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supporting employees’ education</td>
<td>4.39 (.915)</td>
<td>.837</td>
<td>2.55 (63.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contributing resources to not-for-profit orgs</td>
<td>4.49 (.963)</td>
<td>.835</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offering generous product warranties</td>
<td>4.54 (1.134)</td>
<td>.666</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2
*Means, Standard Deviations, Factor Loadings for indicators of OPR*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Measurement Item</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Loading (Variance %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust</strong></td>
<td>Keeping its promises</td>
<td>4.43 (.999)</td>
<td>.862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Including publics in its decision making</td>
<td>4.62 (1.112)</td>
<td>.844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Treating publics fairly</td>
<td>4.82 (1.155)</td>
<td>.807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling confident about its skills</td>
<td>4.84 (1.200)</td>
<td>.797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always concerning publics’ interests</td>
<td>4.31 (1.134)</td>
<td>.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having an ability for goal attainment</td>
<td>4.98 (1.110)</td>
<td>.776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td>Attentive to each other</td>
<td>4.60 (1.066)</td>
<td>.869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mutuality</strong></td>
<td>Considering publics’ opinions legitimate</td>
<td>4.65 (1.102)</td>
<td>.864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Really listening to publics’ opinions</td>
<td>4.45 (1.081)</td>
<td>.853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Throwing its weight around (Reversed)</td>
<td>4.22 (1.118)</td>
<td>.519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong></td>
<td>Maintaining a long-lasting bond</td>
<td>4.31 (1.350)</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caring about a long-term commitment</td>
<td>4.67 (1.178)</td>
<td>.883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wanting to maintain a relationship</td>
<td>4.66 (1.188)</td>
<td>.876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valuing the relationship more</td>
<td>3.73 (1.512)</td>
<td>.724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>Mutually benefitting from the relationship</td>
<td>4.57 (1.247)</td>
<td>.908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pleased with the relationship</td>
<td>4.73 (1.237)</td>
<td>.897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happy in interactions with the org</td>
<td>4.71 (1.242)</td>
<td>.894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Happy with the org</td>
<td>4.81 (1.442)</td>
<td>.857</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3
*Model Fit Measures for the Measurement and Structural Models*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measurement Model</td>
<td>393.839</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.966</td>
<td>.0417</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Model I</td>
<td>409.051</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.964</td>
<td>.0399</td>
<td>.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Model II</td>
<td>409.785</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.964</td>
<td>.0400</td>
<td>.060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Structural equation models can be considered acceptable when meeting the following criteria: CFI ≥ .95, SRMR ≤ .08, and RMSEA ≤ .06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).
### Table 4

**Standardized Parameter Estimates for the Structural Model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Direct effect</th>
<th>Indirect effect</th>
<th>Total effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR $\rightarrow$ OPR</td>
<td>.520**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR $\rightarrow$ CE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>.163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR $\rightarrow$ BI</td>
<td>-.167**</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA $\rightarrow$ OPR</td>
<td>.372**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA $\rightarrow$ CE</td>
<td>.553**</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>.669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA $\rightarrow$ BI</td>
<td>.456**</td>
<td>.299</td>
<td>.756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPR $\rightarrow$ CE</td>
<td>.313**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPR $\rightarrow$ BI</td>
<td>.512**</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE $\rightarrow$ BI</td>
<td>.162*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

CSR = corporate social responsibility, CA = corporate ability, OPR = organization-public relationship, CE = company evaluation, BI = behavioral intentions

---

**Figure 1.** Conceptual model
Figure 2. Estimated coefficients for the relationships among the latent variables. Standardized structural coefficients are reported. For the sake of brevity, the observed variables and their error variances were omitted in this figure.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
Finding Publics within the Blogosphere: The Blogger Public Segmentation Model

Park, Nohil
Postdoctoral Researcher
Missouri International Training Institute, University of Missouri
parkn@missouri.edu, (573) 355-0717

Jeong, JiYeon
Doctoral Student, Missouri School of Journalism, University of Missouri
jj7b6@mail.missouri.edu, (573) 355-1031

and

Han, Jung Ho
Professor, Graduate School of Communication, Yonsei University, South Korea
jungho@yonsei.ac.kr, (82-10) 7105-2975

Abstract

Although bloggers serve a critical role in the public relations world, research to identify potential target blogger public remains neglected. This study addresses the limitations of a traditional public segmentation model (Grunig’s situational theory) for bloggers in order to propose and verify a new blogger public segmentation model. Results from analyzing 895 online surveys submitted by Korean bloggers confirm the proposed model has good model fit indices in Structural Equation Modeling analyses, and all of the model hypotheses are supported by statistically significant coefficients. The results show the proposed model effectively typolizes bloggers as active, constrained, latent, and routine publics.
Introduction

The increasing substantial influence of social media on journalistic practices has provided a new arena for public relations to execute diverse programs bypassing the traditional media outlets. When considering blogs as a form of social media, several journalism studies have argued that each blogger is a potential journalist and becomes part of the journalistic process (Carlson, 2007; Domingo & Heinonen, 2008; Gillmor, 2004; Haas, 2005; Knight, 2008; Matheson, 2004; Regan, 2003). Likewise, recent public relations studies insist that blogs have had a huge impact on the reputation of organizations as well as their products and services (Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005; Flynn, 2006; Kent, 2008; Scoble & Israel, 2006; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007; Yang & Lim, 2009). Recognizing these bloggers’ potential roles in journalism and PR practices, organizations have tried to converse with popular bloggers to generate positive word-of-mouth in the blogosphere.

Nevertheless, even though blogs have been studied by PR researchers, none of these studies have taken up the theoretical issue of how individual organizations might find their key publics in the blogosphere. Neither public relations practitioners nor researchers are ignorant to the fact that a public relations program cannot be executed without identification of important target publics to an organization (Wilcox & Cameron, 2008). Research identifying potential publics in the blogosphere nevertheless remains neglected. This may be because current public relations research has mainly focused on how organizations technically use blogs in the application of public relations and online marketing practices, or in building a positive relationships with customers, rather than developing the segment models or theories for blogger publics (Kent, 2008; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007; Yang & Lim, 2009).

Grunig’s situational theory, of course, has been used traditionally for identifying publics. (Atwood & Major, 1991; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Repper, 1992; Hamilton, 1992; Sweetser & Metzgar, 2007). Yet the theory has limitations in its application to the Internet, and specifically to the blogosphere context. Situational theory categorizes publics in an attempt to predict their communication behaviors, which are mainly measured by active or passive mass media use—information seeking and processing, respectively (Grunig, 1978; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1989; Grunig & Repper, 1992). However, bloggers have different media use patterns and characteristics; bloggers who own their media cannot be neatly separated into either media producers or consumers (Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005). Bloggers are not just mere receivers of mass mediated information, but are co-creators of information, and become part of journalism. (Gillmor, 2004; Scoble & Israel, 2006). In other words, the act of blogging re-situates the place of the “public” from the end of journalism (its consumption) to a central place in its productive processes. Situational theory, which concentrates analytic focus on mass media use, must necessarily have limited applicability to bloggers’ journalistic (that is, non-consumptive) behaviors.

In sum, previous public relations research on blogs lacks a comprehensive or systematic model of blogger public segmentation. This article therefore takes a first step toward filling that void by proposing a model that typolizes segmented blogger publics within the blogosphere. Addressing the limitations of situational theory in its application to the blogosphere, this study begins with an overview of blogger publics. This informs the new model advanced for making sense of blogger public segmentation. Furthermore, this paper disproves the applicability of situational theory in the blog context, and verifies the proposed model by applying the empirical example of food security in Korea.
Public and Blogger Public

Public relations studies have defined a public as a homogeneous social group whose members face a problem, recognize the problem, and work together toward resolution (Blumer, 1966; Dewey, 1927; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Ni & Kim, 2009). In classifying publics from non-public to active public, communication is a critical criterion (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Also, a public evolving from communication behaviors requires social spaces where the communication behaviors are present (Ni & Kim, 2009). Similarly, a blogger public can be defined as a group of bloggers who face a problem, recognize the problem, and engage in blogging about how to proceed or organize to take action. The social space in which this occurs is known colloquially as “the blogosphere.” Likewise, as communication leads publics to become involved with corollary issues, conversation in the blogosphere appears to make bloggers active in related issues (Scoble & Israel, 2006). Thus, depending on communication in the blogosphere, bloggers can show up as a key public to organizations.

Despite the absence of a universal definition for the concept of “key” bloggers, previous studies have offered approximate titles, for example: A-list blogs, well-known blogs, most read blogs, elite blogs, highly interconnected blogs, and information hub blogs. (Bar-Ilan, 2005; Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2005; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). These titles emphasize individual blogs’ popularity, i.e. how many people visit the blog or the frequency at which people visit. (Bar-Ilan, 2005; Blood, 2002b, 2004; Marlow, 2004; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005). These previous studies assert that blogs with popularity are more powerful at generating public discussion and transmitting issues rapidly in the blogosphere.

In identifying key blogger publics, however, people underneath the surface of the blogosphere should be targeted. Even if the existence of popular blogs may indicate the existence of key blogger publics, blogs cannot directly testify to the existence of these users. One of several reasons is that one can have multiple blogs, or several people may operate one blog at the same time (Herring, et al., 2005). Another reason is that despite low popularity, in several cases, some bloggers play pivotal roles in journalism practices (Asaravala, 2004). On the other hand, bloggers as active creators of media represent a centralized locus of control and unique subjection behind their blogs (Qian & Scott, 2007; Siapera, 2008). This is why blog popularity indices have limited meaning to public segmentation research. Thus rather than technical popular indices of blogs, it is necessary to investigate the people who are closely associated with issues in the blogosphere.

In typologizing blogger publics, one must consider the reality that blogging blurs the boundary between journalists and non-journalists. What distinguishes the blogging revolution from previous informational transitions is that people have a medium which transfers journalistic power to ordinary people (Blood, 2002b, 2004; Domingo & Heinonen, 2008; Scoble & Israel, 2006). In other words, blogging enables regular citizens to be journalists who can communicate freely in an often unregulated, uncensored, multinational, and very public environment (Blood, 2002b; Delwiche, 2005; Gillmor, 2004; Lowery, 2006; Wall, 2005). In this respect, bloggers can be understood as journalists who have easy access to publicize their own subjective perspectives about the outside world (Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005; Gillmor, 2004; Siapera, 2008). Rather than traditional, passive media users, bloggers are consumers who also exercise journalistic perspectives. By blogging, bloggers evolve as active media publics with the motivations and
capabilities to report or comment on issues. Accordingly, theories or models of public segmentation must grapple with the blogger publics’ journalistic behaviors.

**Situational Theory and Its Limitations in the Blogosphere**

Traditionally, Grunig’s situational theory has been used for public relations to identify key publics (Atwood & Major, 1991; Grunig, 1978, 1983, 1988; Kim, Ni, & Sha, 2008; Sha, 2006; Sriramesh, Moghan, & Wei, 2007). To classify publics methodologically, situational theory examines related communication behaviors of specific publics using three independent variables (problem recognition, constrained recognition, and level of involvement) and two dependent variables (information seeking and processing). Four behavioral types of publics (problem-facing, constrained, fatalistic, and routine), sorted by the matrix of problem and constrained recognition variables, are multiplied by two levels of involvement (high and low) so that publics are assorted as one of eight kinds of groups. Indeed, this methodology of situational theory has been replicated, applied, and extended in predicting the communication behavior of publics regarding various issues (Hamilton, 1992; Major, 1998; Sha, 2006; Sriramesh, et al., 2007).

Nevertheless, situational theory has received criticism in respect to both theory and methodology. One of the theoretical criticisms is that situational theory has a tendency to overemphasize the view that a public is anchored on situations or issues (Cozier & Witmer, 2001; Slater, Chipman, Auld, Keeffe, & Kendall, 1992). Indeed, several studies have reported that the embedded variables, which include individual motivation, political efficacy, and socio-demographic variables, influence publics’ communication behaviors (Hamilton, 1992; Ni & Kim, 2009; Postmes & Brunsting, 2002; Slater, et al., 1992). The other criticism is that the situational theory provides a model lacking in explanatory power. Indeed, several studies have addressed the statistical insignificance in which independent variables predict publics’ communicative behaviors (Atwood & Major, 1991; Grunig, 1983, 1988; Kim, Downie, & Stefano, 2005; Major, 1998; Slater, et al., 1992). Particularly, Slater and his colleagues (1992) found that the main statistical instability in situational theory was rooted in the multicollinearity between two variables: problem recognition and level of involvement. This ought to be unsurprising, as even Grunig (1983) admitted that involvement and problem recognition variables offset each other in predicting communicative behavior since there might be multicollinearity problem between two variables.

An additional criticism of situational theory is that the variable of constrained recognition has weak measurement reliability and validity. Grunig and Hunt (1984) have measured constrained recognition with a one-dimensional scale by asking “Would you think of whether you could do anything personally that would make a difference in the way these issues are handled” (p.150). However, in order to draw valid and reliable inference from respondents’ psychological constructs, only multidimensional items which are clearly associated with each other should be used (Osterlind, 1988). The single item assessment for constrained recognition fails to reflect the variance of that specific psychological construct. Accordingly, the measurement for constrained recognition should be reassessed to assure the reliability and validity in assessing the publics’ psychological status in solving problems.
Conceivably, in the blogosphere context, it is estimated that situational theory will have more limited explanatory power to segment blogger publics. As noted previously, bloggers have different psychological conditions surrounding problem solving in the blogosphere. Bloggers may not feel constrained severely in blogging on issues because the blogosphere offers them freedom of expression; thus the constrained recognition variable fails to characterize the psychological state of bloggers. Also situational theory’s multicollinearity problem is statistically lacking in predicting blogger public’s communication behaviors. Furthermore, situational theory’s dependent variables will have low internal validity in detecting bloggers’ journalistic behaviors because bloggers have different media use patterns compared with traditional media; bloggers tends to behave journalistically. In sum, a public segmentation model for bloggers needs to reflect the unique influence of bloggers’ psychological status on their journalistic behaviors.

The Blogger Public Segmentation Model

In response to prior literature, the present study proposes a new public segmentation model, the Blogger Public Segmentation model (hereafter called BPS model). The BPS model is based on the causal relationships between two dimensions—issue involvement and blog self-efficacy—and journalistic behaviors. This assumes that bloggers’ journalistic behavior will vary depending on the two dimensions. Before presenting the BPS model, conceptualizations for the variables of BPS model are discussed.

Journalistic Behavior

The BPS model considers bloggers’ journalistic behavior as a dependent variable to see how blogging connects to problem-solving efforts. Bloggers’ journalistic behaviors refer to how often bloggers are commenting on issues, editing information, checking facts, correcting errors in their blogging, going to fields to report, and monitoring the mass media.

Based on the previous studies on blogs, journalistic behaviors are characterized by six features. The first is commenting on issues in a timely manner, because bloggers who post
professional and critical opinions on their blogs have the power to rapidly mobilize people (Blood, 2004; Delwiche, 2005; Wall, 2005). The second is editing or filtering information. From the third person perspective, if bloggers summarize issues for a general audience, they can be considered journalists (Andrews, 2003; Bar-Ilan, 2005; Blood, 2004). The third and fourth are fact checking and error correction in their blogs. Since the blog conversation is ongoing, credibility is guaranteed by continuous fact-checking and error correction of one’s own blogs. The fifth is on-the-spot reporting. Several bloggers not only stay at the computer, but also go out the scene of the event in question and report as eyewitness-journalists (Bowman & Willis, 2005; Matheson, 2004). These bloggers’ grassroots methods of reporting complement traditional journalism practices (Blood, 2002b). The last feature is watching the media. Some bloggers have ruthlessly monitored the mass media’s biased and unfair reporting (Usborne, 2004), rallying readers and fellow bloggers to bring about social and political change (Kaye, 2006). In sum, bloggers’ journalistic behaviors on certain issues can be defined as bloggers’ commenting, filtering information, reporting on the spot news, checking facts, correcting errors, and watching mass media practices.

**Issue Involvement**

The question now is not whether bloggers can act as journalists, but which factors influence bloggers to behave as journalists. The BPS model conceptualizes issue involvement, which combines the variables of problem recognition and level of involvement as used in situational theory, as one independent variable. If bloggers perceive the situation as relevant or of consequence for them, they pay attention to and communicate about that problem. Bloggers for whom the issue is of direct importance will be more readily involved, thus aroused out of inactivity quickly.

Even though previous studies have used independently the two variables—problem recognition and the level of involvement (Grunig, 1978, 1983, 1988, 1989; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig & Repper, 1992)—this study suggests that the two variables can be taken together as one dimension since both dimensions are overlapped in meaning. In fact, several researchers have indicated that the two variables of situational theory are highly associated with each other (Grunig, 1983; Major, 1998; Slater, et al., 1992). Involvement, defined as a person's assessment of connectedness, and problem recognition, measured by asking respondents how often they stop and think about a given issue, may be easily perceived as indistinguishable by respondents. Furthermore, these overlapping variables are sub-items of Zaichkowsky's (1994) Personal Involvement Inventory (PII): important and relevant meanings. Indeed, accumulated studies in advertising research have used personal involvement to measure people’s connectedness with an issue and perception of importance for an issue (Zaichkowsky, 1985, 1994). Not surprisingly, this is why the situational theory has a multicollinearity problem.

Issue involvement, which combines problem recognition and level of involvement, will be a useful variable in predicting bloggers’ journalistic behaviors because bloggers highly involved with a given issue is more likely to post articles, and engage journalistically in the process of communication on that issue. Indeed, online communication researchers have insisted that issue
involvement is considered to be the most suitable variable to explain online communication behaviors (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). Additionally, research on blogs-as-a-genre has also addressed issue involvement as a useful variable in classifying blogs’ characteristics (Blood, 2002b; Herring, et al., 2005; Krishnamurthy, 2002). For instance, when bloggers are involved with a topical issue, they are likely to function as filter blogs which behave like editors in print newspapers (Krishnamurthy, 2002). Accordingly, issue involvement is an independent variable used to predict bloggers’ journalistic behaviors. Bloggers with high issue involvement are better able to raise issues using a more sophisticated schema, utilizing processing strategies that are well prepared to make sense of an issue and present their points effectively.

**Blog Self-efficacy**

Even if issue involvement positively predicts bloggers’ journalistic behaviors, bloggers’ psychological mechanism will be to foster journalistic behaviors in their blogs. The present study suggests a new concept for bloggers’ psychological competence on blogs as blog self-efficacy. By passing the traditional gatekeepers, bloggers have the potential to attract widespread attention from organizations, and can bring the organizations to their knees (Edelman & Intelliseek, 2005; Scoble & Israel, 2006). With few structural constraints in the blogosphere, blogger publics can be organized and involved in the discussion of problems depending on their capacity to bring issues to the table for discussion.

Classically, self-efficacy is a person’s judgment of his or her own capability to organize and execute the actions required in attaining designated types of performances (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1983, 1997). Self-efficacy is related to an individual’s psychological mechanism which determines the actions or skills taken by an individual, not the skills one possesses. It is important because people may have both positive and negative expectations of the perceived consequences of a behavior. When a person expects positive outcomes, the expectations help to build self-esteem, self-satisfaction, and pride. On the contrary, expectation of negative outcomes leads to self-devaluation (Bandura, 1997). Shortly, self-efficacy is essential because the judgments of personal efficacy are the most central and pervasive self-referential thoughts which influence human motivation and action.

Numerous concepts have developed as an extension of individual self-efficacy, such as computer self-efficacy (Compeau & Higgins, 1995), Internet self-efficacy (Eastin & LaRose, 2000), web users self-efficacy (Eachus & Cassidy, 2006), information search efficacy (Vishwanath, 2007), political information efficacy (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007), etc. Computer self-efficacy research, for instance, has focused on one’s competence in utilizing technology related tasks (Compeau & Higgins, 1995); Internet self-efficacy is a broader concept concerning perceptions of one’s ability to accomplish Internet-related behaviors (Eastin & LaRose, 2000). In general, the concepts of self-efficacy have been emphasized as a psychological mechanism: the beliefs, expectations, and confidence that have a profound impact on achieving one’s objective.

This study applies the self-efficacy concept to bloggers within the blog context, and suggests the notion of blog self-efficacy. Blog self-efficacy refers to the psychological aspect which predicts
and determines the activity of blogging. That is, the level of blog self-efficacy is one’s relative
desire and confidence to influence the issues by using blogs, leading to different actions in
blogging. The BPS model posits that blog self-efficacy will be positively associated with bloggers’
journalistic behaviors. This means that active engagement with issues in the blogosphere will
depend on bloggers’ capacities–blog self-efficacy–which carries the issues into the public arena of
the blogosphere.

**The Blogger Public Segmentation Model**

Blogger publics are segmented as groups who are inactive or routine but who migrate toward
the active journalistic state as their levels of issue involvement and blog self-efficacy in a problem
increase. In the BPS model, issue involvement, a triggering factor, connects bloggers with an issue
and leads them to behave journalistically in the blogosphere. Individual bloggers with high issue
involvement are more likely to journalistically post blog articles and arguments about a topic on
their blogs. Likewise, blog self-efficacy, a psychological factor distinct from issue involvement, is
an embedded attribution of the individual blogger to raise an issue and solve the problem using
blogs. Bloggers with high blog self-efficacy are more likely to go the blogosphere and more likely
to behave journalistically to solve problems. The BPS model which typologizes bloggers as active,
constrained, latent, and routine publics is illustrated in Figure 1.

![Figure 1 Typology of Blogger Publics in the BPS Model](image)

**Active blogger publics** are defined as bloggers who have high levels of issue involvement and
blog self-efficacy in a topic. This definition is consistent with the traditional use of the term active
public defined as a group of people who have identified a problem and who organize to effect
change. High issue involvement and high blog self-efficacy are necessary conditions for activating
bloggers’ journalistic behaviors in response to a specific topic. Active blogger publics can include
the opinion leaders, agenda setters, and commentators, as well as their close followers who have
high blog self-efficacy and are able to demonstrate problems saliently and frame situations as issues.

**Constrained blogger publics** are bloggers with high issue involvement but low blog self-efficacy concerning a problem or how to resolve it. Constrained blogger publics include bloggers who have recognized a potential problem or issue but lack high enough conviction or confidence to move into a journalistic role. They have motivation, but find their blogs’ efficacy lacking to organize the issues to blogosphere’s agenda. Constrained blogger publics are akin to the potential followers of active blogger publics.

**Latent blogger publics** include bloggers who have high confidence in using their blogs to solve a problem but are not involved in the problem personally. Latent blogger publics also incorporate what Grunig and Hunt (1984) called *all-issue publics*. They are generally confident in their blogs’ capability to affect change, but are not likely to comment or report on a particular issue.

**Routine blogger publics** are bloggers who have low levels of blog self-efficacy and issue involvement in a topic. Routine blogger publics represent an inactive public or a non-public in the blogosphere. They lack the motivation to post articles on their blogs or attend to communication. Rather than behave journalistically, they remain in the private sphere, using blogs as personal diaries.

**Research Hypotheses**

The main purpose of this study is to disprove the applicability of situational theory for bloggers, and propose and verify a new blogger public segmentation model. For this purpose, first, we examine situational theory’s structural (path) model using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

First, for determining statistically whether the model has not too large of a discrepancy between the theoretical and observed relations, the goodness of model fit indices for situational theory are tested. As noted previously, since situational theory has limitations in applying to the blog context, it is estimated that situational theory will have unacceptable model fit indices in its SEM analyses. Based on the literature reviews, the structural model of situational theory can be constructed as: problem recognition positively predicts information seeking and processing; and involvement also positively predicts information seeking, whereas constrained recognition negatively predicts information seeking and processing. Hence, given the structural model of situational theory as presented in Figure 2, the first hypothesis is suggested:

**H1.** The structural model of situational theory will have unacceptable model fit indices.
Based on the literature reviews, a new public segmentation model, the BPS model was proposed. This new model hypothesizes that issue involvement and blog self-efficacy will have positive associations with journalistic behavior. In the BPS model, four types of blogger publics—active, constrained, latent, and routine—will be characterized by different levels of journalistic behavior. The active blogger public will, importantly, have a higher level of journalistic behavior than other types. Relating to the structural model of the BPS model is presented in Figure 3, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H2. Issue involvement will positively predict journalistic behaviors.
H4. The active blogger public type, as described by the BPS model, will have a higher degree of journalistic behavior than other publics.

Method

Participants and Selection of the Issue

A communication research institute at a large University in South Korea conducted an online survey, from October 29, 2008 through December 3, 2008, to collect bloggers’ blog use patterns and their journalistic activities. Respondents were recruited from seven Korean online blog portal
Internet sites including blog.ohmynews.com, www.allblog.net, and www.blogkorea.net, etc. Ultimately the 895 respondents used for analysis were Korean, and the male to female ratio was 74.5% to 25.5%, with the age ranging from 11 to 71 years, and with an average of 29.11 years old (SD = 9.080). In terms of education, 54.8% of the respondents were college graduates, 22.8% were high school graduates, 13.8% were middle school graduates, and 8.6% were graduate school students or graduates. In addition, approximately 85.3% had a monthly income of less than $3,000.

To demonstrate the usefulness of BPS modeling in identifying blogger publics around an issue, this study applies the example of Korea’s food security problem. At the time this study was conducted, this issue was the one of the most frequently reported on topic in Korean mass media. In October 2008, most Korean media dealt with the food security and public health problem because of the 2008 Chinese milk scandal. The Korean mass media treated this issue as a major news topic, which also received heavy discussion in the blogosphere. Thus this study considered this food security problem as a timely subject to examine how blogger publics become segmented by a given issue.

**Measures**

*Journalistic Behavior.* Bloggers’ journalistic behavior was measured using a total of six items related to solving the food security problem. Specifically, journalistic behavior was measured by asking how often (1 = rarely; 5 = very often) they (1) wrote their comments or opinions on the food security problem, (2) edited or summarized the information related to the problem, (3) checked facts when they posted the articles related with the problem, (4) collected errors in posting the articles related with the problem on their blogs, (5) visited the location of events to report about the problem on their blogs, and (6) monitored or watched the mass media’s reporting on the problem.

*Issue Involvement.* Issue Involvement was measured by determining the perceived effect of an issue on self-relevance and importance. A 3-item questionnaire asking about the food security problem was designed to measure levels of issue involvement. Specifically, issue involvement was measured by asking (1 = rarely; 5 = very strongly) the (1) frequency of thought on, (2) personal relevance with, and (3) importance of the food security problem.

*Blog Self-efficacy.* Measurement of blog self-efficacy assessed respondents’ belief, confidence, and volition to solve the problem using their blogs. For example, blog self-efficacy was measured by asking (1 = not at all; 5 = very likely); (1) ‘If you are using the blog to solve the food security problem, do you believe yourself that you are capable of executing a behavior required to produce certain outcomes?’ (2) ‘If you use blogs to solve the problem, are you confident that you are capable of executing a behavior required to produce certain outcomes?’ and (3) ‘If you use blogs to solve the problem, do you have strong volition to execute the behavior required to produce certain outcomes in spite of interruption from other groups?’

*Situational theory’s variables:* Problem recognition was measured by asking (1 = rarely; 5 = very often) the extent to which individuals recognize a problem facing them: the frequency of

---

14 The Chinese milk and infant formula adulterated with melamine led to kidney stones and other renal failure, especially among young children, and nearly 300,000 people had become ill, with more than 50,000 infant hospitalizations and six infant deaths (Branigan, 2008)

15 Journalistic behaviors’ items was parceled into three sets of item to reduce the dimensionality and number of parameters estimated, resulting in more stable parameter estimates and proper solutions of model fit.
thought on the food security problem. *Constrained recognition* was measured by asking (1=none; 5=great deal) the respondents whether they believed they could do anything personally that would make a difference in the way the issue is handled. *Level of involvement* was measured by asking to what extent (1=rarely; 5=very strongly) the respondents see a connection between themselves and the issue, and to what extent the respondents believe the issue has affected them. *Information seeking* was measured by asking (1=not at all; 5=very likely) (1) how likely the respondents will subscribe to an Internet news site to receive the information when the Internet news site distributes important food security information to its subscribers, (2) how likely the respondents would seek the information related to the issue in the mass media (TV, radio, and newspapers), and (3) how often they discussed the issue with their family and (4) friends. *Information processing* was measured by asking (1=rarely; 5=very often) (1) how often they watch, read, and listen the food security issue from the media, (2) to what extent they recall hearing or reading about the food security issue from the media, and (3) how much attention the respondents will pay to the food security issue as reported by the mass media.

**Results**

*Measurement Models*

In SEM, the survey data were analyzed in two ways: checking the validity of the measurement and testing the path model’s goodness of fits. First, as confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) can be used to check the validity of the measurement (McDonald & Ho, 2002), this study used confirmatory factor analysis to assure that the latent variables in situational theory and the BPS model are exclusive with each other, and that the indicators were loading solely on the expected variable. The results, as shown in Table 1, revealed that the indicators load on their latent variables, and fall clearly into six factors explained by the six variables. The original theoretical division of six latent variables is thus strongly supported.
Table 1 CFA Results for Six Latent Variables (N=895)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Cronbach's α</th>
<th>Standardized Factor Loadings</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information Seeking</strong></td>
<td>.726</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Subscribe to receive the information</td>
<td>.650</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Seek information in news media</td>
<td>.645</td>
<td>11.504***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Discuss the issue with family</td>
<td>.729</td>
<td>11.935***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Discuss the issue with friends</td>
<td>.710</td>
<td>11.872***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information Processing</strong></td>
<td>.777</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Consume the information</td>
<td>.593</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Recall the information</td>
<td>.645</td>
<td>14.833***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Pay attention to the issue</td>
<td>.729</td>
<td>15.061***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journalistic Behavior</strong></td>
<td>.882</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Commenting on the issue</td>
<td>.853</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Editing the information</td>
<td>.849</td>
<td>31.298***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Checking facts</td>
<td>.617</td>
<td>19.920***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Collect errors</td>
<td>.552</td>
<td>16.567***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Reporting on-the-spot</td>
<td>.824</td>
<td>29.903***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Watching the media</td>
<td>.817</td>
<td>29.493***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue Involvement</strong></td>
<td>.790</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Frequency of thought</td>
<td>.710</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Personal relevance</td>
<td>.647</td>
<td>17.671***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Importance</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>17.772***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blog Self-efficacy</strong></td>
<td>.855</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Belief</td>
<td>.835</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Confidence</td>
<td>.906</td>
<td>23.319***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Volition to overcome constraints</td>
<td>.710</td>
<td>22.756***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ***p < .001

In addition, measurement models were evaluated using goodness of fit measures to check whether the model’s items on the corresponding scale represented the same latent variable. To examine the goodness-of-fit of the measurement models for situational theory and the BPS model, this study used the chi-square test, the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA); the values of CFI and TLI are recommended greater than .9; RMSEA accepted less than .08 corresponds to an acceptable fit, which generally used in SEM studies (McDonald & Ho, 2002).

The results indicate the measurement models of situational theory and the BPS model had acceptable fit measures. Specifically, the measurement model for situational theory has an acceptable fit measures ($\chi^2=66.785$, df=13, p<.001, CFI=.973, TLI=.956, RMSEA=.068). In BPS model, it has also good fit measures ($\chi^2=53.556$, df=24, p<.001, CFI=.992, TLI=.989, RMSEA=.037). Although the chi-square value is unacceptable, it cannot be taken definitively
because of its sensitivity to sample size (McDonald & Ho, 2002). Other values of CFI, TLI, and RMSEA, which are insensitive to sample size, are strongly considered to be acceptable. Hence, the path model for the BPS was examined next.

Path Model and Hypotheses Testing
Finally, analyzing the path models of situational theory and the BPS with the method of maximum likelihood, research hypotheses were tested. Technically, in SEM, a hypothesized model produces an estimated population covariance matrix. This matrix examines the extent to which the proposed estimated population covariance can fit into the sample covariance matrix, estimating as the difference between the discrepancy functions for the measurement model and the structural model (McDonald & Ho, 2002). Most of all, H1 was tested by the goodness-of-fit indices in the path model of situational theory analysis. H2 and H3 were tested in the same way the fit of the path model of the BPS to the sample data was evaluated. For H4, one-way ANOVA was used to demonstrate the distinctions between an active blogger public and other publics in their degree of journalistic behavior.

Regarding H1, H2, and H3, the evaluation results of path models for situational theory and the BPS produced four kinds of structural model fit indices, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Model fit indexes for the path models of situational theory and BPS (N=895)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model fit indexes</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ (df)</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable fit</td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;.9</td>
<td>&gt;.9</td>
<td>&lt; .08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation theory</td>
<td>685.679(33)**</td>
<td>.697</td>
<td>.632</td>
<td>.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPS model</td>
<td>115.267(25)**</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td>.967</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **p < .001

H1 is to prove situational theory’s limitation in segmenting public in the blog context; it is estimated that the path model of situational theory will have an unacceptable fit. As shown in Table 2, supporting H1, situational theory lacked acceptable path model fits ($\chi^2=685.679, df=33, p<.001, CFI=.697, TLI=.632, RMSEA=.159$). The path model for situational theory indicated a poor fit in that there is a substantial proportion of variance in the data not explained by the model. Corresponding with the arguments for situational theory’s limitations in the blog context, the weak path model fits in SEM underscores situational theory’s failure to represent the substantial phenomenon of the blogging context. Thus, H1 was accepted.

H2 and H3, testing the direct effects of issue involvement and blog self-efficacy on journalistic behavior, were evaluated by the statistical significance of independently estimated coefficients in the path model of the BPS. Before testing these hypotheses, the path model was confirmed by the Q-plot of standardized residuals which characterized by points falling approximately on a line. Also, as shown in Table 2, the goodness of fit indices of the BPS model was examined. The results had a good fit to test our hypotheses ($\chi^2=115.267, df=25, p<.001, CFI=.977, TLI=.967$, RMSEA=.064).

Figure 3 presents the results of the path model equation. This path model consists of three latent variables: issue involvement, blog self-efficacy, and journalistic behavior. This causal model indicated that issue involvement positively and significantly predicts an increase in journalistic behavior. The value .23 is the standardized coefficient for the strong positive direct effects of issue involvement on journalistic behavior, supporting H2 ($p < .001$). Likewise, blog self-efficacy had a
significant positive association with journalistic behavior; the standardized coefficient of .32 represents a strong positive effect of blog self-efficacy on journalistic behavior, supporting H3 \( (p < .001) \). These results mean bloggers with high issue involvement and blog self-efficacy are more likely to behave journalistically in the blogosphere.

**Figure 3** Results of the path model of BPS.
Note: Parameter estimates are standardized path coefficients; \( **p < .001 \).

Lastly, regarding H4, the active blogger public of the BPS model will exhibit a higher degree of journalistic behaviors than other publics. One-way ANOVA used to test for difference between blogger publics reinforces this finding. The analyses revealed a significant main effect in two independent variables on the dependent variable (\( F(891, 3)= 36.671, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.110 \)). In the additional results of the follow-up test, Bonferroni post-hoc was employed to compare the active public with each other group’s mean of journalistic behavior yielded a significant difference between active blogger publics and other publics (\( p <.01 \)), which strongly supported H4.

**Table 3** Comparisons of Blogger Publics’ Journalistic Behaviors by the BPS model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogger Publics Types</th>
<th>Active (N=281)</th>
<th>Constrained (N=375)</th>
<th>Latent (N=54)</th>
<th>Routine (N=185)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalistic Behavior (M,SD)</td>
<td>3.106(1.079)</td>
<td>2.453(1.053)</td>
<td>2.447(1.106)</td>
<td>2.142(.951)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post hoc comparisons A-BCD**</td>
<td>B-AD**</td>
<td>C-A**</td>
<td>D-AB**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: A=active public, B= constrained public, C= latent public, D=routine public, **p < .01,*

**Discussions**

Even though some key bloggers are critical roles in journalism and public relations practices, little research has been conducted on how to find the potential target blogger publics. This study presupposes that the traditional public segmentation theory—Grunig’s situational theory—with information-based approaches, is limited in usefully segmenting blogger publics. Because bloggers
represent a different paradigm in media use, they, through re-creation of shared experiences, can behave journalistically. In this background, the present study theoretically proposes a new blogger public segmentation model. The proposed model, the BPS model, posits that bloggers’ substantial influence on issue activation must be gauged as journalistic behavior; and both their issue involvement and blog self-efficacy variables are estimated to increase of their journalistic behaviors. In this model, bloggers are typologized as active, constrained, latent, or routine publics. In sum, this article aims to disprove the applicability of situational theory to the blog situation, and to propose and verify a new model to segment blogger publics. This is demonstrated using the food security issue Korea experienced in 2008. Analysis of the data collected from 895 online surveys garnered from Korean bloggers is summarized as follows.

First, this study reveals that situational theory is ineffective in the blog context. In a structural equation model approach, the path model of situational theory has no acceptable model fit indices. This implies situational theory fails to effectively classify blogger publics. As estimated, bloggers go beyond the boundary of traditional public segmentation theory; situational theory has limits in covering bloggers’ journalistic attributions and the source of their motivation to act journalistically in the blogosphere. Briefly, this article suggests that since bloggers become part of journalism in certain situations, situation theory misplaces the public at the “end” of the journalistic process. This ignores the blogger’s role as an active producer of information, rather than a passive recipient.

Second, the proposed hypothetical BPS model has been empirically verified. The BPS model has good model fit indices in SEM analyses and the four types of publics by the BPS model also have different levels of journalistic behaviors. The BPS model has good indices, and active blogger publics have higher level of journalistic behaviors than other types of bloggers. In total, this indicates the proposed model represents well the phenomenon of the blogosphere.

As a whole, this study proposes and verifies a new public segmentation model for bloggers, attempting to move away from the use of mass communication approaches. These results have implications in both theory and practice. In theory, these results suggest that to identify the emergence of new publics in the blogosphere, public relations researchers need to move beyond the traditional approach in which a public refers to a group of individuals who can be understood as mere users of media. In a scientific way, the structural equation model approach also helps examine an argument for situational theory’s limitations. To be more proactive, the researchers need to view the new publics in the blogosphere as emergent through the creation and re-creation of shared information embedded in journalistic practices.

Additionally, this study identifies and describes the new types of blogger publics, which theoretically advances the research on the segmentation and identification of publics. This proposed model suggests that bloggers’ journalistic behavior activate issues in the blogosphere. At the same time, this model emphasizes that even if journalistic communication over the blogosphere facilitates the issue activation, it varies depending on bloggers psychological competence and issue involvement. Particularly, this study integrates the numerous communication activities that constitute issue activation with the concept of journalistic behavior. This concept maintains that even if journalism studies have argued that blogging can result in the formation of new journalism (Blood, 2002a; Gillmor, 2004; Kerbel & Bloom, 2005), individual blogger’s level of journalistic behavior is a crucial yardstick for judging whether bloggers are influential key publics to organizations. This means that unless bloggers behave journalistically, they are merely equal to private online diary users. In addition, the blog self-efficacy concept has value because it circumscribes bloggers’ journalistic behaviors. These new criteria for segmenting blogger publics – blog self-efficacy and journalistic behavior – are useful in understanding how members of blogger
publics perceive choices about their possible courses of action, and how they view communicative constraints. Under constraint, some bloggers do blog more on issues, such as the war situation, while other bloggers don’t. These call for extensive naturalistic inquiry to uncover which conditions and factors accelerate the level of blog self-efficacy and journalistic behavior.

In practical terms, this proposed model may help public relations practitioners to discern the dominant publics in the blog context for a focal organization. In specific, the BPS model offers the practitioners useful tools to investigate the journalistic practices of blogger publics. Analyzing the journalistic practices of blogger publics is more proactive than waiting for a group to dispute issues relevant to an organization, which opens greater opportunities for public relations to develop relationships with potential target blogger publics. To deal effectively with an issue in the blogosphere, practitioners need to develop an understanding of both the strength of journalistic behavior and the state of blogger publics in which a particular issue evolves. The practitioners should also keep in mind that diverse journalistic communications of blogger publics are available worldwide and facilitate active blogger publics’ abilities to influence others, mobilize people to action, and create new issues and publics. Moreover, public relations practitioners must understand which blogging patterns activate issues, and try to develop positive relationships with the key blogger publics at ordinary times.

These findings also have limitations. First, the proposed model should be verified in diverse issues and cultural contexts. This study is conducted regarding one issue, the food security problem in Korea, and may thus pose limitations for interpreting the emergence of blogger public types in general. Additionally, the method of online sampling may not be representative of other blogger populations. However, it is rarely possible to sample systematically given there are no lists for blog populations; replication studies for this model are thus needed. Second, in addition to the variables of the BPS model, there are several candidate variables. For instance, levels of knowledge on issues may relate to other specific blogger publics, and valence of hostility or goodwill of publics to an organization will classify bloggers in detail. Because some publics could be either supportive of or hostile to the current organizational stance, they would also be different in journalistic communication patterns in problem solving. These can be future research topics in line with the research program to find ‘to whom’ the blog-related public relations practices should be directed.
References


Regan, T. (2003). Weblogs Threaten and Inform Traditional Journalism Blogs 'challenge conventional notions of who is a journalist and what journalism is'. *Nieman Reports, 57*(3), 68-70.


Doing Measurement Right: On the Road to ROI

Mark R. Phillips, VP of Corporate Communications, USO, and doctoral candidate, Department of Communication, University of Maryland

Katie Delahaye Paine, CEO, KDPaine & Partners, and Publisher, The Measurement Standard
Introduction

This is the second report from the USO’s (United Service Organizations) longitudinal program of communication metrics development and evaluation. It is driven by the organization’s desire to understand the effectiveness of its communication program and to be able to use that understanding to fine tune communication programs, activities and resources.

A year ago, we presented the background design and goals of the USO’s new communication measurement and evaluation program. The gist of that presentation was that we had identified the strengths and weaknesses of the USO’s in-house communication capabilities, developed a long-term measurement and evaluation schema, completed a year-long data collection process for mainstream media data and conducted a national public awareness survey. These last two activities provided baseline assessments for the longitudinal study.

During the past year, we continued to collect and analyze data for the mainstream media database and began collecting data that would enable correlations between communication activities and the USO’s overall key performance indicators. Such data include USO web traffic, social media activity, public service announcement (PSA) program data, customer satisfaction, organizational climate and employee satisfaction, online donation and other revenue data. These data sets are now being integrated into the dashboard, so that we can identify correlations and determine actionable meaning buried within the data.

Progress Made

Developing a Metrics Schema

For us, the first step in developing a metrics schema was to very clearly identify those groups of people with whom we need to communicate and about what. To do this, we asked the question, “At the most fundamental level, who does the USO depend upon for its existence and operation?” We also asked, “Who depends upon the USO?” The answers to these two questions identified the constellation of strategic stakeholders for the USO. Furthermore, we noted that the more important that organization-stakeholder interdependence was to either or both parties, the more strategically important that stakeholder relationship was to the USO.

The resulting constellation of stakeholders is presented in Figure 1. This constellation represents those groups of people who are vital to the organization. By “vital,” we mean that they organization cannot exist or thrive without these groups of people. Serving the customers (i.e., American troops and their families) is the USO’s reason for being. For the most part, the other groups of stakeholders have an affinity for these customers and, therefore, are allied with the USO as they help the organization fulfill its mission of lifting the spirits of the troops and their families.
Figure 1. The USO’s constellation of strategic stakeholders.

Once the constellation of strategic stakeholders had been identified, we had answered the “Who” question. Next, we needed to answer the “What” and “Why” questions. Essentially, these were, “For what do our stakeholders depend on us and for what do we depend on them?” and “Why is this important to each of us?” These questions help us confirm that the level of interdependence means that these relationships are strategically important to each party.

These questions also help us understand what it is that we need to communicate about. In a nutshell, the core of the USO’s communication with each stakeholder group should focus on our interdependence. Using the relationship with our customers as an example, they need to know programs and services the USO has to offer and how to access these programs and services. The USO needs to know whether it is offering the programs and services that customers need and want, along with the degree to which customers are satisfied with these offerings.

With the constellation of strategic stakeholders identified, along with a clear understanding of what constitutes each group’s stake in the USO and vice versa, the next step was to develop a metrics schema that would guide the collection, assessment and reporting of communication data. Our presentation at the 2009 IPRRC conference, along with the accompanying paper, laid out these metrics in detail; we have consolidated that into a more easily digested form, presented in Figure 2.
Figure 2. USO metrics schema overview.

The metrics laid out in Figure 2 should be read from left to right, with importance to the organization increasing as one moves from outputs to impacts. It should be noted that there is not universal agreement on communication metrics terminology (e.g., some organizations use outputs, outcomes and outgrowths), but these are the terms that work for us.

Outputs represent “busyness;” they are the things that keep organizational communicators, especially those working in a technician role, busy. These activities include writing, coordinating and disseminating press releases and social media releases, producing brochures and other collateral materials, building web pages, engaging in social media communities, shooting and editing photographs and video, and so forth. Measuring these outputs is essentially a simple accounting of the numbers of things produced. These could be numbers of press releases written and sent, media events staged and collateral materials (e.g., fact sheets, brochures, white papers and annual reports) produced. When viewed alone, output metrics are not very useful, but they serve as the first step in assessing the efficiency of an organization’s communication programs. It also sets the stage for determining the ROI (return on investment) of communication programs.
Measuring processes is an attempt to understand the level of efficiency of an organization’s communication programs. These process metrics can focus on the time between an event and a corresponding press release, social media release, blog post or tweet on Twitter. Process metrics can also focus on the accuracy of communication products; an example of this could be the assessment of error rates in press release drafts that have been sent out for coordination. Another process metric can focus on the degree to which organizational publications or collateral materials (e.g., brochures, fact sheets, web pages and so forth) are current. In this context, currency refers to the degree to which these products contain up-to-date facts, figures, video and messages. As with output metrics, these process metrics are useful mainly in assessing the efficiency of an organization’s communication activities.

Outcomes are intermediate results that lie somewhere between the things produced and the effects that those things create. For the USO, outcome metrics include media coverage from pitches and releases, as well as PSA (public service announcement) program media values that also result from producing high-quality PSAs and pitching them to public service directors.

It is a more thorough understanding of the impact of our communication program that we are really trying to develop via this evaluation process. For the USO’s purposes, impact can be assessed in terms of changes in stakeholder perceptions, behaviors and the resulting quality of the relationships between the organization and its stakeholders. Within this model, perception includes awareness and understanding of the USO, its mission and how that is connected to stakeholders’ lives. Perception also includes stakeholder opinions (i.e., what they think about the USO) and attitudes (i.e., how they feel about the USO).

Behaviors are unique to each stakeholder group, but each is vitally important. For example, vital donor behavior is in the act of donating money or in-kind support. Volunteers and celebrity entertainers donate their time. The board of governors provide strategic guidance and access for business development. Members of the Congressional caucus may vote one way or another on appropriations bills that provide some financial support to the organization. Thus, each stakeholder group behaves in ways that are either supportive of the organization or not, just as the organization behaves in ways that might or might not support its stakeholders.

A simplified way of viewing this model is that we produce things (Outputs: Releases, videos, photos, tweets, blog posts, web pages, and so forth), that people have the opportunity to experience (Outcomes: Opportunities to see) and that can change their perceptions, behaviors and our relationships (Impacts).

Ultimately, goal of the USO’s communication program is to help the organization foster long-term, stable, mutually beneficial relationships with its strategic stakeholders. The communication metrics schema reflects this, as the output, process, outcome and other impact metrics are designed to support relationship building.

A confounding factor in such a measurement schema is that as one moves toward a more important metric (i.e., moving from left to right on the Figure 2 diagram), the metric is less about communication specifically and more about the behavior of the overall organization. Thus, as
one measures things that are more important to the organization, it is increasingly difficult to attribute changes in those measurements to specific communication inputs.

*Feeling the Elephant: Communication Measurement in the Round*

We now have two full years of data from mainstream media coverage of the USO. This rich data was collected by monitoring 385 publications and broadcast outlets in the top 200 DMAs (i.e., Designated Market Areas) across the United States. Mentions of the USO in these media outlets are identified, captured and filtered by a third party media monitoring service. Mentions of “USO” that are about other organizations or uses of the acronym (e.g., references to Universal Service Obligations, U.S. Open tennis tournament, and so forth) are filtered out. Also filtered out are incidental mentions, such as obituaries that mention that the deceased had been a USO volunteer or that they had met their spouse at a USO decades earlier.

These data collected from mainstream media coverage allow us to understand the number of articles, tone of coverage (*Figure 3*), and subjects covered (*Figure 4*); which departments were covered (*Figure 5*) and the level of exposure (i.e., opportunities to see or “reach” of the coverage); the extent to which key messages were present in the coverage (*Figure 6*); the accuracy and completeness of USO messages in coverage (*Figure 7*); the degree to which the coverage was focused on the USO (*Figure 8*); where the USO coverage occurred in the publication or broadcast (i.e., whether the USO was the lead story or was buried); and what share of coverage the USO garnered as compared to peer organizations. These assessments were explained in the authors’ 2009 paper, “Doing Measurement Right: One Organization’s Experience Creating A Best-In-Class Measurement Program From Scratch,” which is available on the IPRRC website. Additionally, this data set enables analysis of mainstream media coverage by geographic location, media type, communication campaign, and may be aggregated by day, week, month or year.
Figure 3. Monthly articles in mainstream media by tone.

Figure 4. Quarterly articles in mainstream media by subject.
Figure 5. Quarterly exposure in mainstream media by department.

Figure 6. Quarterly articles in mainstream media by key message content.
It is important to note that each of these metrics is essentially meaningless when viewed in isolation. Like the story of the blind men each feeling different parts of the elephant, it is only by examining all of the metrics that they begin to take on context and meaning. One way we do
this is by looking, over time, at the volume of opportunities to see, tonality of coverage, the degree of USO visibility in media coverage, and the presence of key messages (Figure 9).

![Figure 9. Key performance indicators for mainstream media coverage.](image)

Few if any organizations, whether for-profit, non-profit or governmental, can afford to do communication measurement and evaluation simply for the sake of doing it. Data collection, evaluation and reporting is a time-consuming and typically not inexpensive process. Ultimately, measurement has to be able to inform decision-making and help organizations more effectively plan and execute their communication and other operations.

One example is at Figure 10, which shows the relationships between opportunities to see (OTS) and numbers of articles by quarter in a comparison of 2008 and 2009 media coverage. For non-profit organizations, which depend on donations for operating capital, the last quarter of the year is the most important fund-raising period of the year. This is due to a combination of holidays, during which time people tend to be more generous, and the approach of the end of the tax year, which drives charitable contributions that can be counted as tax deductions. During the fourth quarter of 2009, the USO made a deliberate, concerted effort to communicate as broadly as possible. This included a significant outreach effort to national media. If one simply looks at the number of stories in Q4 of 2009 as compared to 2008, there was some increase, but it was not
dramatic. Conversely, if one compares the level of exposure (i.e., OTS) of the same periods, the increase is dramatic. It is not until one considers both changes in numbers of stories and OTS that the true picture emerges: The Q4 2009 push for coverage in national media was successful.

Figure 10. Year-over-year comparison of OTS and articles by quarter (2008-2009).
Another example is seen in Figure 11, which correlates donations received through the USO website (www.uso.org) with episodic national media coverage. In the summer of 2009, the USO conducted an Operation USO Care Package stuffing event on the south lawn of the White House with President Obama and the Pittsburgh Steelers, a similar care package event on NBC’s Today Show plaza with Dr. Jill Biden and the show’s hosts, and then took The Colbert Report to Iraq, where a week of shows were taped with a military audience in Baghdad. These events generated substantial national media coverage and Figure 11 correlates online donations with media coverage.

A third example of how we are now incorporating various data sets into USO communication evaluations can be seen in Figure 12, which illustrates social media activity with the USO’s website and email fund-raising campaign. Data from 8/15 shows a spike in Facebook activity that resulted from the USO actively promoting a “Support the USO” Friday; this is similar to “Follow Fridays” on Twitter. Activity on the USO’s Ning online community also spiked that day, which is a cross-platform spillover of the Facebook activity. The lesson learned is that online activity on one online platform can affect other platforms. This phenomenon was also evident between 8/22 and 8/29, when a fund-raising email blast drove increased activity on
the USO’s Facebook page. Thus, communicators should expect and plan for spillover effects when developing online communication plans.

In a similar vein, real-world events have the potential to drive online activity. This was the case on 9/11, when the anniversary of the terrorist attacks coincided with a spike in activity on the USO’s Facebook page. Similarly, the USO’s annual gala on 10/7 also generated an increase in Ning activity and a spike on Facebook.

*Figure 12.* Correlation of Facebook, Twitter, Ning and USO website activity with fund-raising email and annual gala (2009).

Do the assessments presented here answer all of the important questions about the USO’s communication program? No, but they are much more valuable than having only a pile of raw media clippings from which to discern the effectiveness of the organization’s communications. So, what are the next steps for the USO’s communication measurement program?
R.O.I.: ARE WE THERE YET?

Taking an organization-wide view of measurement

Over the past two years, the USO has made tremendous strides in being able to clearly articulate what should be communicated, with whom and to what effect. With the help of KDPaine & Partners, we have established important data and assessment baselines, particularly with respect to determining many of the outcomes of the USO’s media relations program.

With the second year of this communication measurement program, the USO-KDPaine team has launched into the next phase of development. This phase is three-fold: First, we are incorporating additional types of data that will enable ever more meaningful assessments of the effectiveness of the communications department and the USO overall. Second, we will provide data-driven formative research to continue to guide communication program planning. Third, we will conduct evaluative research to determine the effectiveness of the USO’s communication programs and how these communication efforts affect the organizational goals.

Based on the metrics schema highlighted in Figure 2 and detailed in the 2009 IPRRC paper, this phase of measurement seeks to move beyond measuring data (e.g., media coverage) that are typically thought of as belonging to the communications department. The next step is to include operational data from throughout the organization. Such data includes information on customer, donor and partner behavior; customer, volunteer and employee satisfaction; and organizational culture and climate, along with many other potentially relevant sets of data that, when viewed as a whole can provide operationally useful insight.

Incorporating organizationally important data

The ability to incorporate new data sets into the overall communication evaluation program has already proven to hold tremendous potential because of the myriad ways it can inform organizational decision-making. For example, with the USO’s customers (i.e., the stakeholder group that includes service members and their families), goals include increasing awareness and understanding, improving attitudes and opinions, encouraging use of USO programs and services, and fostering long-term positive relationships between the USO and its customers. Given the assessments previously discuss in this paper, we know which messages to which they might be exposed and how those messages are available via news media. Combining data from news media coverage with data from the USO’s public service announcement (PSA) program enables more thorough understanding of the ways in which stakeholders in particular geographic areas might be exposed to key messages.

Data from feedback surveys of customers using USO centers and non-center based programs should enable the determination of the degree to which they are aware of, understand and value the programs and services provided by the USO. So, too, should assessments of customer use of specific programs, services and communication tools. With respect to program use, the USO participates in the United Through Reading Military Program, in which deployed military parents record DVDs of themselves reading children’s books on camera. The DVDs and books are mailed to the children at home, who can follow along in the book while their
parent reads to them on the television. The parent at home is encouraged to photograph or videotape the child doing this and send the photos or video to the deployed parent, thus completing the circle of communication. Tracking use of this program, along with collecting feedback from the service members and the parents at home will allow the USO to fine tune this program to best meet customer needs and expectations.

Customer attitudes and opinions are tied to both communications about the USO and their experiences with the USO. To better understand how troops and their families perceive the USO, in the fall of 2009, we undertook the first of what should be an annual customer awareness and satisfaction study. This online survey was conducted with 5,656 participants. Questions were designed to determine customers’ awareness and use of USO programs and services, how these services can be improved, which programs and services are the most highly valued, and so forth. Figure 13 illustrates one of the macro-level findings from this study. Such survey data, especially if conducted longitudinally, will be useful in assessing customer awareness, attitudes, opinions and satisfaction with the USO. They will also be useful in identifying how well USO communication efforts are improving levels of program awareness and use.

Figure 13. Active duty service members’ satisfaction with USO services.

This principle applies to all of the organization’s programs and services. Likewise, customer traffic and feedback from USO centers in airports and in combat zones overseas can be fed into the system to be correlated with the other relevant data sets. Finally, to determine the health of the relationship between the organization and its customers, service members and their families can be surveyed to determine their perception of satisfaction, trust, commitment, control mutuality (i.e., the degree to which the distribution of power in the relationship is acceptable to each party) and relationship type.
Similar processes of correlating various data sets can be used to assess awareness, understanding, opinions, attitudes, and, ultimately, the nature of their relationships with the USO for each of the strategic stakeholder groups. For example, volunteer behavior (e.g., number of hours donated, longevity with the organization, and so forth) can be correlated with relationship and organizational climate data from volunteer surveys to paint a more detailed picture of how well the USO is maintaining relations with this critical group of stakeholders. Additional detail can be added by also including data on volunteers’ use of the USO’s social networking site (i.e., www.usocommunity.com), Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media.

As the USO-KDPaine team moves into more sophisticated assessments of the organization’s communications programs, we will include regular waves of public opinion data, the baseline of which was established with a national survey conducted at the end of 2008 to gauge awareness of the USO mission and interest in specific communication initiatives, such as the USO electronic newsletter and a USO magazine. A follow-up survey has just been fielded.

During 2009, the USO also conducted its first organization-wide climate study. This study was designed to assess the health of the organizational climate, as well as employee attitudes and opinions about the organizational culture and structure, work distribution, leadership, resources, and a host of other factors that affect employee recruitment and retention.

Additional data on the use of the USO website (e.g., traffic statistics, search engine rankings, online donations, and so forth), PSA program data, customer and employee satisfaction, social media data, and revenue data are also now being collected and will be incorporated into the evaluations during 2010. The USO’s dashboard was structured to accommodate and integrate such disparate data sets into the organization’s evaluation program. This is critical, as the communications evaluation dashboard now has the capability to not only provide meaningful feedback on the effectiveness of the communication program, but on overall organizational effectiveness as well.
The Community and Physician Relations Department at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital: A Case Study in Public Relations Management

Erika H. Powelson
Powelson Communications, Inc.

Kenneth D. Plowman
Sara Shawcroft
Brigham Young University
plowman@byu.edu
Introduction

The healthcare industry in the United States is changing at record speed, especially in California. California has seen the emergence of Health Maintenance Organizations (HMO's) and the drastic effects they have had on the hospital environment. These changes are occurring throughout the organization and affect everything from ordering of supplies to length of patient stay. It has also caused great changes in one particular area of the hospital—the public relations and marketing departments.

The purpose of this case study was to explain communications management in a period of time of the recent past to ensure no encroachment on the current state of public relations for the Community and Physician Relations Department (CPRD) at Lucile Salter Packard Children's hospital at Stanford (LPCH).

The change in this department reflects the overall trend in healthcare marketing and the need for hospitals to promote themselves to stay profitable. The San Francisco Bay area is being hit particularly hard by all these changes and prediction that several hospitals may close in the near future. One goal of the CPRD is to educate the community about the hospital so they will use and pay for its services. Another goal is to encourage physicians to purchase phone triage services that bring in revenue and referrals to LPCH.

The CPRD has several areas of focus, but this case study did not attempt to cover them all. This case study focused on two main areas: the Pediatric Telecenter, a medically-based outreach program and Community Relations which is non-medically based outreach. It has only been in existence for 20 months and is a conglomeration of several different employees who previously belonged to different departments. Community Outreach used to be part of the Development and Communications Departments and the Pediatric Telecenter was part of the Medical Outreach Department. These two areas now combine their resources to more effectively reach out to the community and physicians in the Bay Area.

Managing this relatively new and varied group can be a challenge. Not only is the overall healthcare system changing, but LPCH has been experiencing work redesign for the past four years which also has impacted the department. Additionally, new areas keep being added to the CPRD. The Volunteer Services area of the hospital became a part of the CPRD, and a few months earlier, Continuing Medical Education was added. In all, the CPRD now had nine different areas of responsibility under the leadership of one director and four managers.

This case study explored three theories relative to the management style of the CPRD: participative versus authoritarian management, symmetrical versus asymmetrical communication, and the role of the dominant coalition. The management style of the director is important because it affects her staff. As an outreach department, knowing how to communicate with its various publics is a must. The asymmetrical and symmetrical theory is necessary to comprehending the overall communication management of the CPRD. Finally, the concept of the dominant coalition will be discussed because although the director of the CPRD is not considered senior management, she does have an important role to play with those in higher echelons of management. This also affects her management style and effectiveness.

As the role of the CPRD director is discussed, it is important to keep in mind that she is not a professional in communications or public relations; she is a nurse. This unique characteristic brings a different approach to the management of the CPRD and this will be explained in this case study.

The first author of this study was a member of this department and reported to the
director. As a result, this case study departs from others in that it relies on participant observations and is an insider's look at the creation, current management and future goals of this uniquely designed department.

Several methods of evidence were used in this case study to develop the process of triangulation and add to the verifiability of the results (Yin, 2009). Documents were selected based on the existing archives and availability. Agendas and year-end reports were useful to show the background, past successes, and future goals of the CPRD. Archival records such as organizational charts and budgets provided the business aspects of the department. The time period covered was one fiscal year. The bulk of evidence came from conducting personal interviews with several individuals. Those individuals were the CPRD Director and the two managers in charge of Community Outreach and the Pediatric Telecenter respectively. These interviews focused on the creation of this department, management style, communication to the public, and the effect of the director's role in the dominant coalition.

There were several delimiters to this case study. First was the time factor. The case study was conducted in fewer than 16 weeks so there was a limit to the amount of information that could be collected and examined during that time. Another delimiter was the role of the first author as a participant observer. Although this circumstance allowed for ease of access to people and information, it also was somewhat awkward in an interview situation. Because all the individuals involved worked together, the respondents knew that what they said could affect the interviewer. Some of the interview questions were awkward but the answers obtained still seemed more honest and in-depth than an outsider could have obtained.

The CPRD at Packard Children's Hospital is an important link in the continued viability of the hospital. After reading this case study, the department's purpose, style of management, and role within the community and hospital should be more evident.

**Literature Review**

This case study compares the theories of authoritarian and participative management, asymmetrical and symmetrical communication, and looks at the concept of dominant coalitions. These theories will be discussed to show that the Community and Physicians Relations Department (CPRD) is managed in a mostly participative fashion that focuses on both asymmetrical and symmetrical communication and is directed by a manager who, although not part of senior management, is definitely a player in the dominant coalition of the organization.

**Authoritarian and Participative Organizational Cultures**

An organizational structure is "the sum total of shared values, symbols, meanings, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations that organize and integrate a group of people who work together" (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, p. 482). There are two main types of organizational structure: authoritarian and participative.

Authoritarian organizational cultures are marked by centralized control and authority. According to Dozier et al. (1995), "The various departments in authoritative organizational cultures do not share a common mission. Employees say managers act as if the employees they supervise don't have initiative and require constant direction" (p. 140). In this type of department, decisions are made by the manager without consulting staff members. These staff members are then expected to follow through on whatever decision the manager has decreed.

On the other extreme is the participative organizational culture. Dozier et al. (1995) said: Feeling part of the team, working together, fostering interdepartmental coordination, and maintaining team-level responsibility for getting the job done are values and beliefs central to participative organizational cultures. These types of cultures also share
decision-making authority, fostering a sense of equality, because decisions are made with the involvement of those most affected by the decision. (p. 138)

Based on these definitions, the Community and Physicians Relations Department (CPRD) seems to have a mostly participative organizational culture based on preliminary observations. Terry O'Grady, Director of CPRD, oversees a diverse array of programs, managers and staff. As the director of medical and non-medical outreach programs, O'Grady must understand all the publics involved, but must also rely heavily on the managerial staff who specialize in these areas.

Likert's (1961) research proved that the participative management approach was most successful because increasing participation by organizational members at all levels helped build more productive organizations. House and Dessler (1974) said managers could enhance the psychological state of employees, giving them greater motivation to perform and increasing job satisfaction. Matejko (1986) said, "Participation implies a situation in which all interested parties exercise some legitimate control over these decisions which are of vital interest to them" (p. 193).

Yeung's (2004) research posits that the control exercised in facilitation lies in providing a structure for collaborative rational inquiry, channeling different ideas and allowing for negotiation of different interests. The discourse strategies are thus differently oriented and often show features which are opposite those of top-down control.

O'Grady, from the Children's Hospital, scheduled regular meetings with her staff; weekly individual meetings with managers, and monthly group meetings with all other staff. She encouraged staff members at personal and professional levels, and helped them focus on their strengths and improve on their weaknesses. She seemed to have realized the importance of teamwork in getting things done and in making the most people satisfied with their jobs.

Fleishman (1956) characterized managers in two categories: relationship-oriented and task-oriented. The relationship-oriented behavior was one of friendship, mutual trust and good relations between the manager and group. The task-oriented behavior was noted by defining relationships within a group, listing ways a job can get done, scheduling and criticizing. As a director, O'Grady is much more relationship-oriented. She even used this word herself to explain many aspects of her role in the department. Schriesheim and Schreisheim (1980) said this relationship-oriented behavior has the most positive impact on satisfaction and production of those employees who work on stressful and frustrating tasks. The Pediatric Telecenter deals with medical calls and emergencies so there can be a high level of stress in those jobs. Community Outreach has had to deal with a number of cutbacks in recent months that can make the situation frustrating. As a result, both of these departments benefit from O'Grady's relationship-oriented management style.

According to Etzioni (1960), a less formalized structure is appropriate in organizations where change is occurring. This statement is reflective of the current environment experienced in the CPRD. As a conglomeration of different staff people from completely different backgrounds, everyone has had to learn how to best work with, and relate to the diverse areas covered by the department. This type of diversity would not lend itself well to a highly structured environment. With all individuals having such different roles there are a variety of approaches for each job. A structured environment would hinder personnel from performing these diverse tasks in the best way possible.

One other aspect of participative management is to "empower employees, giving them sufficient control over needed resources to complete the job. The empowerment value runs deep
in participative culture" (Dozier et al., 1995, p. 77). Leher (1982) also discussed empowerment and said, "it is being recognized throughout the world that productivity and quality of work like can both be enhanced by involving those who do work in solving problems associated with their work" (p. 1).

Although O'Grady leans heavily towards the participative management style, she is still in charge of an entire department and all parties involved do not always agree with her decisions. Barnard (1938) said that although goals were imposed from the top down, attainment of these goals depended on the willingness to comply from the bottom up. In times of disagreement amongst staff members, O'Grady makes the final decision and personnel, whose respect she has earned, perform accordingly. Barnard said authority depends on the subordinate's approval, which goes hand-in-hand with the issues of teamwork emphasized in this department.

Two other researchers also had ideas on this theme of conflict. House (1977) characterized effective leaders as using the authoritative style when resistance is encountered, but encouraging employee participation in decision-making when compliance is assured. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) said successful leaders are flexible and cognizant of their choices; directing when necessary and allowing freedom when possible. This second theory is most reflective of the overall management of CPRD.

This case study looked at the empowerment of the CPRD staff and the control they were given to complete their jobs. It was important to find out if the management style of O'Grady is considered to be participative by two of her managers and herself. The type of management style is important in discussing the functions of the department -- is the asymmetrical or symmetrical form of communication practiced?

Two-way Communication Theories

Asymmetrical and symmetrical or two-way models of communications make a major contribution to this case study. "In asymmetrical practices, communicators use attitude theory, persuasion, and manipulation to shape public attitudes and behaviors. In symmetrical practices communicators use theories and techniques of conflict resolution and negotiation to increase dominant coalition understanding of publics" (Dozier et al., 1995, p. 46). This case study will show that in many ways the CPRD is functioning in an asymmetrical fashion because its ultimate goal is to raise funds for the hospital and convince parents that this hospital will provide the best care for their children. The tasks of a department's function in asymmetrical communication are:

- Persuade a public that your organization is right on an issue
- Get publics to behave as your organization wants
- Manipulates publics scientifically
- Use attitude theory in a campaign (Dozier et al., 1995, p. 46)

Looking at the functions of the CPRD will show that asymmetrical tasks are performed often. Getting the public (general community and physicians) to choose Packard Children's Hospital over any other hospital is the department's main goal. Showing a strong stance for advocacy of children is a method to persuade the public that the organization is right on an issue, i.e. child safety seats, health care reform, and injury prevention. Convincing physicians that the nurses are the most qualified to provide triage services is another important message. However, the CPRD is not completely asymmetrical because it does not try to manipulate the public scientifically and it does not launch any full public relations campaigns. The task for a symmetrical communicator is:

- Negotiate with an activist public
Use theories of conflict resolution in dealing with publics
- Help management to understand the opinion of particular publics
- Determine how publics react to the organization (Dozier et al., 1995, p. 46)

Based on this list of criteria, the CPRD also participates in symmetrical communication. It is an important role of the department to communicate with its publics to find out what their interests are to serve them better in the future. Spending so much time in the community is an important way to find out what the organization's publics think about it and ensures that top management understands those publics. One of those publics is the patients and families who have returned home after a visit at LPCH. Patient satisfaction surveys are sent to all the families to track the type of care they received. It is important that hospital management know what its customers think and make changes accordingly. This theory is important to the entire hospital organization because it is easy to forget about the publics served on the outside when so many people must face patients (another public) needing attention on the inside.

"Symmetrical practices emphasize change in the management opinions and behavior, as well as those of publics. Asymmetrical practices, on the other hand, emphasize changing the opinions and behavior of publics, without similar changes in the opinions and behavior of dominant coalitions" (Dozier et al., 1995, p. 95).

The two main publics served by the CPRD are the community of physicians and the community at large. These are two very distinct groups, but each is important to the role of the CPRD and it is important that the role of these publics is clearly defined to hospital management. Without either of these publics, the hospital could not exist. Keeping good relations with the physicians and creating win/win situations are vital to the continued care of the patients at LPCH. The continued tracking of the community to see where they hear about outreach programs, what their attitude is toward them, and whether they would bring their children to LPCH are important factors for hospital management to understand. Although the CPRD serves to educate and serve the community, the ultimate goal is to have the publics think of LPCH when they need care for their child or want to refer a patient.

Using both symmetrical and asymmetrical communication is not unusual. Murphy (1991) developed the term mixed motives from game theory that suggest both sides pursue their own interests, but both sides also realize that the game's outcome must be satisfactory to both parties. Because the majority of the communication is asymmetrical in this situation, the new model of symmetry as two-way practices (Dozier et al., 1995) does not seem to apply to this department. The new model of symmetry applies when "...communicators try to persuade dominant coalitions to move towards the public's position" (p. 49). In the case of the CPRD, the majority of persuasion is to the external publics, not the internal. Also, the hospital's dominant coalition (top management) is well aware of its publics' issues so there is not much urgency to convince them of their positions. Plowman (2008), however, expanded on the Dozier et al. model and encompassed both the asymmetrical and symmetrical communications within a mixed motive model for public relations.

Having examined the authoritative and participative management styles and the combined asymmetrical and symmetrical communication practices in mixed motives for CPRD, the next step is to evaluate the director of the department's role in the dominant coalition of the hospital.

Dominant Coalition

The director of the CPRD is not only key because of her role in the department but also because of her role with the dominant coalition of the hospital. "The dominant coalition is the
group of individuals within an organization who have the power to determine its mission and goals.” (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, p. 141). O’Grady is not a member of the senior management team, but her management style of negotiating a win/win for all sides has made her a valuable member of the dominant coalition.

Although not the director for the actual Communications Department, O'Grady does have an impact on many of the story ideas sent to the media and promotional tools used for her various programs. She also has the respect and trust of those in senior management. After more than 20 years at LPCH, O'Grady has the reputation as someone who cares about the hospital—its patients and staff. However, through these many years she also has been progressive in creating new programs for the hospital. All of these programs have been successful in bringing revenue or creating strong relationships with the community physicians and other publics.

The director's role in the dominant coalition provides the CPRD with more respect and latitude than other departments within the hospital. The department is perceived as valuable because O'Grady is seen as valuable. Her role in the dominant coalition positively affects her staff. As the hospital continues to make necessary financial and structural changes, O'Grady is viewed as a pivotal figure to explain those sometimes difficult changes to others throughout the hospital personnel structure. The hospital is changing course and O'Grady is helping captain some of that change.

What is intriguing about O'Grady's role as the director of this department is her nursing background. She has no formal training in writing, editing or working with the media. However, as this case study will show, she has these skills and other non-technical skills that actually are more important. "...technical expertise alone is not what makes excellent programs excellent: the best communication programs achieve excellence through strategic use of such craft expertise to solve important problems or create important opportunities for senior management" (Dozier et al., 1995, p. 22). Grunig (1992) preceded this statement when he said, "Strategically managed public relations, therefore, is designed to build relationships with the most important stakeholders of an organization" (p. 123). This is precisely what O'Grady strives to achieve.

**Research Questions**

This case study examined O'Grady's role within the dominant coalition and how this affects her style and communication practices. Based on the three theoretical emphases of the literature review, the research questions are:

1. Is the organizational culture of the CPRD more participative than authoritative?
2. Do the communication practices tend to be more asymmetrical than symmetrical?
3. Is the director of the CPRD not a member of the dominant coalition but does she have significant influence on that coalition?

**Methodology**

Although there are many types of research studies, this paper focused on the case study because as Yin (2009) said, "In brief, the case study allows an investigator to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as ...organizational and managerial process..." (p. 3). The case study helps answer the "how" and "why" through qualitative methods of evidence instead of statistical data. In an effort to answer the three research questions for this case study, several sources of evidence will be used. According to Yin (2009), "...the various sources are highly complimentary, and a good case study will therefore want to use as many sources as possible" (p. 80). Four sources of evidence were used: documentation, archival records, interviews, and participant observation.
Documentation

According to Yin (2009), documents have three main purposes: verifying correct spelling and titles or names of organizations, providing specific details to corroborate information from other sources, and helping the researcher make inferences. In an organization the size of Packard Children's Hospital, there is a tremendous amount of documentation that could be obtained. However, those most relevant to the issues of the Community and Physician Relations Department (CPRD) were meeting agendas and year end reports of the hospital and the CPRD. The CPRD was established as a separate department two years prior to this time. These documents helped show the overall mission of the hospital and the role of the CPRD to help fulfill this mission. In this time of massive changes in the health care facility, these documents also showed an historical progression of the hospital's role in the community.

Archival Records

Although archival records are an important source of information, Yin (2009) warned that, "Most archival records were produced for a specific purpose and a specific audience...and these conditions must be fully appreciated in order to interpret the usefulness of any archival records" (p. 84). Keeping this in mind, it was still helpful to look at some of the budget information and organizational charts for the CPRD. These financial documents were not audited and the time period for which they were examined was the same as for the documents listed above. The budget information was especially interesting in discussing the Pediatric Telecenter, which has a high salary budget, but the Telecenter also helps in fundraising for the hospital. The Community Outreach budget is not as large, but also does not have the same measure of fundraising to evaluate its success.

Personal Interviews

The bulk of evidence for this case study came from three personal interviews with the aforementioned O'Grady, Director of CPRD; Deb Zwahlen, Pediatric Telecenter Coordinator; and Ellen Corman, Community Outreach Manager. The individuals were selected because of their positions and length of time with CPRD. O'Grady was in charge of the department and the others were chosen because they were both managers who had worked for O'Grady since the inception of CPRD. O'Grady provided an overall view of the entire department and was vital in answering questions regarding her role in the dominant coalition. Zwahlen leads the Pediatric Telecenter, which is the medical outreach program of the CPRD and Corman leads the Community Outreach department whose efforts are primarily of a non-medical nature.

Focused interviews were conducted in which"...the interviews may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but you are more likely to be following a certain set of questions derived from case study protocol" (Yin, 2009, p. 85). The focused interview was developed "... to provide some basis for interpreting statistically significant effects of mass communications" (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1956, p. 5). The focused interviews worked better for this case study for two reasons. First, the schedules of these three individuals were known so it was easier to capturing an hour of their valuable time. Secondly, and more importantly, because of the close relationship of the primary researcher and first author with each of these individuals it was quite easy for the interview to shift directions and discuss numerous issues other than the case study.

Participant Observation

There are several obvious benefits to being a participant observer in a case study. The researcher had access to all the documentation and archival records. The researcher worked closely with those being interviewed so scheduling time with them was easier than with an
outsider. And finally, the researcher had an understanding of the hospital, the department, and the community it serves -- moreso than a direct observer.

Concerns of being a participant observer included innate bias from the researcher's viewpoint of job, department, staff, etc. Becker (1958) said this was a main problem of this research method because the investigator has to assume positions or advocacy roles at certain times that may interfere with the interest of good scientific practice. Trying to discount these biases while doing the case study was a challenge. What this department does for the patients, families, physicians and communities is so important that those values cannot be discounted in doing this case study. However, this strong disposition toward the organization worked to the benefit of this case study because of the depth of research that was accomplished.

Using these multiple sources of evidence represents the process of triangulation that is an important advantage. It means that "...any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode" (Yin, 2009, p. 92). Again, the basis for collection of the information for this study was guided by the parameters of the research questions. It was evaluated and analyzed according to pattern-matching analysis mentioned later and in accord with the stated mission of the hospital. For example, financial documents were used to show how much of a budget O'Grady had to work with in the Pediatric Telecenter. This was a costly program because of the large size of the nursing staff. That same budget did, however, show the projections of profit for Telecenter allowing O'Grady to justify the program.

Now that methods of evidence have been determined, some predictions can be made about the information expected to be found in the research. The management style of O'Grady will have strong overtones of the participatory style with many meetings and inclusion of staff in making departmental decisions. However, as with any organization, someone still has to make an ultimate decision so there will be some authoritative effects as well. The documentation, archival records and interviews should all be able to help justify these guiding hypotheses (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The varied publics of the CPRD dictate that both asymmetrical and symmetrical communication systems will likely be implemented. The archival records will help corroborate this information as well as the interviews. And, all the interviews should confirm O'Grady's unofficial role in the hospital's dominant coalition. It is not expected that any written information will be found substantiating this guiding hypothesis because that information is unofficial, but the interviews should bring it out quite distinctly.

There are some limitations to the sources of evidence. The interviews were all conducted at the office and although a quiet place to interview was sought, there were occasional interruptions from other staff. The interview with O'Grady was done on the phone while she was on vacation in Hawaii. Time constraints on everyone's part required that less than perfect conditions be taken advantage of for these interviews to occur at all. There were no limitations to the archival records or documentation. In fact, the second author limited herself to just a few items of when more items began to restate the same information.

Stages of Analysis

In order to analyze all of the information obtained, the pattern-matching technique was implemented that Yin (2009) considered the most desirable strategy for case study analysis. According to Trochim (1989), this pattern-matching logic compares an empirically based logic with a predicted one. If the patterns coincide, the results strengthen the case study's validity. First, interview transcripts were compared with the literature review to make sure the theories were adequately discussed and conclusions could be drawn from them. Then, the archival and
document information was compared to the literature review for the same purpose. Since the ultimate goal was to make conclusions about the three proposed theories, this type of analysis should work best for and will provide the accurate analysis needed.

Results

Focused interviews were conducted with Terry O'Grady, Director of the Community and Physician Relations Department (CPRD); Deb Zwahlen, Pediatric Telecenter Coordinator; and Ellen Corman, Community Outreach Manager. Once that information was collected and compared to archival records, documents and personal observations using the pattern-matching technique, five patterns resulted. These five patterns were: 1) The leadership style of the director is mostly participative with definite instances of authoritative, 2) The main role of each area is "relationships" whether this be with the community, physicians or dominant coalition, 3) The director of the CPRD is a member of the hospital's dominant coalition, 4) The director's background as a nurse impacts her management style, and 5) Each sub-area of the department has a different idea of how they will be affected by the changes in the healthcare industry.

Result 1 - Leadership Style

O'Grady has worked within the Stanford hospital system for the past 20 years in a variety of managerial roles. As the current director of the CPRD, she hopes her staff sees her as "collaborative" and that she tries to present things in a "palatable" way to make things OK with everyone. O'Grady said, "Teamwork is very, very important to me in how I manage." She said she tries very hard to be a good listener and tries to be as available as possible when staff need her and helps them problem solve as necessary. O'Grady also said she tries very hard to be a good listener and tries to be as available as possible when staff need her and helps them problem solve as necessary. O'Grady also said she gives as much authority as possible to her managers, but she will stay more involved if she feels she has more of a history in the situation or that her relationships with others will help in a particular situation. The two managers seem to corroborate much of what O'Grady said she tries to do.

Zwahlen, who has known O'Grady since 1982, said they have built a "foundation of trust" that helps them have a positive working relationship. Zwahlen gets a "huge amount of support" from O'Grady in regular meetings, "spur of the moment" meetings when extra input is needed, and the time O'Grady gives to plan out future projects and just "touch base" on current ones. Zwahlen also said O'Grady is a great listener and "really cares what I am doing." Zwahlen also mentioned O'Grady's creative energy and encouragement as two more positive characteristics to her management style.

Corman also said O'Grady is a good listener and appreciates the consistent "open door policy" that allows her to talk with O'Grady as needed even during the busiest of times. Corman said it is easy to talk with O'Grady and also mentioned the director's ability at providing praise and not constant criticism of her staff. Corman also said O'Grady is good at bringing information from meetings with senior managers to her staff to keep them informed. She added that O'Grady has "enthusiasm for the job and hospital and tries to make everyone else feel the same way." Overall, Corman felt O'Grady "believes in what I do and is there for me."

The overall comments on O'Grady's leadership style parlay directly into the goals she strives for as a leader. However, Corman and Zwahlen both said O'Grady needs to give more authority to them. Zwahlen said she has about "70% of the authority" over her area that she should have which she attributes to O'Grady's fear of burdening her staff and her innate nature as a perfectionist who is used to doing things herself. Zwahlen said O'Grady "doesn't punt more to me" but that they have discussed this and more responsibility is being relinquished to Zwahlen after each of these talks. Zwahlen feels that because of her long time relationship with O'Grady, they are able to discuss differences and that O'Grady really listens to her input.
Corman held the opinion that although she has the "responsibility" for all her programs, she only has "authority" over some. She said that O'Grady does expect communication on everything although she doesn't "just hang around all the time" interfering. Unlike Zwahlen, who is on a friendship level with O'Grady as well as professional, Corman feels their relationship is more of a "boss to employee" one and very professional.

Reading throughout the monthly agenda notes, it is clear to see that O'Grady involves every staff member in these meetings. Everyone is able to discuss what they are currently working on or any announcements or concerns they might have. Not only are these discussed in a particular meeting, but the follow-up minutes are distributed to each staff person as well.

Both Zwahlen and Corman felt supported by O'Grady although Corman felt she needed to ask for actual physical support such as additional personnel help. O'Grady's encouragement, praise for staff, and time taken to listen, however, were cited by both managers.

Result 2 - Department Roles

The main role of the overall department and the sub-areas within it all has to do with relationships. Each person interviewed used this word and it is used several times in the 1995 year end report. O'Grady said, "The focus of this department is around relationships with the community, physicians, patients and volunteers." She said the CPRD helps the hospital "deal with the inside and outside world" since they serve publics in both.

O'Grady said her department involves the community in helping make some decisions and other times they just let the community know what they are planning to do. She said there are situations that lend themselves to both methods. O'Grady said her department tries to make sure the public is aware of its free community service programs and know about the specialized care the hospital has just for children. A common theme they try to express is "one size doesn't fit all" meaning that children need to come to a children's hospital where equipment is the right size and the caregivers are specialized in pediatric issues and needs. O'Grady said the healthcare marketplace is "cut throat" right now and her department's goal is to do their best for less or "at least convince the payers and physicians - our market - that we are."

Zwahlen said the goal of the Pediatric Telecenter is to "develop relationships with all the community - patients, families and physicians." The Pediatric Telecenter houses five different programs: Physician Hotline, Admission and Discharge Notification Service, AfterHours Care and Call Triage Service, Parent Information and Referral Center (PIRC), and the Physician Referral Service. Each of these is designed for a different public. Some need marketing and publicity, whereas others do not. PIRC is a free community service that is publicized on bus cards, billboards, in newspaper and magazine ads, phone directories, and at educational fairs. It is the most highly publicized program in the Pediatric Telecenter although it is not considered a money making program. According to a CPRD Year-End Report, "PIRC plays a significant role in the promotion of the most appropriate use of health care resources." Pediatric nurses answering this toll free line respond to health questions for parents and other caregivers. The Physician Referral service is also for the community because it has over 400 affiliated doctors to which families can be referred. Zwahlen said the primary public for these programs are parents and caretakers and her role is "to get people aware of these services they can get for free."

The Physician Hotline and AfterHours Care and Call Triage Service are designed to appeal to the community physician so it is a set market that can use these services. Physicians can purchase these services, which provide nurses to triage after-hour calls and provide a clinic where the physicians' patients can be seen after hours. Both of these programs were started a few years ago and are continuing to grow. ZwaWen said they have not marketed the AfterHours
program to date, but it is included in the strategic plan of the department and should happen in the future.

The Patient Discharge Program is a completely different program whose public is the patients and their families. Zwahlen said nurses call patients after discharge to answer any further medical questions. Zwahlen said the patient satisfaction is a large focus right now and this program helps them measure what families think.

Most of Zwahlen's programs can be quantifiably recorded as verified by the researcher. She has statistics, graphs and tables that show how many calls they have received, referrals to the hospital, number of emergency room visits they have preempted, etc. Zwahlen has the ability to take these numbers to show how greatly her programs impact the hospital financially.

Corman has a completely different role as the Community Outreach Manager. She is in charge of community education, educational outreach, hospital tours, SafeKids Coalition of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties, and serves as a liaison between the hospital and other community organizations and the public. She sees her role as having the hospital out there in the professional community by being involved in coalitions, and committees. She said the "hospital needs to be seen as a player in community programming."

Corman said the hospital cannot exist unless patients come to it, but she does not feel she does actual "marketing" for the hospital. Corman said she does the "feel good" stuff and markets the hospital in a "more subtle and comfortable way." She also said this is not like other types of marketing because even if she convinces someone that LPCH is the best place for their child, there are other factors parents have to deal with such as HMO options.

She builds "relationships" with schools, organizations, businesses, physicians and the general public in her job. Corman said LPCH wants to be "collaborative" and they realize that "taking care of kids is a community effort - not just one or more programs." Her main public is the general community and more specifically, the parents. She said one of her roles is to "provide our experts as people available and specialized to talk with parents with needs." Parents are one of the main publics served by the CPRD and in the LPCh Report to The Community. It emphasizes this commitment by stating, "In a time when caring for children seems harder than ever, LPCH wants parents to know there is a place to turn for help." It is one of Corman's roles to make sure parents know about this help. Unlike Zwahlen, Corman said she "cannot measure our success accordingly because it is immeasurable." Corman can show the number of events attended, tours conducted and promotional supplies distributed, but there is not an accurate way to show the impact this area has on the hospital, and definitely not a way to show it financially. Each of these areas has very different focuses, but they are all similar in that they build relationships, which is one of the goals listed in the year end report.

**Result 3 - Dominant Coalition**

This was the one area where interviews and participant observation were the only two methods of evidence used. There is nothing in writing that would show O'Grady's unofficial role in the hospital's dominant coalition. However, each person interviewed, including O'Grady, agreed this was fact.

O'Grady said there are certain members of the senior management team that she is close to and feels she has "some impact" on decisions made. She said there are "certain ones of them that seek out my opinion on a regular basis" because they care what she has to say and they listen closely. O'Grady said she makes sure the right people hear her and that she will bring issues to senior management if she deems it necessary. However, she said she is "not emotional- I do it in a data-driven kind of way." O'Grady said she goes to these members with facts and clearly
explains why it is important to her and why it is important to the institution. She said, "It doesn't work if it's just how I feel about something."

Zwahlen and Corman were quick to say that O'Grady has a special role in this dominant coalition and that it has helped their department. Corman said O'Grady's role has a positive effect on what she does for Corman's department. She said O'Grady is "highly respected by senior management and those higher." Corman also said that if O'Grady is associated with something, that gives it more importance.

Zwahlen said O'Grady has "brought personal power to that role" that someone else would not have and she has "brought the department into the limelight." Zwahlen cited O'Grady's personal friendship with the hospital's chief operating officer as a "springboard" to this role of power and that O'Grady purposefully cultivates certain relationships that she knows will be helpful to her department. Zwahlen feels O'Grady's role has had a definite impact on her own department and she knows she reports to "a fairly powerful person." Zwahlen attributes much of O'Grady's focal role to the relationships she has built in the past 20 years, the ones she continues to build and her "great personal touch." Zwahlen also said what O'Grady does is "behind the scenes" so she works hard at building these relationships, but many people do not even realize her impact.

**Results 4 - Nursing Background**

As stated previously in this case study, O'Grady is the director of a department that oversees medically-based and non-medically based programs that have various different markets to which to publicize. She works with the media, fundraising team and others, but her background is in nursing which has had an impact on her management style and feelings about the department. O'Grady said her nursing background has helped her "incredibly" in her new management role. The relationships she has built with nurses, physicians and management through the years has been useful in knowing who to talk to about getting things done and promoting various programs. She said her training as a nurse was also quite important because she was trained to always "assess situations" which she has carried over into this new role. As a nurse, O'Grady said she was trained to be outcome oriented. She also said that, "As a nurse you have a lot going on at once - juggling, reprioritizing, and attending to details all at the same time. That preparation has helped me manage."

This nursing background helps O'Grady as she oversees several nurses who staff the Pediatric Telecenter and has helped her create the Community Education program, which is a monthly seminar on childhood issues available to parents. Corman said O'Grady's nursing background is evident in all she does and can be helpful when a new community outreach program needs support of the medical staff. This nursing background has personally affected Zwahlen. She worked with O'Grady when they were both nurses and later on, when Zwahlen was laid off, O'Grady helped her get a job at the Telecenter. O'Grady's nursing background has been brought out in many different ways in her current managerial role.

**Results 5 - Effects of Healthcare Changes**

This is the only result that is an aberration because none of those interviewed said the same thing. Only one question was asked about the effects they expected from all of the changes in the overall healthcare system. However, this question had larger meaning because LPCH is about to merge with two other Bay Area hospitals, which means major changes are forthcoming.

Zwahlen felt that her area was pretty safe during this upcoming time of change. She said, "We are one of the minority departments that will be positively impacted." Zwahlen attributes this to the services she supervises and said they are at the "forefront" of needs and wants in the
healthcare community. She said they have been serving LPCH quite well and the hospitals considered in the merger do not have any such telephone services so it is a "good opportunity" for us to expand.

The Community Outreach Department is not so hopeful. Corman said this department has "not been on the highest priority of the External Affairs Department, much less the hospital." She said some of what she does exists in other departments and feels it is quite possible that her department could be eliminated.

O'Grady answered in the middle of this question. She said she really doesn't know what might happen - "the department could become very important or it could become superfluous." She said everyone needs to "understand the culture that is coming" and that change is inevitable. "Can we preserve what we've done?" she asked. "I sure hope so."

**Conclusions**

The three research questions were answered in this study and the results corroborate earlier predictions. The management style of the Community and Physician Relations Department (CPRD), led by Terry O'Grady, definitely leans towards the participative theory, but will resort to the authoritative style on certain occasions, in a mixed motive manner.

Two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical communications also are in evidence. The roles of each department are quite different and impact different audiences. Some programs are designed with input from the community or based on community needs. Some decisions are just made by the hospital without such input. Therefore, the CPRD implements the asymmetrical and symmetrical forms of communication with their publics.

Finally, the role of O'Grady within the dominant coalition has been proven to have an impact on her personal role within the hospital and the importance of her department. Her department is looked at with more respect and she has the ear of those in the senior management. She has an unofficial role in the dominant coalition of the hospital.

These findings are important to those in the healthcare profession and managers of any profession. Management style, communication behavior and working with the dominant coalition are important factors to be considered by any professionals can see how these three areas have an impact on a department going through change. Since many hospitals are going through similar change, they would be wise to read this case study and get ideas how they can make improvements or avoid certain mistakes before it affects them. This case study also will be useful to academics because it substantiates and modifies those theories by which managers communicate with their own staffs.

The CPRD has been a department in the midst of change since it started and 20 months later, it is still adjusting to some changes an preparing for many more. The management of this department will be even more crucial in the upcoming months as hospitals merge and departments begin to metamorphasize. This could be the toughest test yet for O'Grady's leadership style as she supports her department through potentially tumultuous times. It may also dramatically change her role in the hospital's dominant coalition that may no longer exist in its current form.
References


Strategic CSR Communication: The Effect of Source and Valence of Message on Consumers’ Perceptions

Mya Pronschinske
Mark D. Groza
Matthew Walker

Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a prime topic of interest for scholars and practitioners alike as companies desire to be ethical corporate citizens. The concomitant need for positive publicity and firm value has produced a shift of focus from altruistic giving towards the strategic nature of CSR activities. The current study analyzed how the intent of a CSR initiative and the communication of said initiative influences consumer perceptions of company motives. This study utilized an experimental design with random assignment to test the effects of information source and valence on consumers’ attributions of CSR. Our findings suggest that the source of information influences consumers’ perceptions of the company’s underlying motives of the CSR initiative. Individuals exposed to an internally published press release perceived the corporate motives to be more stakeholder-driven and more strategic-driven as compared to individuals exposed to an externally published press release. Our findings also suggest that proactive CSR is viewed as being values-driven while reactive CSR is perceived as being more stakeholder-driven. Practical implications of these findings, limitations, and guidelines for future research are provided at the end of the paper.
Introduction

Over the past decade, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has risen in both priority and profile for firms operating in a global marketplace (Franklin, 2008). This shift in business strategy has been most clearly evidenced by the millions spent developing and implementing various CSR initiatives (Waddock, 2004). According to Hutton (2001), CSR communication is the third largest expense item on a company’s communication budget. Thus, CSR has become an integral strategy utilized by public relations practitioners and “… social responsibility has become a major reason for an organization to have a public relations function” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 48). Corporate unethical business practices, which were so prevalent during the first half-decade of the beginning of the twentieth century, have also heightened the importance of communicating CSR. Headline making companies such as Enron, Arthur Anderson, Global Crossing, WorldCom, and Martha Stewart Worldwide; have triggered the rapid shift in how companies are viewed by the public at large. This has forced managers to focus increasing attention on the strategic aspect of CSR. Increasingly, profit-centric managers seek to engage in socially responsible efforts that synergistically align with their business activities. Managers must be cognizant of their fiduciary duties and must effectively communicate the value of these efforts to shareholders.

In 2005, 360 different CSR-related shareholder resolutions were filed on issues ranging from labor conditions to global warming (Porter & Kramer, 2006) and more recently, of the 250 largest multinational corporations, 64% now publish CSR reports. An issue that challenges companies in this area is striking the appropriate balance between altruistic giving and strategic goal attainment. Porter and Kramer (2002) describe this predicament: “… executives increasingly see themselves in a no-win situation, caught between critics demanding higher levels of CSR and investors applying relentless pressure to maximize short term profits” (p. 5). While achieving the exact balance is still an important question, today it is clear that firms must properly communicate their CSR initiatives in order to maximize the potential benefits these activities provide (e.g., image enhancement, reputation management, etc.) (Husted, 2000).

Much like marketing a product or service to the public, the structure and placement of CSR messages has become a function so central to a business that it requires careful nurturing and a considerable amount of personal attention. And only after this care has been taken, the initiative’s effectiveness is activated when salient stakeholders are made aware of the content. Once awareness has been established though, research has shown that attitudes, perceptions, and subsequent behavior toward the organization begin to manifest (Wigley, 2008). While these studies have shown (in the aggregate) that consumers react favorably to CSR (e.g., Hoeffler & Keller, 2002; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Nan & Heo, 2007; Walker & Kent, 2009), little is actually known about how to optimally frame and communicate social initiatives. Accordingly, some initial work has indicated that consumer attributions (i.e., perceived corporate motives) toward CSR can affect consumer intentions (see Ellen et al., 2006; Vlachos et al., 2009). However, much of this work has centered on either corporate ability (i.e., ability to produce a quality product) or company commitment to social causes (i.e., CSR).

Given this dichotomy and to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in this area, the purpose of this study was to evaluate how the message framing characteristics of source and valence influence the perceived motives consumers’ assign to a company’s CSR practices. Guided by attribution theory (Jones & Davis, 1965), we employed a framework which described consumers’ attributional judgments as being values-driven, stakeholder-driven, and strategic-
driven (Ellen et al., 2006). This paper is organized as follows: First, a conceptual background highlighting the importance of CSR information source and message valence is outlined. Next, a series of hypotheses predicting the influence of source and valence on consumers’ perceptions of CSR are provided. Following this is a description of the method deployed to test the hypotheses. In the next section, the results of the experiment are described and a brief discussion of the specific findings is offered. Finally, the last section contains a general discussion of the study’s findings including implications, and provides limitations and guidelines for future research.

Conceptual Background

Source

While a substantial body of work has elucidated the importance of communicating CSR (Biehal & Sheinin, 2007; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Wagner et al. 2009), research on the importance of information source has not kept pace. When choosing to communicate their CSR initiatives, companies utilize many different mechanisms such as advertising, online distribution (i.e., website, social-networking sites), press releases, social sponsorships, and word-of-mouth dissemination. Some of these tools involve information being offered to the public through internal sources (e.g., published in an annual report or on a company website) while others involve information being offered to the public through external sources (e.g., published by an outside news organization). Little however, is known as to which communication method resonates more (or less) desirably with stakeholders. In one of the few studies that examined this idea, Simmons and Becker-Olsen (2006) found that CSR information released from a partnering organization (i.e., a nonprofit) instead of the company caused fewer impressions of misfit between the company and the cause.

Correspondingly, a small body of research has emerged highlighting the effects of source bias in message delivery (Artz & Tybout, 1999; Grewal et al., 1994). Primarily using attribution theory, this work implicitly argued that an observer assumes a behavior is done to achieve a certain outcome and then assumes there are underlying motives directing the behavior (Jones & Davis, 1965). For example, individual skepticism toward a message directly from a firm is largely seen as self-serving because the organization had the ability to craft the message content. Because of the potential biasing of this information, both credibility (Grewal et al., 1994) and firm trustworthiness (Morsing & Schultz, 2006) are often called into question. Simply put, stakeholders are often cynical about message from an internal source if they perceive bias – especially if the information is responsive (e.g., covering up corporate malfeasance); and careful elaboration of a message is more commonplace when an individual’s question the motives behind the message (Artz & Tybout, 1999). Conversely, externally produced messages may result in less skepticism resulting in far less critical evaluations of the underlying motivations (Birnbaum & Stegner, 1979). Therefore, the perceived motives (i.e., attributions) that individuals assign to the CSR initiative should be affected (either positively or negatively) by the source of the information.

Valence

Reviewing previous CSR literature indicates that many firms either elect to pursue proactive or reactive strategies (or a convergence of the two; Wagner et al., 2009). A proactive
strategy is when firms engage in (and support) CSR before any negative information is received by stakeholders; thereby leading to increased visibility and an enhanced firm image (Du et al., 2007). Conversely as Murray and Vogel (1997) maintained, reactivity implies that firms engage in CSR to protect (rather than enhance) their image after an irresponsible action has been reported.

As indicated in the literature, consumers typically respond favorably to positive CSR campaigns due to its seemingly altruistic nature (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Consequently, most CSR messages are framed in a positive and ethically charged light (e.g., corporate giving, philanthropy). However, some CSR messages might also evoke negative stakeholder attention (e.g., compensating for damages) that will involve some level of negative affect for the consumer, which may overpower a previously held positive view of the firm (Ricks, 2005). Thus, negative information has the propensity to resonate deeper resulting in the “negativity effect” that Wright (1986) discussed. Similarly, Hutton et al. (2001) noted that reactionary CSR may carry more weight, finding a negative correlation between reputation and social spending. In contrast to proactive CSR, the reactive form illustrates that while good is being done, the effect on the attributions consumer make may likely be different in nature.

Consumer Attributions

Consumers generally form evaluations or reactions to organizations’ motives for engaging in CSR (Du et al., 2007; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Sen et al., 2006). In this light, attribution theory help to explain the way a message is interpreted. Incorporating an attribution model into our theorizing means that when consumers become aware of the organization’s social involvement (e.g., through various communication outlets), they are likely to interpret the message by way of some very specific attribution effects. Previous work in this area (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Ellen et al., 2006) has confirmed that consumers’ evaluations of a firm are influenced by these attributions. While several previous investigations have examined the moderating role of these attributions, one recent study by Vlachos et al. (2009) treated attributions as directly influencing consumer responses. For the current study we take a slightly different track, treating the attributions as outcomes rather than antecedents or intervening variables.

Operationalized by Ellen et al. (2006), the consumer attributions used for this study were initially classified as: values-driven, stakeholder-driven, strategic-driven, and egoistic-driven. Ellen and her colleagues based these attribution effects on two dimensions of CSR: (1) self-centered and (2) other-centered. For example, if a firm is acting in its own self-interest or with profit-centric motivations (i.e., strategic-driven), attitudes toward the firm will likely diminish or negatively manifest; however if a firm is genuinely socially motivated (i.e., values-driven) or is focused on the society/community (i.e., stakeholder-driven), attitudes toward the organization are likely enhanced (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). While these four dimensions demonstrated signs of internal consistency and face validity, we adopted the views of Walker et al. (2010) and excluded the egoistic-driven construct. This construct designates a very negative judgment of the firm’s activities but if the negative wording is removed, it closely aligns with the strategic-driven dimension. Recent work by Vlachos et al. (2009) revealed that these attributions influenced consumer trust, repeat purchase intentions, and recommendation intentions. However, we sought (by way of this study) to understand the front-end of the model. Specifically, we examined the effects of information source and valence on (1) self-centered attributions (i.e. strategic-driven),
Hypothesis Development

Values-Driven Attributions

Values-driven attributions indicate that the consumer perceives the corporate action to be altruistic and socially motivated. As discussed above, consumers will likely be more skeptical of information released directly from the company itself (Artz & Tybout, 1999). As such, we predict consumers will question if in fact a company is acting in a truly altruistic manner when publishing their CSR activities internally. Conversely, when exposed to externally published information, individuals have less reason to be skeptical of the message and its contents. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is formally proposed:

H1: Values-driven attributions will be lower when CSR information is published internally as opposed to when it is published externally.

We also predict that a proactive CSR initiative (an initiative that precedes information regarding any social misdeeds of a company) will be perceived as being more altruistic in nature than a reactive CSR initiative (an initiative that is performed because of the negative actions of a company). We predict that consumers will perceive this optional giving as being genuinely altruistic. On the other hand, consumers may be skeptical of the underlying motives of a company engaging in a CSR initiative to assuage their social misdeeds. Considering these points, Hypothesis 2 is formally proposed:

H2: Values-driven attributions will be higher when the message contains proactive rather than reactive CSR information.

Stakeholder-Driven Attributions

Firms that are stakeholder-driven work to attend to the interests of all persons coming in contact either directly or indirectly with the firm. Source of information may affect individuals’ stakeholder-driven attributions because consumers may perceive that the content of internally published information is intended for a firm’s stakeholders; the internal communication mechanisms of a firm after all, are geared toward the firm’s stakeholders (Hutton et al., 2001). However, externally published information is not always intended solely for stakeholders involved in the story. For example, readers of newspapers often read interesting articles that have little if any personal relevance. We predict therefore, that individuals who are exposed to internally published CSR information will believe the content is intended for the firm’s stakeholders and thus will perceive the corporate motives to be more stakeholder-driven. Formally, Hypothesis 3 is proposed:

H3: Stakeholder-driven attributions will be higher when CSR information is published internally as opposed to when it is published externally.
When individuals perceive a firm’s CSR actions as being stakeholder-driven they believe the firm is performing the action because important stakeholders expect the company to act ethically and responsibly. Increasingly, stakeholders are placing more emphases on proactive CSR (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Customers, employees, suppliers, and society in general are becoming more accustomed to firms acting in a proactive fashion regarding their social responsibilities. With that said, research has shown that all stakeholders hold firms accountable when they act in an unethical manor (Vlachos et al., 2009). For example, if a company is caught polluting the environment stakeholders will demand the company to rectify their wrongdoings. While stakeholders may have heightened expectations for firms to be proactive, we predict that all stakeholders will expect a firm to rectify their social wrongdoings. We therefore hypothesize that proactive CSR will be perceived as being less stakeholder-driven than reactive CSR. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is proposed:

**H4:** Stakeholder-driven attributions will be lower when the message contains proactive rather than reactive CSR information.

*Strategic-Driven Attributions*

Strategic-driven attributions are placed toward a firm’s CSR initiatives when an individual believes the firm is engaging in the activities to accomplish specific business goals. As discussed earlier, information published directly by a company is often perceived to be self-serving in nature (Morsing & Schultz, 2006). Considering this we predict that individuals exposed to internally published CSR information will perceive the firm’s motives to be strategic-driven. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is proposed:

**H5:** Strategic-driven attributions will be higher when CSR information is published internally as opposed to when it is published externally.

A reactive CSR strategy involves a company spontaneously reacting to some negative event (Wagner et al., 2009). Firms that deploy a reactive CSR strategy simply respond when negative information is made public. On the other hand, firms that deploy a proactive CSR strategy expend a great deal of recourses to plan and implement such a strategy. Considering the characteristics of these two strategies we predict that individuals exposed to proactive CSR information will perceive the company to be more calculating in their CSR endeavors and therefore will attribute the action as being strategically driven. Thus, Hypothesis 6 is proposed:

**H6:** Strategic-driven attributions will be higher when the message contains proactive rather than reactive CSR information.

*Method*

The study participants (n=230) consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in introductory business courses at a large public university located in the Northeastern United States. Students consensually volunteered to participate in exchange for course credit. The subjects ranged in age from 18 to 49 (M=20) and in terms of gender, approximately 77% (n=177) were male while 23% (n=53) were female. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in
a 2 (CSR valence: proactive vs. reactive) x 2 (information source: internal vs. external) between
subjects experimental design. Following their consent to participate, the subjects received an
experimental packet consisting of a questionnaire, instructions, a fictitious press release, and a
series of questions in response to the press release. To prevent against demand artifacts (i.e.
subjects predicting the objective of the experiment) subjects were informed that the goal of the
study was to assess the effectiveness of press releases in disseminating information; study
participants were not informed about the experimental manipulations (Sawyer, 1975).

The press release consisted of information about a recent CSR initiative of a fictitious
company (i.e., Mayetta Food and Beverage Corp). A fictitious company was used to minimize
any confounds due to preexisting attitudes toward the firm (Brown & Dacin, 1997). An Internet
search was conducted to verify that this company did not exist.

Independent variables. Similar to Wagner et al. (2009), in the proactive condition the
press release explained that the company voluntarily donated money to assist in the aid of an
environmental issue. In the reactive condition the company appeared to be irresponsible
regarding the same environmental issue and agreed to pay a sum of money to compensate for
damages. The information source manipulation was achieved with a header above the press
release which stated the following press release was either taken directly from the company itself
(i.e. Mayetta Food and Beverage Corp.) or from an external news outlet (i.e. The Associated
Press). For priming purposes and gauge whether they successfully processed the manipulation,
the subjects were asked what organization published the press release. Of the 230 initial
subjects, 215 (93%) successfully processed the manipulation. An analysis of variance (ANOVA)
between these two groups indicated no significant difference on any of the three dependent
outcomes. Thus, all 230 subjects were retained. Except for the described manipulations, all
other aspects of the press release were invariant.

Dependent variables. The dependent measures consisted of three consumer attribution
dimensions (i.e., values-driven attributions, stakeholder-driven attributions, and strategic-driven)
adopted from the work of Ellen et al. (2006). Each scale consisted of three items which were
averaged to form the operational measures used in the analysis. As in previous administrations,
the three scales were internally consistent (α = .86 values-driven; α = .85 stakeholder-driven; α = .85 strategic-driven)
according to the criteria suggested by Lance et al. (2006). The items used in this study can be
found in the appendix.

Results and Discussion

A series of one-way ANOVAs were run to assess the effects of CSR valence and
information source on the attributions individuals assigned to both proactive and reactive CSR
initiatives. Following is a discussion of the results of these ANOVAs separated by each
attribution and listed in order of our hypotheses.

Values-driven attributions. To test Hypothesis 1, a one-way ANOVA with source of
information as the between subject factor was analyzed. Contrary to our prediction, source had
no effect on values-driven attributions (F(1,228)=.358, p>.10). To test Hypothesis 2, a one-way
ANOVA with valence as the between-subjects factor and values-driven attributions as the
dependent variable was analyzed. The valence effect was significant (F(1,228)=141.94, p<
Individuals exposed to the proactive CSR initiative perceive the act to be more values-driven \((M=4.87)\) than individuals exposed to the reactive CSR initiative \((M=3.07)\). This result indicates that consumers perceive firms engaging in proactive (versus reactive) CSR as acting in more of an altruistic manner. Therefore as predicted, firms that voluntarily participate in CSR are perceived by consumers as being values-driven. Table 1 contains the cell means and \(F\)-test scores for the values-driven attributions.

While source of the press release was predicted to significantly influence values-driven attributions, there is a possible explanation for the non-significant result. The proactive manipulation was extremely strong and as a result had a large influence on individuals’ perception of a values-driven attribution \((F(1,228)=141.94)\). This strong manipulation may have overpowered any affect the source of the information may have had. Additionally, the source manipulation was relatively weak (i.e., a header preceding the press release). This particular manipulation may not have been strong enough to account for any additional variance not accounted for by the valence of the information. These equivocal results suggest that valence influenced the values-driven attributions individuals assigned to a firm’s CSR actions. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 was supported while Hypothesis 1 was not.

**Table 1.** The Effect of Source and Valence on Values-Driven Attributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>External</th>
<th>(F)-value</th>
<th>(p)-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(H_1)</td>
<td>4.00 (1.50)</td>
<td>3.92 (1.43)</td>
<td>(F(1,228)=.358)</td>
<td>(p&gt;.10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valence</th>
<th>Proactive</th>
<th>Reactive</th>
<th>(F)-value</th>
<th>(p)-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(H_2)</td>
<td>4.87 (1.04)</td>
<td>3.07 (1.24)</td>
<td>(F(1,228)=141.94)</td>
<td>(p&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stakeholder-driven attributions.** To assess the effect of source of information on stakeholder-driven attributions (Hypothesis 3) a one-way ANOVA was performed. The analysis indicated that source did affect stakeholder-driven attributions \((F(1,228)=3.73, p<.10)\). Individuals exposed to the press release published by the company perceived the action to be more stakeholder-driven \((M=4.50)\) than individuals exposed to a press release published by an external source \((M=4.20)\). Essentially, individuals exposed to internally published information believed the company was participating in CSR because of pressures from relevant stakeholder groups (i.e. customers, employees, and society). Presumably, the perception might be that communication of CSR via internal mechanisms signals to stakeholders that the company is working for them; and they subsequently anticipate some action to be taken. As such, the motives assigned to internal corporate communications are perceived as being more stakeholder-driven than if the information came from an external source.

Hypothesis 4 was again tested using a one-way ANOVA with valence as the between-subjects factor and stakeholder-driven attributions as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis indicated the effect of valence on the outcome significant \((F(1,228)=6.78, p<.01)\). As predicted then, individuals exposed to a reactive CSR initiative perceived the act to be more stakeholder-driven \((M=4.55)\) than those exposed to the proactive CSR initiative \((M=4.15)\). Stakeholders may not always expect companies to be proactive in their CSR activities but it is reasonable to surmise that many stakeholders do expect companies to rectify any societal wrongs they may have caused. Based on this finding, the results support the prediction that reactive initiatives are perceived to be more stakeholder-driven than proactive initiatives. As such (at
least in this context), the subjects in this study believed the company engaged in reactive CSR because of pressures from salient stakeholders. Table 2 contains the cell means and F-test scores for stakeholder-driven attributions.

**Table 2. The Effect of Source and Valence on Stakeholder-Driven Attributions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>External</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H₃: Source</td>
<td>4.50 (1.13)</td>
<td>4.20 (1.21)</td>
<td>F(1,228)=3.73</td>
<td>p&lt;.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₄: Valence</td>
<td>4.15 (1.02)</td>
<td>4.55 (1.29)</td>
<td>F(1,228)=6.78</td>
<td>p&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Strategic-driven attributions.* For Hypothesis 5, a one-way ANOVA with source as the between-subjects factor and strategic-driven attributions as the dependent variable was performed. The results of this analysis supported Hypothesis 5 in that, information source significantly affected strategic-driven attributions (F(1,228)=3.57, p<.10). As predicted, the information contained in the internally published press release was perceived to be more strategic-driven (M=5.32) than the information contained in the externally published press release (M=5.02). Hypothesis 5 predicted the CSR action communicated via an internally published press release would be perceived to be more strategic-driven or “self-centered” compared to CSR action communicated via an externally published press release. This prediction was empirically supported. Individuals likely believe that the communication of a CSR initiative is an important strategic consideration made by a company involved in CSR activities. As such, individuals assigned strategic-driven attributions toward a CSR initiative that was communicated internally as opposed to that communicated coming from an external source.

For the final analysis, Hypothesis 6 was tested using the same method as noted above. The effect of valence on strategic-driven attributions was significant (F(1,228)=39.72, p<.001), thereby providing support for Hypothesis 6. Individuals in the proactive condition perceived the action to be more strategic (M=5.68) than those in the reactive condition (M=4.68). For this hypothesis we predicted that proactive CSR would be associated with strategic-driven attributions because of the important role corporate planning has in implementing a proactive CSR strategy (Wagner et al. 2009). Unlike reactive CSR, which is simply a response to some negative event, proactive CSR involves a firm engaging in CSR without any prior motive. As such, proactive CSR was perceived to be more strategic than the reactive form. Table 3 contains the cell means and F-test scores for strategic-driven attributions.

**Table 3. The Effect of Source and Valence on Strategic-Driven Attributions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>External</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H₅: Source</td>
<td>5.32 (1.26)</td>
<td>5.02 (1.36)</td>
<td>F(1,228)=3.57</td>
<td>p&lt;.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₆: Valence</td>
<td>5.68 (1.03)</td>
<td>4.68 (1.3824)</td>
<td>F(1,228)=39.72</td>
<td>p&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General Discussion and Implications

This study extends the literature by illustrating the practical importance of communicating CSR. We empirically demonstrated that the source and valence of a message can influence an individuals’ perception of a firm’s motives for engaging in CSR. While prior research has indicated consumer perceptions of CSR are important predictors of firm-level outcomes, the current study suggests that message characteristics may be important antecedents that influence perceptions of CSR. Public relations practitioners will find this information useful when creating and disseminating strategic CSR communication.

Practitioners have many options when structuring and deciding on the placement of CSR messages. Our finding that an internally published proactive initiative resulted in the perception of strategy is particularly noteworthy. While releasing information related to proactive CSR may maximize values-driven attributions, it may also exacerbate consumers’ strategic-driven attributions. This highlights the conflict that many managers face when electing to publish a proactive CSR initiative. In order to maximize the values-driven attributions consumers assign to CSR, managers also run the risk of maximizing the strategic-driven attributions.

Limitations and Future Research

Our findings extend the literature by applying source and valence as independent variables and demonstrating that the placement and source of a press release can affect their perceptions of an activity. In light of our reported findings, we do recognize several limitations to the analysis procedures used in this study. First, we utilized experimental design to empirically test the hypothesized manipulations. A substantial amount of research in the CSR arena has utilized this design to understand consumer responses to CSR (Du et al., 2007). However, a criticism of the significance of hypothetical designs is questioned as it is difficult to gauge actual consumer reactions (Diamond & Hausman, 1994). Thus, future work should transpose our model to actual businesses to reinforce the importance of message characteristics and the attributions’ consumers assign to various CSR efforts. Second, communication strategies taken by a firm may differ from organizations’ actual ethical policies and practices. CSR communications may amplify the potential benefits of the initiative (i.e., internal communications) or undervalue the practices, reach, and performance of the initiative (i.e., external communications). Given the heightened visibility of many multinational firms and the increased scrutiny that goes along with it, careful selection and focused CSR communications may provide added benefits. Thirdly, based on our design we were unable to illustrate the potential tradeoffs for the different attributions. For example, while many respondents might regard a CSR initiative as largely strategic-driven (i.e., firm-serving), this information has the ability to resonate deeply with consumers. Thus the “any news is good news” saying may prove correct. As addition, there exists a potential conflict between maximizing the values-driven perceptions of proactive CSR and simultaneously running the risk of maximizing strategic-driven perceptions by publishing the information internally. Again, firm discretion and managerial influence on the placement of messages provides an area for future research.

In sum, our results suggest that firms engaging in CSR should carefully evaluate how they communicate their initiatives. Source and valence both influence consumers’ attributions of the action. Future research should continue to explore how varying message characteristics (i.e., location of action, timing, source credibility, different mediums) affect these attributions.
References


Appendix. Dependent Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>CR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values-Driven</strong></td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They have a long-term interest in society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their owners and employees believe in this cause</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are trying to give something back to the community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder-Driven</strong></td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They feel their customers expect it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They feel society in general expects it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They feel their stakeholders expect it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic-Driven</strong></td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They will get more customers by supporting this initiative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They will keep more of their customers by supporting this initiative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They hope to increase profits by supporting this initiative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. <sup>a</sup>1=Strongly Disagree; 7=Strongly Agree*
Crisis of Confidence:  
News Coverage of America’s Largest Banks during the 2008 Financial Crisis  

David L. Remund, APR  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  

Abstract  
This study analyzes the degree to which image repair theory (IRT) and situation crisis communications theory (SSCT) apply to an industry-wide crisis, rather than simply a crisis faced by a single organization. Fundamentally, this content analysis study examines the news releases and national and local newspaper coverage of America’s 10 largest banks from July 1, 2008, through December 31, 2008, a six-month period during which Americans’ average net worth fell nearly 18 percent. Findings indicate that neither IRT nor SCCT adequately address the complexities of an industry-wide crisis. The lessons learned highlight the need for further crisis communications research, as well as awareness among corporate communication practitioners that not every crisis is created equal, particularly when an entire industry is affected.
Introduction

Since the late 1970s, as many as 112 systemic banking crises have crippled economies in 93 countries around the world (Rochet, 2008). The United States is the latest country to experience a devastating banking crisis; in the second half of 2008, credit markets froze and the American economy went into a tailspin. Policy-makers, banking officials, journalists, and consumers scrambled to identify root causes and place blame. Indeed, a banking crisis can have devastating effects. Beyond the taxpayer money necessary to keep troubled institutions afloat, the significant effect of a banking crisis is the average 15 to 20 percent loss in annual gross domestic product (Rochet, 2008). Maintaining public confidence in the financial system is critical to a nation’s economic stability and growth. Banks and other financial institutions manage their relationships with news media, in part, to attempt to bolster public confidence.

This study analyzed the crisis communication strategies employed by the 10 largest banks in America during the onset of the 2008 financial crisis. The study examined the news releases of these banks from July 1, 2008, through December 31, 2008, a six-month period during which the Dow Jones Industrial average dropped nearly 23 percent, Americans’ net worth fell nearly 18 percent, and the Consumer Confidence IndexTM slid more than 13 percent (Franco, 2008; Hagenbaugh, 2009; Shell, 2009). News stories in the Wall Street Journal and the hometown newspaper of each bank’s headquarters city were also analyzed. The purpose of analyzing news coverage in these newspapers was not to correlate specific news releases with subsequent news articles, but rather to gauge the cumulative effect of the banks’ news releases on the overall tone of their news coverage during this volatile time. Wall Street Journal provided national perspective, while the banks’ hometown newspapers provided local and regional perspective.

This study was designed to yield lessons about managing reputation and maintaining public confidence in the midst of an industry-wide crisis. Beyond practical application for those who work in public relations, this study was also designed to evaluate two existing bodies of scholarly research – image repair theory (IRT) and situational crisis communications theory (SCCT). IRT, introduced in 1991 and originally called image restoration theory, focuses on the message strategies an organization might take when faced with a crisis (Benoit, 1997). What constitutes appropriate, effective message discourse varies by crisis, according to this model.

SCCT, introduced in 2002, focuses on the range of crises that an organization may face but does not include a category within which the 2008 financial crisis easily fits (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). The 2008 financial crisis was an industry-wide, interdependent issue, and SCCT does not explicitly address the concept of an industry-wide crisis. The study was designed to help determine whether the SCCT applies to such industry-wide situations.

Fundamentally, there does not seem to be a single crisis communications model that adequately addresses both the types of crises an organization may face (SCCT) and the restoration strategies an organization may wish to employ when facing a crisis (IRT). This study strived to test both models and the applicability of each when planning for, or facing, a crisis.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined economic news coverage, and even in some cases, coverage tied to a specific economic crisis or event (Coulson & Lacy, 1998; Fursich, 2002; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Kim, 2004). However, few if any studies have analyzed the relationship between financial institutions’ response strategies relative to an economic crisis. Some mass communication critics have published commentary about what lessons might be learned from the
2008 financial crisis in America (Hamilton, 2009). However, no scholars or critics have yet provided systematic evidence or quantitative analysis of such crisis strategies or media coverage.

This study, then, is a longitudinal assessment of banks’ media relations strategies and newspaper coverage during a six-month period in 2008 when the financial crisis in America grew in scope and impact. As the crisis escalated, one would have expected the nation’s largest banks to express increasing concern for victims of the crisis. The situational crisis communications theory (SCCT) maintains that organizations must – in order to protect reputation – demonstrate concern for victims, particularly as the crisis escalates and the possibility of reputational damage increases (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Therefore, SCCT provided a relevant theoretical framework from which to analyze the 2008 financial crisis.

In developing SCCT, its authors integrated crisis types from several previous models into a purportedly more cohesive family of crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Their work ultimately resulted in a list of 13 potential crises that an organization might face. These crises are grouped into clusters, including the victim cluster, in which the organization is also a victim of the crisis, such as a natural disaster; the accidental cluster, in which the organizational actions leading to the crisis were unintentional; and the preventable cluster, in which the organization knowingly placed people at risk, took inappropriate actions, or violated a law or regulation (Coombs, 2006).

Aside from natural disaster, though, none of the 13 crisis types in the SCCT model represent industry-wide, interdependent situations. Because SCCT is used to develop recommendations for various crisis response strategies, it is important that the theory holds up when applied to an industry-wide situation such as the 2008 financial crisis, not just situations in which the pressure or spotlight is on a single organization.

It could be argued that some banks took inappropriate lending and underwriting actions, and that, as a result, all banks became drawn into the 2008 financial crisis. In this way, the preventable cluster within the SCCT model could be expanded from actions hurting not just a solitary organization but an entire industry of related organizations.

SCCT includes a family of crisis response strategies that the authors of SCCT contend are more precise than those used in older models, such as image repair theory (IRT), because they have been empirically tested (Coombs, 2006). However, the testing consisted of a single study in which 78 undergraduate students were asked to evaluate 10 different crisis response strategies and indicate their degree of agreement with each strategy. It is difficult to accept that a single study that does not consider real-world outcomes should hold more weight than nearly 20 years of case study analysis provided by researchers using IRT (Benoit, 2000). Therefore, response strategies outlined in IRT will be evaluated in this study instead of the strategies outlined in SCCT.

IRT, which was introduced 11 years before SCCT, established that an organization’s image is a subjective impression formed through one’s direct experience with an organization and/or interpretation of the organization relayed by a third party (Benoit et al., 1991). Crucially for this study, third-party interpretation consisted of media coverage, specifically articles in *Wall Street Journal* and the banks’ hometown newspapers.

The fundamental argument of IRT, relative to the practice of public relations, is that a crisis situation – or reputational risk – happens only when an offensive act has occurred and the organization is believed to be responsible for that act (Benoit, 1997). The financial crisis that developed in the second half of 2008 had wide-sweeping effect on the financial security and stability of the American public, and the nation’s banks, as a collective body, were held partially responsible for questionable lending, underwriting, and hedging strategies. In this way and
according to IRT, each of the nation’s 10 largest banks should have faced reputational risk in 2008.

Employment of IRT begins when an organization acknowledges a perceived crisis in some way. Typically, this is a strategic move made by the organization to announce or pursue corrective action, or to prevent litigation. Response strategies from the IRT model are grouped into five categories: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action, and mortification or apologizing (Benoit, 1997). These strategies represent a continuum of responses ranging from simply acknowledging the crisis to taking full accountability.

Nearly 20 years of case study analysis by researchers using IRT has shown that organizations at fault should admit this fact. However, while people want to know whom to blame, it’s often more important to reassure the public that steps have been taken to address the crisis and to prevent another crisis of the same sort in the future (Benoit, 1997; Benoit et al., 1991). Acknowledging the crisis, then, serves as a critical starting point for image repair, according to the IRT model. One of the goals for this study was to determine how these tenets hold true for an industry-wide crisis like the 2008 financial crisis.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study examined a six-month window in 2008 during which the financial crisis began to unfold. Who to blame was not an easy or simple question to answer; however, the media and consumers pushed for assurance that the crisis would be addressed and would not happen again. How did the nation’s largest banks respond to these concerns, and how were response strategies reflected in news coverage? These are the broad questions this study sought to answer.

Fundamentally, this study is a test of image restoration and confidence-building by the nation’s largest banks during the 2008 financial crisis. For this study, image restoration focuses on two broad actions – acknowledging the crisis and expressing concern for consumers – banks might have taken in an attempt to bolster confidence during the onset of the financial crisis. These definitions of image restoration are drawn from the original IRT model, as stated earlier (Benoit, 1997). With regard to news coverage, confidence-building is the sum impression created by mentions in the newspaper; that is, news articles that generally place a bank in a positive light are confidence-building, while those that put the bank in a neutral or negative light are not confidence-building. This approach is consistent with the good news and bad news coding protocol used in previous research evaluating Wall Street news coverage (Lowry, 2008).

The primary research questions addressed through this study were:

- **RQ1:** How do the image restoration strategies used by banks during a financial crisis relate to the tone of newspaper coverage these banks receive – positive (confidence-building), neutral (neither confidence-building nor confidence-eroding), mixed (confidence-building and confidence-eroding) or negative (confidence-eroding)?

- **RQ2:** How do newspapers generally treat the role of banks in a systemic financial crisis – as victimized by the crisis, as accidentally involved in the crisis, or as perpetrators of preventable actions that might have averted the crisis?

The study tested two hypotheses specific to image restoration:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Banks that actively acknowledged the financial crisis in their media relations efforts – regardless of the image restoration strategy employed – earned a higher percentage of confidence-building news coverage than banks...
that did not acknowledge the crisis at all. Employing IRT as a framework, we would expect the media to more favorably interpret the reputation of a bank that works to pro-actively repair its image, no matter which repair route it takes, versus a bank that does not even acknowledge that a crisis is happening.

- **Hypothesis 2:** Banks that expressed concern for consumers regarding the financial crisis earned a higher percentage of confidence-building news coverage than banks that did not express concern for consumers. IRT contends that acknowledging a crisis is one way that an organization might restore its image. SCCT takes this argument a step further and maintains that organizations must – in order to protect reputation – demonstrate concern for victims, particularly as the crisis escalates and the possibility of reputational damage increases.

The independent variables for Hypotheses 1 and 2 were the response strategies exemplified by the banks’ news releases. The dependent variable for each hypothesis was the percentage of news coverage that was confidence-building (i.e. positive, as opposed to neutral, negative or mixed).

**Method**

Content analysis is a commonly used method in mass communication research to test hypotheses derived from theory (Riffe et al., 2005). In this study, two goals were desired. On one hand, the study sought to evaluate tenets of SCCT and IRT, both of which are widely used models in the crisis communications fields. On the other hand, the study was designed to possibly expand the reach of the SCCT model, by categorically assigning definitions of an industry-wide crisis to one of three existing crisis clusters which, with the exception of natural disaster, have previously been applied only to organization-specific crises.

**Population**

The population for this study included news releases and news coverage from the period July 1, 2008, through December 31, 2008. The financial crisis escalated on September 29, 2008, when the Dow Jones Industrial Average suffered its largest single-day point loss in history; thus, the span from July 1 through December 31 provided a benchmark of three months prior to the market drop and three months of activity following the drop.

News releases were limited to those issued by the nation’s 10 largest banks based on total U.S. deposits as of January 1, 2008. Those banks were Citicorp, Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, Wachovia, Wells Fargo, Washington Mutual, HSBC Holding, U.S. Bancorp, Bank of New York, and Sun Trust. All releases for the period July 1, 2008, through December 31, 2008, were drawn from the banks’ websites. The population contained 592 releases.

News clips were limited to newspapers published in the headquarters city of each major bank, as well as the *Wall Street Journal*. The headquarters city newspapers and the corresponding banks included the *New York Times* (Citicorp, JP Morgan Chase, Bank of New York), *Charlotte Observer* (Bank of America, Wachovia), *San Francisco Chronicle* (Wells Fargo), *Seattle Times* (Washington Mutual), *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* (U S Bancorp), and *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (SunTrust). (Note: HSBC Holding is headquartered in London, England, and, therefore, had no hometown American newspaper to include in the study.) News articles from these newspapers mentioning the banks were drawn using the America’s Newspapers database and the *Wall Street Journal* proprietary database, with the legal names of
each bank as the keyword search terms used in separate searches for each bank. The population included more than 6,000 articles.

Unit of Analysis
For news releases, the unit of analysis was the full text of the release, including the headline and the body of the release. For newspapers, the unit of analysis was the headline and the full text of the article.

Sampling Method
For news releases, no sampling was done. All 592 releases in the population were coded. For newspapers, the large number of articles within the population required the use of stratified sampling.

An efficient stratified sampling method for a year of daily newspapers is two constructed weeks from that year (randomly selecting two Mondays, two Tuesdays, etc.) (Riffe et al, 2005). Given that this study looked at only six months of coverage, a single constructed week (randomly selecting one Monday, one Tuesday, etc.) for each newspaper would have sufficed. However, the study was designed to compare coverage from before the historic single-day market drop and after that event. So, a constructed week was drawn for each period. That means seven days of coverage for each of seven newspapers for each of the two portions of the study period, or a total of 14 days of coverage were analyzed. The news articles were coded and categorized as “Before” (prior to September 30, 2008) and “After” (September 30, 2008, and thereafter).

A total of 188 articles were downloaded using this stratified sampling method. The constructed week’s worth of coverage from each newspaper yielded 85 articles from the “Before” period and 103 articles from the “After” period. An online random number generator was used to determine the dates of coverage to be included in the study. The dates randomly identified were as follows:

- **“Before” Period:** Monday (July 28), Tuesday (August 5), Wednesday (July 16), Thursday (August 14), Friday (July 18), Saturday (August 2), and Sunday (September 7)
- **“After” Period:** Monday (November 24), Tuesday (November 11), Wednesday (October 15), Thursday (December 18), Friday (October 10), Saturday (December 20), and Sunday (December 9)

Content Categories

News releases were coded for two image restoration strategies: (1) acknowledging the financial crisis and (2) expressing concern for consumers. Acknowledging the crisis means banks made reference to uncertainty and/or declines in the American financial market. Expressing concern for consumers means the bank acknowledged that consumers’ well-being may be affected by the financial crisis. Both of these strategies were coded as being either present or absent within the news release.
For the purposes of this study, a mention in news coverage was defined as the first mention of a bank within the text of article, as well as the two subsequent paragraphs following that mention.

In assessing the tone of news coverage, each bank’s mention in an article was coded as being positive, neutral, negative, or a mix of positive and negative. A bank’s mention was considered positive if it alluded to growth in revenue, market share, and/or size and scope of operations. Within the realm of positive news, indicators specific to the banking industry were used as identifiers, including strong earnings, healthy liquidity (the ability to convert reserves and investments to cash), sufficient capital for reinvestment in its own business, increasing assets, decreasing liabilities, or general expressions of growth either through the sharing of tangible results or the announcement of new products, services, strategies, facilities or markets, or the promotion and/or recruitment of new leaders within the organization (e.g. “Our earnings exceeded expectations this quarter.”). Negative coverage consisted of a negative slant to any of the factors mentioned above (e.g. “Our earnings fell short of expectations this quarter.”) Neutral was the absence of a positive or negative tone (e.g. “Our earnings met expectations this quarter”), while mixed coverage included those mentions that contained both positive and negative statements (e.g. “Our earnings were down this quarter, but we see a bright year ahead.”)

To assess the applicability of the SCCT to an industry-wide crisis, mentions of banks in news articles were classified into one of the three organization-specific crisis clusters from the SCCT model (i.e. victim, accidental, or preventable). The victim cluster is one in which news coverage positioned the bank as a victim of the financial crisis -- that is, the bank did not take any actions whatsoever that contributed to the industry-wide crisis. For the accidental cluster, news coverage positioned the bank as having taken some actions that unknowingly, inadvertently and/or indirectly contributed to the industry-wide crisis. Finally, the preventable cluster includes news coverage that positioned the bank as having allegedly put people at risk, taken inappropriate actions, violated laws or regulations or done something else intentionally that contributed directly to the development of the industry-wide crisis.

The study was designed to compare news releases and news coverage from before the historic single-day Dow Jones Industrial Average market drop on September 29, 2008, with news releases and news coverage after that event. The coding categories for timeframe were “Before” (July 1, 2008 through September 29, 2008) and “After” (September 30, 2008 through December 31, 2008).

**Intercoder Reliability**

Two coders, working independently, implemented this study. Ten percent of the news releases and a randomly selected sample of 10 percent of news articles were used for reliability testing. Intercoder reliability results (Scott’s pi) ranged from .86 to .92 (see Table 1).

---

16 Adapted from the Uniform Bank Performance Report, an analytical tool used by the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council in examining banks. The FFIEC is a formal, interagency body empowered to prescribe uniform principles, standards, and report forms for the federal examination of financial institutions by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the National Credit Union Administration, the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, and the Office of Thrift Supervision, and to make recommendations to promote uniformity in the supervision of financial institutions. For more information, visit [http://www.ffiec.gov/about.htm](http://www.ffiec.gov/about.htm)
Findings

Results of the content analysis are as follows:

**RQ1**: How do the image restoration strategies used by banks during a financial crisis relate to the tone of newspaper coverage these banks receive – positive (confidence-building), neutral (neither confidence-building nor confidence-eroding), mixed (confidence-building and confidence-eroding) or negative (confidence-eroding)? There was not a readily apparent pattern of correspondence between how a bank positioned its news release content and the overall ratio of positive news coverage received during the six-month period studied (see Table 2). Washington Mutual, which had the highest percentage of news releases acknowledging the financial crisis, finished in the middle of the pack in terms of ratio of positive news coverage. Wachovia had the highest percentage of news releases expressing concern for consumers, among banks receiving news coverage during the study period, yet had the lowest ratio of positive news coverage.

The findings for Hypothesis 2, shared later in this paper, examine correlations between these variables. However, it should first be noted that the five largest banks accounted for more than 86 percent of all news coverage during the time period (see Table 3). In fact, four of the smallest banks in the top ten each received less than four percent of the total news coverage during the study period. For that reason, the remaining analysis in this paper focuses only on the top five banks, namely Citigroup, Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, Wachovia and Wells Fargo.

To help understand the efficiency of the banks’ media relations efforts, a side-by-side comparison of news release volume and efficiency ratios was calculated (see Table 4). Citigroup received the most amount of coverage for its media relations efforts during the study period; JP Morgan Chase, conversely, had the least efficient media relations among the five banks most successful in terms of media relations efforts.

**RQ2**: How do newspapers generally treat the role of banks in a systemic financial crisis – as victimized by the crisis, as accidentally involved in the crisis, or as perpetuators of preventable actions that might have averted the crisis? Most often, the five largest banks in the nation were positioned as having taken preventable actions that contributed to the financial crisis; Bank of America was most often portrayed in this negative light, while Wells Fargo was the bank least likely to be portrayed this way (see Table 5). Conversely, Bank of America and JP Morgan Chase were most often portrayed as victims of the industry-wide financial crisis; Wells Fargo, once again, was least likely to be portrayed in this light. It seems that Wells Fargo, on average, received the least coverage portraying it as a catalyst for, or victim of, the financial crisis. This may have had some relationship with Wells Fargo’s successful bid to purchase Wachovia, another of the five largest banks, during this time period. It may be that the media perceived Wells Fargo as being relatively unfazed by the crisis. Further research would be necessary to answer that question. Finally, none of the five largest banks received any news coverage portraying them as being accidentally involved in the financial crisis. That fact challenges the viability of applying the SCCT model to an industry-wide crisis.
Hypothesis 1: Banks that actively acknowledged the financial crisis in their media relations efforts – regardless of the image restoration strategy employed – earned a higher percentage of confidence-building news coverage than banks that did not acknowledge the crisis at all. This hypothesis was not supported. In fact, the bank that most often acknowledged the financial crisis in its news releases – Wachovia – had the lowest ratio of positive coverage (see Table 6). Conversely, Bank of America least often acknowledged the financial crisis yet had the greatest ratio of positive coverage. It could be inferred that focus on more positive matters than crisis-related problems might be the most successful media relations strategy in the midst of an industry-wide crisis, or at least one of a financial nature. Further research would be necessary to validate this new hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Banks that expressed concern for consumers regarding the financial crisis earned a higher percentage of confidence-building news coverage than banks that did not express concern for consumers. This hypothesis was not supported. As with Hypothesis 1, Wachovia most often expressed concern for consumers yet received the lowest ratio of positive news coverage, while Bank of America least often expressed concern yet received the highest ratio of positive coverage (see Table 7). Again, it could be inferred that steering clear of industry-wide headaches and related consumer concerns might yield the most effective media relations results. Further research would be necessary to test this approach.

To provide more detailed analysis, correlation coefficients were calculated for the variables at play in the two hypotheses of this study. The only correlation that emerged as significant was the one between banks being portrayed as victims by the media and news coverage being positive in tone, $r_s = .900, p < .05$ (see Table 8).

One final data analysis reveals an interesting trend. During the study period, the reputations of JP Morgan Chase and Wells Fargo worsened significantly, in terms of tone of coverage as well as media portrayal of them as either victim of or catalyst for the financial crisis (see Table 9). Citigroup and Bank of America, on the other hand, generally improved or maintained their reputations. JP Morgan Chase and Wells Fargo bought Washington Mutual and Wachovia, respectively, during the study period, while neither Citigroup nor Bank of America had such significant acquisitions, although Citigroup did lose its takeover bid for Wachovia to Bank of America. It might be inferred that staying the course is the key to riding out the storm of an industry-wide crisis. Again, further research would be necessary to explore this hypothesis adequately.

Discussion

This study was designed to help answer how the image restoration strategies used by banks during a financial crisis relate to the tone of newspaper coverage and how newspapers, generally, treat the role of banks in a systemic financial crisis. Findings indicate that news media are most likely to portray banks as having taken preventable actions that contributed to an industry-wide crisis rather than as victims of the crisis. In addition, not acknowledging the crisis and/or not expressing crisis-related concern for consumers may result in a greater ratio of positive news coverage for banks involved in an industry-wide crisis, which is contrary to the originally proposed hypotheses.
Findings indicate that neither IRT nor SCCT adequately address an industry-wide crisis. Results of this content analysis indicate that the models may only hold true for organization-specific crises, which is how they have been defined and defended to date by other scholars.

Many factors are at play during a financial crisis, and it is all but impossible to control for so many variables in a study of this sort. However, with further research and analysis building upon these initial findings, it may be possible to validate that IRT and SCCT are not acceptable models for crises that stretch beyond a single organization and affect entire industries.

Acknowledgments
The author wishes to thank Daniel Riffe, Ph.D., for guidance regarding research design and analysis, and Chris Perry for assistance with coding.
References


Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Scott’s Pi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tone of Coverage</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Cluster: News Articles</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Cluster: News Releases</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 1: Intercoder Reliability by Variables**
**TABLE 2:**  
*Percentage Comparisons for Image Restoration Strategies and Positive News Coverage Among the 10 Largest Banks in America*  
*July 1, 2008 – December 31, 2008*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>% of News Releases Acknowledging Crisis</th>
<th>% of News Releases Expressing Concern</th>
<th>% of News Coverage Positive in Tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bank of America</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSBC</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP Morgan Chase</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells Fargo</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank of New York</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Mutual¹</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U S Bancorp</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citigroup</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wachovia²</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun Trust³</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ JP Morgan Chase acquired Washington Mutual’s operations during this time period, but continued to use the Washington Mutual brand throughout the time period studied.  
² Wells Fargo received shareholder approval to purchase Wachovia during this time period, but Wachovia continued to operate independently throughout the duration of the time period studied.  
³ No articles for Sun Trust appeared in any of the newspapers on any of the days randomly selected for inclusion in this study.
TABLE 3
Share of News Coverage Among the 10 Largest Banks in America
July 1, 2008 – December 31, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>Number of Mentions</th>
<th>% of Total Coverage for All 10 Banks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citigroup*</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank of America*</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wachovia*</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells Fargo*</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP Morgan Chase*</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Mutual</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank of New York</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSBC</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U S Bancorp</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun Trust</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Each of these banks was among the five largest in the nation during 2008.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>Number of News Releases</th>
<th>Ratio of Releases to Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bank of America</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citigroup</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wachovia</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells Fargo</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP Morgan Chase</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 4**  
*Media Relations Efficiency Among the 5 Largest Banks in America  
July 1, 2008 – December 31, 2008*
TABLE 5:  
*Crisis Cluster Associations for the 5 Largest Banks in America*  
*July 1, 2008 – December 31, 2008*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>Victimized</th>
<th>Accidentally Involved</th>
<th>Took Preventable Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bank of America</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citigroup</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP Morgan Chase</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells Fargo</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wachovia</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (Mean)</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 6
Side-by-Side Comparisons of Crisis Acknowledgment and Positive News Coverage for the 5 Largest Banks in America
July 1, 2008 – December 31, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>% of Releases Acknowledging Crisis</th>
<th>% of Coverage Positive in Tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wachovia</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells Fargo</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citigroup</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP Morgan Chase</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank of America</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 7
Side-by-Side Comparisons of Expressing Concern and Positive News Coverage for the 5 Largest Banks in America
July 1, 2008 – December 31, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>% of Releases Expressing Concern</th>
<th>% of Coverage Positive in Tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wachovia</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells Fargo</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citigroup</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP Morgan Chase</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank of America</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## TABLE 8:
**Significant Correlations Between News Releases and News Coverage**
*for the 5 Largest Banks in America*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging Concern &amp; Positive News Coverage</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing Concern &amp; Positive News Coverage</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim Portrayal &amp; Positive News Coverage</td>
<td>.900 (.037)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventable Actions &amp; Positive Coverage</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation coefficients calculated using Spearman’s rho, p < .05*
TABLE 9:
*Trend in Media Coverage for the 5 Largest Banks in America*
*(July 1, 2008 – September 29, 2008) → (September 30 - December 31, 2008)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>% of Coverage Positive in Tone</th>
<th>% of Coverage Portrayed as Victim</th>
<th>% of Coverage Portrayed as Catalyst</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citigroup</td>
<td>9.5 → 11.1</td>
<td>0 → 13.3</td>
<td>33.3 → 6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank of America</td>
<td>12.0 → 13.0</td>
<td>12.0 → 10.9</td>
<td>40 → 21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J P Morgan Chase</td>
<td>44.4 → 4.8</td>
<td>14.3 → 4.8</td>
<td>0 → 11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wachovia</td>
<td>11.1 → 5.6</td>
<td>7.4 → 10.5</td>
<td>33.3 → 18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells Fargo</td>
<td>33.3 → 20.0</td>
<td>25 → 2.5</td>
<td>0 → 2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When volunteering is no longer voluntary: Assessing the impact of forced volunteerism on intentions to volunteer

Kate M. Sies  
Graduate Student  
Illinois State University  
School of Communication  
Campus Box 4480  
Normal, IL 61790-4480  
kate.sies@gmail.com

Isabel C. Botero  
Assistant Professor  
Illinois State University  
School of Communication  
Campus Box 4480  
Normal, IL 61790-4480  
Office: (309) 438 2688  
ibotero@ilstu.edu

Abstract

Although volunteering – in donation of time and skills – has increased in the last decade, one problem that NPOs are facing is the difficulty in attracting and retaining dedicated volunteers. This is an important issue for public relations practitioners because, in NPOs, PR professionals are often assigned roles that include the management and recruitment of volunteers and up to date there is not much understanding of what motivates individuals to volunteer and remain as a volunteer for an organization. In this study we explored how attitudes, beliefs and self efficacy predict volunteering behavior for students. Additionally, we explored the effects of requiring students to volunteer for a class on their current volunteering behavior. As part of a larger study, we collected data from 308 students in a Midwest university about their current volunteer behavior, their attitudes, self efficacy, and beliefs about volunteering and information about classes that required them to volunteer in the past. Our results indicate that after controlling for student group membership and past volunteering experiences, attitudes toward volunteering was the strongest predictor of volunteering behavior. In general, students who had taken a course that required them to volunteer were more likely to be currently volunteering. Implications of these results for public relations practitioners are discussed.
**Introduction**

Volunteering has become a very important factor in today’s society. Volunteerism is seen as a way in which individuals can benefit their careers at the same time that they are helping society (Farmer & Fedor, 2001). Volunteers are especially important for non-profit organizations (NPOs) because they enable these organizations to sustain the services they offer without exhausting their operational budget (Laverie & McDonald, 2007). And, as governmental sources of funding disappear for NPOs, these organizations will need to turn to volunteers to help in terms of time and financial support (Farmer & Fedor, 2001). Because of this in the last 15 years there has been more academic and applied research trying to understand what motivates individuals to volunteer and what volunteers actually do for NPOs (Clary & Orenstein, 1991; Clary et al., 1998; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). For public relations scholars and practitioners understanding volunteer behaviors is important because in NPOs one of the relationships that PR practitioners manage is with volunteers, thus by understanding what motivates and hurts volunteering behavior can be useful in the process of recruiting and managing the volunteer workforce.

Most of the research that has explored volunteering behaviors has primarily focused on predicting above average volunteering (Farmer & Fedor, 1999, 2001; Greenslade & White, 2005), understanding motivations to volunteer (Clary et al, 1998; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998), looking at the effects of demographic factors on volunteering behavior (Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Winterich, Mittal, & Ross, 2009), and exploring how organizations can understand the performance of volunteers and how to retain them (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2007, 2008; Stephens, Dawley, & Stephens, 2004; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Laverie & McDonald, 2007). One aspect that has not received a lot of attention yet is how the combination of attitudes, beliefs, self-efficacy, and previous experience with volunteering affects volunteering behaviors. This paper tries to address that gap.

We are also interested in understanding is how the movement towards requiring students to volunteer as part of class assignments affects their future volunteering behaviors. Although researchers exploring the effects of volunteerism within courses and university life argue that it has positive effects for students (Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich & Torney-Purta, 2006; Spieazio et al., 2005; Hillygus, 2005), there is not a lot of research exploring the unintended consequences of requiring volunteerism as part of a course grade. One point of view would suggest that forced volunteerism may promote more volunteering from students in the future. By requiring community involvement, students may become more aware of social issues and may believe that volunteer efforts have a lasting impact on communities, and thus, these individuals may be more likely to volunteer in the future. On the other hand, if students perceive that they are obligated to volunteer, they may develop a negative attitude toward future volunteering. If volunteerism is enforced within classroom, students may perceive that their freedom is restricted and may act against the desired behavior (this has been labeled psychological reactance). Psychological reactance suggests that when individuals are forced to engage in a particular behavior, they may develop negative attitudes toward the behavior (Brehm, 1966). Therefore, requiring students to volunteer may lead to less volunteering in the future.

With this in mind, the current study focuses uses the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1985) and to better understand how attitudes, beliefs, perceived behavioral control, and past volunteering experiences affect future volunteering behavior. To explain the rationale for this project the following section includes a description of what volunteerism is, followed by an explanation of the factors that predict volunteerism and how previous volunteering experiences
affect volunteering. Finally, the methodology for current study is described, followed by the implications of this study for PR scholars and practitioners.

**Review of Literature**

**Volunteerism**

Volunteerism refers to any activity by which individuals freely donate their time, money, or services to benefit another person, group, or organization (Wilson, 2000). Generally, volunteering is a manifestation of human helpfulness that is planned, proactive, and primarily intended to benefit others (Clary et al., 1998; Wilson, 2000). Although volunteering is generally clustered with other helping activities, some researchers argue that volunteering is a unique form of helping in that it requires a lot more planning, sorting priorities, and the matching of the capabilities of the individual and interests with some type of volunteering opportunity (Benson et al., 1980; Clary et al., 1998; Wilson, 2000). Given this, it is important to differentiate volunteering from other forms of helping. Unlike spontaneous help which is reactive, brief and often chaotic, volunteering is proactive and it entails commitment and time effort (Wilson, 2000). Volunteerism also differs from caring (another helping behavior), in that caring implies some form of obligation that is not found in volunteering (Wilson, 2000).

It is also important to differentiate volunteering from activities like organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), participation in voluntary organizations, and activism. OCB is a term used to describe “individual employee behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). Although some would suggest that OCBs are a form of volunteerism, this project is interested in volunteer behavior that happens outside of the organization of employment or outside the university to which a student is associated. Participation in voluntary organizations can also be different than individual volunteering. Individuals can volunteer on their own time or can join organizations with the purpose of volunteering. Wilson (2000) suggests that these two contexts for volunteering are different. Individuals who seek out volunteer opportunities on their own are considered programming volunteers and are seen to be different from associational volunteers, or individuals who are members of volunteer organizations (e.g., Kiwanis International, Habitat for Humanity, or the American Cancer Society). Where programming volunteers produce the goods needed by others, associational volunteers consume the collective goods of the organization. Regardless, both types of volunteering are proactive, self initiated, and serve to support others. Another behavior that is important to differentiate from volunteerism is social activism. Social activists are focused on promoting and implementing social change that could benefit the future of society, whereas volunteers focus on the current state and, instead, devote their time to solving the problems of others (Wilson, 2000). Volunteers dedicate their time to solving current problems and social causes and not to producing radical societal change.

Although there are multiple approaches to volunteering we want to highlight that this project focuses on volunteering as a behavior that is self-initiated and intended to benefit other individuals, groups, or organizations for which the initiator is not a full time employee or registered student. In particular, this project will focus on volunteering as a donation of time and skills to non-profit organizations (NPOs). Recent budget cuts and decreasing resources, along with the current economic environment can negatively impact the survival of NPOs. As funding is being taken away, NPOs need to rely heavily on the efforts of volunteer labor (Farmer & Fedor, 2001). One of the ways to recruit and retain consistent volunteers is by relying on the
skills and abilities of PR practitioners. Thus, it is important to have a better understanding of what predicts volunteering and the impact that forcing volunteerism may have on intentions to volunteer on behalf for an NPO. In the next section, research exploring why individuals volunteer is summarized.

Predicting Volunteering

Research exploring the factors associated with volunteering and social support suggests that there are many predictors to volunteering. These predictors range from psychological and demographic factors to individual personality traits. In general, the study of psychological predictors can be grouped based on three broad levels: community, organizational, and individual levels (House, 1981; Wilson, 2000). At the community level, researchers have explored how the context in which individuals grow up or live affects their intentions to volunteer (Wilson, 2000). At the organizational level, research has explored the treatment that volunteers receive, and how this predicts intentions to continue to volunteer for the same organization (Grube & Piliavin, 2000). At the individual level, researchers have explained volunteering based on exchange theory, human capital and motives (Wilson, 2000). This study explores volunteering at the individual level based on a motives approach.

Many researchers have focused on identifying demographic characteristics common among individuals who engage in volunteerism (Wilson, 2000; Perry et al., 2008). Research in this area has indicated the value of identifying individual characteristics as a means of ensuring that these organizations recruit the “dream” volunteer, which can in turn assist PR practitioners in recruiting dedicated long-term volunteers to provide support for the mission of the organization. Age, gender, and race are individual characteristics that have been frequently assessed in research on volunteerism (Volunteering in America, 2009).

Demographic characteristics only provide a partial glimpse into understanding why individuals volunteer. Because volunteering is unpaid, some research suggests that individuals who volunteer possess certain personality characteristics that may make them more likely to cope with these responsibilities (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). Two personality traits that have been linked to volunteering behaviors are altruistic attitude and a pro-social personality (Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). Individuals who possess an altruistic attitude display gratitude for the possessions and resources that they have and may be more likely to extend similar benefits to others as an expression of their thanks (McCullough et al., 2008), and will be more likely to volunteer. In a similar way, proactive personality matters when understanding volunteering behaviors. Proactive personality is a dispositional trait that describes the extent to which individuals take action to influence their environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Individuals who score high on proactive personality have a personal disposition to engage in behaviors that alter their environments (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Therefore, those who score high on proactive personality are also more likely to engage in volunteering behaviors.

Although research has tried to understand the predictors of volunteering based on all the factors described above, a theory that can be very useful in understanding volunteering behaviors in the theory of planned behavior. In the next section we summarize this theory and explain how it predicts volunteering behavior.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The TPB is largely based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and suggests that individuals are more likely to perform a behavior if they intend to perform the behavior. Intentions are generally defined as an individual’s motivation to engage in a behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). Behavior intentions are in turn predicted by the attitudes and
bels that an individual holds towards the behavior, the evaluations made by valued social networks, the perceived behavioral control or difficulty perceived in performing this behavior (Ajzen, 1985). The central premise of the TPB is that individuals rationally make decisions about their actions by using the information they have accessible to them, thus the antecedents to behavior are a logical sequence of cognitions (Ajzen, 1985).

Attitudes the first predictor of behavior intentions and are conceptualized as rational responses that individuals hold toward the behavior (Ajzen, 1985; 1991). Attitudes represent the summation of the beliefs held about the behavior and the strength of those beliefs (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Ajzen (1991) suggested that attitudes reflect personal feelings of moral obligation which could be helpful in understanding altruistic behaviors such as volunteerism. Therefore, before committing to a behavior, individuals first evaluate and prioritize these beliefs. The stronger the belief about the behavior, the more likely the individual may be to develop intentions to perform it.

While individuals base their decision to engage in a behavior on personal evaluations of the behavior, they also rely on the beliefs of others. Subjective norms and beliefs assess how valued social networks feel about the individual engaging in a behavior and the importance of these networks in influencing intentions to perform behaviors (Ajzen, 1985). Social networks include family members, close friends, or co-workers. Individuals make sense of others’ beliefs by first assessing the expectations of others. Then, they evaluate their motivation to comply with the expectations of others. And, last, they also evaluate their motivation to comply the expectations of others.

Perceived behavioral control is the third component of the theory of planned behavior. Perceived behavioral control is described as the level of difficulty of performing a particular behavior and it is conceptually similar to the notion of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Based on Bandura’s idea, TPB suggests that perceptions of control will determine whether an individual will attempt a particular behavior. In situations in which individuals perceive they possess the required resources and capabilities to perform a behavior they will be more likely to execute the behavior.

Although it has not been previously used, TPB can serve as a framework to understand why individuals volunteer. Based on this framework it could be argued that volunteering behavior is predicted by three factors: attitudes towards volunteering, perceived and importance of norms from significant others, and the belief that an individual is capable of volunteering and can make a difference through volunteering. Specifically, individuals that believe that volunteering is important will be more likely to volunteer. Additionally, if an individual’s significant social network (i.e., immediate family, friends, and classmates) also believes that volunteering is an important behavior then a student will also be more likely to engage in volunteering behavior. Finally, individuals will be more likely to engage in volunteering behavior to the extent that they perceive that they are capable of volunteering and that their volunteering will make a difference. Given the rationale presented above we advance the following hypotheses for this study:

H1a: Attitudes toward volunteering will be positively related to volunteering behavior.
H1b: Perceptions about volunteering held by important others will be positively related to volunteering behavior.
H1c: Perceived control regarding volunteering will be positively related to volunteering behavior.
A second factor that we were interested in exploring for this project was how previous volunteering experiences affected current volunteering behaviors. In the last 5 years, universities have started encouraging students to engage in volunteerism by incorporating community service into courses and university life. In the classroom, instructors are promoting a sense of civic responsibility by requiring students to engage in community service or creating awareness of important social issues as part of a course requirement. Outside of the classroom, student organizations are also encouraging community involvement (Illinois State University Dean of Students, 2009). While volunteering may be required to become a member of a student organization, students have the freedom to choose their involvement with these organizations. However, students may be required to take particular courses to fulfill graduation requirements and may not be aware of course requirements prior to enrolling. Thus, requiring community involvement for a grade can lead to perceptions of forced volunteerism. And, forcing students to volunteer can in turn negatively impact the ability of NPOs to recruit and retain dedicated volunteers. In the following section we discuss the how previous volunteering experiences may influence future volunteering behaviors.

Previous Volunteering Experiences

There is some research in different areas of the literature that suggests that past behaviors and experiences will affect how we behave in the future. As mentioned above, in the last 5 years universities have been trying to incorporate to their missions developing civically engaged students. In a general sense, civic engagement movements incorporate goals that are intended to create more productive and involved citizens. These goals can be achieved through democratic and political engagement, community involvement, and involvement with voluntary associations. Civically engaged individuals are educated to become agents of change and are equipped with the ability and motivation to solve community problems, connect with other citizens, and become involved with a larger social community (McCoy & Scully, 2002; Kwak et al., 2005). In the university context, these movements promote student involvement with their peers, with the institution, and with their community as a whole (McCoy & Scully, 2002).

Recently, academic institutions have promoted these movements within classrooms and university life. Programs such as the American Democracy Project and Political Engagement Project reinforce the importance of being knowledgeable and responsible citizens and give students opportunities to engage with others for the greater social good (Illinois State University Outreach, 2009; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009). In these programs community service is the most advocated activity for students (Lawry, Laurison, & VanAntwerpen, 2006). Community service includes activities such as volunteering (e.g. volunteering for a personal relevant cause, assisting with a school project or event, etc.) and becoming involved with voluntary associations, such as NPOs.

It is important to note that civic engagement movements in general do not force students to volunteer. Their goals are to prepare students to become more aware and involved citizens and to encourage them to serve a greater good. However, many academic institutions are integrating civic engagement goals and activities into course curriculum in a way that may represent forced volunteerism. Volunteerism is frequently implemented into academic institutions as a part of service learning, or the application of civic engagement projects into coursework (Jacoby, 2009). In the classroom, instructors integrate service learning by requiring students to engage in some form of community service or involvement to meet course requirements (Illinois State University Outreach, 2009). Such projects range from working with a local NPO, developing campaigns to
promote important social issues, or writing speeches and papers designed to prepare active and engaged citizens.

Civic engagement can be promoted both inside the classroom through service activities and requirements, and outside of the classroom through student organizations. Unlike the former instance, students who join organizations are familiar and knowledgeable of the mission of the organization and of the expectations of members. However, when students register for a course, they may not realize what the requirements are until they have already registered for the course. Thus, whereas students voluntarily enter into student organizations that may require volunteerism, students may register for a course only because it meets a graduation or major requirement. Therefore, if a course requires individuals to volunteer, and a grade is attached to this volunteering behavior, the civic engagement movement might be forcing volunteerism.

With this in mind, in the current project we were interested in exploring what the relationship was between having had a course that required students to volunteer, attitudes toward volunteering, and volunteering behavior. We were particularly interesting in exploring if there were any negative consequences on attitudes toward volunteering or volunteering behavior for students. As described above, forcing students to volunteering can have both positive and negative consequences. With this in mind we advanced the following research question:

RQ1: What is the relationship between having had a course that requires volunteering and attitudes toward volunteering?
RQ2: What is the relationship between having had a course that requires volunteering and volunteering behavior?

Methods

Participants

Three hundred and eight students participated in this study. The age of participants ranged from 17 to 52 ($M = 19.98$, $SD = 3.03$). Forty four percent of the participants were male, 70% were Caucasian, and 51% were freshman in college. Additionally, 52% of the sample was actively involved in a student organization and 65% were members of a church group. Finally, 77% of the respondents indicated that they had donated money in the past to organizations.

Procedure

Participants were recruited during in-class briefings. The researcher visited introductory undergraduate communication courses at the university and explained the purpose of the study. Students that consented to participate were given a paper copy of our survey to complete in class. Participants answered questions about their current volunteer behavior, experience with volunteering as part of a course, their previous volunteer experience, their attitudes toward volunteering, individual characteristics, and demographic information. Completion of the survey took between 10 and 20 minutes.

Measures

Volunteering behaviors. Seven questions were developed for this study to evaluate the volunteering experiences of the participants. Individuals were asked to indicate whether they currently volunteered, for how many organizations, how many hours a month, what type of organizations that had volunteered for, and the reasons why they volunteered.

Previous volunteer experience. To assess participant’s previous experience with volunteering as part of a mandated classroom assignment, students were asked 4 questions: “have you ever been enrolled in a class that requires you to volunteer”, “What type of
volunteering did the course require”, what type of volunteering did volunteering fulfilled”, and “how relevant was the volunteering requirement to the course work”.

Attitudes toward volunteering. Six items were created to assess attitudes toward volunteering (M = 3.93, SD = .64, α = .82). Participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). A sample item was “It is important to engage in volunteering activities”.

Subjective beliefs about volunteering. Subjective beliefs about volunteering were measured using a nine items. Three items asked questions about the perceptions of the family network norms and their importance; three items assessed perceptions about the friendship network and the final three asked questions about their perceptions regarding norms of classmates. Participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree). Sample items are “My friends/ family/ classmates would want me to volunteer” and “I am motivated by what my friends/ family/ classmates think”.

Self-efficacy toward Volunteering. Self-efficacy toward volunteering was measured using an adaptation of Sherer et al.’s (1982) General Self-Efficacy Measure. Participants indicated their level of agreement to six statements using a 5-point Likert scale (M = 3.68, SD = .59, α = .70). Sample items include: “I am capable of donating time to volunteer” and “I believe that if I volunteer, my volunteer efforts will make a difference”.

Proactive Personality. Proactive personality was added as a control variable. This personality characteristics was measured using Bateman & Crant’s (1993) Proactive Personality scale (M = 3.31, SD = .55, α = .87). Similar to all the scales in this study, participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). A sample item was “I feel a drive to make a difference in my community and maybe in the world”.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study and the correlations for the variables included in this study. Before we present the analysis for hypotheses we would like to describe the volunteering behavior of the participants in our study.

Volunteering Behavior

Fifty five percent of the participants in the study reported that they currently did not engage in any volunteering behavior. Out of those that expressed that they currently volunteered, 66% volunteering for one organization while 21% volunteered for two organizations. Additionally, 74% of the participants reported volunteering between 1 and 5 hours a month primarily for non for profit (51%) and religious organizations (23%). When asked about previous volunteering experiences that were part of a course, 51% of the participants reported that had a course in the past that required them to volunteers and 47% of the participants indicated that this volunteering counted primarily as part of the course grade. Finally, 32% of the sample also indicated that they were currently enrolled in a course that required them to volunteer either as a part of the grade for the course (35%), as part of extra-credit opportunities (36%) or as an alternative assignment (29%).

Hypothesis Testing

Two statistical analyses were used to test the hypotheses in this study. We first looked at the correlation between the dependent and independent variables, and then we conducted a regression analysis to provide a more stringent test for our hypothesis. Initial correlation analysis supported the relationship between attitudes toward volunteering and volunteering
behavior ($r = .28, p < .001$) and self-efficacy towards volunteering and current volunteering behavior ($r = .27, p < .001$), but did not support the relationship between subjective beliefs and volunteering behaviors (friends: $r = .06$, classmates: $r = .06$, and family: $r = -.02$). These analyses indicate support for H1a and H1c.

We also evaluated the hypotheses with hierarchical regression analysis. In step 1, we controlled for sex, age, membership to a club, and proactive personality because these because these characteristics can be associated with volunteering behaviors (Need ref). In step 2 we entered the effects for attitudes, beliefs (friends, classmates, and family), self efficacy and taking a class that required volunteering in the past. We evaluated the significance of each step with Change $F (\Delta F)$ and interpreted betas with $t$-values. After accounting for the controls, addition of main effects in step 2 significantly increased explained variance in voice ($\Delta F = 2.74, p < .05$). As reported in Table 2, the beta for attitudes was positive and significant in step two ($\beta = .24, p < .05$), supporting H1a. Results were not consistent with H1b or H1c because neither of the beliefs or self-efficacy was significantly related to volunteering behavior. Overall variance explained was 22% (adjusted $R^2 = .17$).

**Research Questions**

To assess the RQ1 and RQ2 we explored the correlation of the variables and we also conducted a t-test. RQ1 focused on understanding whether there was a relationship between having had a course that requires volunteerism and attitudes toward volunteering. As can be seen in table 1, there was no significant relationship between attitudes toward volunteering and having had a previous course that required the participant to volunteer ($r = .06, p = n.s.$). Similarly, when conducting a t-test we found that there was no significant difference between those who had taken a course that required them to volunteer ($M = 3.89, SD = .61$) and those that did not ($M = 3.98, SD = .65$) in their current volunteer behavior, $t(302) = 1.12, p = n.s.$

RQ2 focused on understanding whether there was a relationship between having had a course that requires volunteerism and current volunteering behavior. There was a significant relationship between having had a course that required participants to volunteer and the current volunteer behavior ($r = .14, p < .05$). T-test also showed this relationship. In particular, participants who had taken a course that required them to volunteer ($M = 1.51, SD = .50$) where more likely to report that they were currently volunteering, when compared to participants that had not taken a course that required them to volunteer ($M = 1.38, SD = .49$), $t(302) = 2.37, p < .05$.

**Discussion**

The current study was designed to explore how attitudes, the beliefs of others, and perceptions of control predict volunteering behavior for students. Results indicate that, in regards to volunteering, attitudes and a perceived level of control are positively related to volunteering behaviors. Thus, individuals are more likely to engage in volunteerism if they possess positive attitudes toward the behavior and if they believe they possess the resources needed to be a successful and effective volunteer. In the case of our study, the beliefs of valued others (i.e., friends, classmates, or family) regarding volunteering did not have a significant impact on volunteering behavior.

The study also examined the consequences of forcing students to volunteer as part of a course requirement on their current attitudes toward volunteering and their volunteering behavior. As referenced earlier, academic institutions nationwide are beginning to incorporate civic engagement and community service into courses and student organizations. The current study further explored whether volunteering for a course requirement impacts students’ attitudes...
toward volunteering and volunteering behavior. Results indicate that having been enrolled in a course that requires volunteering has no impact on attitudes towards volunteering, but does have an impact on current volunteer behavior of students.

When taken together, these results have important implications for PR scholars and practitioners, especially for those that work for non-profit organizations. For scholars, this study provide an important avenue that can help advance research on volunteerism as well as provide a strong snapshot of which variables may impact volunteering behavior. First, results indicate that when deciding to engage in volunteerism, individuals may rely more on their own perceptions about volunteering than on the feedback of others. This is consistent with the intrinsic rewards and personal dedication to service that is characteristic of long-term volunteers. However, pressure from an external source, such as a volunteerism requirement for a course only affected the volunteer behavior but not the attitudes toward volunteering. This is interesting, because it may be that having students volunteer as part of a course is only good for a while, but does not change the attitudes towards volunteering. This is important because it may be that the best way to promote volunteering may come by creating messages that affect the attitudes that students have toward volunteering. Thus, future research in PR should explore the long term consequences of requiring students to volunteer on their attitudes towards volunteering, and how messages developed by NPOs can affect attitudes towards volunteering.

Our results can also help public relations practitioners who assist NPOs in volunteer recruitment. Changes in the economy are beginning to increase NPO reliance on a strong and consistent volunteer base to support the mission and achieve organizational goals (Farmer & Fedor, 1999). Given that individuals are more likely to volunteer when possessing positive attitudes toward volunteering as well as a level of control over the behavior, public relations practitioners can incorporate these ideas into promotional materials when trying to recruit volunteers for NPOs. One tactic PR practitioners can use is to identify attitudes of community members in regards to volunteering and make attempts to reinforce positive attitudes through the messages that they create. Another strategy PR practitioners can adopt is to clearly communicate what makes a “good” volunteer “good.” In promotional materials, practitioners can identify the type of volunteer that the organization is looking for and, perhaps, can include statistics mentioning the financial equivalent of volunteer contributions. This may encourage individuals who are uncertain about skills and resources to engage in volunteerism. Many organizations, when soliciting financial donations, communicate how even the smallest contribution can help fulfill their mission. While NPOs could use this in soliciting financial donations, practitioners could also adapt this message when recruiting volunteers.

**Strengths & Limitations**

Like any study, this study has both strengths and weaknesses. One of the main strengths of the study is that it helps explore the effects of the civic engagement movement on college campuses. With the prevalence of civic engagement movements in academic institutions, it is important to understand what these projects do to help in developing volunteers for the future. Regarding our current understanding, although we found a positive relationship between having to volunteer for a class in the past and current volunteering behaviors, it was interesting that there was no effect on intentions to volunteer in the future. An additional strength of the study was its focus on civic engagement within the classroom. As discussed earlier, civic engagement components can be found both inside and outside of the classroom, especially in student organizations. However, students are able to learn more about student organizations prior to joining and willingly choose to become involved with them. With college courses, it is possible
that students may only have a basic familiarity with the structure of the course prior to enrolling. Even then, some courses with volunteer components may be required for the student, whether to fulfill general education requirements or course credit to their major area of concentration.

There are also some limitations that are important to highlight. Because a majority of the participants were freshmen, this may decrease the chance of their having prior experiences with civic engagement in courses. Many, if not all, of the introductory courses at the university chosen for the study are larger lecture courses and, as a result, may not be conducive to incorporating group projects related to volunteerism or community service. Additionally, one of the theories used in the study, the theory of planned behavior, incorporates a variable that was not addressed in the survey: behavioral intentions. The theory indicates that while attitudes, subjective beliefs, and perceived control over the behavior (the variables tested in each of the three hypotheses) are effective predictors of behavior performance, they are indirect predictors and the strongest predictor of behavior is the intention to perform it. The current study did not provide a way to measure intentions to volunteer and instead only tested whether there was a relationship between each of the components and volunteering behavior. As a result, the research may not provide a thorough enough evaluation of the hypotheses. Finally, having collected data only at one point in time can also affect our results. Thus future research should collect data in a longitudinal way to help see the effects across time.

Future Research

While the study provided insight into what may predict volunteerism, future research could test similar hypotheses in different volunteering contexts. First, it may be of interest to understand what may predict volunteerism within the workplace, or the performance of OCBs. Similar to civic engagement movements, corporate social responsibility is becoming a top way for organizations and companies to brand them in a socially responsible light, and these behaviors may be helpful in developing a solid organizational reputation. This would also be an interesting context for future research because the pressure from an employer could represent an external force similar to that of the volunteerism requirement set by instructors. Additionally, working professionals may have more experience with volunteering than college students, and may possess more sufficient skills, including time and money, for NPOs. It may also be interesting to examine whether programming volunteers are motivated in ways different from associational volunteers. Research has suggested that these “types” of volunteers are unique in their roles and how they help NPOs, so understanding the motivating factors could also help public relations practitioners in recruiting different types of volunteers. Finally, future research could incorporate a measurement of behavioral intentions, to test the strength of the relationship between intentions to volunteer and engaging in volunteerism behavior.
References


Illinois State University Dean of Students Office. Retrieved September 18, 2009 from http://www.deanofstudents.ilstu.edu/


# Appendix

## Descriptive statistics and correlations for the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Current Volunteer a</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Required Volunteering a</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Attitudes</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>(82)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Friends Beliefs</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Classmates Beliefs</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Family Beliefs</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>(.70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Proactive P</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>(.87)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Age</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
<td>-1.10</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Sex b</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-1.16*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Class Level c</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Member Club a</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Reliabilities are in the diagonal.
a No = 1, Yes = 2
b Male = 1, Female = 2
c Freshman = 1, Sophomore = 2, Junior = 3, Senior = 4, Graduate Student = 5

*p < .05 **p < .01
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex (^b)</td>
<td>.16(^*)</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Club (^c)</td>
<td>.27(^{**})</td>
<td>.26(^{**})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Personality</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td></td>
<td>.24(^*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs Friends</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief Classmates</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief Family</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Volunteer for course</td>
<td></td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(F\)                      \(8.40^{**}\) | \(5.18^{**}\) |
\(\Delta F\)               \(2.73^{*}\) |
\(R^2\)                    \(.15\)     | \(.22\)    |
\(\Delta R^2\)             \(.07\)     |
Adjusted \(R^2\)            \(.13\)     | \(.17\)    |

\(^a\) Model statistics are betas.
\(^b\) Coding: 1 = Male, 2 = Female
\(^c\) Coding: 1 = No, 2 = Yes
\(^{**}\) \(p < .01\)
\(^{*}\) \(p < .05\)
Ethical Issues as an Important Factor within International Public Relations: Heuristic remarks on a Systematical Analysis and a Comparative Case Study from Five European Countries

Dr. Holger Sievert (Zeppelin University / TU Munich / WWW Muenster)

Tobias Haeusser (Università Bocconi)

Introduction

Ethical questions represent quite a difficult subject within Public Relations. Of course, there already exist general, but significant commitments to PR ethics, such as the “Code d’Athènes” or the “Code de Lisbon”. Of course, ‘PR ethics’ is today an established subject within PR education as well as within PR associations worldwide. If you count the number of “Sunday speeches” on this subject, for example, everything seems to be going just fine within the profession. And of course, the new “Stockholm Accords” will have to address some ethical issues, too.

However, I strongly believe that this is not the case. The ongoing struggle over PR ethics in a country like Germany within the last year alone, shows this very clearly: One academic claimed that PR had a “licence to lie”, deception being in turn a fundamental part of the profession. And some practitioners tried and succeeded to produce blog content on behalf of a relatively large corporation without mentioning the management’s paying for the activity, an example of malpractice that precipitated a large media discussion and even brought PR associations onto the TV news and resulted in a number of magazine features (which normally never happens at all).

If we want to discuss PR ethics in a contemporarily relevant way, we need to examine not only a kind of “must do ethics” (“Pflichtethik”), but also “target ethic” (“Zielethik”). If we want to enhance and affirm the growing value of public relations for organizational success in today’s networked society, we also have to consider the overall function and responsibility of PR within modern society; it is simply not sufficient to consider it satisfactory to have merely fulfilled one or another formal standard in our behaviour. Therefore, the ethical question becomes fundamental for the future of PR.

And if we want to discuss PR ethics on an international scale, it is also very important not only to look at simple explanations of “good” and “bad”, but also to see this ethics within the context of their country of origin and their target-country. What might be very well-established and traditional in one context, might be very modern and open-minded in another – and vice versa. In other words: If we want to observe PR ethics on an international scale, we need to analyse it within its quite complex (cultural) context.

This paper aims to do so. In order to conduct the comparative analysis, the authors will apply a methodological framework developed originally by one of them. It was fully presented in the paper “From Back-Seat to Dashboard: The Global Navigation of International Corporate Communications”, presented at last year’s Annual Meeting of the Commission on Global PR Research at the International Public Relations Research Conference in Miami (vgl. Sievert 2009b). An older version of this argument also won last year’s IPR Bledcom Special Prize.

In his development of this concept the author argued that there is no comprehensive interlinking of PR knowledge with relevant expertise derived from other disciplines; in this light he proposed a heuristic analytical grid, along with its interdisciplinary application using the example of Media Relations. The current authors will first examine in detail the most important ethical aspects of each level of the heuristic analytical framework, and then use the findings to analyze the situation in five European countries as a first practical application.
The functioning of the heuristic framework

A highly differentiated heuristic working model for social subsystem of ‘corporate communications’ is required for a full analysis of “International Corporate Communication” ICC. The model proposed by the current authors is based on four contexts, all of which are of immense importance when it comes to the navigation ofGlobal PR activities (cf. diagram 1).

Diagram 1: Heuristic grid for analysis of (international) corporate communications

Source: Sievert 2007, adapting Weischenberg 1992

The social subsystem of corporate communications can be represented by the layers of an onion, but also by a kind of “compass” showing the different dimensions of the model. There is space here only for a very short outline of these (for more details, please see the literature mentioned at the end):

• Economic and political systems, together with the respective media environments in which corporate communications occur, constitute the normative context.

• In the structural context, specific foreign target institutions, usually corporations, are scrutinized with regard to their financial and leadership structures.

• The functional context primarily involves cultural dimensions and conflicts that can (and should) strongly influence the contents of international corporate communications.

• Last but not least, the role context looks at international target actors against the backdrop of their different features, expertise, and attitudes.
Standard context
- General characteristics of political and economic systems
- Concrete characteristics of media systems and media relations in particular

Structure context
- Typology of company’s financing ("corporate finance system")
- Chosen model for company’s management and controlling ("corporate governance")

Function context
- Distinctive dimensions in describing culture
- Other subjects with content pertinence and communication goals

Role context
- Identification of global players for the international achievement of communication goals
- Knowledge and general characteristics of the alignment of players
For each of these contexts within ICC, research can be carried out regarding the individual countries which are the targets of international communications. This research would consider the extent to which distinctions can be made between the contexts or the extent to which differences in other industries or corporate cultures flow from them. In this way, and for each communication situation confronted in practice, a grid could be developed that would cover all target countries, institutions, media and actors. PR agencies could use the grid as they planned and evaluated efforts and strategies. Exactly how many and which particular compass axes should be selected for an individual strategic communications goal would depend upon the situation in question.

Ethical aspect within the ICC framework and results for “typical” European countries

The following section will present some initial results on the ICC compass for European countries, with specific regard to the ethically interesting aspects of each level. More general results concerning the featured countries will also be presented at year’s Miami session of the Commission on Global PR Research.

The selected European countries are Germany, the UK, France (on account of their being three of the largest countries within the European Union, and grounded as they are respectively in very different Germanic, Anglo-Saxon and Roman cultural tradition), Poland (as the largest East-European EU member) and Denmark (as an example for Scandinavia). We will order our discussion of the results by context rather than by country, so as to make a direct comparison easier.

Normative context

The first context to be considered with regard both to the five countries and to pertinent ethical issues in PR, is the normative context. This context concerns the norms that are generally recognized within a media system (cf. Sievert 2009: 5). For this purpose, the model by Hallin and Manchini (2004) can be used to compare characteristics of the political and media systems in the chosen societies. The authors defined nine parameters, within which the general political perspectives and the media system in concrete are analyzed. The parameter with most ethical input in these seems to be “qualification of the communication profession”. This criterion considers the degree of professionalization of the communication business (cf. Hallin & Manchini 2004: 289).

Concerning this ‘qualification of the communication profession’, the media systems in Denmark, Germany and United Kingdom are self-regulated and show a high degree of professionalization (cf. Hallin & Manchini 2004: 67), whereas France and Poland have a less professionalized system (cf. Hallin & Manchini 2004: 67) (cf. Wyka 2008: 60). Within this discrepancy, there is (potential) space for ethical conflicts. Countries with a highly professionalized communication environment normally possess an own code of ethical standards and control institutions, which determines the duties of communication professionals on the one hand, and, on the other, ensures the quality of their work (cf. Whitaker et al. 2004: 31).

Therefore, it can be assumed that reliable content is provided; and because of this assumption an implicit trust develops between producer and consumer. Conversely, countries with a lower
professionalization in the communication profession may suffer from a lack of competency, proficiency and a negative public image (cf. Coombs et al. 1994: 24), and consequently find it more difficult to build up trust with their audience (cf. Harcup 2004: 4). Therefore, a high professionalization of the communication profession in a country can ensure that both morality and social standards are retained. Through this, if indirectly, it can secure ethical standards within the context of PR.
**Structural context**

The structural context will focus on the target (or “sender”) institutions, thereby examining the financial structures and the cultural implications associated with them (cf. Sievert 2009: 10f). Based on the work of Berglöf (1997), Williams and Conley (2005) and Mallin (2006), the target countries will be analyzed with help of five variables, which together cover the various dimensions of corporate finance and corporate governance. The most obvious variable with regards the current ethical question is “CSR orientation”. In this the authors consider how much emphasis corporations or other organization in the investigated countries place on corporate social responsibility.

In respect of this criterion, it can be seen that all the examined countries all place a degree of emphasis on ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR). Nonetheless, in this comparison, Germany, United Kingdom and Denmark show a higher priority on CSR than France and Poland (cf. Schrott 2007: 87, Den Hond et al. 2007: 206, Perrini et al. 2006: 43, Hilz 2008:, 60 and Habisch 2007: 497).

A trend towards CSR within the investigated countries is undeniable. Companies are becoming increasingly conscious about their responsibility in a society, a consciousness which is in turn reinforced by a general increase in public awareness of the importance of ethics (cf. Idowu & Filho 2008: 127). The famous quotation of Milton Friedman’s, “The social responsibility of business is to increase profit” (NY Times Magazine 1970: 13), thus appears in view of this to be both outdated and incorrect. With regard to corporate communication, it is clear that ethical behaviour within the CSR context requires a regular, meaningful, and sustained communication, rather than a trickle of filtered, sporadic information (cf. Jonker & de Witte 2006: 214).

Nonetheless, CSR is increasingly running the risk of becoming a vague, abstract buzzword, rather than a clearly measurable criterion (cf. Rawlins 2005: 214f). Frankental (2001) underlines this danger in his argument that “CSR is a vague and intangible term, which can mean anything to anybody, and therefore is without meaning.” Consequently, a common understanding of the term “CSR”, as well as standardization the measurement of CSR activities, is necessary to guarantee ethical correctness. In view of these requirements, a “triple bottom line” can function as a starting point, whereby companies publish their economic, environmental and social responsibility outcomes (cf. Henriques & Richardson 2004: 214).

**Functional context**

The functional context describes the target content, whether it be directly conveyed in a certain cultural context or whether it needs to be transmitted through several interim steps (cf. Sievert 2009: 13). The work of Geert Hofstede (2001) serves as an excellent starting point for analyzing the cultural context of the selected countries. In his work, he developed four cultural dimensions (and subsequently a fifth one), which differ from country to country.
The fifth criteria ("long-term vs. short-term orientation"; (cf. Hopper et al. 2007: 98) is the most important one for ethical questions of PR. For example, the above-mentioned German discussion as to whether PR has a “licence to lie” would be answered very differently from a long-term than from a short-term perspective. Additionally, concerns such as reputation building, customer trust and reliability (classical motivators for ethical behaviour within the field of PR) function primarily on a long-term perspective.

While the first four dimensions are covered by the research of Hofstede and are presented under www.geert-hofstede.com/geert_hofstede_resources.shtml, the last dimension is not available for all the investigated countries by Hofstede, due to the fact that the dimension ‘long-term vs. short term orientation’ was introduced subsequently to the original study (cf. Hopper et al. 2007: 98). Therefore, in order to ensure a consistent and reliable comparison, the current ‘saving ratio’ of the different countries is used to investigate the long- or short-term orientation of the societies. This is not without problems; but other ideas on this item are very welcome.

Within this dimension, it must be anticipated that overall European and Anglo-American countries, have traditionally registered a short-term orientation in systematic global comparisons (cf. Lussier 2009: 392). Nonetheless, in this differentiation, France and Germany, both with a saving ratio of over 10 per cent, show a slightly stronger long-term orientation (cf. Finanz.Geld Finanznachrichten 2008), while Denmark, with -3%, has a clearer orientation towards short term planning (cf. Statista 2006). The United Kingdom, with 1%, and Poland, with 4%, are situated in the middle (cf. Kollewe 2008, Statista 2006).

As shown in the previous paragraph, the planning horizon in the countries differs. While France and Germany have a more long-term orientation, Denmark has, when measured on the basis of the average Danish saving ratio, a more short-term orientation. United Kingdom and Poland are located between these poles.

In comparison to this, a society that ranks low from the point of view of ‘long-term orientation’ places emphasis on short-term results, and on the importance of rapid need-gratification (cf. Samovar et al. 2009: 207). Therefore, it must taken into consideration from an ethical standpoint that in a short-term oriented country, the domination of short-term results can lead to disadvantages in the long run, which can stay in contrast to the CSR orientation, as discussed before (cf. Samli 2008: 115 and Riahi-Belkaoui 1995: 79).

Role context

Finally, in the role context, the target actors in the chosen countries must be reconsidered. Due to the fact that communication actors work in manifold disciplines and professions, the last part is primarily focused on journalism, an area in which a cross-border comparison is applicable (cf. Sievert 2009: 15). In this connection, David H. Weaver’s book ‘the global journalist’ (1998), in which he analyzes 21 countries with regard to their journalistic proficiency and formulates various features and attributes which can be fulfilled to a higher or lesser extent, can serve as a basis of such a comparison.
For this paper, the authors have selected one characteristic from the role self-definition for the ethical comparison: ‘being a watchdog of the government’. This criterion describes how involved the journalists are (or at least think they are) in their capacity as a kind of ‘fourth estate’, a notion which entails the idea of the press as a representative of the public, a critic of government and an advocate of policies (cf. McQuail 2005: 284).
The United Kingdom and Poland both register a result of 56% in response to this particular criterion, ‘being a watchdog of the government’ (cf. Weaver 1998 and Sievert 1998). 43 per cent of the Danish journalists and 40 per cent of the French journalists perceive this element as important (cf. Hovden et al. 2009: 161 and Sievert 1998). German correspondents ‘only’ value this remark with 33 per cent (cf. Weaver 1998). A sum-up of the results can be found in Table 4.

This, together with some other items, offers interesting insights in the moral mindset of journalists. The aspect of ‘being a watchdog of the government’, in particular, is ideal for a further ethical examination, due to the fact that it can (mis)used for serious investigations for the public good as well as for prurient and transitory interests (cf. Preston 2003: 104). All the investigated countries consider this attribute to be of medium importance. This may in part be attributed to a fear of being accused to be partisan or biased. Ellen Debenport, St. Petersburg Times political editor, has placed particular emphasis on this point: “They tell us they want analysis, background, interpretation, and when we do that and it’s not entirely in keeping with their view of the world, they say we’re biased” (Katz 1993: 26). Therefore, one way of avoiding ethical issues concerning the objectivity of journalists would be a definitional shift from ‘objective’ towards ‘fair’ or ‘honest’, as happened in the statutes of the Society of Professional Journalists in 1996 (cf. Smith 2003: 78).

Summary and perspective

Putting all these results together, we get at least one indicator, per level, for the ethical understanding of PR in these different countries. The authors have tried to collate the results in Table 1 on this page. According to this very first analysis, we can see that Poland is the only country where a lot of development in the realization of PR ethics in practice still needs to be done. All other analyzed countries already have quite well-established ethical frameworks in the various contexts of their PR subsystem.

Table 1: Indicators für Ethical Standards in PR based on different ICC levels But it should also be noted that each of the countries has it own particular ‘blind spot’: German journalists are less likely, for example, to ascribe to themselves a ‘critical’ role compared to their counterparts in other EU countries; in France the qualification of PR professionals, including on ethical issues, needs to be improved; in the UK, despite some problematic development before the world financial crises, we encounter a highly professionalized industry, whose actors adhere to high professional standards on ethical issues. Meanwhile, In Denmark, the only “negative” point is currently a short-term orientation in the cultural framework, an orientation which will probably align itself with European standards in the wake of the current economic crisis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country / Attribute</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualification of Communication Profession</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Orientation</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>long</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a watchdog of the government</td>
<td>Low - Medium (33%)</td>
<td>Medium (40%)</td>
<td>Medium (56%)</td>
<td>Medium (56%)</td>
<td>Medium (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very first overall assessment on ethics in PR</td>
<td>developed, but not very critical counterpart</td>
<td>developed, but qualification needs improvement</td>
<td>developed in the wake of recent change</td>
<td>still under development</td>
<td>developed, but currently short-term-focused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once again, it should be emphasized that this analysis is a heuristic one. The authors do not consider this a complete or fully appropriate description of the PR ethical situation in the five countries analyzed. But we strongly believe that a differentiated approach, such as the one that had been chosen here for the ethical aspect, does indeed represent the only correct approach. If we discuss ethical questions on a purely theoretical level without taking contexts into account, we shouldn’t be surprised if people don’t follow. If we look at it in real life and with particular focus on the overall function of PR to society, we have a chance to get our message through.
References

Classical sources


Chen, John-ren (2004): International institutions and multinational enterprises: global players-
global markets. Cheltenham Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing


Chen, Ni (2003). ‘From Propaganda to public relations. Evolutionary change in the Chinese
government.’ Asian Journal of Communication (17) 2: 96-21

Coombs, Timothy W. / Holladay, Sherry / Hasenauer, Gabriele / Signitzer, Gabriele (1994):
International Public Relations: Identification and Interpretation of Similarities and Differences
Between Professionalization in Austria, Nprway, and the United States. In: Journal of Public
Relations Research, 6 (1), p. 23-39

Cooper, Stuart (2004): Corporate Social Performance: a stakeholder approach. Farnham Surrey:
Ashgate Publishing

Crane, Andrew / Mc Williams, Abagail / Matten, Dirk (2008): The Oxford handbook of

Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications

analysis. Mahwah/NJ.

Global Perspectives. Sheffield.

responsibility in action: talking, doing and measuring. Farnham Surrey: Ashgate Publishing

in Polen und Großbritannien. Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede. In: Diskussionspapier der
Forschungsgruppe EU-integration. Berlin: Deutsches Institut für internationale Politik und
Sicherheit, 14/08/2006

Du Plessis, J / et al. (2007): German corporate governance in international and European context.
Berlin: Springer Verlag

Society in an Enlarged Europe. Berlin and Heidelberg.

In: Journal of Economic Perspectives, Vol. 21 (1), Winter 2007, p. 117-140

Falconi, Toni Muzi (2006). Moving towards a global dashboard of local public relations
infrastructure? Posted on “PR Conversations”. Online blog post, available at


Grunig, James E., Larissa A Grunig, Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Yi-Hui Huang and Anastasia
Relations Research (7) 3: 163


Henriques, Adrian / Richardson, Julia (2004): The triple bottom line, does it all add up?: assessing the sustainability of business and CSR. London: Earthscan


Rose, Caspar / Mejer. Carsten (2003): The Danish Corporate Governance System: From


Tilson, Donn James, and Emmanuel C. Alozie (2003). Toward the Common Good. Perspectives in International Public Relations. Prentice Hall.


Internet Sources

Absalonsen, Anne: Beyond the logic of hard news. In: http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/674/article/5/, visited 22/12/2009 at 5 pm


Kollewe, Julia: UK economy weakened as consumers spend their savings. In: http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2008/jun/27/gdp.growth, visited 15/12/2009 at 1 pm


Endnotes

1 Unfortunately, it is not available on the Institute’s website (only in its preliminary version awarded with the IPR Bledcom Special Price 2009 at [www.instituteforpr.org/about/global_commission/icpublications](http://www.instituteforpr.org/about/global_commission/icpublications)), but at the Social Sciences Research Network (SSRN) at [http://ssrn.com/abstract=1371507](http://ssrn.com/abstract=1371507).

2 In this essay, the author chose a working model that, in the final analysis, starts from system-theoretical concepts from German-speaking countries (cf. instructively Sievert 1999). Corporate communications is understood here to refer to a territorially differentiated subsystem of the economic system. The present essay does not provide the necessary space or the appropriate context to discuss related questions. An essay on that issue is in the planning stages.

3 The author of this paper appreciate that in no way, in the modern world, is PR simply media relations, but rather concerns many other fields of application. There is a certain narrowness to the perspective when these two terms are used synonymously. The understanding of media systems, however, continues to be vital for PR work, and therefore this definition seems to be wholly justified.
Organic Integration: The Natural Process Underlying Communication Integration

Brian G. Smith, Ph.D.
University of Houston
bgsmith@uh.edu
801-420-8891

Abstract
Integrated communication research has, so far, emphasized definition debates and normative models of implementation. This research progresses understanding and practice of integrated communication through a case study of an organization with a high level of integration, demonstrating the philosophy and processes of integration. This qualitative study, which uses depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, reveals that communication integration operates organically, through cross-functional connections and knowledge sharing and facilitated by an open organizational structure whereby integration occurs naturally.
Introduction

Integrated communication is at a critical stage in its development, as much of the research emphasizes definition debates and underexplored models for implementation (Kerr, Schultz, Patti, & Kim, 2008; Gronstedt, 2000; Duncan & Caywood, 1996). There is a need to move scholarship from semantics to execution. The current study, a case analysis of successful integration at Adventure Communications17, demonstrates that integration is implemented organically—even naturally—through cross-functional connections and knowledge-sharing.

Literature Review

Integrated communication is a philosophy and process by which organizations seek to reach the heart and mind of stakeholders by coordinating multiple communication functions to fulfill stakeholder needs (Schultz, 2007; Debreceny & Cochrane, 2004). Integration recognizes “the added value in a program that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines…to provide…maximum communication impact” (Kerr, et al., 2008, p. 515), and features the concepts of branding (Madhavaram, et al., 2005), synergy (Moriarty, 1996), and information control (Reid, 2003; Schultz & Kitchen, 1997). Integration involves managing “stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programs” (p. 140).

Integrating stakeholders requires communication focus beyond consumers to all potential stakeholders (Kerr, et al., 2008; Gronstedt, 2000). Gronstedt (1996) has argued that public relations and marketing “targets” are not mutually exclusive (i.e. an employee may also be a consumer or a consumer may also be an opinion leader) (p. 292). Stakeholders are the primary focus of integration because they are already integrating organizational messages (Schultz, 2007). They inform strategy, as practitioners seek to fulfill stakeholder needs and build relationships based on stakeholder interests (Kim, Han, & Schultz, 2004; Kitchen, Brignell, Li, & Spickett, 2004).

Integrating content involves building communication synergy, or the added value of synchronized content (Kliatchko, 2008; Stammerjohan, et al. 2005). Synergy occurs when “various marketing and communication activities interact with each other in the marketplace [and] come together to impact…the host of other stakeholders that are involved in today’s marketplace success” (Schultz, 2005, p. 7), and it requires every department to “speak the brand language” (Kitchen, et al., 2007, p. 154). Research by Kerr, et al. (2008) confirms the holistic effect of coordinating all messages, rather than only marketing messages (p. 516).

Channel integration includes consideration of all access points between a company and its stakeholders (Stammerjohan, et al., 2005), with strategic consideration of a “diversified media sector… varying consumers’ needs, and clients’ desires to develop a cost-efficient and effective marketing strategy” (Kitchen, et al., 2007, p. 33).

Finally, integration involves cross-functional measurement of a program’s components (Liodice, 2008; Zahay, et al., 2004). Kerr, et al. (2008) argue for consideration of long-term results, such as relationships.

Some scholars have prescribed models for integrating stakeholders, content, channels and results. Duncan and Caywood (1996; also Caywood, 1997) propose that integration begins in response to changing business landscapes and leads organizations to coordinate the look and feel of the organization (image integration). Higher levels of integration include coordination of traditionally disparate departments (functional integration) and customer touch-points (consumer

---

17 Names of the organization and its members have been changed for confidentiality.
integration), and finally, the coordination of the full range of organizational stakeholder relationships (relationship management integration).

Most research on integrated communication has explored favorability of integration (Kitchen, et al., 2007; Kitchen & Li, 2005), and scholars have called for research that identifies how integrated communication works and its effect on communication structures (Hallahan, 2007; Schultz, 2005). This study seeks to fulfill this research need using the model proposed by Duncan and Caywood (1996) to identify the processes underlying communication integration.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How is the integration of communication defined and understood at an organization with a high level of integrated communication?

RQ 2: How is integration implemented at an organization with a high level of integrated communication?

Method

This research comprises a qualitative case study of an exemplary case of integrated communication, featuring interviews, participant observation and document analysis as data collection sources. Case studies are commonly used to examine organizational phenomena and are useful for theory evaluation, particularly through the evaluation of exemplary representations of an occurrence (Yin, 2003).

I used a purposive sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994) based on organizational location, willingness, and fit with advanced levels of integrated communication. As incentive, I offered executives a research-based analysis of the organization’s communications. Informal interviews were used to determine preliminary fit with the Duncan and Caywood model, and contacted six organizations before choosing one that demonstrated high levels of integration. I sampled individuals, documents, and participant observation experiences based on theoretical sampling, recruiting participants who could discuss as many categorical concepts as possible to reach a point of saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

I gathered data from three sources: interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The following table outlines my data sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents: Web Sites</td>
<td>Network sites (6), Blog/Fan sites (20), Twitter page, Intranet Portal, Strategic documents, company investor and client presentations, corporate newsletters (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I conducted nine 45-75 minute informant interviews (Lindlof, 1995), in-person and over-the-phone, with professionals in both marketing and public relations capacities. Participants included males and females with varying levels of tenure, position and responsibility (from associate to executive levels). Interviews were purposive, conversational and loosely structured (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) around integrating stakeholders, content, channels, and results (Klitachko, 2008), and were based on an interview guide I pretested with three professional contacts. Interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed. During interviews, I noted reflections and patterns.

Participant observation, which is based on the notion that enacting roles provides understanding (Sanday, 1979), and document analysis were used to confirm interview findings (Yin, 2003). My six hours of participant observation involved analyzing a company event and included meetings with the event coordinator and pre- and post-event evaluation. I also produced
an analysis for the event that was delivered to company executives. To secure this experience, I requested opportunities to work with the company from my interviewees, offering my services as an unpaid intern and promising transparency. Documents, which were obtained from interviewees and from personal online research, included both internal and external materials, newsletters, presentations and websites (organizational and third party).

To analyze data, I combined structured analysis with the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), “keeping a box score along the way (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 86) to identify all possible themes. I began with a literature-based coding list and added themes missing from the literature throughout analysis. Data were coded, summarized, and then were used to produce conceptual categories designed to answer each research question. I used the conceptual categories and summaries to write “the story” of integration through a reflexive process of evaluation, working through connections and writing notes.

Case Overview: Adventure Communications

Adventure Communications\(^\text{18}\) is a media company that broadcasts nature, learning, and exploration programs through over 100 worldwide television and digital networks. Adventure boasts top-rated cable programming across its several networks. Adventure’s networks operate under the umbrella corporate brand of Adventure, but feature their own name, brand, logo, and management structures. Though corporate headquarters sets the overall direction for the company and its networks, each network operates as its own unit, maintaining its own management structure and programming decisions. Communication at Adventure is divided into two main functions: advertising, which includes advertising, business to business, and sales functions, and communication, which fills responsibilities in public relations, viewer relations, promotion, crisis communication, as well as internal, employee communication.

Results

RQ 1: How is the integration of communication defined and understood at an organization with a high level of integrated communication?

Individually held concepts of integration are central to understanding the execution of integrated communication at Adventure Communications. Primary among considerations of integration are interdependence, strategic communication, and message unity.

Interdependence

Integration involves recognition of “being part of the same team,” and that other functions are integral to completing a project or conducting a campaign. As a network publicity director explained, “We all work very closely because what I’m doing is affected completely by what the other team is doing.” To this end practitioners recognize interdependence among communication and marketing functions. “You need to balance each other. So, if marketing is going hardcore one way, we might play a little more straight and narrow knowing that we’ll balance each other out.”

Adventure demonstrates a focus on collective approach, as one respondent said, “We all work towards the greater good here and we all want to be a successful company.” Company presentations also showed this collective approach, lumping networks and communications and marketing teams into the holistic success of the organization.

Strategic Communication

Integrated communication is also considered a strategic endeavour, because, as one publicity agent explained, it involves the coordination of communication activities for an

\(^\text{18}\) The organization’s name has been changed to maintain confidentiality.
intended benefit for the organization. “Strategic” is defined by respondents as “supporting the corporate brand” and “putting a consistent face forward.” This theme resonated through interviews, documents, and participant observation. A network publicity director explained that everything “has to be strategic in terms of all the communications teams working together so that we’re promoting our brands separately but also strategically together at the same time.”

**Message Unity**

Consistent messaging may be the common denominator in consideration of integration at Adventure Communications. During interviews, participants commonly referred to integration as coordinating messages between websites and communication material. One respondent said that being “completely integrated” involves putting out a press release and making sure employees get the same message. One network manager said success comes when “the communications message, the marketing message and the sales message are all in harmony and are not conflicting, that’s how you know you’ve succeeded.”

**RQ 2: How is integration implemented at an organization with a high level of integrated communication?**

Integrated communication at Adventure is based on the intersection of management priorities and an organizational culture that values transparency and teamwork. Integration is implemented both externally and internally.

**External Integration**

Adventure Communications’ integration efforts seek consistency in messaging, media channels, and across stakeholder groups. Efforts toward internetwork consistency are also evident.

**Messaging.** Adventure communicators use a concept referred to as “message sharing,” in which, according to a publicity manager, communicators “share the same assets to enable as consistent and joint a message as we can.” Message sharing involves using a unified message across media and promotional materials, ensuring that different messages are not at odds with each other.

Message sharing also requires employees to be on the same page. “We train ourselves and make sure that we’re on message when we talk to people,” said one network general manager. Communicators ensure all employees are “on message” by working in tandem with human resources to create and distribute messaging to employees through the company’s internal employee website. Managers also encourage message sharing informally. One network general manager said, “If I notice that in the course of meetings and day-to-day work, people are missing one another and are not speaking the same message, then I’ll encourage them to get together and do that.”

Message sharing allows room for differences in semantics or word choice, as a corporate vice president explained: “It’s not that the lines have to be the same…it’s the essence that has to be the same.” This “essence” is managed through a company editorial filter. “An Adventure show has to be immersive, engaging and informative at the same time,” said one network manager. “That brand filter is a way of helping us remember how to frame our projection of ourselves so that when I’m talking to a reporter, I’ll have a lexicon of words that I can pull from.” Through message sharing, taglines and semantics may differ, but themes are consistent. This was evident in communication material and interviews.

**Media.** Adventure Communications synchronizes media outlets for a comprehensive reach of target publics by balancing earned and paid-for media, as well as print and online channels. Integrating across media channels entails earning as much media coverage as possible for targeted stakeholder groups and often involves close coordination between marketing and
communications on scheduling media releases and launches. Adventure communicators often work with a magazine that the ad sales department is also targeting to “double down” and “own” a particular media outlet. This was evident in my experiences working with the company on a promotional event, as event organizers indicated their desire to own the online space regarding their event’s subject.

Several respondents reported putting more emphasis on social media, like blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, because of their viewers’ social media attention. In fact, many reported that digital and online media are changing the way they integrate channels because “some people want to do everything online.” Respondents discussed the difficulty coordinating across online media because of the lack of message control in online forums and messaging environments.

Stakeholder integration. “I think what drives integration is what the audience wants,” said a brand director. “A lot of bloggers, for example, don’t want a press release, they want a message that’s customized to them…but maybe there’s another message that’s more important for certain audiences.” Stakeholder integration involves having “the same audience in mind, and the same brand promise in mind,” when targeting stakeholders, and may involve “coming at the same pitch from five different angles.” In this way, the underlying message may be the same, but way the message is presented differs according to audience. For example, one network general manager divides target audiences into four groups—viewers, trade reporters, consumer reporters, and advertisers—considering a different message for each group. “You are speaking to different audiences but you want them to be in harmony,” he said.

For many, stakeholder integration is facilitated by online technology, as practitioners try to capitalize on direct to consumer media channels. “People are out there listening to us, and it’s good to get it directly from the network, not necessarily from a reporter.” This was also evident in my participant observation experiences, as the network sought to capitalize on direct connections to bloggers.

Integrating networks. One of the principle areas for integration at Adventure is ensuring that networks are in sync with the corporate brand and in sync with each other. This is done through a coordinated set of priorities—network priorities are on promoting programming and corporate priorities are on promoting each network. This puts the bulk of integration efforts on the network level to represent Adventure Communications appropriately, and networks keep headquarters “in the loop” on activities through weekly integrated meetings. Network general managers also supervise network integration efforts, serving as “the ultimate style guide,” as one general manager said, ensuring that networks are aligned with the corporate brand.

On the network level, marketing and communication maintain fluid levels of integration, based on a recognition that “we’re both stronger for doing that,” as one respondent said. For example, in a DVD launch of a network series, communication supported marketing and sales by creating promotional activities and setting up talk show interviews. The two functions begin projects separately, and then come together prior to a campaign to synchronize efforts. “I’ll watch the show and I’ll put together my own messages,” one publicity manager said. “But at some point, I’m going to sit down with marketing and marketing will have done the same thing…and I might decide at that point that I really like some of their things.” Another respondent explained:

“We approach every show together. So, as marketing is building their media bios and we [communication] are pitching, we’ll look and figure out where we have crossover, or if marketing is buying media that will help us. For example, does marketing not need to buy
a certain publication because we have a feature coming out, so they can put money somewhere else?”

Networks also use “share messaging” to “tag along with a bigger corporate story” or work in unison with other networks. Through share messaging, communication teams “work together to promote [network] brands separately, but also strategically together at the same time,” as one respondent explained. Network websites confirm this strategic connection, as network websites are sub-domains of the broader corporate site—that is, each network is an “.adventure.com” site—and each site maintains the same framework as the corporate site.

**Internal Integration**

Communication strategy starts at network levels, where managers set up teams to brainstorm and develop strategy, and then report to the network vice-president who approves the strategy. Strategy creation ultimately relies on the communication team, as vice presidents tend to trust the team’s direction and may only offer minor changes. This puts the onus on network and corporate teams, which demonstrate high levels of cross-functional collaboration and interaction.

**Cross-functional collaboration.** Teamwork and cross-functional collaboration are endemic to the Adventure culture, a trait commonly lauded in interviews. The company hosts a weekly coordination meeting, referred to as “the main meeting of the week” in which network communicators and corporate communicators meet to discuss initiatives, programs, and activities going on for the week. During meetings “priorities are set with everyone’s feedback” as participants decide on processes to put in place.

Communication and marketing initiatives also emphasize cross-functional knowledge sharing and teamwork. For one, executives give employees experience in several different roles. One network executive said she likes to “push people in the direction they haven’t been before…and keep things fresh.” She explained: “We might switch it up and put a whole new group on [a network show]. It’s a chance to just breakout into something new.” This gives employees valued experience to work cohesively with across units and functions. One network executive said, “Anyone that works on my team is exposed to all of the things that relate to [the network]. There isn’t anyone on my team that just does program publicity, or that just writes. We do all of it.”

Adventure professionals also gain cross-functional experience by serving as inter-department liaisons, splitting time between marketing and communication teams to “be that much more collaborative and in sync, and know what’s going on,” as one publicity manager said. Employees rely on each other for their expertise and the assets they bring to a team. One network GM said, “The guy in the communications department is aware of the ingredients of a marketing campaign and the marketing department is aware of the ingredients of a communications campaign. We are all sharing the same assets.”

Executives also facilitate cross-functional coordination. One network communicator commented, “I think communication really works well because the leadership has made us feel very connected to one another in a tuned way.” One executive explained his role in cross-functional collaboration in this way:

“I always encourage people to communicate with one another. It’s my job to say, ‘Go see how [one person] does this or see what [another person] in marketing says about what you’re thinking, and get some input, because it’s valuable.’”

**Culture of Collaboration.** At Adventure Communications, collaboration appears to be a natural occurrence or “something that people do on their own,” as one communicator explained.
A network vice president said, “If something works well, it works organically—something that naturally occurs when you’re working on something.” This natural integration may be attributed to a company culture “based on communication among every department, every team. Not just department but outside of communication…and all over the place” and which “doesn’t have a great level of tolerance for people who are obstructionist.”

Adventure’s culture emphasizes transparency and teamwork, “so that nobody feels walled off from information” said one respondent. Corporate headquarters routinely brings everyone together for big events and to celebrate network successes. A brand director added that collaboration “has something to do with the corporate culture…when there’s a priority, there’s definitely a do-whatever-we-can-do-to-make-sure-it-happens attitude.” This undercurrent of team spirit was evident in my experience helping one network assess an upcoming promotional event—even as an outsider, I was invited to contribute to the brainstorming process. One executive explained, “It’s not that often that something just happens and it’s one person that has worked on it, there have been lots of hands in it, lots of cooks in the kitchen and if it’s a win from this person over here, it’s really a win for all of us.”

Employees at Adventure also maintain ongoing relationships as several respondents pointed to the tendency to reach out to each other to “keep in mind what teammates are doing” so they can “percolate ideas together” and can avoid “stepping on each other’s toes.” One professional called it “a collaborative partnership.” A communication director illustrated it in this way: “It’s one of those things where you could just walk down the hall and say, ‘Hey! What do you think about this?’ We are all on one team.”

Intra-Company Competition. Though collaborative, the company is not immune to competition. In particular, some interviewees revealed undercurrents of animosity between networks, which are separate and responsible for meeting viewership goals, but are also tasked with being aligned together. It is apparent that priorities skew toward larger networks, which at least one respondent noticed: “Larger networks have the bigger priorities, so if [a larger network] is coming out with this huge promotable, we’re all supposed to back down for the greater good of the company.”

This competition is also evident in the company’s press database, which houses media contacts, dates of interaction, and feedback for the entire company. Though this database is designed to keep everyone on the same page, one respondent revealed:

“I think in theory it’s great, and we all love each other and we all work under one umbrella…but we’re charged with bringing viewers to our network, so there’s a little competition there. So, there’s a lot of media contacts that don’t make it onto the database, sometimes because of competitiveness and sometimes because we just don’t get to it.”

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to provide research-based insights on integrated communication where opinion-based and normative theories have dominated the literature. Adventure Communications represents a high level of integration because its structure permits “each form of communication to contribute to the success of the corporate mission” through the full cooperation of public relations, marketing, and selling (Duncan & Caywood, 1996, p. 23). Additionally, communication professionals are brought “in direct contact with the full range of management functions and businesses” (p. 32) for the strategic relationship management of the company’s stakeholders.

As a representative case example of high levels of integration, Adventure Communications demonstrates how integration is implemented. Communicators at the company
lead formal and informal processes behind integration by building brand-specific initiatives and by facilitating connections between employees en route to natural and spontaneous collaboration—a process I refer to as organic integration.

**Organic Integration: A New Direction in Theory and Practice**

Results from this study reveal a need to reconsider integrated communication as an organic process, in which integration occurs naturally (even spontaneously), and is fertilized by an open structure of interaction and cross-functional collaboration. In particular, integration occurs through relationships. Though management directives may serve to initiate the process, integration works as organically, through self-initiative, from the bottom of the organization up, and from the inside of the organization out.

Organic integration reflects the essence of the model Duncan and Caywood (1996) proposed: “The greatest degree of integration emerges from cooperative efforts…as each step of integration is mastered and accepted, the elements begin to work together” (p. 23, 29). This study demonstrates that the integrated elements “work together” through bottom-up, inside-out collaboration. This organic integration operates based on the following factors:

*Access.* Employees need access and face-time in order to collaborate. This may be common sense, but it is one element of integrated communication that is not recognized enough in management or academic literature. For Adventure Communications, getting employees together to spur integration was a priority. Access requires that communicators have informal interaction outside of meetings. This process was often spontaneous at Adventure, though management also encouraged it.

*Organizational support.* Successful integration depends on an open and fluid company structure. Adventure communicators described the company culture as flexible, open, and one that welcomes change. Adventure's autonomous structure, evident in interviews and participant observation, enables practitioners to work independently toward communication success.

*Knowledge sharing.* A fluid knowledge-sharing process facilitates integrated communication, and enables communicators to collaborate. Adventure Communications ensures knowledge sharing through employee luncheons with executives, weekly meetings, daily intranet information updates, and even global events featuring interactive sessions with network talent and celebrities. Additionally, Adventure's inter-department liaisons facilitate knowledge sharing by creating connections as they attend meetings outside of their department. By keeping both marketing and communication teams informed on the other’s activities, they create synergy and ensure integration.

*Self-initiative.* The propensity for an individual to interact with others and seek out opportunities to coordinate efforts defines integration. Individual relationships and interactions may have the greatest effect on integration.

*Brand essence.* Integration operates more on matching the essence of the company brand rather than copying messages and matching words. Though a company may have a brand lexicon, representing a company’s brand themes is more important than semantic similarities.

*Internal relationships.* Fluid internal relationships enable integration to work organically. Communication is a relationship-driven function, and should be considered as such internally, through employee relationships, as much as it is externally, through relationship marketing and management efforts.

*Innovation.* Innovation may be a contributing factor to organic integration. In order to enable integration to operate naturally, management and employees should be open to change and engage in new ways to solve communication problems and approach communication
campaigns. This was evident in one executive’s efforts to mix and match team members through different projects at Adventure.

**Practical Applications: Sowing Organic Integration**

This research provides managerial insights on building a successful integrated program. Communication managers can facilitate integration by building an open organizational culture of knowledge-sharing, and recognizing and intervening in traditional department silos between communication functions. Managers can facilitate ongoing interaction through cross-functional teams, in which roles are assigned based on individual expertise rather than traditional functional boundaries. Furthermore, teams should be built around issue or programme goal, and should emphasize collaboration.

Managers should also be cautious in mandating integrated efforts. Putting up boundaries, restrictions, and excessively governed processes may hinder integration efforts. Rather, encouraged collaboration or company-wide recognition of successful collaboration efforts may lead to the level of innovation among individual communicators that is requisite for a functioning organic system. Finally, when managing messaging, professionals should consider integrating communications based on the essence of the organization brand. Tagline dependency can be limiting, and expanding brand messaging around brand purpose and its reception among stakeholders may yield better communication results.

**Limitations**

Confounding variables may have influenced the results of this research, not the least of which is the type of organization I studied. As a media company, it is possible that integration may be more of a focus for Adventure due to the company’s high media profile. At the same time, however, company type may not be a valid limitation for this study because the purpose of qualitative methodology is to describe a phenomenon’s occurrence, not prove that it is consistent across all contexts. Within this framework, the results here represent a possibility in professional practice and provide a theoretical perspective to be tested across organizational settings.

**Future Research: Cultural and Systemic Dimensions of Integration**

It is possible that this study provides a set of generic principles of integration that have specific applications in the same way that Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2006) have argued that the principles of excellent communication management apply generally, though each country may apply them differently. However, taking a generic principles approach to explain integrated communication may overshadow important cultural contributions. First, Adventure operates within a Western-societal framework, and integration may differ in other regions. Second, Adventure’s organizational culture poses unique influences.

Several scholars point to the need to understand such cultural influences on communication management, including Bardhan (2003), whose research showed that Western models overlook important social differences, and Holtzhausen and Tindall (2003), who question whether communication models “developed in some countries can be applied to others” (p. 306). The same questions apply here, and future research should explore the cultural characteristics that are unique to a single culture and look for differences in practice between societies and cultures because professionals deal with "publics who are acculturated differently by society and by organizations, respectively” (Sriramesh, 2007 p. 509).

Another argument could be made that this study shows integration should be understood as a systems construct—that is, the interaction between an organization’s interrelated parts or subsystems (i.e. functions, teams, and groups) influences the performance of the entire system (Grunig, 1992). Examining integration from a systems approach implies studying the social
structure within which organizational actors operate, including actor interdependence, needs fulfilment, and external influences. Further research should consider such perspectives in the system’s operation. Research should also consider the related perspectives of competing values within an integrated system and the needs of strategic constituencies (see Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier [2006]). Such perspectives, coupled with this study’s findings, provide a basis for Schultz’s (2005) call to “focus on indentifying the interactions that integration creates” (p. 7).

Overall, this study has demonstrated that integrated communication operates organically through natural processes and cross-functional collaboration. Scholarship and practice can flourish from the consideration of integrated communication as a cultural and relational discipline.
References


Kitchen, P. J. & Li, T. (2005), “Perceptions of integrated marketing communications:


Corporate Performance Rhetoric: Essential Balance for Effective Internal Public Relations

Peter M. Smudde, Ph.D., APR
Assistant Professor of Public Relations
School of Communication
430 Fell Hall
Campus Box 4480
Illinois State University
Normal, IL 61790-4480 U.S.A.
Office: +309.438.7339
Mobile: +309.825.7869
Fax: +309.438.3048
E-mail: psmudde@ilstu.edu

Abstract

Business and industry have over-privileged positivistic attitudes and methodologies to managing performance. A shift is apparent from positivism to humanism in the measurement and management of business performance. My paper presents rhetorical “correctives” for performance management discourse that balances positivistic and humanistic needs. Top-down discourse about organizational performance, as a matter of internal public relations, should inspire employees to identify with management’s enacted dramas of the environment so employees/members see themselves in the way things are and, especially, the way things must be for organizational success.

Corporate discourse about organizational performance can rely too much on positivistic messages at the expense of more holistic and humanistic ones, which are also important to success. Rhetorical-organizational analysis of performance measurement discourse can account for why employees’ identification with management’s messages must be more bottom-up than top-down to be truly effective. My paper applies a discourse analytical approach to analyze the simultaneously rhetorical (per Kenneth Burke) and organizational (per Karl Weick) dynamics of a selected performance management approach used in myriad corporations today, the Balanced Scorecard.

The simultaneously rhetorical and organizational nature of performance management approaches can affect the study and enactment of organizational discourse. This paper focuses on only one approach for managing performance, but it does so to indicate a direction for correcting the imbalance of positivism and humanism when measuring and managing corporate performance. Other performance management approaches could be tested as well.

This paper reveals more about the discourse and practice of managing organizational performance and it analyzes how one performance measurement approach is both rhetorical and organizational in nature. Accordingly, this paper provides a foundation for improving the rhetorical and organizational dynamics for other performance management approaches. Ultimately, the rhetorical and organizational nature of corporate performance rhetoric reveals the essential need for and implications of balancing the positivistic and humanistic dimensions of business in internal public relations.
Introduction

An old saying in business is, “You can’t manage what you don’t measure.” The positivistic attitude behind this adage has deep roots. Those roots extend at least from Frederick Taylor (1911/1998), include the very influential thinking of W. Edwards Deming (1986) for statistical process control, and add management gurus like the late Peter Drucker (1993) and even Jack Welch (Slater, 1998). Surely the vast volumes on effective management could be chronicled and analyzed for the presence of positivistic perspectives on managing organizational performance, but I think such work would prove the obvious: that organizations can over-privilege “hard,” quantitative measurements of their performance. With the need for organizations to keep their stakeholders “in the know” about how viable they are and will likely be in the future, it is no wonder that quantitative approaches to measuring and managing business performance have been created, advanced, and employed across industries.1

The issue, however, is not whether performance measurement approaches, which have tended to be positivistic in design and substance, are appropriate or which ones should be used. The issue, rather, is how to properly balance the positivistic (i.e., quantitative) orientation for measuring performance with a humanistic (i.e., qualitative) perspective for managing performance among employees. This paper does not take a stand on any particular performance-management method, but it does analyze how one performance measurement approach is truly both rhetorical and organizational in nature, which thereby helps us to learn more about the discourse and practice of managing organizational performance.

I believe there is a shift (albeit a slow one) in business culture from positivism to humanism, signaled by deWaal (2002), who argues that “Performance management information is specifically intended to be used to support decision-making processes to control the organization (not decision-making processes in general)” (p. 5). This shift is in line with Kenneth Burke’s view of such an evolution in human social development (Brock, 1990). With this shift to a more humanistic approach to business management, I predict an increasing need to blend quantitative (“hard”) and qualitative (“soft”) attitudes and methods more systematically so that management obtains and enacts a more rounded, holistic view of the business. Indeed, the simultaneously rhetorical and organizational nature of performance measurement approaches has profound implications for the study and enactment of related organizational discourse.

Rhetorical-organizational analysis of performance measurement discourse, as this paper proposes, can (1) account for why employees’ identification with management’s messages must be at as much bottom-up as top-down to be truly effective and, therefore, (2) be essential in effective internal public relations (a.k.a. employee communications). (Effectiveness in this context concerns how well communication helps or hinders employees at all levels to understand what is going on and, especially, attain organizational performance goals based on performance information.) More specifically, top-down discourse (i.e., all texts, written and oral) about organizational performance should inspire people to identify with management’s enacted dramas of the environment so employees/members see themselves in the way things are and, especially, the way things must be for organizational success. This paper explains one dominant approach to measuring business performance, and it presents rhetorical “correctives” for performance measurement discourse that can be integrated in the arenas of scholarship and, especially, practice.
A Performance Management Approach

Performance management approaches involve more than merely informing internal stakeholders about meeting organizational goals and key performance indicators (KPIs). They also involve more than stating whether the organization is going in the right direction or is on the wrong track or a bit of both. There is a subtle but important distinction between “performance measurement” and “performance management.” Very basically, the former is subsumed by the latter; whereas, performance measurements are the quantitative and qualitative methods (tools) used to evaluate progress toward/against organizational goals. Performance management applies a combination of leadership skills and performance measurements to inspire people to attain or surpass goals.

Performance measurement tools concern tracking performance to show how much people add (or subtract) value to the organization and, by reporting and analyzing performance, inspire cooperation among individuals to act more like business owners no matter what their role is (cf. Shaffer, 2000). Over the long term, the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) (2002) says, performance measures have critical benefits to an organization. A performance measurement system “can justify corporate support for capital request, create an enduring focus, and justify capital allocation. Most important, performance measures are leading indicators of long-term health and consequently, represent a long-term planning asset” (APQC, 2002). A company’s own performance measurement approach can live up to these principles and, especially, accrue specific benefits that will help inspire organizational members to work toward success.

The Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 1996, 2001) is one dominant performance management approach that focuses on the organizational dimensions of financial performance, business growth and learning, internal processes, and customer perspectives. The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) is arguably among the most holistic and potentially the most accommodating of rhetorical concepts, although other approaches may be worth investigating for a similar synthesis. Some key benefits of a Balanced Scorecard performance management system are those shown in Table 1.

See Table 1

These benefits have been visually organized in Figure 1, which illustrates that the company vision and strategy are at the center with the four key areas of any business radiating out from it. This way of representing the relationship among the business, customer, financial, and learning/growth perspectives of a business—as they support the company vision and strategy—is called a “Balanced Scorecard”, and it was developed by Robert Kaplan of Harvard Business School and David Norton of the Balanced Scorecard Collaborative. A company’s scorecard about its performance is said to be “balanced” when each of the four business perspectives support one another equitably, especially the financial perspective. More specifically, the balance that performance measures should achieve is possible because they encompass dimensions that are financial and nonfinancial, leading and lagging, internal and external, quantitative and qualitative, and short-term and long-term.
The BSC gives us a way to structure relevant measurements in each of the four business perspectives. The Balanced Scorecard is also a management system that helps an organization to clarify its vision and strategy so they can be communicated to employees and translated into action by them in the work they do. The scorecard also establishes internal and external feedback mechanisms to ensure focus on both business outputs and outcomes through close examination of data from specific performance measurements and other sources. So this model is a useful way for organizations to measure and manage performance on financial and nonfinancial dimensions.

All four areas are critical because they each help to manage discreet areas of a business in more-effective ways. That is, when taken together, all four perspectives help a company stay focused on where it wants to go, not dwell on what it has been through, which is what financial measures tend to do as they tell the story of past events. As use of the scorecard implies, financial measures by themselves, then, are inadequate for information-age companies to create future value through investment in customers, suppliers, employees, processes, technology, and innovation. Such value creation is spurred through the communication that the organization has with employees. As Kaplan and Norton (1996) put it:

The scorecard provides a framework, a language, to communicate mission and strategy; it uses measurement to inform employees about the drivers of current and future success. By articulating the outcomes the organization desires and the drives of those outcomes, senior executives hope to channel the energies, the abilities, and the specific knowledge of people throughout the organization toward achieving the long-term goals. (p. 25)

Kaplan and Norton (1996, 2001) discuss communication, as do many who have argued for the Balanced Scorecard’s usefulness and power in managing organizational performance. The focus on communication, however, is linear—an application of the sender-message-receiver model or, worse, the “empty vessel” theory of communication (i.e., if you tell them, they will understand). Kaplan and Norton (and those who adhere to their perspective) have given real-world examples about how communication must be part of the Balanced Scorecard. Those examples are, indeed, useful and illustrative of the process only. What is missing and is vital is a deeper understanding of why communication works (or not) when managing organizational performance. Indeed, Malina and Selto (2002), in a probing empirical study about the effectiveness of the Balanced Scorecard, begin to scratch the surface of the BSC’s rhetorical dimensions when they discuss process and messages developed from performance data. There is a rhetoric of performance management; whereas, within the context of organizing, management uses language about performance to inspire cooperation between itself and employees/members. The key, then, is establishing identification among employees/members with a business plan using the information and insights gained through the BSC.

To be sure, Kaplan and Norton outline a communication program (1996, pp. 206-208), and it is focused on developing particular communication discourse at specific times for specific audiences. Testimonials about BSC-oriented communication that Kaplan and Norton cite refer to the idea of winning over employees’ (and board members’ and external stakeholders’) “hearts and minds,” but the next step of action is only assumed. This point is critical, as Malina and Selto (2002) assert, that effective communication based on the BSC must have a lasting and
positive effect on “reinforcing desired patterns of behavior, shared values, and beliefs…. [and] encourage[ing] behavior consistent with goals, values, and beliefs.”

Having the performance data and publishing it is one thing, but getting people to do something with their heads, hearts, and hands is another. That is, people need to understand what is going on and what is at stake in their minds (head), embrace it emotionally as important to themselves and the organization (heart), and apply it directly in their work (hands) (cf. Jensen, 1995). The issue here is not simply one of communication—that is easy if we adhere to the linear view of communication. It is also more than just persuasion—if we tell them what is in it for them, they will buy our arguments. It is more about identification—employees seeing themselves in both the data and the solutions for success and acting on that vision. When we play out the organization’s drama effectively, complete with data and evidence about what is going on, why, and next steps for the future, employees/members will identify with how things came to be and what everyone must do individually and collectively to move forward to achieve success.

An Example for Illustration

As a consultant I have had the opportunity to work with many companies of different sizes and in different industries on their communication challenges. Indeed, one such opportunity featured an electrical contractor serving architects, builders, and building owners in a major Midwestern metropolitan area. This company was and still is family-owned and is in its second generation of family ownership. The chairman of the company confided in me that he has been worried that, statistically speaking, the odds are against his company, which his father and his uncle started in the 1950s, surviving beyond his tenure. His initial view to secure his company’s future was to engage in more external communication.

I interviewed him and reviewed many documents about the company’s history, performance, and industry comparisons. I discovered that the company did not have a strategic plan and never had one. The business had survived for half a century by seat-of-the-pants management, and the chairman was right in sensing that approach would no longer work or at least would not work much longer with the economic changes taking place. Unfortunately, he felt there was a silver bullet in public relations, but my analysis showed that the company needed much more—and it had to start with a clear strategic plan to measure and manage performance. The basis for the management and measurement of the company’s performance included the Balanced Scorecard and other appropriate approaches, such as those from Epstein and Birchard (2000), Frost (2000), and Harbour (1997). This case will be used as an illustrative example woven through the remainder of this paper. The following analysis will feature principles and practices, bridging the two in ways that make points about the rhetoric of performance measurement concrete.

A Rhetoric of Performance Measurement

The Balanced Scorecard is founded on communication—the symbolic action—germane to each of the four areas the approach covers, as described in Table 1 and visualized in Figure 1. Much of the substance of the Balanced Scorecard is rhetorical in nature, which means that communication about corporate performance can and should be managed prospectively. This approach does not so much look back retrospectively on what worked or what did not, although that view would be valuable; the task is to look forward prospectively and enact effective communications for appropriate stakeholders about corporate performance and how it will be managed.
Measuring the performance of a company, departments, individuals, processes, programs, products and services, projects, and teams is critical to any organization’s success—to achieve the results called for in the strategic plan. All of this is exactly what my client needed. The strategic plan is a detailed document developed by management that defines the direction of the business for a year or so by describing objectives, goals, and other matters vital to the company achieving success (see Mintzberg, 1994). Proof of the importance of measuring performance comes from a comparison of those companies that measure their performance to those that do not. According to Schiemann and Lingle (1999), companies that measured their performance and managed their businesses accordingly substantially outperformed all companies that do not. Table 2 breaks down the study’s results. It was these findings that tipped the scales for the electrical contractor to decide to develop an organizational strategic plan first, then create operational plans (e.g., sales, public relations) based on the organizational plan.

See Table 2

Fundamentally, performance measurements are ways of tracking how well an organization is getting the results it needs to achieve its objectives and realize its vision. Such measurements are based on data that are collected daily and reported on each day, week, month and quarter—which ever periods are needed. Working with my client we determined a series of performance measures that were necessary to manage the business on a continuing basis. Based on the Balanced Scorecard approach, the breakdown of performance measurements tied directly to the new strategic plan I prepared were as follows (note that specific targets are not presented to further protect the client’s competitive position):

**Financial**
- Market Share
- Profit per job
- Cash flow per job
- Economic profit (book profit less cost of capital employed)

**Business Growth & Learning**
- Percentage of new-client sales (overall and by market)
- Percentage of current customer sales (overall and by market)
- Sales pipeline (overall and by market)

**Internal Business Processes**
- Employee satisfaction
- Productivity
- Training time per year
- Safety record

**Customers**
- Customer satisfaction
- Service quality index
- Repair incidence
- Customer loyalty

At an individual level, what each person does at my client was distilled to the most important, measurable things that relate directly to the company’s strategic plan and the
individual activities employees at all levels do. What is also important to know is that my client valued the company’s position within the community. So other measurements beyond the BSC were devised to track community satisfaction, charitable and community contributions (tied to the financial view), and community program involvement.

In the reporting of performance, the data alone cannot speak for themselves. The rhetoric of the performance reports enact the environment supported by the data and the sensemaking activity about the data and other enactments. These reports present the information that management needs to run the business, and the reports show employees how their work is paying off (or not). The key: the reporting of corporate performance is inherently rhetorical, as they are the enacted environments for certain audiences for certain purposes focused on improved organization performance. Cheney, Christensen, Conrad, and Lair (2004) argue that rhetorical analyses reveal key dimensions to organizational discourse, including (1) interactional dynamics about what is going on and how certain, ambiguous, or contingent they may be, (2) the simultaneous affects of authority and rationality on the sizing up of organizational situations large and small, and (3) the variability of audiences internal and external to organizations that must be addressed effectively (p. 81-82). The successfulness of companies who measure performance effectively is, therefore, a direct result of the symbolic action of good organizing behaviors among organizational members who apply the information well to their work. What is still missing is an understanding about these dynamics, including the balancing of quantitative and qualitative, “hard” and “soft” information.

Establishing Identification through the Balanced Scorecard

Important in this analysis of the Balanced Scorecard is the concept of identification as it relates to specific stakeholders involved in each of the four scorecard areas. Identification entails simultaneous unity and division—it is rooted in the inherent division among people because of their physical separateness, and language helps them bridge that condition to find common ground or “substance” (Burke, 1950/1969). Because identification involves simultaneous unity and division between people that is bridged through symbolic action, it has direct implications on organizing and, particularly, in the naming of situations. Cheney and Tompkins (1987) argue that identification in organizations “is a process closely tied to identity [i.e. what is commonly taken as representative of a person or group], both linguistically and conceptually,” and linked to individual and group commitment (pp. 5; 6-7). Identity, identification, and commitment, then, are the result of socially constructed symbolic action when people organize, and this is a systems view of organizational identification. Larkey and Morrill (1995) argue that organizational identification involves symbolic action among people within and across hierarchical groups that emerges from daily and informal interactions between individual actors in organizations over what it means to be an organizational member [cf. Weick’s notions of raw talk and consensual validation in the process of sensemaking]. . . . It is through such interactions, particularly between rank-and-file members and managers, that individual actors co-create overlapping identities and ultimately to a lesser or greater degree create the shared symbolic systems (‘cultures’) which enable individual actors working in concert to become the organization [i.e., participate in the process of organizing]. (p. 198)

In his Rhetoric in an Organizational Society, Cheney (1991) argues that because the nexus of organizations is communication and is, therefore, rhetorical, the paramount task is the “management of multiple identities” among all of an organization’s publics. People enact this rhetorical process, because “[w]e are constantly aligning ourselves with the interests of some
persons and distancing ourselves from the interests of other persons” (p. 20). Organizational rhetoric is a process enacted by individuals on behalf of themselves and the collectives with which they are affiliated. In Cheney’s scheme, “identity” refers to an individual’s or group’s sense of who they are in the social order; “identification” refers to the process by which people appropriate an identity; “organization” concerns symbolic and material energies used among people to coordinate their own interests and maintain the collective; and “rhetoric” subsumes both processes of identification and organization to simultaneously balance the unity and division among people both within and without a collective (pp. 19-20). For organizational rhetoric, “[t]he coordination of identities in expression becomes complicated in proportion to the multiplicity of identities for which and to which a collectivity such as a corporation must speak, including both members and outsiders” (p. 17). The Balanced Scorecard relies on the symbolic action of organizational rhetoric along its four dimensions shown in Figure 1.

The concepts of identification and symbolic action are key to clarifying how the four areas of the Balanced Scorecard function rhetorically. In terms of the symbolic action through which identification can be established between targeted stakeholders and management, the first of the Balanced Scorecard’s four areas is financial. This area in general involves symbolic action with employees, retirees, suppliers, shareholders, analysts, news media, civic leaders, and others about business forecasts, key performance indicators, market analyses, and sales, financial and performance reports. The second area of the Balanced Scorecard focuses on growth and learning with all organizational members and is largely (if not completely) internally oriented. Selected information may be used in the recruitment of new employees/members. Relevant types of symbolic action include documentation of corporate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; the strategic plan; performance goals compared to actuals; and employee education and training opportunities. The third Balanced Scorecard area, which focuses on internal business processes, involves symbolic action with all organizational members and outside suppliers and dealers about an organization’s mission and strategies for doing business; periodic reports of goal-based performance of corporate functions; and individual assessments of one’s own performance and what adjustments need to be made. The fourth and final area of the Balanced Scorecard concerns customers.

Overall, it is important for everyone to know that performance expectations are defined on an annual basis and applied periodically. This means that management begins a year with certain expectations, and each department works toward meeting or exceeding those expectations. The assumption is that performance expectations for the year will be met or exceeded as defined in the strategic plan. Only a major circumstance, like a severely faltering economy, a new and aggressive competitor, or unexpected heightened demand for the company’s services, would significantly affect the company’s ability to achieve its objectives and probably require changes to the strategic plan and each department’s work.

Symbolic action here targets organizational members, especially operational leaders and those with customer contact, and it concerns the attitudes and behaviors of established, new, and potential customers. Symbolic action in general includes reports about customer trends, feedback gained about an organization in almost any light, and targeted communications with established, new, and potential customers. For my client, the following were key role-specific means for gaining buy-in to performance:

- **VP Project Managers**
- Bid list
- Current customer contacts
- New customer solicitations
- Net profit per labor hour

**Superintendents**
- Labor hours supervised
- Net profit per labor hour

**Foremen**
- Labor hours above/below estimate
- Material cost above/below estimate

**Administrative Office**
- Volume (labor hours & billings)
- Call backs & adjustments

The company-level and individual measurements would be assembled into management reports that will be run twice a month (bimonthly) so everyone can see how well they are doing along the way and not only at the end of the month when it’s too late to address matters. Such reporting will give us the best view of business performance (e.g., sales actuals and projections) over any period of time. Monthly performance targets will be established and adjusted up or down so they better reflect customer demand and projected sales. The specific targets for individual performance measurements will be defined together by each person and management, based on projected sales performance and the strategic plan’s objectives and goals. The results of performance measurements, as published in the regular management reports that you’ll also receive, will help everyone see how well we’re doing at any time. In this way, each of us can make adjustments to take advantage of new situations that come up or anticipate opportunities before they happen so we can make the most of them—all with the idea that we move closer to realizing the company’s vision and achieving our objectives and goals.

This understanding of the role of identification in organizational rhetoric clarifies the rhetoric of the four areas of the Balanced Scorecard. With his numerous publications, Cheney (and his coauthors) is without question the leading scholar of rhetorical identification. Indeed, Cheney’s (1991) *Rhetoric in Organizational Society* is perhaps the most extensive application of Burke’s concept of identification, and Cheney’s earlier work (1983a; 1983b) are among the very earliest, thorough, and systematic treatments of Burkan identification to organizational communication. His view of identification among members within organizations is key in the next section to my analysis of the Balanced Scorecard and the rhetoric of performance management.

*Organizing and a Rhetoric of Form for the Balanced Scorecard*

All the symbolic action about managing performance through the Balanced Scorecard means that businesses engage in *organizing* more than they are *organizations*, as Weick (1979) argues. This perspective includes and takes us beyond Cheney’s view of organizational, even managerial, communication. Organizing, according to Weick, is an intersubjective activity where people try to reduce a perceived level of equivocality—the various possible interpretations we may have for a situation taken from a flow of events—through communicative action. Some strategies of organizing feature people arguing about which enactments should be *selected* and, later, which ones should be retained for organizational memory and prospective/proactive enactment. In this regard, sensemaking is a rhetorical process among people that involves (1) retrospective structuring about past and present events and actions from the flows of experience and, most important, (2) prospective structuring about events and actions from the anticipated...
discursively transforms a difficult and [intangible] reality into a resource that people can use” (p.
408). The upshot: Upon enacting an environment, people decide what discourse type to use about
organizational performance and how to frame messages rhetorically to aid in management
decision making and employee buy-in.

As the example of my client shows, the symbolic action stemming from the BSC is
preserved in the form of selected documents that present data and analyses of the data. Lyles and
Schwenk (1991) explore how organizational discourse is key to the creation and maintenance of
organizational knowledge structures, which affects organizational learning and adaptability to
change. Symbolic action may take any form and is rhetorical; whereas, Burke says that rhetoric
“is rooted in an essential function of language itself . . . the use of language as a symbolic means
of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (Burke, 1950/1969, p. 43).
Identification between people results when the content of one’s statement appeals to someone
through its form, i.e., a discourse pattern that “gratifies the needs which it creates [in someone]”
(Burke, 1931/1968, p. 138). The forming of discourse involves action, from those fundamental
principles of symbolic forming that are covert, primal acts of the mind through the acting of
principles and ideas in repetitive, progressive movement, to the summing up act of perceiving the
forming structure which encompasses all. At each level, the action includes inducement to
participate; to participate is to act in terms of building expectancies and to be gratified by the
fulfillment provided. The inducement . . . is rhetorical; invitation to action involves critical and
evaluative faculties at every level and is therefore partisan in stance and tone. (Gregg, 1978, p.
10) In this way, rhetoric becomes “equipment for living”—albeit, in the case of the Balanced
Scorecard, rhetoric is equipment for managing—because it helps us make sense of things for a
business and represents a creative strategy for dealing with or solving problems within situations.

For example, although someone may act as the representative of my client or a document
that was published by and about the company, organizational discourse is the sum of the many
people’s enactments shared, selected, and retained according to organizing recipes during the
sensemaking process. In the case of a technical document, like an annual report, the document’s
development process includes writers, editors, photographers, graphic designers, management,
and legal counsel (cf. Smudde, 1991). These people made sense of their enactments about the
organization’s performance during the previous year, projected these enactments in particular
frames of reference, and followed recipes to enact one discourse type that would induce
cooperation between the organization and its publics, especially stockholders and investors.

Rhetorical choices about the form, content, and even frame of reference for enactments
are the object of the creative process of sensemaking, which are in tune with Weick’s idea of
organizing grammars. The rhetorical dynamics of organizing involves retrospective structuring
about events and actions from the environment. Weick and Browning (1986) argue that the
dynamics of argument and narration in organizational communication in any medium feed an
organization’s process, structure, and culture. People argue about which enactments should be
selected and, later, which ones should be retained for organizational memory. The Balanced
Scorecard (and other performance management approaches) facilitates this argumentative
process literally. In this regard, sensemaking can be viewed as a rhetorical, dramatistic process
among people that involves retrospective structuring about events and actions from the flows of
experience and fosters prospective structuring about anticipated future events in tune with a
corporate strategic plan and other “forward looking” data about corporate performance and how
it will be managed.
When describing Burke’s view of the creative process, Rueckert (1982) effectively reflects Weickian organizing, saying that process “starts with experience, moves to the abstracting of essences from experience, thence to the translation to that essence into some kind of progressive form, and then to the.bodying forth of that form” (p. 170). Since communication is the nexus of organizing, the sensemaking recipes people use necessarily include those related to enacting certain frames of reference and particular kinds of texts, from Balanced Scorecard reports to press releases, that advance the selection and retention of enactments.

People bridge the divisions or loose couplings among each other within the order of organizations through identification and may adopt, as Burke prescribes (1937/1984, pp. 19-30; 92-105) one of three frames of reference about their situations: a frame of acceptance about the status quo of enacted environments and retained enactments (i.e. to do their duty in organizing); or a frame of rejection, which is to enact alternative environments in response to those enacted or retained within the status quo (e.g. corporate restructuring [cf. Smudde, 1993] or labor strikes); or a frame of passivity, which is to enact environments of inaction that are neither those that are accepted nor those rejected by others. Frames of reference and enacted environments are congruent with each other, because both establish contexts, even perspectives about what is going on that people share, select, and retain when organizing (cf. Weick, 1995, p. 51, 53).

So we can think of the texts generated through and reflecting the findings of the Balanced Scorecard as fitting specific genres of discourse that can be studied for their rhetorical and social dimensions, for as Burke (1941/1973) says, “to guide our observations about the form itself [of some discourse type], we seek to discover the functions which the structure serves. This takes us into a discussion of purpose, strategy, [and] the symbolic act” (p. 101). The Balanced Scorecard data are mostly internally generated according to management’s needs. Of course management has its own preferred set of reports about specific measured dimensions of the business’ viability in terms of is financial, internal, learning and growth, and customer dimensions. Management also must generate reports and engage prospectively and proactively in other symbolic action (e.g., meetings) about data and trends that matter to other internal stakeholders, like operations leaders (e.g., division heads, department directors, functional managers) and employees at large. These internal stakeholders are key because it is they who are responsible for enacting the organization’s strategic plan and engaging in business processes in light of that plan.

The form and substance of the performance-focused communication with these stakeholders must establish a level of identification with target stakeholders so they see themselves in the situation in terms of their roles and spheres of control in an organization, and see themselves as part of the process to making the organization successful. Ancillary stakeholders, like shareholders, retirees, public policymakers, the community, mass media, and civic leaders, could be recipients of selected scorecard-based information that conforms to management’s communications needs and legal and ethical obligations through functional areas like public relations, investor relations, government relations, community relations, and so on.

Because discourse conventions for corporate texts that management could use to report organizational performance are broadly upheld, these discourse categories can be said to fit what Orlikowski and Yates (1994) call “communication genres,” which serve as “institutionalized template[s] for social action—an organizing structure that shapes the ongoing communicative actions of community members through their use of it. Such genre usage, in turn, reinforces that genre as a distinctive and useful organizing structure for the community” (p. 542; emphasis added). Orlikowski and Yates’ research explains how people in particular organizational functions (even whole organizations) routinely enact many kinds of discourse. The researchers
call this set of discourse types a “genre repertoire,” the study of which helps to explain established communicative practices and how activities are organized (p. 542).

See Table 3

Institutionalized genres of organizational communication, like those in Table 3, are distinctive and “characterized by a socially recognized communicative purpose [i.e. being constructed, recognized, and reinforced within a community] and common aspects of form [i.e. the readily observable features of the communication, including structure, medium, and language]” (Orlikowski & Yates 1994, p. 543, 544). The forming of performance-based discourse involves symbolic action that includes inducement to participate, where the inducement is rhetorical (Gregg, 1978). Management, then, chooses specific discursive forms because those forms make sense for and convey meaning about enacted environments about organizational performance.

Next Steps to Enacting Performance Measurement Rhetoric

Making a rhetorical theory work prospectively for communications opportunities about corporate performance and making it work in synch with corporate strategic planning, execution, and measurement (qualitative and quantitative) is key. Although critique and rhetorical criticism is traditionally anchored in retrospective analysis (i.e., looking at an artifact to investigate it for what it was and is), there is no reason why critical methods like the one used here, cannot be used prospectively to the benefit of future discursive action. In this way we move from traditional critique (which looks back upon extant discourse) to prediction (which looks forward to planned discourse). Criticism and rhetorical theory, then, becomes something more strategically potent—a tool for planning and enacting more effective discourse rather than an exercise attaining 20/20 hindsight. This prospective view is especially relevant to business because spending too much time looking in the rearview mirror means the advantage from looking down and preparing for the road ahead has been lost and the opportunities that go with it.

As my client realized, among the most challenging things management must do is to vigilantly monitor performance and share information about the state of the business to organizational members. The Balanced Scorecard and other performance management tools depend on such symbolic action as the way to inspire cooperation among all members in realizing the vision for an organization according to a strategic plan. The proactive, even prospective application of a Burkean orientation to rhetoric combined with a Weickian perspective on organizing—what I call “dramatistic organizing” (Smudde, in press)—that I applied to the Balanced Scorecard is just a first step in correcting the balance of positivism and humanism when measuring and managing corporate performance. Other approaches could be advanced as well. The bigger challenge, though, is making inroads with the management literature and practice—in that order.

Thanks to the recognition of communication’s centrality in performance management by the likes of deWaal (2002) and Kaplan and Norton (1996), making the argument that the rhetoric of performance management is a necessary dimension for success is fairly easy to make. The next step is to prove the concept by focusing on the benefits of the rhetorical-organizational nature of performance management through case examples of successful implementation in particular discourse forms. Organization and rhetoric scholars should be at the lead of this pursuit, especially those familiar with organizations and performance measurement/management
approaches. Although there may not be many of this pedigree, scholars with a willingness and interest in this kind of study can team with business scholars and practitioners to devise and study the effectiveness of the system I have explained here. Applications could come through MBA programs and on-the-job/consulting situations. In the end the kind integration into the business field must first occur in business journals. Crossing the chasm from academe to the main stream will not be easy, and this quest will not be swiftly completed. But the promise of applying “dramatistic organizing” in this new direction in organizational studies and adding value to both fields of rhetoric and performance management may be good.
A performance measurement system, as defined by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and Lawrence Maisel in their 2001 report, Performance Measurement Practices Survey Results, is one that “enables an enterprise to plan, measure, and control its performance and helps ensure that sales and marketing initiatives, operating practices, information technology resources, business decision, and people’s activities are aligned with business strategies to achieve desired business results and create shareholder value.” Simply put, a business measures what it must to make sure it achieves its objectives and goals (also see Coveney et al., 2003; Epstein and Birchard, 2000; Frost, 2000; Gore, 1997; and Harbor, 1997).

Some methods for measuring performance have gained immense fame while others have faded away. Note that such methods are different from process-related and output-focused measurements like total quality management, which is a statistical approach based on Deming’s work to ensure continuous improvement of output quality throughout a process (cf. Goetsch and Davis, 2002). A parallel example is six sigma, which also uses statistical methods about variation in data and processes (denoted by the lowercase Greek letter sigma) to ensure the high quality and reliability of products, services, and transactions. All system components must perform to specific targets, and so too must each critical aspect of every component. The idea is that a system will produce less than 3.4 errors or defects per million—produce the right thing the right way 99.9997 percent of the time (six standard deviations), which is nearly perfect (cf. Pande, Neuman, and Cavanagh, 2002).

Much recent scholarship argues that communication practitioners must be at the nexus of business planning by being business strategists (D’Aprix, 1996b, 1997; Dozier, 1995; Ferguson, 1999; Garone, 1995; Gayeski, 1996; Jensen, 1995; Landes, 1997; Ledingham and Bruning, 2000; Potter, 1998; Whitwell and Argenbright, 1998; Williams, 1996). In this vein, the most effective communication professionals are those who participate in corporate planning, counsel organizational leaders on all communication issues and opportunities, and build relationships among people in other departments and organizations. For example, more-effective communication is key during organizational change, including change that is spurred by corporate-performance issues, through face-to-face communication between supervisors and employees (not large employee meetings led by executives) about facts (not values) (Larkin and Larkin, 1994, 1995, 1996a, 1996b; D’Aprix, 1996a). Fleisher and Mahaffy (1997) go so far as to describe how the Balanced Scorecard could be specifically used to manage public relations departments’ performance.
References


Table 1. Performance measures for the balanced scorecard and their benefits by functional area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Area</th>
<th>Specific Benefits Accrueable by Functional Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial</strong></td>
<td>- Develop more accurate forecasts, based on customers in the pipeline, and produce these forecasts more quickly, which gives us a clearer picture of demand we must meet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Measure on a market-by-market basis to gives us a clearer picture of how well we are meeting our sales goals and company objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Produce sales, financial and performance reports faster with better data, which makes managing the company’s competitive position easier to see overall and by market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Business Processes</strong></td>
<td>- Links our organization’s mission and strategy, then translates that strategy to operational objectives and measures. We’ll know how well we’re turning high-level strategy into action. Everyone works toward the same objectives in ways that pertain to their jobs, which means everyone knows what results are expected and how to achieve them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Provide a link between lead generation and completed sales, which means you know about your own performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Create a foundation for establishing daily, monthly, quarterly and yearly goals for department, team and personal performance, which means we can always find out how we’re doing on any measure at any time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Make adjustments to or create new measurements as business needs dictate, which means we are well-prepared to adapt to, measure, and capitalize on market changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning &amp; Growth</strong></td>
<td>- Identify opportunities and problems sooner, perhaps in real time, to meet our sales performance goals, take advantage of our strengths and minimize our weaknesses sooner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Measure aspects of sales that tie back to the corporate strategic plan, which shows how our work translates into the overall success of the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Tie individual performance with team goals to recognize both, while emphasizing team contributions to the company’s growth, all of which mean exemplary performance can be more easily identified and rewarded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Encourage employees to enroll in education/training opportunities to expand their knowledge related to aspects of the business so they develop professionally, personally and intellectually in ways that also help the company grow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer-focused</strong></td>
<td>- Track customer relationships and buying behaviors more effectively over time, which means we can better anticipate our customers’ needs and build the business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ensure that we know how our customers feel about our organization and our products and compare ourselves to the competition, which means we collect and apply the feedback from customers about our service for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Engage in effective communications within our target markets to obtain new customers and to inspire continued purchases from established customers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Comparison between companies that measure and don’t measure performance.

(Schiemann & Lingle, 1999, p. 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of Success</th>
<th>Measurement-managed Organizations</th>
<th>Nonmeasurement-managed Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived as an industry leader over past 3 years</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported to be financially ranked in the top third of their industry</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three-year return on investment (ROI)</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last major cultural or operational change judged to be very or moderately successful</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Representative genre set for corporate discourse, which could well apply performance-based texts from findings of the Balanced Scorecard. (Smudde, 2004, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Formal letters</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tax forms</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interviews (media and analysts)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Memos (printed and electronic, including e-mail)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Corporate image pieces (e.g. brochures, Web content, advertisements)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Articles</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meetings (e.g. team, department, company)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Prepared statements</strong></td>
<td><strong>Media releases</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shareholder meetings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Press releases</strong></td>
<td><strong>White papers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Department/division operations reports</strong></td>
<td><strong>Video news releases (VNR)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Case studies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research reports</strong></td>
<td><strong>Photo news releases (PNR)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public service announcements (PSA)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proposals</strong></td>
<td><strong>Audio news releases (ANR)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Advertorials</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal presentations</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fact sheets</strong></td>
<td><strong>Newsletters</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Speeches</strong></td>
<td><strong>Backgrounders</strong></td>
<td><strong>Video programs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic planning documents</strong></td>
<td><strong>FAQs (“frequently asked questions”)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Letters/Written correspondence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Periodic financial reporting documents</strong></td>
<td><strong>Press conferences</strong></td>
<td><strong>Phone calls</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual corporate reports (e.g. financial and public-interest)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Press kits</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conversations (telephone, face-to-face, or real-time video conference calls)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Internet and intranet sites (including blogs and podcasts)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. The Balanced Scorecard model. (Arveson, 1998; adapted from Kaplan and Norton, 1996, p. 9).
Public Relations Online Then and Now: Stakeholder Relations by Corporations and Non-Profits

Krishnamurthy Sriramesh
Professor of Public Relations
Department of Journalism, Communication, & Marketing
School of Business
Massey University
Wellington
New Zealand

&

Milagros Rivera-Sanchez
Associate Professor and Head
Communication and New Media Programme
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
National University of Singapore
Singapore
Introduction

The Internet is a powerful medium of communication whose potential has not yet been harnessed to the fullest by public relations practitioners. In particular, the interactive applications that have been developed for use on the internet offer immense possibilities for the development of ethical, strategic, and symbiotic communication between organisations and their relevant publics. Further, in this era of globalization, these new media (often referred to as “social media”) provide organisations with the ability to communicate with a global audience around the clock easily and economically. On the other hand, organizational actions can also be closely scrutinized and challenged by a global audience now.

In the past decade, a number of studies have assessed how new media, especially web sites, have contributed to the public relations activities of a variety of organisations. Studies have examined the use of web features for public relations (eg. Wright & Hinson, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Park and Reber, 2008; Kang and Norton, 2004; Kent, et al 2003; Taylor, et.al 2001; Esrock & Leichty, 1998, 2000); the perceptions of public relations practitioners and users on the potential and actual effectiveness of websites for public relations purposes (eg. McAllister-Spooner, 2008; Hill & White, 2000); and the cultural and organisational factors that affect the differences in the use of websites for dialogic communication (e.g. Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009, Pan & Xu, 2009, and Kang & Norton, 2004). Studies also have tried to develop, enhance, or critique frameworks for the use of websites for public relations using communication/organisational models and theories (e.g. Vovoreanu, 2006, Taylor, et.al 2001, Hallahan, 2001, Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Organizations have traditionally used websites primarily for publicity purposes such as increasing awareness of their products and services. More recently, the onset of a variety of social media such as weblogs, chat rooms, social networking sites, micro-blogs, podcasts, and video sharing sites has led to varying degrees of diversification in the use of new media for public relations activities around the world. But that phenomenon is only now beginning to be studied.

Our enthusiasm for new media and their usefulness to organizations is tempered by our recognition of the Digital Divide. Norris (2001, p. 3 – 4) defined Digital Divide as the disparity in access to new media based on socio-economic factors, seen mostly between industrialized and developing countries and between the information rich (new media users) and information poor (non-users of new media) within a nation. Scholars such as Rose (2004) have contended that the gap in internet penetration may eventually disappear as proposed by the diffusion of innovations theory as market forces enable most people to access the internet using various media. However, others have focused on the gap among Internet users, or the divide between those who use and do not use the range of digital resources for personal purposes or for participation in public life (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001). Further, while previous perspectives on the digital divide focused on consumption and use, Schradie (2009) introduced another divide focusing on the gap in the digital production of content, which has become more relevant with the advent of Web 2.0 applications.
With the shift in focus from *access* to *extent of use*, the optimization of the Internet by those who already have access becomes a function of individual/organization choice, skills and capabilities, and culture, as well as efficient policymaking by regulatory institutions (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001). Notwithstanding the Digital Divide, social media enable the aggregation, richness and porosity of information and can increase the interactivity, connectivity and networking amongst, at least, the publics who have access to these media. Availability of social media has made it easier for organizations to engage in interactive dialogic communication, which is the underpinning of building stable relationships with key stakeholders. But the Digital Divide should remind us that new media are not the panacea that a section of the elite tend to make them out to be – a point we wish to highlight at the outset, as it is very important when we view this topic from a global perspective.

This study seeks to understand: 1) how a sample of corporations and non-profit organizations are using websites to interact with six key stakeholders; 2) whether there are key differences in the way these two types of organizations use websites for building relationships with the six stakeholder groups; and 3) whether there has been a difference in website usage by these organizations at two points in time—2004 and 2009 especially considering the onset of social media over the past couple of years. The next sections will review the existing literature and identify some key gaps; offer the study’s research objectives, research questions, and method used; and offer findings.

**Literature Review**

*Usage of Online Media for Public Relations*

Much of the scholarship on new media and organisations has focused on prescribing better web design, appropriate features and content that facilitate dialogic communication, and analysis of actual use and relational outcomes across organisation types, across media, and across time. In general, one can discern three categories of literature that link new media with public relations.

The first set of studies consists of perception research regarding the potential and actual effects of the Web as a public relations tool. Some studies have contended that public relations practitioners believe that websites display an organisation’s competitiveness, enhance its image, and increase a sense of professionalism, which has led them to set up organizational web presence (Hill & White, 2000). Others have assessed the views of CEO on the positive and negative potential of social media that encourage or hinder organisational decisions to invest on these media (PR Week/Burson-Marsteller, 2008). Among the positive perceptions of CEOs were websites as the best channel for communication during a crisis and online media as a tool for improving the organisation’s reputation. Negative perceptions of online media included lack of control over information exchanged and irrelevance to target clientele. On the other hand, scholars who have studied public relations practitioners’ perception of blogs (Wright & Hinson, 2008, 2009b) have noted that blogs help in building organizational credibility, help increase transparency, offer a low-cost way to develop relationships with stakeholders, and serve as a watchdog for traditional media. With regard to implications for employees, a study...
commissioned by Edelman Public Relations and Intelliseek (2005) noted that social media have the potential to empower employees (p. 3).

A growing number of more recent studies have studied users’ perceived effectiveness of a variety of online social media. McAllister-Spooner (2008) studied the perception of college student users on the effectiveness of university websites using Vorvoreanu's (2003) user-experience model. Kelleher (2006) examined how blogs could create a conversational human voice and relational commitment, which were found to positively correlate with relational outcomes such as trust, satisfaction, and commitment. Wright & Hinson's (2008, 2009) studies have found that public relations practitioners believe that the emergence of different social media has improved the way organizations communicate with internal and external publics. PR Week/Burson-Marsteller (2008) surveyed CEOs to assess their perception on the effectiveness of blogs and other social media in communicating with stakeholders, and on its impact of building relationships, reputation, and improving sales, among others. The study found that CEOs were divided about the effectiveness of using social media to reach stakeholders with 29% agreeing that social media are extremely effective as a communication tool while an equal number disagreed. Significantly, a large proportion (43%) believed that social media are only somewhat effective.

A second category of studies reevaluates the relevance of traditional public relations and suggests ways of using new media to enhance public relations practice. Kent and Taylor (1998) offered five dialogical principles relevant to the design and use of websites to enhance organisational relationship building practices. They noted that “without a dialogic loop in webbed communication, Internet public relations become [sic] nothing more than a new monologic communication medium, or a new marketing technology” (p. 325). Ryan (2003) emphasized that features that enable two-way communication are important components of a website and argued that dialogic online communication would force communicators to constantly refine, redevelop, and redesign products and services to meet changing customer demands. Phillips (2001) and Holtz (1999) discussed how to utilize specific internet applications (such as search engines, hyperlink libraries, webcasts, email, and newsgroups) to monitor and reach different audiences online. Hallahan (2001) examined the nature and value of usability research and provided an extensive list of ‘elements of an effective website based on usability principles.’

Despite some differences in the perspectives and strategies advanced, studies offering an alternative method of conducting public relations seem to point to three relevant themes: usability, interactivity, and dialogic communication. Dialogic communication, especially in the context of online communications, is more than an understanding of procedural rules or the development of feedback mechanisms. It includes the delivery of trustworthy information and a full understanding and disclosure of identities and online networks (Cozier & Witmer, 2007; Phillip & Young, 2009). Jo & Kim (2003) posited that interactivity by means of innovativeness of websites and multimedia functions do not increase publics’ perception of involvement and relationship-building. This implies that superficial appearance and technological gimmicks in web sites have much lower return on investment (ROI) in terms of relational outcomes.
Studies have also challenged some fundamental assumptions about traditional public relations activities. The interactive features of the internet differ from traditional public relations tools, which called for much more effort on the part of organizations to engage in two-way communication (Cutlip et al., 2006; Oliver, 2001; Smith, 2002). Interactivity offers organisations different ways of analyzing and improving relationships by facilitating two-way feedback from the public. Phillips and Young (2009) posited that one of the dominant schools of thought in public relations scholarship (the Excellence Theory proposed by J. Grunig and his associates) characterizes the vector of communication as being between an organisation and its publics and is concerned with the “symmetry” of this action. However, Phillips and Young argued that in the context of new media, “the significant discourse is that which surrounds the organisation, product or service” enabled and aggregated across social networks (pp. 247-248). Perspectives on how new media change the discourse of public relations have not been widely tested and deserve further study.

The third category consists of empirical studies, mostly using content analysis, that test the use of models for harnessing new media for public relations. A series of studies by Kent, Taylor and White (e.g. 2001, 2003) investigated the websites of environmental non-profit organisations in terms of the five dialogic principles in online communication that they advanced in 1998. Kang and Norton (2004) and Ingenhoff and Koelling (2009) used Kent & Taylor’s (1998) dialogic principles to study whether non-profit organisations use websites sufficiently enough to meet organisational relationship-building goals. Esrock and Leichty (1998, 2000) conducted a content analysis of messages and structural features of websites of Fortune 500 companies in terms of corporate responsibility and relationship-building respectively, and found minimal “meaningful, two way interaction between organisations and their publics” and that one-way corporate communication was very prominent in the use of web sites (p. 317). Park & Reber (2008) also conducted a content analysis of web sites and contended that Fortune 500 companies can do more to harness this medium to promote dialogue with stakeholders. Recent studies have extended this line of inquiry to Web 2.0 by investigating the usability, interactivity, and dialogic characteristics of organisations’ weblogs (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Xifra & Huertas 2008).

Even though the opportunities for using the Internet for public relations activities have expanded, scholarship about online public relations is still evolving. A number of studies show that practitioners do not always maximise the interactive features of the Internet (Naudé, Froneman, & Atwood, 2004, Kang & Norton, 2004). Low interactivity in organisations’ web sites was found by some studies (Kent, et.al 2001, 2003; Kenix, 2007; Stein, 2007; Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009) while others (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009, Waters, et. al., 2009) observed that organisations have used the dialogic and relationship-building abilities afforded by social media such as Facebook minimally.

Kent (2008) noted that “most organisations have not figured out how to use their Web sites except to sell things” (p. 39), and that while blogs have incredible potential as research, framing, and persuasion tools, their utility as a public relations tool is currently limited (pp. 1, 38-39). Jo and Kim (2003, p. 216) mentioned that while the Web is believed to facilitate better communication with a variety of publics, a number of content analysis studies (Hill & White, 2000; Ho, 1997) indicated that most content materials online are generally associated with
marketing activities to promote a favorable corporate image or for ‘promotional purposes.’ Park & Reber (2008) and Kent (2008) noted that organisations may be aware of the interactive capability of the web, but unclear about how to employ its dialogic features for relationship building. In sum, although the past decade has seen a significant increase in the research studying new media and organizations, there are also important gaps.

**Gaps in Literature on Online Public Relations**

Although several recent studies have examined organisational use of specific social media for public relations purposes, only a few studies have explored how organisations use a variety of social media in combination with their websites. Further, there is a paucity of research exploring the differences in use of web sites between non-profit organisations and for-profit corporations. In a survey of practitioners of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Ryan (2003) found that practitioners working in non-profit organisations tended to privilege channels which were designed for “contacting organisational leadership, for gathering the publics’ ideas, and for contacting a parent organisation,” while those working in the for-profit sector regarded news releases and annual reports as most important (pp. 345-346). Naudé et al (2004) interviewed practitioners from ten South African non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and discovered that several practitioners considered their organisation’s website non-essential. Jo and Kim (2003, p. 215) contended that public relations practitioners need to take into account audience-oriented web content, which facilitates building positive relationships with a variety of target publics. Their study implied that content and features of websites need to be adjusted to specific audiences and that differences may be found in the features and uses of websites across organisation types. While these studies reveal some differences between the views of practitioners working in different organisations, they are preliminary at best. More attention needs to be given to the use of new media by non-profit organizations and to the differences in use of web sites between for-profit and non-profit organizations.

Studying the use of new media for public relations practices **across time** is another important area that has received little scholarly attention. Dougall (2006) commented that “longitudinal research is rare in public relations, and even rarer in the study of organisation - public relationships” (p. 176). Wright & Hinson's studies (2008, 2009a, 2009b) are among the few that have tracked how organisations are using a variety of social media across time. However, their analyses focus on blogs and other social media and not particularly on organisational websites. A large percentage of organisations, especially in non-Western countries, are still using websites as their primary online public relations tool. Further, organisations see websites as playing a symbolic role: as a reflection of the organisation’s image, as showcase of its competitiveness, making them appear as cutting edge and technologically savvy (Hill & White, 2000, pp. 44, 46-47). Some organisations also see websites as a medium whose content they can fully control (p.44). Therefore, even as new media evolve into new dimensions, analyzing the use of new media across time is direly needed.

Finally, with the availability of social media and their potential for building dialogic communication and relationship-building with publics, the question remains whether—and if so, to what extent—organisations have adjusted their public relations strategies to harness all the features of new media. We also have little knowledge on which type of organisations are more
likely to adjust strategies and use the interactive features of the Internet and whether the adoption of interactive features favors image-building rather than relationship-building.

**Research Objectives and Research Questions**

Keeping the above lacunae in mind, this study sought to contribute to the body of knowledge in three primary ways:

- Compare the changes in the websites of a sample of 78 organisations over two points in time (2004 and 2009) with particular focus on organisations' efforts at harnessing the interactive communication potential offered by the Web while also observing organisations’ linkages to other social media;

- Track the changes in the use of web sites of a sample of 78 organisations for building relationships with six stakeholder publics over two points in time (2004 and 2009); and

- Compare the web sites of for-profit corporations and non-profit organisations to discern differences in how these two types of organisations use web sites for their communication and relationship-building activities.

In attempting to address these issues, we drafted the following research questions for this study:

RQ 1 a. What communication/public relations strategies are apparent in the web sites of corporations and non-profit organisations in the sample?

RQ 1 b. Have these strategies changed in any way between 2004 and 2009?

RQ 2 a. What differences, if any, are there in the way for-profit corporations and non-profit organisations use their web sites?

RQ 2 b. Have there been any discernible differences in such use between 2004 and 2009?

RQ 3 a. How do for-profit corporations and non-profit organisations use their web sites for communicating with six key stakeholder groups?

RQ 3 b. Has this changed between 2004 and 2009?

RQ 4 a. How well have the sample organisations used the interactive features offered by this medium?

RQ 4 b. Given the prevalence of Web 2.0 applications in 2009, what changes have the sample organisations made to their web sites in 2009 (compared to 2004) in order to harness Web 2.0 features?
Methodology

In 2004, we studied the websites of ninety six (96) organisations seeking to understand, among other things, how they used the Web as a communication tool to build and maintain relationships with six key stakeholders: the mass media, consumers, investor/donors, employees, the government, and the community. We also wanted to ascertain if there were differences between the way for-profit corporations and non-profits used their web sites for relationship building. Therefore, half the web sites were of for-profit corporations and the other half of non-profits. Although the data were collected and analyzed over a two-month period in 2004, the findings were not published.

In 2009, a different coder visited the web sites of 78 of the 96 organisations (some web sites were untraceable) to assess if there were any differences in web site usage among the sample organizations given the introduction of social media and the expansion of knowledge about web sites as well as the onset of weblogs. We see the analysis in 2009 as the second phase of a time-lag study with two distinct points of analysis five years apart. Data from both these analyses are being reported here for publication for the first time.

Findings and Discussion

Overall Profile of Organisational Websites

We first offer findings on the overall profile of websites and then focus on individual research questions. Of the seventyeight (78) websites analysed both in 2004 and 2009, 35 (46%) belonged to non-profit organisations and 43 (54%) to corporations. There was an almost equal balance in the distribution of global (49%) and domestic (Singapore, 51%) websites. We classified websites as domestic or global based on intended target audience discerned from the websites. Global websites targeted a global audience and also belonged mostly to organizations with a global outreach such as the World Wildlife Fund, Doctors without Borders, World Vision, Dell, Microsoft, Tommy Hilfiger, Shell International, and Starbucks. Domestic websites principally targeted a local (Singaporean) audience or operated on a national scope such as the Singapore Police Force, National Kidney Foundation (NKF), People’s Association, China Children and Teenagers’ Fund, Starhub (Singapore), and MobileOne Ltd (Singapore).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NON-PROFIT (Global)</th>
<th>NON-PROFIT (Local)</th>
<th>PROFIT (Global)</th>
<th>PROFIT (Local)</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We observed “glocalization” strategies among some globally-operating organizations that set up domestic versions (eg. McDonald’s, Standard Chartered, Coke, and World Vision) to better target local audiences. The local sites had significantly different information from their
global/mother websites in such areas as the products, services, store/branch locators, promotions, games/quizzes, graphics, and music. Local job opportunities and volunteer opportunities were also specified, including local employee profiles and testimonials from local staff and volunteers. Feature articles or videos of community or consumer-related activities were also made available. Some of the domestic websites directed visitors to the global website for product history and a range of investor information such as financial factsheets.

**RQ 1 a. What communication/public relations strategies are apparent in the web sites of corporations and non-profit organisations in the sample?**

**RQ 1 b. Have these strategies changed in any way between 2004 and 2009?**

Although scholars (including J. Grunig) have contended that the models of public relations are now dated, we found the description of the “original” four models of public relations useful in categorizing the communication strategies apparent in the web sites we analyzed. In both 2004 and 2009, most websites seemed to engage in the public information model (67% for each year), followed by the two-way asymmetrical (45% for 2004 and 50% in 2009). As in numerous previous studies, the least used model was the two-way symmetrical (27% in 2004 and 35% in 2009) indicating that most organisations still use their website primarily as an information dissemination tool. It was disappointing that the use of websites by a majority of organizations in the sample has not changed significantly over the past five years despite the growth of interactive Web 2.0 features that are more aligned to dialogic public relations and relationship building.

The only encouraging change appears to be the 6% increase in the percentage of organisations who use two-way communication. Organisations that preferred two-way communication in 2004 continued to do so in 2009 with about 25 organizations even improving their efforts at two-way communication by using newer developments such as blogs, forums, wikis, and social networking sites and by embedding links into their websites. Most of the organisations that used the press agentry and public information models in 2004 continued to do so in 2009.

**Figure 1. Use of Communication Models in 2004 and 2009**
**RQ 2 a. What differences, if any, are there in the way for-profit corporations and non-profit organisations use their web sites?**

**RQ 2 b. Have there been any discernible differences in such use between 2004 and 2009?**

We discerned clear distinctions between the public relations methods of corporations and non-profits both in 2004 and 2009.

In 2004, corporations used their websites to practice two-way asymmetrical and press agentry models (each used about 31% of the time) followed by the public information model (28%). The two-way symmetrical model of public relations was again found to be the least practiced by corporations (13%), confirming yet again that this model is normative.

The most widely used public relations model by corporations in 2009 was press-agentry (37%), followed by the two-way asymmetrical (27%) and public information models (26%). As in 2004, fewer websites engaged in two-way symmetrical communication (19%). Nonetheless, the percentage of corporations using the two-way communication models increased slightly between 2004 and 2009. Four more corporations (5% increase) practiced the two-way asymmetrical model in 2009 and six more (8% increase) used the two way symmetrical model.

In 2004, non-profit organisations focused on disseminating information with 38% preferring the public information model. Two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical models were a distant second (14% for each model). As expected, non-profit organizations in the sample preferred the public information model over press-agentry (13%) confirming the propositions of the original four models.

In 2009, non-profit organisations continued to favor the public information model (41%), followed by the 2-way assymmetrical model (23%). We observed a negligible increase of 1% non-profit organisations that used the two-way symmetrical model compared to 2004, for a total of 15% . Press-agentry remained the least used model among non-profits (8%) continuing a downward trend over time. These findings show that there is a clear difference in how corporations and non-profit organisations conduct public relations online and that over time such fundamental differences in world views do not appear to change.
RQ 3 a. How do for-profit corporations and non-profit organisations use their web sites for communicating with six key stakeholder groups?

RQ 3 b. Has this changed between 2004 and 2009?

Media Relations

In general, the web sites of corporations were better developed than those of non-profits vis-a-vis media relations. Members of the media seemed to consistently get more extensive, organized, and current information from corporate than non-profit web sites both in 2004 and 2009. For example, corporate web sites offered more comprehensive news and information on the corporation, extensive and searchable news and press release archives (some dating back ten years), and specific press contact details (some providing more than one contact). Some corporations even included “notes to editors,” and provided proprietary high-resolution pictures and graphics for use by the media.

In 2009, almost 40% (31 of 78) of organizations in our sample used podcasts and webcasts to supplement traditional newsletters and textual media reports to communicate important issues and activities. Although both corporations (e.g. Cisco, Nike, Samsung, Hewlett Packard, Starbucks, Dell, and Microsoft) and non-profits (e.g. Locks of Love, World Vision, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Lance Armstrong Foundation) use podcasts/webcasts, the percentage of corporations using them was much higher (48.8%) than non-profits (28.6%).

The podcasts on corporate websites were also generally more current and archived more entries per website. More than half the sampled corporate websites had online videos of previously held events and upcoming promotions. In some cases, a calendar of events was also
listed, with organisations even offering an automated email “reminder service” for events that members of the media could attend. Some organisations also offered links to their Twitter and Facebook accounts where media and consumers alike could access information on various activities and promotional material.

In contrast, although most non-profit websites provided the same type of information to members of the media as corporations, the information was usually less organized. News articles about the organisation, interviews, speeches, press releases and research papers were often archived in a way that made information searches difficult. On some non-profit websites, no specific press contact was provided and media inquiries were directed to a generic “catch-all” email address. Most provided extensive write-ups on their organisations as well as calendars of events – an example of public information mindset. However, some non-profits were actively using interactive online features to enhance their communication with the mass media, including the use of online videos, podcasts, and social networking sites to complement media kits.

**Consumer Relations**

As consumers are the main revenue-generating stakeholders for corporations, the attention given to cultivating good customer relations was very evident, albeit at different levels for different organizations. In 2004, corporations such as Nike, Starbucks, Heineken, and Singapore Airlines stood out in customer relations. Among non-profits, (Singapore’s) People’s Association, World Wildlife Fund, Singapore International Foundation, and (Singapore) National Kidney Foundation offered better consumer relations information. A plethora of information was available for consumers such as detailed fact-sheets and descriptions of products, online newsletters, after-sales service, product registration, frequently-asked-questions (FAQs), technical support, online knowledge-base, and forums. These channels ranged from the static (such as FAQ section, which appeared to be updated infrequently), to the interactive and dynamic (such as forums, which allow customers to voice their opinions or seek help regarding a problem). The aggressive manner in which corporations sought to establish two-way communication with consumers was evident in a significant percentage of corporations utilizing the two-way asymmetrical (45%) and two-way symmetrical (27%) models.

In 2009, the corporate websites in our sample offered customers the opportunity to browse products, see promotional videos, learn from interactive brochures, generally remained more active in providing information to customers than non-profits. Clothing, shoes, and accessories companies (e.g. Nike, Adidas, and Tommy Hilfiger) were more likely to utilize interactive features by launching games and videos to mix and match styles to engage the imagination of customers about their products’ style possibilities. Food and beverage (e.g. Coca Cola, Heineken, and Starbucks) as well as cosmetics (L’Oreal) companies also used interactive features such as games and quizzes for consumers to better understand product content and advantage, as well as basic tips about body/skin care. Online forums and social networking sites are also now being used to enable customers to offer suggestions and comments about products or discuss promotional events hosted by corporations. Corporations such as Starbucks, Coca Cola, Dell, IBM and Blizzard Entertainment invited customers to use the forums and SNS to share their ideas on new product variations, product enhancement or product names, inquiries, or on how to create a community of product supporters or enhance the experience in outlets/stores.
Corporations such as Starbucks, Heineken, Coca Cola, Nike, and Shell are also presenting product history through interactive media, such as games.

Consumers are not so clearly defined for non-profits. As most non-profit organisations benefit the community in one way or the other, “consumers” could refer to both the beneficiaries of the charity as well as members of the public (including donors and volunteers) who visit the website to find out more about the organisation or source information on topics of interest to them. Despite this, non-profit sites followed the patterns of corporations when designing their websites. Most non-profit websites analyzed for this study provided extensive information including details on services and functions of the organisation, its mission, its beneficiaries, telephone numbers, email, FAQs, testimonials, and guestbooks. In fact, both non-profits and corporations, went the extra mile to cater to this stakeholder. One reason behind this could be that this stakeholder group comprises many more sub-stakeholder groups which are radically different from each other and therefore public relations policy reflects the diverse needs of different sub-stakeholder groups. Some global and US-based non-profits (such as World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace, Red Cross, Lance Armstrong Foundation, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals (SPCA) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals - PETA) have website-hosted online forums and linkages to a variety of social networking sites to create/reach a network supporters. They also offer downloadable files, videos, music, or advocacy-related games/quizzes. Among the Singapore non-profits in this sample, only a few actively used interactive features. However, most interactive features were geared to promote organisational services and activities (asymmetrical) rather than using interactive features to seek suggestions on how to improve their services (symmetrical).

**Investor Relations**

Both non-profits and corporations generally provided similar information to this group of stakeholders considering how important donors/investors are to both organization types. Although annual reports and financial statements were the two common features for both types, they differed in the amount of information provided. Corporations tended to include more information to investors such as annual reports (dating back several years), real-time stock updates, credit ratings, quarterly financial results, corporate videos, milestones, achievements, messages and introductions from the board of directors, etc. Email alerts were available for those interested in subscribing and registered stockholders were provided with accounts and the option of customizing the information they want in their website. Further, information that could be downloaded onto personal digital assistants (PDAs) and even options to conduct financial transactions were provided. Contact information such as the addresses, email and telephone number for directing shareholder inquiries were also readily available. The general thrust was to present the corporation’s point of view and financial standing. Overt attempts to present the organisation’s viewpoints were not observed in any of the websites surveyed. In 2009, corporations still focused more on offering information useful to potential investors, which included reports on funds usage, financial factsheets, SEC information, track record, and contact information for interested investors. The reports were often formally presented in downloadable pdf formats.
Non-profit organisations provided information similar to corporations. Annual reports, financial statements, and specific breakdowns of how the donations are used to fund specific items were available. Websites of non-profits also included online donation portals and application forms for automated deductions from bank accounts. Online recognition was also given to volunteers – a different kind of investor.

Employee Relations

Both corporations and non-profits in our sample used their websites only to address potential employees with no reference to current employees by providing links and information on employment, internships, and volunteer opportunities. However, in 2004 corporations used more interactive features to provide better access to the information, often allowing for employment searches by different factors, such as location, job type and keyword searches. In what could be seen as an attempt at positive publicity, some corporations courted new employees with current employee testimonials, the company’s human resource ranking by external sources, and promises of career and personal development.

In 2004, non-profit websites also provided information about employment and volunteer opportunities albeit in a more static manner. Information about career opportunities was listed plainly, requiring users to scroll through the page and search for information. Most non-profit websites also did not have online job applications asking volunteers or interested applicants to send resumes via email or regular mail.

In 2009, both types of organizations used social media to reach prospective employees (and volunteers in the case of non-profits) more effectively. Online forums, social networking sites (Facebook), and micro blogging (i.e. Twitter) were also used as avenues for members and volunteers to share their experiences and disseminate announcements on how to be involved in future activities. Social media have been making steady inroads into corporate and non-profit web sites to facilitate better communication with stakeholders but we consider the pace of adoption to be far slower.

Community Relations

Most corporations listed a link for community relations in their websites to showcase their CSR-related activities. Some corporations (eg. Coca Cola, Shell, Tommy Hilfiger) have set up foundations to support humanitarian and environmental work. It was evident that corporations generally seemed to equate community relations either with endorsing a community event such as medical missions or environmental campaigns or supporting socially-responsible causes such as supporting an arts group or relief efforts. In 2009, a number of corporations took greater advantage of social networking sites and other online/mobile applications to build a community of customers or supporters and to facilitate a sharing of product experiences or promote community-building events. For example, Starbucks invited its customers to use its online forums and social networking sites to build interest groups and organize community-oriented activities such as poetry reading or book clubs at its outlets. The podcasts/webcasts of these activities were also featured in the website. Nike, Coca Cola and Dell also encouraged their customers to form online and mobile communities offering downloadable mobile community
software. Companies’ websites also provided free audio, games, and video downloads to these communities.

In the case of non-profit organisations, the community is often comprised of both consumers and investors/volunteers. Most non-profit organisations had programmes that were aimed at involving the community, and their commitment to community relations is often inherent within their organisation’s mission. In 2009 some of the non-profits (especially environmental organizations such as WWF and Greenpeace) used online and mobile applications to build a community of volunteers and interested supporters.

**Government Relations**

There was a marked lack of attention given to this stakeholder group by both organization types, apart from the odd indication of organisation-government affiliation, such as linkages to statutory boards. Even in 2009, use of websites for government relations remained limited or nonexistent. An exception is lobbying activities and linkages to some government offices with which the organisation has joint projects. It is important to note that this study was conducted in Asia where government relations is almost exclusively done on an interpersonal basis. Further, in Singapore, lobbying of government officials would have to be done more subtly.

4 a. *How well have the sample organisations used the interactive features offered by this medium?*

4 b. *Given the prevalence of Web 2.0 applications in 2009, what changes have the sample organisations made to their web sites in 2009 (compared to 2004) in order to harness Web 2.0 features?*

In 2009, both organisation types increased their use of the interactive features of the Web (See Table 4) even though such use was mostly intended for asymmetrical communication and for dissemination of product/service promotion, product updates, disseminating community-related activities to generate more publicity for the organisation.

A growing number of organisations also used interactive features for soliciting feedback, albeit to a very limited extent. Sixty seven percent (67%) of corporations and 48% of non-profits had at least some online feature to solicit ideas or suggestions from website visitors. A few stretched their efforts a bit more, offering e-surveys on the usefulness or ease of use of the website, or e-polls on products and services. Interestingly, more non-profits appeared to use online surveys and e-polls than corporations, although more corporations had an online suggestion box feature in their website.

Another avenue for possible interactive communication with publics are social media. A number of organisations have established links on their websites to relevant blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube. The most popular social networking site was Facebook, with about 46% of both profit and non-profits embedding Facebook links to their websites. Other popular social media applications were: online forums, online/mobile communities, and micro-blogging (such as Twitter). Global web sites used social networking sites more than domestic
(Singaporean) websites, which is surprising given the popularity of social media among the average Singaporean.

In general, a larger percentage of corporations used interactive features such as blogs, links to social networking sites, micro-blogs, and online forums. The only exceptions were online donation, YouTube video links, and email-alert/sign-up features, which non-profits seemed to use more actively. Online donation features provided detailed information for interested supporters of non-profits on how to donate, and some even offered the filling of pledge forms or making immediate online donations. On the other hand, corporations offered a wealth of information online to potential investors who were invited for further offline discussions. Links to uploaded videos (to YouTube) were also more commonly used among non-profits, who often posted videos created by their volunteers.

A variety of content has also been created seemingly to draw more web visits. Downloadables include files, newsletters, e-cards, wallpapers, icons, calendars, screensavers, mobile phone skins, music in mp3 format, and videos. Website visitors were also offered advertisements or promotional videos, and could take organisation-related quizzes and play games that showcase products or organisational causes. Interactive features were used to a greater extent in 2009 than 2004 to showcase products and services.

Interestingly, in 2009 a number of global corporate and non-profit web sites contain fraud or security alerts such as employment scams or fake “grant awards” from organisations (e.g. Shell, Glaxo-SmithKline, and World Vision). Some also provide tips for ensuring secured online transactions (e.g. Standard Charter). Child-oriented websites (e.g. Disney) offer online advice to parents and guardians on ensuring safe internet surfing. This development suggests that while more organisations realize the value of internet resources to advance their goals and build better relations with their publics, they are also cautious about the possible negative implications of internet use for their stakeholders, which may also affect the organisation's reputation. As organisational use of online interactive features are intensified, risks also increase for both the organisation and its online visitors. Thus, internet use by organisations for public relations needs to take into consideration features that ensure the protection of users and the security of transactions made by publics online, an aspect which seems to have received limited attention in previous studies of online public relations and can be explored in greater detail by future studies.

Table 2. Use of Web Features (2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online Features</th>
<th>Profit</th>
<th>Non-Profit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Survey</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Poll</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea/ suggestion/ Feedback link</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Download / Listen/ Watch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Files</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletter</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-Cards</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallpaper/icons/skin</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcast/webcast</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum/chat</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS (i.e. Facebook)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro-blog (i.e. Twitter)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile / Online community</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Donation*</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Shopping*</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online games</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Map</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search Engine</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email alerts/sign-ups</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>69.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Online shopping and donation include signing in of forms (i.e. online/pledge) and may not cover e-payment

**Conclusion and Future Research**

This time lag study, a snapshot of online public relations at two points in time (2004 and 2009), has yielded some interesting findings on the use of web sites by corporations and non-profits. First, there is a marked difference in how corporations and non-profit organisations practice public relations online through the use of web sites. Second, compared to 2004, in 2009 more organizational websites had linkages to social media sites such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube. Third, aside from increased use of social media, more organizations used feedback mechanisms such as e-surveys and e-polls embedded in their websites, in 2009 enhancing interactions with a variety of stakeholders.

These findings also show that for the most part, both corporations and non-profit organizations generally utilize their websites as information-dissemination tools, where the information flow is one-way, although the percentage of corporations and non profits that used two-way communication has increased between 2004 and 2009. We note that two-way communication does not imply symmetry. One also has to recognize that the majority of corporations favoured two-way asymmetrical public relations, while non-profits preferred the public information model. By examining the methods that both for-profit and non-profit organisations use to engage their publics, we can see that the nature and industry of the corporation influences the choice of public relations practiced through its website. The inherent difference between corporations and non-profits makes them define their stakeholder groups differently, which seems to affect their use of web sites for public relations. Even their use of social media reflected this difference.
A finding that would be worthy of further study is why as of 2009 many for-profit and non-profit organizations were still a long way from fully utilizing the interactive features of social media to create, among other things, a sense of community among their respective stakeholders. One would have expected that since many of the social media applications are freely available and widely used by millions, corporations and non profits would have jumped at the opportunity to use the interactive features of social media to further enhance their relationship building efforts.

While this study included multinational corporations and non profits, it is limited in that the domestic organizations are from a single Asian country (Singapore). Future studies could do comparative research on how corporations and non profits (local and global) use social media in various countries and across regions (Asia, Africa, Latin America, etc.). Such studies could also make comparisons between developed and less developed countries (particularly assessing the impact of the Digital Divide within and among countries), to better assess the way that organizations around the world are embracing social media for public relations purposes. In addition, future studies could explore whether there are specific sectors (e.g. manufacturing, service, retailing, etc.) that seem to more aggressively embrace social media to enhance the communication with their publics. The possibilities are plentiful for research agendas on online public relations, enough to keep scholars busy for the decades.
Bibliography


Holtz, S. (1999). *Public relations on the Net: winning strategies to inform and influence the media, the investment community, the government, the public, and more!* New York: AMACOM.


Oliver, Sandra (2001). *Public Relations Strategy.* Institute of Public Relations


Ethics during Crisis: Applying Ethical Values, Best Practices, and the Symbolic Approach to a Coal Mine Disaster

Bonnie Stewart, M.A.
Assistant Professor

Diana Knott Martinelli, Ph.D.
Widmeyer Professor in Public Relations
P.I. Reed School of Journalism
West Virginia University

The authors thank graduate student Michael Conti for his assistance with this project.
Introduction

On January 2, 2006, explosions rocked a small coal mining town in West Virginia, trapping 13 miners in the Sago Mine. Some 41 hours later, the miners’ families and media worldwide celebrated the astonishing news that 12 men had survived the accident. As we now know, the news proved inaccurate, and only 1 of the 13 miners was found alive. This disaster captured the nation’s attention for its drama and media coverage mistakes, and in its aftermath, Congress passed tougher mine safety legislation. Ironically, that legislation has led to such a backlog of cases that repeat mine violators could go longer before being caught. However, coal mining disasters are nothing new to West Virginia or the nation, and it was another high-profile coal mine disaster that had led to tougher regulations nearly 40 years before.

Even earlier, in 1946, national media were reporting on mining dangers. An Aug. 10 article that year in the Saturday Evening Post, titled “They Don’t Have to Die,” brought the profession’s dangers to light in an emotional feature spread that included the following pull quote: “Spectacular explosions and hair-raising rescues are commonplace in the coal industry. But the stark truth is that nearly all the accidents could be prevented—saving suffering and improving labor relations.” Six years later, in 1952, President Harry S. Truman signed the Federal Coal Mine Safety Act, but warned it was not a very effective safety measure: “I am advised that the exemptions in the measure were provided to avoid any economic impact on the coal mining industry,” he said.

It would take more than two decades before more stringent national mine safety legislation was passed, and it was the direct result of the Farmington, West Virginia, No. 9 coal mine disaster. At the time, more coal was mined and more miners were employed in West Virginia than in any other state.

In the early morning hours of Nov. 20, 1968, 78 people died when a huge explosion rocked Consolidation Coal’s No. 9 Farmington mine. Three years prior, four men had died there in an explosion so severe that “victims were blown completely out of the shaft.” That day, the men had been working inside a new airshaft when methane was ignited. Investigators speculated that a frayed wire or a spark from a dropped tool set off the explosion. A decade earlier, the No. 9 mine had claimed 16 miners in a gas explosion. Some of the surviving family members of that disaster lost additional family members in the 1968 blast. The worst mining disaster in the nation’s history occurred just 10 miles from the

22 Some 20 years after the more stringent legislation was passed, national media continued to highlight problems with the mining industry’s “lax enforcement.” “Mine Safety Agency Accused of Lax Enforcement,” The New York Times, March 12, 1987.
Farmington site on Dec. 6, 1907, when 361 men and boys were killed in an explosion. In his book, Monongah, former federal mine official Davitt McAteer puts the death toll at well more than 500 men and boys.

On that tragic day in Farmington, 99 miners were underground when the explosion occurred, and 21 managed to make it to the surface. Then, as when the Sago Mine disaster was under way, Americans watched a coal mine disaster’s aftermath on national television, hoping for a miracle. The difference between the media events is that the Farmington disaster was the first in the U.S. to be played out before a national television audience. After ten days of rescue efforts, company officials sealed the mine to put out the fires, with the bodies of 78 men still inside, 600 feet below surface. The coal company, CONSOL, later retrieved 59 bodies. Nineteen men remain entombed.

Company and federal officials said they didn’t know what caused the explosion, and for 40 years, the cause remained a mystery. However, just months after the disaster, a federal investigator discovered a safety alarm on a ventilation fan had been deliberately disabled. The investigator wrote a memo to his superiors that was largely ignored and filed away, remaining unknown to the public until November 2008, when co-author Bonnie Stewart found and reported on it as part of a National Public Radio story on the disaster’s anniversary.

CONSOL Energy: CONSOL began operations in 1864, and at the time of the Farmington disaster was the world’s largest soft coal producer. Today, CONSOL remains the second largest coal producer in the U.S., having produced more than 3.5 billion tons of coal since its inception. The company employs more than 8,000 people across six states, with the majority employed in West Virginia and Pennsylvania, and owns more than 430,000 acres of land in North America. In addition, the company operates the largest private coal research and development facility in the world. A CONSOL subsidiary, CNX Gas, is the largest producer of natural gas in the Appalachian Basin, operating more than 2,600 wells and producing 245 million cubic feet of methane per day.

The energy company practices corporate social responsibility, donating more than $1 million to the various communities in which it operates. According to its Web site, this charitable giving supports youth organizations, public safety and other community organizations. CONSOL is a corporate sponsor of the Pittsburgh Penguins hockey team, and has even acquired the naming rights to the new Pittsburgh multi-purpose arena where the Penguins are scheduled to begin play in 2010.

According to their corporate Web site, safety is “at the core of everything” CONSOL does, stating that their safety record is nearly two times better than the industry average. It also mentions that they’ve been nationally and internationally recognized for their safety efforts and achievements, although details are not given. However, they claim not to be satisfied with this, saying: “Our Absolute Zero safety initiative sets zero accidents as the only acceptable result.” There is little other detail, although it does mention that CONSOL will teach employees that they are empowered to stop operations if they believe that safety is being compromised.

---

26 That disaster has been chronicled by a colleague of the authors, Gina Martino Dahlia, in her award-winning documentary, “The Monongah Heroines.”


29 From Consol Web site?
This paper examines the 1968 disaster that led to the landmark National Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 by exploring media reports and available CONSOL documents through a symbolic approach lens, and then via today’s Public Relations Society of America stated ethical values.

**Literature Review**

Crisis communication scholars have employed numerous research perspectives during just the past decade. For example, some scholars (e.g. Hearit, 2006; Rowland & Jerome, 2004; and Burns & Bruner, 2000) have focused on image restoration theory. Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow (2006) note that this work focuses primarily on “the immediate aftermath of an event and does so through the lens of various strategic messages including denial, shifting the blame, mortification, corrective action, and minimization, among others. In essence, image restoration and its variants attend to questions of reputational repair by articulating the range of assorted strategic messages likely to repair the image of the organization or individual under attack” (p. 130). They go on to argue that another important part of post-crisis research that should be considered is renewal to a “post-crisis innovation and adaptation of the organization” (p. 131).

Other scholars (e.g. Fearn-Banks, 2002, Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2001) have extended excellence theory (Grunig & Grunig, 1992, and Grunig & Hunt, 1984) to crisis communication research, “suggesting how organizations should be practicing public relations in the most ethical and effective manner” (Copple-Moore, Anca Micu and Glen T. Cameron, nd). Others (e.g. Cameron, Croppp & Reber, 2001) have explored contingency theory’s continuum, from advocacy to accommodation and the many points in between, along which an organization might move depending on the particular crisis situation and its aftermath.

Crisis communication scholar Timothy Coombs (2000, 2008) has written extensively about such crisis response typologies. As part of this work, he and Holladay (2001) integrated the relationship history of an organization with the symbolic approach “to unpack the crisis response process” (2001, p. 321). This approach examines how the “situation can influence the selection and effectiveness of crisis response strategies” (p. 321).

Coombs and Holladay (2001) discuss an organization’s performance history in terms of crisis history and relationship history and note that “the justification of crisis history is steeped in the attribution theory roots of the symbolic approach” (p. 323). Research has indicated that the more often an organization experiences crises, the more likely people are to perceive the organization as being at fault (Griffin, Babin & Attaway, 1991). Coombs and Holladay (2001) explain that a positive relational history helps the organization when a crisis does occur. People are more apt to see the crisis as an anomaly and more likely to retain an overall positive perception—a form of “halo” effect, they say.

Certainly, the Consolidated Coal Company had experienced numerous coal mine disasters over the years. After all, it was the nature of the business. A December 1968 *New York Times* article noted that industry-wide, 5,500 coal miners had perished in the 16 years since the first Federal Coal Mine Safety Act had been established in 1952.30 The No. 9 miners and their families also knew that the mine was a dangerous place, and that the company didn’t seem to do all they could to protect them.

In co-author Stewart’s Chapter 4 of her book manuscript about the disaster and its bungled investigation, she discusses her interview with survivor Pete Sehewchuk, “a salaried

---

company man” who had been subpoenaed for the investigation hearing a few days after the explosion, but was told by a superior not to show up and that the company would “take care of it.” Stewart writes, “His superiors knew he wasn’t happy with the conditions in the mine. That, he has always believed, is why they did not want him to testify.” Those who did testify had to do so in front of their company bosses, and were clearly intimidated, Stewart reports. One miner said he would submit his statement in writing to Congress so that it didn’t get “whitewashed” before they saw it.

Survivor Alva Davis testified that “there has been several failures toward safety features and if we would bring it to their attention, the company, there was different times that they would look down their noses at us. I haven’t been proud the way Consol has treated me although I went ahead and made money off Consol. I had a family to support … “ Stewart’s investigation revealed that the government inquiry did demonstrate that the mine was unsafe and that Consol had been breaking numerous state and federal laws, including those that regulated mine ventilation and coal dust control. The mine was permanently sealed in 1978, when Consol said it was too dangerous for the remaining 19 bodies to be recovered. Privately, as seen in confidential company documents, Consol acknowledged the recovery was too onerous and expensive a task.

This research helps add to the crisis communication literature by exploring rare, primary corporate crisis communication documents, uncovered through the co-author’s investigation, and by also reviewing company statements as carried in local and national media during a highly publicized and emotional crisis that lingered for years and that also carried with it a threat to the industry by way of strengthened national safety legislation. The authors use these findings to reflect upon Coombs and Holladay’s crisis communication research regarding performance history in the crisis response process.

Method

Specifically, this paper uses available company documents post-disaster, from October 1970, when the mine was reopened to recover more bodies, through August 1978, when the mine was permanently sealed, and background from nearly 100 local and national newspaper stories from the time of the explosion through December 1978 to examine company responses to the crisis. Therefore, a case study approach was used to document public/external company positions and private/internal communications. Case studies can help understand complex social events by providing context to a situation and can provide evidence of organizations’ crisis actions.

News coverage was gathered from 17 different newspapers over five different years (1968-1971, the time of the explosion, its investigation, federal legislation, and recovery efforts; and 1978, when the mine was permanently sealed). Three national network broadcasts from CBS News also were reviewed: two from 1968; the third, the explosion’s anniversary in 1969). The media coverage was documented, reviewed for company statements, then assimilated.

Findings

Initial Media Coverage. Consol communicated rapidly and regularly following the disaster, with a series of press briefings held throughout the day of the initial blast. The company had a representative, executive vice president of mining operations from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, William Poundstone, on site meeting “with dozens of West Virginia and national

---

31 Bonnie Stewart, Chapter 4, unpublished manuscript, 2010.
newsmen who flocked to the scene” hours after the initial blast. Estimates of the number missing varied throughout the day, but by night, an unnamed spokesperson was reported to say the number was 78.

A store across from the mine served as the gathering place for media updates and waiting relatives. The store supplied shelter, food and drink for “hundreds of persons waiting for word of loved ones trapped in the mine.” At 6 p.m., the last press conference of the day was held, and they announced another for 10 a.m. the next morning. Given the news cycle of that day, this press conference schedule makes sense. The evening news had the latest information from the 6 p.m. news conference, and newspapers could attend the 10 a.m. briefing the next day with their day-shift reporters.

In his initial press conferences, Poundstone cautioned that it would take time to learn what had happened, and he publicly thanked everyone who was assisting, including the news media for their cooperation in keeping the public informed. However, rather than using one designated spokesperson, numerous people spoke on behalf of the company in the early hours and days following the disaster. For example, the day after the blast, a third spokesperson was identified in the local newspaper, The West Virginian, as the treasurer of Mountaineer Coal Co., the subsidiary of CONSOL that operated the No. 9, who cautioned it could “take days before any new developments could be accomplished.”

That day’s (Nov. 21) New York Times quoted James McCartney, Consol’s “personnel and public relations director,” as saying that the official message had become “days or weeks” before rescue workers could enter the mine. The New York Times also reported that officials were pessimistic of survivors, as only two ventilating fans, which provided fresh air to the mine, were still working. When the mine exploded it destroyed two fans that ventilated the west side of the mine where the trapped men were located. Of the two fans still operating, one ventilated the east side of the mine, which was not disturbed by the explosions; the other was a temporary fan set up after the disaster in a new shaft that was under construction when the mine blew up. Air entering the mine through the two damaged fanshafts was feeding the fires and making any rescue impossible. The mine exploded at least another 20 times before it was permanently sealed.

The local newspaper reported two more explosions at the No. 9 the day after the initial blast, and a report from one of the state’s Capital-city newspapers noted that safety violations had been reported at the No. 9 previously, which if left unchecked, could have caused the explosions; no company official is quoted in response. Yet, despite the grim conditions, a Boston newspaper quoted Poundstone, described by one reporter as a stocky, 45-year-old engineer, as saying they would not give up hope, but that rescue efforts could not begin until it was certain the mine was safe to enter. The remark was in stark contrast to the first local newspaper report of the explosion, in which a West Virginia Department of Mines field inspector

was quoted as saying, “There’s not a chance in the world of getting them out.” It also contrasted sharply with what *The New York Times* reporter Ben A. Franklin noted in early coverage for that paper: “Privately, the officials said the miners’ chance of surviving this long were ‘very slim.’ ‘But we will not give up hope as long as any chance exists,’ a company executive said.

In his press briefings, Poundstone also noted the spread of the fire and the lethal carbon monoxide gas in the mine, but said that ventilation fans were still running in case any of the men were alive. He said it was “conceivable” that some of the men may have barricaded themselves in areas free of fire and smoke, but he was not confident. Worse still, a *New York Daily News* article the day before quoted the company’s public relations director as saying that the oxygen lifeline to the men had been cut off because the oxygen was feeding the fire. Therefore, while it was known the men had no oxygen, the language of continued hope and rescue intent was still being used.

In the Boston article, the president of the United Mine Workers of America labor union, Anthony Boyle, praised the company as being one of the better in terms of safety, and a local *West Virginia* newspaper carried the page 1 headline “Boyle Has Praise For Consol Safety.” However, federal Interior Secretary Stewart Udall was quoted in stories from Washington that he blamed the unions as well as the coal mining industry and government for not doing enough to prevent such disasters. Two days after the blast, *The New York Times* reported that “Consol PR man John Roberts,” a consultant who’d been hired by the company, dismissed a list of the mine’s safety violations, calling them “similar to the safety deficiencies frequently found in family automobiles upon state inspections.”

The morning following the disaster, Poundstone and other officials, including Consol’s president, John Corcoran, union leaders, and federal Bureau of Mines officials, gathered for the 10 a.m. press conference and answered questions “in the improvised news room at the rear of the … store.” The senior vice president of Continental Oil Co., which owned Consol, flew in from Chicago and gathered with other company officials, including its general counsel, at the nearby local corporate headquarters. Some officials gathered with families at a small nearby church where a short prayer service was held, and the company distributed its paychecks, as usual, for

---

the first 10 days of November to men who had survived and to the families of those trapped below.48

At one point during the first days, after an hour of questions and answers with the media, the company agreed to hold more frequent briefings and said that “officials competent to answer technical questions would be present to do so.”49 Meanwhile, The New York Times continued to cover the story and noted that for the first time, Poundstone’s news conference, still being conducted in the nearby store, was carried over a public address system, so the families of the missing men, could hear what was being said. During the hour-long news conference, Poundstone asserted the mine, although “moderately gassy” was a “safe mine.”50 Bureau of Mines officials, however, disagreed, stating that the gas levels in the mine had always been high.

Drills were brought in to take air samples and to try to determine if men were still alive three days after the blast, but some of the relatives claimed more drills were needed. They remained hopeful, as 21 men had emerged alive from the mine after the initial explosion; eight, four hours after the initial blast. However, another Consol vice president, Peter Ferretti, noted as well the air samples showing lethal carbon monoxide and dangerous methane levels in the area where the men had been trained to go in case of disaster.51 A federal official acknowledged “we are doing all we can.” The next day—now three days following the initial explosion—John Corcoran, Consol president, made the promise to relatives that “as long as there is any hope at all for the life of any man in that mine, I will not give authority” to seal it.52 This key message was repeated again and again: that no plans were then being made to seal the mine. The same day, the local newspaper reported that a microphone had been lowered into the mine but nothing was heard. “If there was anyone down there,” yet another “Consol official” said, “you would hear them.”53

The same day, the New York Knickerbocker News ran an article in which another coal company official, Alder Spotte, confirmed that “an explosion mixture of methane gas and coal dust” existed in the mine, which was creating subsequent explosions. Yet, he also said, “We still have hope we can get a rescue team in there without endangering their lives.” And “I don’t think much else can be done. We are open to suggestions. We have received letters and telegrams from many people, including scientists and visionaries. We are open to any suggestions and will evaluate all of them.”54

Another New York paper, the Albany Times-Union, reported that teams entered the smoldering mine, and the Consol president, John Corcoran, reported, “There was clear air in there. We must evaluate and see what else can be done.” He reported that he still has the “ray of hope that these men will be found alive.”55 In addition, he noted that that concrete stoppings, placed strategically in coal mines to control air flow direction, were in place and that was “a

49 Bill Evans, “More Briefings Are Scheduled After Flareup,” n.d.
good sign.”

It seemed as if he were wishing it were so. But, again, conflicting information was reported the following day in a West Virginia newspaper. It reported that Corcoran made the point at his afternoon news conference that “accumulated evidence indicates that fresh air from the main shaft is not getting back to where the trapped men may be.” He went on to say “We know the hopes are slim. Let’s face it. The question now is how much longer do we go before the judgment has to be made that based on all the evidence accumulated, that the very best job that can be done has been done. We’re not quite there yet.”

It seemed a distinct clue that a methodical attempt would be made to demonstrate Consol’s sincere effort and humanity, and that after the logical progression had been completed, it would be time to forego the operation and seal off the mine, extinguishing both the families’ hopes and the mine’s smoldering fires.

The company was still holding news conferences four days into the tragedy, as a UPI story noted that “some relatives of the trapped men ‘crashed’ a news briefing” conducted by Poundstone. However, no additional details are provided in that particular story. But the New York Times said that relatives shouted out that the mining company was not pressing rescue efforts aggressively enough, and that “one company PR spokesman told reporters this assertion was ‘not true.’ Another discounted the allegation as the reaction of ‘disgruntled people,’” and Poundstone walked out of the room without comment. When pressed, he simply said, “There’s a limit to what we can do. There are other factors,” but he refused to elaborate. One paper reported his departure by saying Poundstone had been near tears after being questioned aggressively by relatives before walking out; however, he later apologized and remained for the duration of a 2-1/2-hour session that evening.

The next day, another explosion occurred at the No. 9 mine.

More than a week after the blast, the local Fairmont Times reporter wrote that Corcoran “continued as chief spokesman for the panel directing the operations, including representatives of the company, the U.S. Bureau of Mine and the United Mine Workers of America. Although the Pittsburgh-based executive tried hard to be reassuring to the families of the trapped men . . . it was becoming increasingly obvious that the last shred of hope … had all but vanished from the group. . . .”

From the earliest hours of the disaster through its 10-day aftermath, multiple persons were speaking on behalf of the company and coal mining industry, and multiple mixed messages were being released and reported. These messages included the number of men trapped inside the mine, the men’s believed fate, the company’s actions in response to the fire, and Consol and the union’s safety records.

---

Ten days after the initial explosion, the mine was sealed with the 78 bodies inside. According to newspaper reports, the families had been called by the company and asked to gather at the nearby James Fork United Methodist Church. About 200 showed up in the church, which holds half that number. Consol’s president “walked slowly down the aisle, turned at the altar and spoke: ‘When I first came here a few days ago I made a promise that when the time came I would be with you. That time has come now.’” He told them that “every human effort to save the men had been made,” and that he could no longer jeopardize others’ lives. He said the only alternative now was to seal the mine. The church’s pastor then rose to say a prayer. Some reported they believed the company still had not done enough; the paper detailed the various steps the company had taken since the initial explosion: air samples, listening devices, rescue teams. It was reported that as relatives left the church, Consol workers could be seen in the distance, already sealing the mine.62

Consol’s Response Reviewed. As noted above, when viewed through modern-day best practice, the company made a number of crisis communication mistakes. The multiple spokespersons, mixed key messages that stirred doubt about corporate sincerity, and walking out of a press conference in which emotions ran high are a few. However, it also did some things well. As noted previously, it communicated early and often, and was responsive to requests for more technical experts to answer questions of media and family. Its highest-ranking officials from both Consol and its parent company were on site, answered questions, and showed compassion for the families in their words and by attending the church service in the community.

Disaster’s Aftermath. By May the following year, a new controversial mine safety bill was introduced in Congress by West Virginia Senator Jennings Randolph. It was noted in a New York Times article that the Consol president, who also headed the National Coal Association, had made suggestions to his friend, the Senator, about what should be included in the bill. Consumer and safety advocate Ralph Nader publicly denounced his suggestions as weakening the bill, which Corcoran denied.63 It was acknowledged in the article that Randolph’s proposed bill was considered the weakest among those proposed. What passed was the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969, which was regarded as “extremely tough” legislation, according to the New York Times, and it took effect the end of that year.64

Ten months after the mine was sealed, the company proceeded with plans to recover the miners’ bodies. A New York Times article noted that the company “felt a special obligation to make the attempt.” It said that the company’s reputation as being safe and progressive had been tarnished by the disaster, “but beyond that, there is still a fortune in virgin coal in No. 9, perhaps 30 to 40 years of production at 10,000 tons a day or more. The company feels its investment must be salvaged.”65 The article also noted that the company president had made “unusual personal efforts” to keep the families informed ahead of the press, sending hand-carried letters to each of the victims’ families and meeting privately with the widows and children of the miners before the recovery effort began.

However, the recovery effort between 1969 and 1971 yielded only 16 bodies, and left 62 interred. Three years after the blast, another miner was killed at the No. 9. He had participated in the rescue efforts to bring out the miners, and was driving a train full of coal out of the mine, when the overloaded train, legally without brakes, crashed. A *New York Times* article said in its report: “Asked about the new No. 9 casualty, a Consol public relations man commented, ‘Yeah, that’s the way it goes.’”  

In April 1978, the company decided to cease recovery efforts. It had spent 10 years and $11 million dollars in the effort, but the point had been reached when it was no longer “safe, reasonable, feasible, and practical” to continue, referring to a 1974 agreement that had been signed by the families, when each had received $10,000 in compensation. A Consol spokesman said, “We have long since gone well beyond that point” and that proceeding further would place the recovery workers’ lives in jeopardy, and noted they would build a memorial to the men on the site.  

By that time, all but 19 men’s bodies had been recovered. The first bodies had been recovered in October 1969, about 10 months after the initial explosion, and the last body to be found was retrieved on Dec. 2, 1977. A total of seventy-nine men were part of the recovery work force during those years, which operated around the clock, six days a week.

An Associated Press article at the time noted that “millions of tons of coal will remain unmined because of federal and state closure orders and a miners’ taboo against taking coal when the bodies of their brethren remain inside.” However, as Stewart would learn in her investigation, mining had continued during the recovery operation, as it was deemed by the company the most efficient way to cut through the mountain for the recovery work. In fact, she reports that 600 tons a day were still coming out of the No. 9. Still, this was merely 10 percent of what had been mined before the explosion, although company documents showed there were neighboring mines through which the company could get at No. 9’s reserves.

An Oct. 30, 1970, three-page news release listed the company contact as P. P. Ferretti, who was one of the vice presidents who had spoken on behalf of the company during the crisis. The release seems unconventional in that a full two of its three pages are direct quotes from the letter the company had sent to widows, noting specifics of the rescue operation. The last paragraph, also directly from the letter, is interesting as well. It says: “Although some people may believe that this work is being done only to produce coal, new entries provide the best means of getting there [to the bodies]. They will permit safer and more rapid means, or perhaps the ONLY [emphasis in original] method of reaching the inby working sections.”

A company news release on the disaster’s eighth anniversary noted that recovery operations were still ongoing on a 24-hour, six-day-a-week basis. It discussed the number of men employed in the recovery operation, the millions of dollars spent, and that a new communications process and training center had been created in part of the mine. Therefore,

---

70 “Consol No. 9 Recovery Operations as of 11/20/76, eighth anniversary,” undated.
as per good crisis communication protocol, the company did discuss changes to try to help improve the safety situation. However, no quote was included from the CEO or any other official regarding continued sympathy or empathy over the ongoing situation. The exact same release was used the following year, on the ninth anniversary, with only handwritten changes to the dates noted.71

Company documents show various plans to close the No. 9 mine, starting with handwritten meeting notes from December 1976 that resulted in a December 6, 1976, confidential interoffice memo. The memo was from Ferretti, in the Bluefield, W.Va., office, and noted the plan to announce the mine closure “on or about the last day of work before the first scheduled Miners’ Vacation period,” along with “simultaneously” scheduled meetings of “the various groups having interest in the activities.” It listed nine such groups, including union, state and federal officials; widows and parents of those not yet recovered; international labor officials; community and county leaders; West Virginia Governor Jay Rockefeller and the state Director of Mines; and Pittsburgh, Pa. media. The memo notes: “the Industrial Relations Department has been assigned the responsibility of communicating this announcement to the widows and parents” of those whose bodies have not yet been recovered and the United Mine Workers offices at the local, district and international levels. It states that the staff will be thoroughly briefed, “so that they may understand the making of the decision to close completely and permanently subject coal mine well enough to communicate it to others.” It mentioned a map of the mine showing the estimated locations of the remaining bodies and other “vital information necessary for briefings and meetings” would be developed. It ends with the following sentence: “Our plan provides that we will stand by on a continuous monitoring basis prepared to deal with any problem which may develop during the two-week Miners’ Vacation immediately following the announcement of the closing and continue the stand-by process into post-vacation period.”72

A Jan. 10, 1977 “confidential report” spelled out the three reasons why the mine wasn’t reopening: 1) it isn’t likely the last 23 men will be recovered; 2) water and dipping coal seams in the mine make it unlikely the cause of the disaster will ever be known; 3) the No. 9 isn’t needed to get the coal; it can be accessed from other Consol mines. However, in the final “approved letter to widows & families of No. 9 victims,” signed a year and a half later by then Consol Chairman and Chief Executive Officer R. E. Samples, the third reason was not stated. Instead, the letter’s third reason said, “further exposure of our miners to the hazardous work is unwarranted.”

The Jan. 10 plan also noted that the best time to announce the closing was some five months in the future, during the traditional Miners’ Vacation week of June 26, 1977, to minimize the chance of wildcat strikes. The memo notes current government activity and anti-mining sentiment, as well as the emotional implications of the announcement during the course of the mid-June UMWA elections. The document says: “In the day of universal living room participation in world tragedy through the electronic media, the Farmington No. 9 Disaster provided the Nation with a full and emotional course on the hazards of coal mining. Few would doubt that this disaster was the compelling catalyst for the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 and the Federal Black Lung Law incorporated therein. There is a real and present danger for another round of such attention….”73

71 “Consol No. 9 Recovery Operations as of 11/20/77, ninth anniversary,” undated.
72 Memo to T. J. Whyte from Peter P. Ferretti, Subject: Farmington No. 9, Dec. 6, 1976.
A seven-page confidential public relations plan on the closing of the mine also is among the documents reviewed in this study. It begins: “Much of the success in the closing of the No. 9 Mine is going to rest with how well the public, community and employee relations phases of the operation are carried out. Therefore, the following plan is recommended.”  

Nine key messages were outlined for the press release, which was noted as the best way to make the news announcement. In addition to the points noted earlier in this paper, it also stressed that the closing was to be permanent and that no more coal would be mined there. “Reasons should be given why it will no longer make a viable mine,” it continued. Another message was that “It will allow the families of the remaining 23 men to pursue normal lives once more.”

The plan notes:

It is inadvisable to contact editors of local papers in advance for editorial support because we would be ‘tipping our hand’ and news stories which ‘leaked out’ would be certain to result. We should be prepared, however to visit with local editors in particular, after the announcement but only in the event a controversy ensues. This action would be to seek editorial support of our position.

We should be prepared to answer all press follow-up questions as promptly and honestly as possible (and there may be many). We should also be prepared to ‘take it on the chin’ from the media as there will be many published criticisms of our action. However, these should last only a few days and should then fade away. These are far less a worry than possible wildcat strikes following the announcement.

The plan discusses that Consol officials will be in meetings at the time of the release. “By doing it otherwise … is to run the extreme risk of premature disclosure of our plans which could result in lopsided press stories, facts not right, the whole issue being blown clear out of proportion and Consol being on the defensive from the start.

“The key element to the success of this press relations plan … is surprise; our determination to do it and quickly; and the finality of the move. To do it any less quickly, or to let anyone (particularly in the government and union) know of our plans in advance of the press announcement is to run the extreme risk of having serious opposition to our move.”

The plan includes the importance of contacting someone in the families of the missing miners prior to the news release. It concludes with community relations activities, which it suggested be handled by the company’s local law firm and other hand-picked representatives of the region who were familiar with the “thought and community leaders” and who could be on hand to make visits to local officials, while communication staff are busy with the press and families.

Despite the detailed plan, the closing would not occur that June. A memo to Steve Young from Ralph Hatch agrees that the announcement should follow the UMWA international elections and that the announcement should be made simultaneously to the various groups or “perhaps the widows should be first.” He suggests that specific people work with specific

74 “Confidential Public Relations Plan—Closing of No. 9 Mine,” undated.
groups, including the press. But the author is concerned about legal issues and suggests that research first be conducted regarding the “[legislative] Act to conclusively determine our right to unilaterally decide to abandon the recovery work.” The author notes that the mine is under a federal order and he is uncertain if they can act without federal and/or state approval, and he fears great political pressure. He also notes water build-up in the mine as a safety concern for those involved in the sealing.

Two more detailed confidential inter-office memos propose two other closing dates. A March 29, 1978, memo recommends a March 31, 1978, announcement; an April 14, 1978, memo suggests an April 19 or 20 closing. The March 29 memo, which emanated from the Pittsburgh, Pa. office, notes the team who is responsible for each notification and 10 points to be “stressed in the release.” It also is covered in handwritten notes that include such details as “personal contact” regarding informing the families, with additional notes indicating delivery of a letter plus noting a letter is in the mail; and that telephone notification is OK for Mine Safety and Health Agency and state Department of Mines officials.

The April 14 memo also stated, “After thinking about putting the plan into action on the Friday following the Conoco Stockholders Meeting, I do not recommend this even with the threat that questions concerning the closing could arise at the meeting.” Board of directors meeting minutes show that as the last order of business, a brief statement was made that the mine was closing and that a memorial would be erected in memory of those lost.

The PR plan included a timeline of events, which began with activities for “D Day minus 1—Mail letters to survivors—indicating therein that in the agreement that they have signed they have said that they will not obstruct . . . and indicate that you would like for them to form a memorial committee.”

The timeline continues with the other steps, including letters to current No. 9 employees the next day, the personal visits to families, the meetings, the notification of West Virginia’s Congressional delegation, communication with coal trade associations, religious leaders, Consol officials, staff assigned to specific media contacts, and the needed documents. This latter list included the following specifics and key messages: “Fact sheet for Consol officials only; Letters to widows—close chapter, memorial committee, do not obstruct, meet; Press release; Radio beeper text; Letter to religious leaders and those who helped at closing final chapter book; Letter to Mesa [MESA]—intention to close; offer to meet and fulfill regs of law and inspection; Letter to W. Va. Dept.—ditto; Letter to W. Va. DNR—request for permit—safety considerations . . .; Letter to No. 9 Employees—have jobs.”

Assignments for the closing also are detailed in a “personal & confidential” document. It lists specific assignments, beginning April 14 and continues through the week. Notes include the need to prepare scripts for radio, TV and phone interviews, as well as background

---

75 Memo to Steve Young from Ralph Hatch, Dec. 8, 1976.
76 Interoffice Memo to B. R. Brown from H. A. Cochran, Subject: Closing of No. 9, March 29, 1978.
77 Memo to R. E. Samples and B. R. Brown from H. A. Cochran, Subject: Closing of No. 9 Mine, April 14, 1978.
information, to check the company’s legal obligations, and to develop correspondence for the families. Consol’s PR director, Hazlett Cochran, was responsible for the releases, scripts, fact sheets, recovery chronology update, assignments, last-minute checks, and the letter to the families.

In his recovery chronology fact sheet, he writes: “The reopening and subsequent recovery operations have been extremely difficult, time consuming and a tremendous waste of good manpower and money.” Families of the men who were recovered likely would have disagreed. Yet, it was noted in the plan that the fact sheets were intended for Consol officials only.

A copy of the release noted “positively not for release before noon, April 19,” and the plan called for them to be hand delivered to AP, UPI, a Charleston newspaper and three local newspapers around mid-morning. A “while you were away” note pad sheet indicated that by 11 a.m. that day, 16 of the 19 families had been notified—“only 1 problem so far!,” it said. Confidential meeting notes from April 19 also are among the papers that show 11 men present for one of the concurrent “community relations” meetings, this one where Consol officials notified the No. 9 Committee and Burdette Crowe, president of the local UMW district of the closing. The cryptic minutes show the meeting opened at 10:15 a.m. with the announcement by Consol Fairmont Vice President H. Eugene Mauck that recovery was to be discontinued and then the letters to the widows were read. The union representative noted that they would oppose “cutting into a burial of brothers.”

The union representative seemed upset that a meeting wasn’t called before of all the agencies to discuss the closing. A No. 9 miner stated he felt that a “divide and conquer tactic” had been used, which was met with silence by the Consol official conducting the meeting. Another No. 9 miner asked if the equipment to be removed was near the supervisor’s body; the Consol official denies knowing where the body is located. In its April 14 memo, it was noted that the body was believed to be in the vicinity, but to begin to search for it would commit to “searching another area and this type of thing could go on indefinitely.” The union official and others urged a meeting with the four agencies—a meeting not planned for, but that did occur, according to company records, on April 27.

The minutes for this meeting showed 28 people present: seven from Consol; three from MSHA; two from the local union district; six from the UMWA, including four representing its Safety Division and one, its Legal Department; three from the state Department of Mines; two widows; and a local reporter. A UMWA representative acted as the meeting’s “leader.” One of the widows and current No. 9 miners, among others, requested that the closing cease until a plea could be made to Consol superiors. Mauck noted that he summarized by saying that no new information had been raised that would change the company’s position; “that the Company had indeed given great concern over the facts, and especially of the 19 remaining bodies interred therein; that the loss of this great mine was a blow to the Community as well as the Company.”

80 To HEM, taken by jlm, “While you were away,” April 19, 1978.
objections raised at the meeting, but then reiterated the three key points outlined for continuing to close the mine—points which had been outlined as key messages nearly a year and a half earlier, in the Jan. 10, 1977, report. Consol does outline that it will seal off the area where it is believed victims’ bodies lie as a cemetery and note as much on mine maps, so that the area is never disturbed, and that a memorial to the men will be placed on the mine site, which Consol will maintain.

Another meeting took place May 24, 1978, at the mine, with 18 attending. All of the previous entities were represented at this meeting, with the exception of the reporter. Some of the men went into the mine and were shown the recovery locations. After conferring with state and federal inspectors and the widows, a union representative again asked that the recovery be continued. Mauck noted again that the decision was made carefully and that the process had become more dangerous. He notes in his meeting minutes: “The only bad statement was from [UMWA official] Dave Smith who challenged Consol’s ‘running record.’ That, ‘Consol hasn’t a good record of explosions and recovery of mines.’ I quickly responded that he was wrong and out of place with his statement; that he should know the facts before he accuses Consol. That was the last I heard from him. That was the end. Everyone left.” 84

One of the widows tried a final time to get the company to change its mind and wrote a heart-wrenching five-page letter that was received in the CEO’s office May 30, 1978. He replied via letter that the decision had been made, but that the Memorial Plan would soon be developed, and he hoped she would be part of or contribute to that Committee. Later, co-author Stewart learned, Mauck called to encourage her to apply for a job with the company. She didn’t; instead, she and other widows filed a lawsuit to try to prevent the sealing. 85

Local and national media noted the company’s decision, which it said was due to unsafe conditions and the unlikelihood of finding more bodies. 86 However, these reports also noted the UMWA representative’s dissenting viewpoint and that the widows vowed to fight on.

Discussion

Coombs and Holladay (2001) found that “an unfavorable relationship history or crisis history leads people to perceive the organization as having more responsibility for the crisis” (p. 335), but they note that in their experiment, at least, the effect was small. Instead, they concluded that “relationship history appears to be a more powerful predictor of organizational reputation than crisis history” (p. 335). “Relationship and crisis history can create a strong, negative velcro effect,” they say, in which a poor performance history or negative reputation attracts additional reputational damage (p. 335).

It is not known how this disaster affected the company that owned Consol, Continental Oil Company’s, stock prices nor what employee or public opinion polls would have found during the 10-year ordeal. However, it is clear that negative comments about company safety did come out during the days after the crisis and during the disaster hearings. National media continued, too, to write of problems with coal mine safety in the years since, and the Sago drama brought these fears—and continued mine safety violations—to national attention again. People involved with the industry also have long understood its dangers, and some seemed to exhibit a fatalistic outlook regarding it.

85 Bonnie Stewart, “Chapter20: Business is Business,” unpublished manuscript.
Regarding crisis communication scholarship, Coombs and Holladay found that an organization’s performance history, which includes both relationship history and crisis history, is closer to organizational reputation than to crisis responsibility in their crisis communication model of personal control → crisis responsibility → organizational reputation → potential supportive behavior. Today, Consol is active in its corporate social responsibility efforts and is highly visible and involved in the community. However, mining companies continue to face headlines for safety violations, and miners continue to die in mining accidents.\(^{87}\) It is known that associative crises can occur for companies whose industries come under fire. For example, an embezzlement scandal involving a well-known nonprofit can result in decreased trust and giving toward other nonprofits. Industries that face additional federal regulations as a result of such crises and lack of public faith may be particularly reactive in trying to ameliorate the crisis effect.

Given this associative crisis effect—the opposite of Coombs and Holladay’s reputational halo effect—it is suggested that the crisis model might be adapted to include such industry-wide crisis influences. Therefore, the performance history factors might be expanded to include not only organizational crisis history, but also industry crisis history as an influencing factor. Research that serves to better understand the associative industry crisis effects could make a broad contribution to the crisis communication literature.

Although the No. 9 coal mine disaster occurred more than 40 years ago, the case demonstrates that the company exhibited some of the suggested practices of modern crisis communication. These include communicating early and often with the media, of having the top official present to communicate and take responsibility, of expressing concern and sympathy, of being responsive to requests by media and families for more technical experts/spokespersons to be made available, and of publicly communicating steps being taken to help prevent future such crises.

However, when viewed through today’s filter, the company also performed poorly in a number of respects. For example, the company had multiple spokespersons at multiple levels throughout the company, and thus mixed messages of doom and hope for the trapped miners, of compassion and arrogance regarding the tragedy, and of sincerity and pretense were relayed through multiple media. The company’s strategic plan to close the mine nearly a decade later was conducted suddenly, without the benefit of two-way communication with the affected stakeholders. In fact, surprise was what the company hoped for to avoid the threat of organized protest and wildcat strikes. Therefore, trust was further compromised.

**Ethical Values.** When viewed through some of PRSA’s ethical values, we can gain yet another perspective of Consol’s actions regarding its No. 9 disaster. Specifically, PRSA believes that practitioners should

* protect and advance the free flow of accurate and truthful information.

However, Consol stated as one of its reasons for closing the mine that it was unlikely the remaining bodies would be located; however, internal documents indicate they believed they were close to another body when the men were ordered to stop their recovery efforts.

PRSA values also state that practitioners should

* foster informed decision making through open communication.

\(^{87}\) In the week before this presentation, an AP story noted that a coal mine supervisor of another company operating in West Virginia, Patriot Coal Company, told officials he was pressured to falsify mine safety forms by his supervisor. “--------,” *Dominion Post*, March 6, 2010, p. #.
Yet, Consol’s “surprise” announcement to cease recovery operations was strategically planned for 15 months in secret to minimize the opportunity for discussion and dissent. In addition, PRSA states that practitioners should
* avoid conflicts of interest.

Although not an issue of communications per se, the company’s conflict in wanting to mine coal to make money and in simultaneously being charged with the rescue operation eventually caused the company to cease its recovery before it was complete. According to Stewart’s research, the federal officials wanted the company to continue its work but were fearful it could not win in court if Consol tried to fight them. Although the company went to great expense to recover the bodies it did, it stopped when it became apparent that they could access the mine’s coal seams in other ways.

Lastly, PRSA’s value to
* work to strengthen the public’s trust in the profession could have been violated as well. Mixed messages, secret decisions, and surprise announcements do not tend to strengthen trust, and thus compromise professional, corporate, and this paper argues, industry reputation.

**Conclusions**

This case study provides a unique look at a nearly decade-long crisis as it was played out in the national media in its first days, then viewed behind the scenes as the company worked to bring the ongoing crisis to a close and avoid further labor, community, stockholder and regulatory complications. Acting in opposition to several of today’s professional PR values, the company’s actions violated trust, thus creating negative relationship histories, ripe for the velcro effect. Although the company fell short in various ways in terms of modern best crisis communication practice, it performed well in other aspects and clearly understood the power of strategic planning and messaging.

Finally, future crisis communication research should consider the power of associative crises and the influence of industry performance histories and reputations on organizational crisis response.
The First Look at Media Non-transparency Practices in the United States (abstract only)

Katerina Tsetsura  
University of Oklahoma

The goal of this research was to explore whether indirect payments and influences on the media exist in the United States, according to communication professionals who are members of the five international professional associations. Previous studies were conducted in countries with transitional economies, and no study investigated media non-transparency in North America. The research which examined perceived influences in current media relations found that surveyed American professionals (n=128) consider news sources ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.27$) the biggest influence on media relations practices. Corporate publisher/owner was only the second most-cited influence ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.20$). These results differed from previous findings in transitional countries, such as Poland, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine, when the biggest influences were corporate publishers, advertisers, and government.  

The findings of this study indicated that indirect payments and influences on media exist at different levels. While paid-for materials are not disguised as editorials and journalists usually state in their reports when they benefited from the provision of a product or service, news releases that are not newsworthy appear in trade publication in exchange for advertising ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .904$). Such practice (advertising sales departments influence decision of editors) was reported as most spread in the trade publications ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .977$), news Websites ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .863$), and local radio ($M = 3.09$, $SD = .888$). In addition, results showed that news sources put financial pressure on the certain types of media in the USA, particularly trade publications ($M = 3.23$, $SD = .937$), news Websites ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .962$), local daily newspapers ($M = 3.19$, $SD = .914$), local television ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .902$), and local radio ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .863$). Discussion of the findings and implications for research and practice are offered.
Ethicality of Media Opacity as a Predictor of Acceptance of Non-Transparent Media Practices among the Romanian Media Professionals (abstract only)

Katerina Tsetsura  
University of Oklahoma  
tsetsura@ou.edu

Anna Klyueva  
University of Oklahoma  
klyueva@ou.edu

This study continues the line of research on media transparency around the world. The goal was to identify the predictors of acceptance of non-transparent media practices in Romania. The data was collected from Romanian journalists and public relations professionals via online survey during the spring and summer of 2009 (N = 190). Findings showed that Romanian communication professionals consider acceptance of direct and indirect payments as a normal practice. At the same time, this practice is rarely regarded by Romanian communication professionals as professional, and even less so as ethical. A linear regression analysis demonstrated that the only predictor of acceptance of the non-transparent practices by media professionals was the perception of the non-transparent practices as ethical (B = .402, p < .001). Perceptions of the practice as normal or professional did not predict the acceptance of the practice. The results also showed the acceptance of this practice does not depend on age, years of experience, or gender of communication professionals.

This is a surprising finding, as previous research argued that the perception of this non-transparent practice as normal and professional should predict the acceptance of this practice by media professionals. However, the results of this study demonstrated that in order for non-transparent practices to be accepted, these practices first and foremost must be perceived as ethical. The results call for additional research on the predictors of the media non-transparent practices. Further evaluation of the current professional ethical standards in Romania and across the world will help to determine how perceptions of this media practice as ethical or non-ethical are formed. Results of this study suggest that the Romanian media professionals believe the standards of professional ethics must be established (M = 3.96, SD = 1.05), and regulated (M = 4.02, SD = .97) by professional organizations, such as Romanian Public Relations Association and the Romanian Center for Independent Journalism.
Applicability of the Generic Principles of Excellent Public Relations in a Different Cultural Context: The Case Study of Kyrgyzstan

Elira Turdubaeva, Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University, Kyrgyzstan

Abstract
This study relies on the generic principles of excellent public relations proposed by Vercic, L. A. Grunig, and J. E. Grunig (1996), which was developed based on the findings of what has come to be popularly known as the Excellence Project (J. E. Grunig, 1992) to address public relations management in Kyrgyzstan. Similar to the strategy followed by Sriramesh et. al. (2005), this study limits its scope to the four generic principles that are related to the contributions that public relations makes to strategic management:

1. Involvement of public relations in strategic management.
2. Empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition–direct reporting relationship.
3. Use of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations.
4. Knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical communication.

Data will be gathered through a self-administered survey, a series of qualitative interviews with public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan. Governmental, private, public, international and nongovernmental organizations with public relations departments will be sampled by this study. In the analysis and discussion, I shall also address how the unique socio-cultural and political system of Kyrgyzstan influences the practice of public relations. It is hoped that this study will add a different perspective to the body of knowledge helping to expand it.
Brief Introduction to Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, bordering Kazakhstan, China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The mountainous region of the Tian Shan covers over 80% of the country with the remainder made up of valleys and basins.

It is a multiethnic society with a varied linguistic, cultural, and religious heritage. Its population of 5.4 million, of those, 34.4% are under the age of 15 and 6.2% are over the age of 65. The country is rural: only about one-third of Kyrgyzstan's population live in urban areas. The nation's largest ethnic group are the Kyrgyz, a Turkic people, who comprise 69% of the population. Other ethnic groups include Russians (9.0%) concentrated in the north and Uzbeks (14.5%) living in the south (Statistics Committee of Kyrgyz Republic, 2009).

Kyrgyzstan is one of the two former Soviet republics in Central Asia to retain Russian as an official language (Kazakhstan is the other). It added the Kyrgyz language to become an officially bilingual country in September 1991. Generally, people understand and speak Russian all over the country, except for some remote mountain areas. Russian is the mother tongue of the majority of Bishkek dwellers, and most business and political affairs are carried out in this language. Until recently, Kyrgyz remained a language spoken at home and was rarely used during meetings or other events. State language of the country is Kyrgyz, but Russian is also a second official language in the country. The major religions are Islam (75%) and Russian Orthodox (20%) (Statistics Committee of Kyrgyz Republic, 2009). Islam in Kyrgyzstan is more of a cultural background than a devout daily practice for many.

Since 1991, when Kyrgyzstan became an independent republic, several political parties have appeared in the country. Tulip Revolution in March 2005 in Kyrgyzstan happened after the sporadic protests against widespread fraud during the parliamentary runoff elections in March 2005 erupted into calls for the government to resign. By March 24, 15,000 pro-opposition demonstrators called for the resignation of the president who had been ruling the country for 15 years and his regime in Bishkek. Protestors seized the presidential administration building, after which President Akayev left the country for Kazakhstan, and then Russia.

The second president of the country Kurmanbek Bakiyev was deposed in an April 7, 2010 uprising that left 86 people dead in the Kyrgyz capital. He fled to neighboring Kazakhstan and arrived in the Belarusian capital Minsk.

Kyrgyzstan has had economic difficulties following independence. Initially, these were a result of the breakup of the Soviet trading bloc and resulting loss of markets, which impeded the republic’s transition to a free market economy. Reforms led to Kyrgyzstan’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) on December 20, 1998. While economic performance has improved considerably in the last few years, and particularly since 1998, difficulties remain in securing adequate fiscal revenues and providing an adequate social safety net. The government and international financial institutions have been engaged in a comprehensive medium-term poverty reduction and economic growth strategy. Its GDP is composed of agriculture (29.8%), industry (19.7%) and services (50.6%) (2008 est.).

Characteristics of the country such as its border with China, its position as the “backyard” of Russia, as the strategic airbase of the USA, the hypothesis that it is
the most democratic country of the region, the country in transition, as the stock of energy source give importance to Kyrgyzstan and also public relations activities in this country (Tunca, 2009).

**Public Relations in Kyrgyzstan: History and Development**

The body of knowledge of public relations in post Soviet countries has developed only in the last decade (Ataol et.al., 2005). However, much of the published information has been predominantly limited to a few post Soviet countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (e.g., Clarke, 2000; Guth, 2000; Pocheptsov, 1998; Pocheptsov, 2001; Terry, 2005; Terry, 2003; Tsetsura, 2009). Kyrgyzstan which is in transition, has not yet been included in PR pedagogy.

Less than a handful of publications exist on the public relations profession in Kyrgyzstan (Ataol et. al., 2005; Turdubaeva, 2008; Tunca, 2008;). Although it was not based on a theoretical framework, Ataol et. al’s (2005) survey attempted to provide an analysis of the public relations model in Kyrgyzstan and concluded that public relations operating in Kyrgyzstan were not “advanced” (strategic) in their practices and practitioners in corporations operate almost exclusively in the technician role. Turdubaeva’s quantitative study (2009) was not based on a theoretical framework but served as the only comprehensive analysis of public relations in Kyrgyzstan. Clearly, there is a need for many more empirical studies from Kyrgyzstan based on strong theoretical underpinnings. It is hoped that such studies from a range of post Soviet nations will set a strong foundation for developing conceptual and theoretical frameworks indigenous to post Soviet countries, which should also be helpful in building global theories of public relations.

The genesis of public relations activities in Kyrgyzstan can be traced to the days immediately following the independence. Public campaigns such as “Privatization” and “Manas 1000” were launched to educate citizens on free market economy relations and on national history critical to young independent nation.

The history of public relations practice in public and private sector in the country according to the results of research about the structure of public relations in the country in 2005, goes far beyond its history in the private sector. (Ataol et.al, 2005: 133 – 134).

According to the results of recent research which was done on public relations agencies, departments and workers without making a differentiation between public and private in Kyrgyzstan (Turdubaeva, 2009); the main functions of public relations are media relations, building relations with publics, government relations. The offices of global corporations and international organizations are much larger buyers of communications expertise than local companies, who tend to rely on their own personal relationships with journalists, forged through money and entertaining.

The concept and definition of public relations in Kyrgyzstan is not understood by the executives of organizations, and even by practitioners. Public relations is perceived as advertisement, journalism, marketing, consulting and even logistics. There is not understanding of what PR manager does, that is why many people think that public relations activities are related with lying and impurity. And this is the
opinion first of all of journalists with whom PR practitioners work directly (Balakina, 2009).

Over the last decade, the public relations market in Kyrgyzstan has been formed. In 2009, there were 4 domestic public relations agencies in Kyrgyzstan. In the country there are few true PR agencies which offer full communication decisions and work in all directions of public relations. In other words which realize not only media relations but also lobby the interests of client companies in government, parliament, cooperate with NGOs, build relations with the clients, publics etc. of the company. As a rule, PR agencies limit their activities with writing information materials and sending them to media. Besides, organization of special events such as parties, celebrations, marketing actions is developing somehow. The program of such events as a rule is typical and fulfill only entertaining function such as ‘to eat, to drink, to dance’. As a rule, the organizers of such events do not put other tasks such as to improve corporate climate in the company, to contribute to the development of team work in the collective and to motivate the workers of the company (Balakina, 2009).

Business in Kyrgyzstan is not ready yet to work with publics. As public relations does not give quick results as expected by the executives of companies, they are not ready to pay for the air, as they think. They do not see the need to work with the publics. Rarely some executives know the terminology of “social responsibility”. That is why every time public relations practitioners have to convince this need. As far as the business in the country prefers to stay in the shadow, avoids journalists and follows the principle “as far, as close” public relations market will not develop (Balakina, 2009).

Companies in Kyrgyzstan except for international organizations and partly foreign companies just started to understand the importance of PR for promotion of products and services. That is why during the work with the representatives of small and average business, PR-agency has to convince the clients that the PR technologies are necessary for them (Temirbekova, 2008).

Flexi Communications, an integrated communications agency, conducted a research to define more effective ways of interaction between journalists and PR-services of state and commercial organizations. Particularly, the journalists’ methods of selecting topics, preparing information, the role of PR-services in this process, also the functions of PR-services which were demanded by journalists or were useful for them.

As for the rating of PR-services, PR-services of organizations and companies depend on “the general line” of their dominant coalitions and on the characteristics of the organizations. The result of research showed that until now the work of PR-services in state organizations remain the most demanded, and the activity of PR-services in business-structures are still perceived as the effort “to advertise” (Flexi Communications, 2009).

In Kyrgyzstan the government supported policies were implemented in order to create the reliability of banking of the country and to attract foreign investments to the country. This provided the implementation of public relations activities as a mean of government within the state mechanism. In other words the introduction of public relations techniques and methods to Kyrgyzstan happened within the framework of
government practices and today also it continues to be practiced within the different government projects (Tunca, 2009).

In Kyrgyzstan there are only a few professional companies who offer PR services. Different groups do PR; these can be advertisement agencies, information agencies and media itself. There are also definite single-specialists who offer their services in this sphere (Tregubova, 2008).

Most journalists treat PR practitioners with distrust. They think that PR practitioners exploit them, use their labor, name, reputation for their own interests. Most journalists perceive any information coming from PR practitioners as an advertisement. As a rule they send to PR practitioners their prices for commercial materials. They think that business companies have money and all the time they try to wheedle money out of them. They think that private companies can pay for it and why we must work with them for free (Flexi Communications Report on the Rating of PR services, 2009).

A look at the current state of public relations in Kazakhstan in its interconnection with culture of the Central Asian former Soviet republic offered by Valerie Terry, the independent researcher from London, can contribute dramatically to the understanding of the situation with public relations in Kyrgyzstan, which is also Central Asian former Soviet republic.

Researcher has revealed following distinctive trends: gate keeping in the country is a “monetary proposition;” journalists expect to be paid for positive mentions of an organization in any article and there is no message quality control; at the same time, “Kazakhstanis are not dummies” and can recognize propaganda (Terry, 2005, p. 34).

Lihosherstova from American University also studied this issue in her diploma work; Advertising copies affect people more than public relations articles, because third party endorsement fails in credibility arousal and because ads use clear, straight, understandable language, when the public relations articles present the message latently, reducing reader comprehension ability (Lihosherstova, 2007).

To evaluate the extent of excellent public relations management practiced in Kyrgyzstan, the following research questions were designed for this study:

RQ1: To what extent are public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan involved in the strategic management of the organization, and do they manage their public relations programs strategically?
RQ2: What kinds of a reporting relationship do public relations departments in Kyrgyzstan have with the dominant coalition and senior management?
RQ3: How effective are J. E. Grunig and Hunt’s original four models (press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) of public relations in describing public relations activities in Kyrgyzstan?
RQ4: What is the extent of public relations knowledge in public relations departments in Kyrgyzstan?
**Methodology**

Data were gathered through a self-administered survey, a series of qualitative interviews. Because this study used the Excellence Project as the foundation, the original survey questionnaire from the project (relevant to the 4 research questions) was used. The survey was conducted using snowball sampling. The sample consisted of practitioners (chief executive officers [CEOs], heads of public relations, senior executives, and junior executives involved in public relations activities) across four types of organizations: public relations agencies, in-house public relations departments of corporations, government ministries, and nonprofit organizations. A total of 80 questionnaires were sent out through e-mail, and 64 were returned for a response rate of 80%. Of the returned questionnaires, 28 from corporations, 14 from nonprofit organizations, 13 from international organizations, 7 from government ministries and 4 were from public relations agencies.

Snowball sampling is preferred for several reasons. First, there are no directories listing all organizations with a public relations or communications function. There is no local professional association in Kyrgyzstan. Second, it is impossible to get a complete listing of every public relations practitioner in Kyrgyzstan. Finally, many professionals conducting public relations functions are not listed as public relations practitioners because they work in departments such as marketing, advertisement or press services.

In addition to the survey, in-depth interviews based on an interview protocol developed by Sriramesh et. al. (2005) (see Appendix) were conducted with a convenience sample of 23 public relations practitioners; some of whom were CEOs and senior and junior executives. 9 of these were from corporations, 3 from government ministries, 3 from nonprofit organizations, 3 from international organizations and 3 from public relations agencies. Some interviewees also participated in the survey. Follow-up questions were asked where necessary. As Russian is one of two official languages of Kyrgyzstan and the language of all business dealings including public relations, Russian was used for gathering data.

The questions aimed to clarify the way public relations is practiced in organizations based on the survey. They also sought to probe and uncover unique local characteristics. The topics included the type of activities carried out by public relations departments, the range of communication activities, practitioners’ education and training background, opinions on the reputation of the profession in Kyrgyzstan, and practitioners’ views on the impact of societal culture, political structure, and economic system on public relations practices in the country. To facilitate greater openness, all interviewees were assured that they would not be identified in any reports emanating from the interviews.

The interviews probed specific aspects of public relations phenomena and helped identify discrepancies found through the quantitative data. Each interview session lasted approximately 1 hr, and interviews were recorded. All taped interviews were transcribed for further analysis. The findings from these interviews as well as the survey were analyzed in answering the research questions.
Findings and Discussion

The respondents to the questionnaire varied in age, experience, ethnicity, and job descriptions. Women outnumbered men 65% to 35% indicating that the industry in Kyrgyzstan is also skewed toward women similar to the findings from many studies in the United States and other parts of the world. The findings confirmed the results of an earlier survey of 34 public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan (Turdubaeva, 2009) that also found that 59% of respondents were women. The majority (74%) were between 26 to 30 years of age. An equal proportion of respondents had journalism and economics education each 25%, whereas only 6% of them had education in public relations. The mode for practitioners’ experience in public relations department of the given organization was 1 to 3 years.

RQ1: INVOLVEMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The findings showed that the majority of public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan do not contribute to strategic management. They engage mostly in routine operations focusing on technical functions. Practitioners contributed mainly to routine operations \( (M = 4.28) \) such as developing and maintaining employee communication, community relations, or media relations (see Table 1).

The item that measured the contribution of the public relations professional to responding to major social issues (e.g., crisis, layoffs, fee hikes etc) displayed the lowest mean \( (3.31, \text{SD} = 1.18) \) showing that public relations professionals do not contribute to responding to major social issues. These practitioners were only advising the top management on how to deal with the media and only on media relations matters.

Although practitioners reported in their responses to the self-administered questionnaires that they conducted research that could be useful to organizational decision making \( (M = 4.07, \text{SD} = 1.02) \), the findings from the in-depth interviews revealed that they do not use research in public relations management because of the small budgets, lack of research skills and time as well as a general lack of understanding of the value of research to strategic public relations and communications management. Two public relations practitioners stated the following:

We conduct mostly informal research. Unfortunately our practitioners do not know the methods of research; they have just started to learn perception analysis. After the program we conduct mostly informal research, for example content analysis, reviews, but they are not systematized. Because it needs money and human resources.

Our purpose is to influence decision makers in government; consequently we use popular state newspaper to disseminate our messages. As for the population, we disseminate our own newspaper without using state media. We
do not know how effective it is, because we do not conduct evaluation research. It also demands huge money.

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Kyrgyzstan Public Relations Practitioners’ Involvement in Strategic Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We contribute to strategic planning.</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We contribute in responding to major social issues (e.g., crisis, layoffs, fee hikes etc).</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We contribute to major initiatives (e.g., mergers, acquisitions, new movements in markets, launch of new products/services, etc.).</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We contribute in routine operations (e.g., development and maintenance of employee communication, community relations or media relations program).</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We conduct formal research (e.g., from news clippings, Internet) for use in decision making.</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We conduct informal research (e.g., informal interviews) for use in decision making.</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We help our management to develop goals and objectives in organizational missions and policies.</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We help management to scan the environment and identify issues that may be potential threats or opportunities.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We help management to identify both internal and external strategic publics that affect the organizational mission and goals.</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have contacts with important publics (e.g., analysts, economists, industry experts, government officials) outside the organization.</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The management seeks our opinion in decision making or planning.</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The management values our judgment in decision making.</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 64. All items are measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), to 5 (strongly agree).

Interview findings showed that the research that was done by the sample organizations was mostly informal, getting information from key publics such as customers. For many public relations departments, the research conducted was limited to press clippings. Although public relations is generally practiced on a tactical rather than strategic level in Kyrgyzstan, practitioners working in international organizations such as UNDP, UNICEF were found to be more likely to contribute to strategic management than those from local organizations.
RQ2: EMPOWERMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS–DIRECT REPORTING RELATIONSHIP IN KYRGYZSTAN

The findings revealed that the organizations in Kyrgyzstan do not empower public relations managers enough by including them in the dominant coalition. Findings from qualitative data indicated that public relations practitioners were not included in the dominant coalition. Practitioners think that the reason for this could be that members of top management lack an understanding of the strategic value of public relations. Findings from interviews showed that the dominant coalition expected only media relations from them. The corporate communications managers of companies and organizations gave the following explanations:

Another task of our PR department is to convince the executives that the good communication is a good business. It is a challenge of our department. Our dominant coalitions do not understand yet the strategic role of communications. We are on the upper middle level management, not top management.

It is a key problem of PR in our country when the executives do not know what they expect from PR specialists except for media relations.

Media relations in our country are a main direction of PR. It is the main characteristic of PR market in our country.

In most organizations in Kyrgyzstan, public relations is understood to be only media relations. And the public is understood to be the public of the media.

The interviewees thought that the members of the dominant coalition did not empower public relations to the extent of seeking counsel in setting up organizational policies. Interviewees reported that the top management lacked an understanding of the strategic role of the profession as stated by these practitioners:

Managers in our country do not understand the importance of reputation, that the reputation brings benefit to them. They do not make a connection of their reputation and their benefit. For them public relations is limited to the mentioning in a newspaper or TV. They do not believe that PR is a strategically planned activity. They think ‘For what I am paying money?’

There is no status of PR specialists in organizations. For example, when I offered to my comrades who work in a private company to hire somebody who would promote their company, they said ‘We will hire a PR woman’. They think that a glamour girl with long legs will come and everything will be ok. In other words, the status is like this, e.g. ‘I will hire a secretary’.
Press services of state ministries which do PR activities (there are no PR departments in all state ministries and agencies), were not empowered as well as was stated by the following press service director:

Structures of these services remained the same as they were in the middle of 1990s when press services were like “a fifth leg” e.g. “journalists came, go and look at them, and do not give out important information to them”. That is why they were powerless and did not make any image and did not fulfill any functions. Unfortunately they have the same status today.

According to practitioners, the budget allocated to public relations is lower compared to advertising and marketing because organizations do not see the results of public relations. Communications managers of local companies stated:

The budget of our department is $30,000, while the budget of marketing department is $1 million. Local companies mostly prefer to hire marketing specialists in order to increase their profits.

Most executives do not want to spend money on PR, because the results of PR activities are not seen immediately. It takes certain period of time to feel the results of PR activities. As a rule the business wants immediate results. In terms of PR they are paying for the air for some time. As for the measuring PR activities, most practitioners in our country count published articles about the organization and say ‘look we have got 15 published materials for free, if you had paid for this, it would cost you this money’.

The difficulties in our work is a small budget, expectation of more free publications and it does not matter for them what quality and direction are these publications, and the lack of strategic planning.

Another practitioner from government organization indicated to the lack of empowerment by stating that the top management did not trust in the professionalism of the practitioners. She stated this problem as following:

Our top management, who hire PR people think that they know everything themselves. They understand that they should not behave this way but they think that they are specialists. For example you are hired and you start working they say to you “No, you should do this way and not that way”. Then the question arises “Why you need me then if you know everything yourself?” In other words they begin redoing everything themselves. They begin breaking the scheme. Normally they should accept the scheme of PR campaign. PR is a profession like the profession of a musician. And if all people start playing one piano together, you cannot play this way. PR specialist knows his/her profession more. The only problem of PR professionals in our country is that their heads start dictating them. Normally they should accept PR strategy, of
course they can add or change something, but they start redoing your plans. In this case PR people cannot get the responsibility for the results.

Press services of governmental ministries which fulfill the functions of PR practitioners also have small budgets and some of them even do not have budgets. The head of the press service of the Ministry of Health stated the following:

The main difficulty is that, our press service is not being financed by the Ministry for two and a half months. We are not getting our salaries, we have to give back this office to the Ministry, and it has not given us another office. For seven years of our work USAID has been supporting us technically, materially, financially. The Ministry of Health did not give us anything. As a result now we are out boarded. Everybody in the Ministry knows that our work is important and that they need us, but they have been used to the fact that our department is financed by ‘some foreign uncles’. It is the tendency in all press services of state Ministries, of my colleagues. Because there is no resources to support them. Press service is an expensive department; they need transport, technical equipment, salary etc. Today an experienced PR specialist does not go to work to state organization where they are paid $100. They go to work at private and media sector where they are paid between $400-$500. And nobody will come to work to the Ministry of Health where the salary is about $150-$200. Press services in government organizations do not have any status, technical and material support. That is why they are supported by international organizations. Educational trainings is not a problem, because most institutions (international, nongovernmental) that are for open society and free information organize educational trainings, seminars for the workers of press services. Most press services do not have resources, technical and material support and some of them have such problems as the management does not understand that they need press services. If the head of governmental organization understands the necessity of press service, it exists. We also have been existed thanks to the political will of the deputy Minister. She created this service and gave this office room. She has been paying energy and heating expenses. Now she does not work in the Ministry and we are out boarded. Now we are working only because of our enthusiasm. Because we have built this bridge between the public and the Ministry and we do not want to lose it. Now the Ministry is searching for budget to support to us.

The government ministries in Kyrgyzstan did not know that it was their duty to inform publics about their activities and give the public true information. This was explained by the head of the Institute of Policy and Development who conducted trainings for the workers of press services of the government Ministries which was sponsored by International Financial Corporation as following:

When the law on the “Access to information” was signed in December 2005 there occurred a problem that the local government organs did not understand the necessity to disclose the information to the public. That the information was such a resource like water and electricity for the public. With the help of
USAID conducted mass trainings for the heads and workers of press services and other departments of local government organs, also with the representatives of communities on working with journalists and publics in order to explain them that they are not against each other as it was before, but they are counterparts and can work jointly in order to solve the local problems in their regions. Slowly we began observing progress in the cooperation of these two sides. Some local mayors implemented acquired knowledge in fundraising activities.

Respondents to this study also mentioned that the corruption in the country influences the practice of public relations. It was expressed by the following practitioner this way:

In Kyrgyzstan PR will develop if the competition among companies develops. Otherwise, business will decide its problems with the help of money. Corruption in political system is also closely related to the problems of PR when people think ‘Why should I spend money on PR specialist if I can decide my problems (to get license, to be elected to the office) with bribery’. Here work other methods. With these tendencies, the PR in our country will work differently in the future. Excellence model may work in our country in the future, but it will be different from the West. Western PR methods work in our country for 50%. Everything should be adapted to local environment. All methods should be adapted even the methods of neighboring Kazakhstan. Even the format of press release like inverted pyramid must be adapted. Added value of every PR professional must be his/her own.

The data from the interviews showed that organizations have hierarchical and closed systems and they do not want to share information with publics. It may be the legacy of the institutionalization in the Soviet system where the government did not need press services and public relations departments in order to work with their publics.

RQ3: THE MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN KYRGYZSTAN

Data revealed that public relations practice in Kyrgyzstan is largely defined by the press-agentry model. About 80% of the respondents indicated that the main purpose of public relations was to promote their organization. Many practitioners stated that they saw the role of public relations as building a favorable “image” of the organization through the dissemination of positive information to the media and other publics as evident in a remark by three practitioners that was typical of many respondents:
Purpose of PR is to deliver our corporate culture to the existing and potential clients.

The purpose of PR is to effectively promote the aims, missions and tasks of our organization.

PR is a strategic and tactical weapon because it gives the opportunity to manage the information and audience. The most important aim is to form public opinion about definite ideology in order to lead the auditory in the desired direction. In no case it is neither propaganda nor the manipulation, it is forming a public opinion.

In the interviews, most practitioners also mentioned that their public relations duties usually revolved around writing press releases, coordinating events, conducting media relations, handling customer complaints, and tasks that helped build a positive image of their organization. These public relations activities are oriented toward the press-agentry model. As stated earlier, most practitioners in Kyrgyzstan do not engage in formative and evaluative research, another indicator that the two-way models are not used in the country. The primary forms of evaluation were tracking the number of people who use a product or attend an event ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.92$) and maintaining press clippings ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.92$) both of which are indicative of the press-agentry model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Means and Standard Deviations of Public Relations Models in Kyrgyzstan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>$M$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press agency/publicity model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of public relations in my company is to get publicity for my organization.</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our public relations unit disseminates only favorable information and avoids disclosing negative information to the media.</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We stage events, tours, and open houses.</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We hold banquets.</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We determine how successful a program is from the number of people who attend an event or use our products/services.</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We determine how successful a program is based on the number of media clippings generated.</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is the view of my organization that public relations should only act as a liaison between the organization and the media.</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public information model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of public relations in my company is to disseminate neutral and accurate information, rather than serve as an advocate for the organization or a mediator between management and publics.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is the view of my organization that the emphasis of public relations is placed on public service and social responsibility.</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is the view of my organization to make private economic gain and special interests subordinate to the public good. 2.28 1.07

Two-way asymmetrical model
Before starting a public relations program, we conduct attitude surveys or other informal research to ensure that an organization’s policies will be implemented in ways its publics will most likely accept. 3.73 0.92
Before starting a public relations program, we conduct research to determine how the public views the organization and how they might change. 3.67 0.83
After a public relations program, we perform evaluation to see how effective the organization has been in changing peoples’ attitudes. 3.76 0.93
The purpose of public relations in my organization is to persuade publics to behave as the organization wants them to behave. 2.84 1.07

Two-way symmetrical model
Before starting a public relations program, we conduct surveys or other informal research to find out how much management and publics understand each other. 3.46 0.90
Before starting a public relations program, we seek the opinions of those groups or individuals who will be affected by the decision or policy. 3.68 0.87
The purpose of public relations in my organization is to develop mutual understanding between the management of the organization and publics the organization affects. 4.00 0.85
The purpose of public relations in my organization is to change the attitudes of management as much as it is to change the attitudes and behaviors of our publics. 3.53 1.00
It is the view of my organization that public relations should provide mediation for the organization—to help management and publics negotiate conflict. 3.51 1.02
We comply to an enforceable code of ethics and standards of performance including the disciplinary action of those who deviate from accepted behavior. 3.82 0.96

Note. N = 64. All items are measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), to 5 (strongly agree).

Furthermore, in the interviews, most practitioners disclosed that the most frequently used method of evaluating a public relations program was by measuring the volume and quality of press coverage. One practitioner said the following:

As for the evaluation of PR activities, we only count media clippings and their tone (neutral, negative, positive), but other methods of evaluating our activities we do not use, because we do not know them. We also count how many people attended the event, got the information and also phone calls.
The management demands the number of media coverage from us. May be they are right, but it should come with the word of caution. Quantity does not translate into quality easily.

The work of qualified PR specialist is first of all a psychology. Because public relations is a tactical tool. The evidence of the effectiveness of the cooperation of the client and public relations specialist is the media coverage of the activity of the client in a necessary angle.

The data indicated that the press agentry model was the most predominant model practiced in government ministries. As was mentioned earlier, the dominant coalitions in government ministries do not understand the importance and necessity of PR. It was expressed by the head of press service of one Ministry in the following way:

Our government machine is stuck in its own laws, norms and bylaws created by themselves against themselves. Government organizations are busy with their routine works and bureaucracy. Everything depends on the head of the organizations. If the head understands what is PR they use it. The managers of most organizations do not understand that PR service is important for the organization; they do not know the aim of PR department. They have narrow understanding of what a PR specialist do should. They think that PR specialists should promote not the organization but the heads of organizations (Ministers, directors etc.) and that is all.

Head of the Institute of Policy and Development in the country explained it this way:

The difficulties of public relations practitioners on the level of organizations differ according to the dominant coalitions’ understanding of public relations. In Kyrgyzstan there are three types of dominant coalitions in relation to public relations. The first type is the ones who do not understand what is public relations at all and try not to deal with it. The second type is the ones who understand very well what public relations is and have public relations departments where professional practitioners work. And the third type is the ones who think that ‘I am a public relations manager for myself’. The organizations of this type of dominant coalitions do not have an image. They make an image for themselves but not for the organization, because they do not have public relations departments.

Head of press service of City Hall (Mériya) stated their duties this way:

We do informational guiding. PR is doing events. Our mayor is doing the event. He is doing and we only provide him media coverage. We do not do PR; we do only informational guiding to him. He decides what to do. He knows all problems himself. There is no need to hire experts or professionals in order to determine problems. He already knows all problems of the city and he is solving them.
Practitioners used the personal influence model to a large extent when they conducted public relations.

The personal influence model is a *quid pro quo* relationship between the practitioner and key publics such as journalists, editors, government legislators, and tax officials (Sriramesh, 1992).

Most respondents for this study reported that they made it a point to have personal friendships with important publics such as analysts, economists, industry experts, and government officials, which in turn contributed highly to their success as strategic managers ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.89$). The use of *personal influence model* was most apparent in the area of media relations. Most interviewees articulated that good relations with representatives of the media are especially critical as practitioners could persuade these gatekeepers to generate publicity favorable to their organizations. According to practitioners, gift giving, media luncheons, cocktail receptions, and sponsored trips are some examples of building good relationships with the media and other stakeholders. A practitioner from the nonprofit sector said:

In Kyrgyzstan personal contacts play important role in any type of communication with audiences. For example I have found out in my experience that it works better if you build friendships with journalists and ‘drink tea’ with them, than if you officially demand from them something on the level of organizations. I have learnt that without this, that it is not possible, after so many years. I know for sure that if a journalist has not seen me before, and we have not talked before or went somewhere with him/her, my press release will not be published. They will not publish the PR materials of the people whom they have never seen before and whom they do not know in person.

Interpersonal relations and communication plays a huge role in our country, because we are an Asian country. It is our mentality that we should encourage journalists with money, too.

There is a tendency that the executives of companies are recognizing the importance of PR. But still interpersonal relations are important. The executive of the company is the face of the company. The portrait of the executive is recognized in the perception of the clients. He/she is accepted or not by the clients. For example, in case of political parties: we say party and we mean Lenin. Or we say Lenin and we mean Lenin. The phenomenon of personality is very important in Kyrgyzstan. It is one of the most important postulates of building relations. The ‘word of mouth’ always has been effective in our country.

The head of a local PR agency also mentioned the following: ‘The key factors of the success of PR agencies in Kyrgyzstan are the “phenomenon of personality” and “acquired relationships”.'
The importance of having good personal relationships with journalists was expressed by the head of PR department of Communications Agency in the country. She explained it as following:

Most PR practitioners in our country are ex journalists. I am also ex journalists and it easy for me to work with journalists, because I used to work with them before and they know me. Why most journalists do not like PR practitioners? Because they think that PR practitioners press on them, that they do not have to do what they want from them. They do not like when somebody who is alien teaches them how to write and what to write, they think that this is not their obligation to write what PR practitioners send to them.

Most respondents expressed that the value of public relations to the organization was not well understood by the dominant coalitions. The following statement explains it this way:

Almost all public relations activities in our country are being implemented on a very primitive level, by ‘fed journalists’ or by the personal preference of the director, e.g. ‘he/she likes this or that singer, or children’s house, or street in her/his village’. The concept of such called ‘social partnership’ does not exist in the country. People perceive public relations not as a tool that can add to the value of organization, but as a cosmetic procedure. Business must understand that public relations is not like ‘looking at the mirror, and admiring themselves how they are beautiful’, but a component of adding value to the organization.

All respondents for this study reported that they pay for the media coverage, for the mentioning the name of the organization. This finding is consistent with the finding of Terry’s research (2005) in Kazakstan. She revealed that ‘journalists expect to be paid for positive mentions of an organization in any article’. The same finding was revealed by this study through qualitative interviews where practitioners told that they not only pay money but also encourage journalists through gift-giving and other ways. This practice was expressed by these practitioners as following:

As for the paid PR articles, the law on advertisement obliges editors to put a mark on advertisement and PR publications if it is paid in order not to lie to the reader. It is practiced all over the world. However in our country most companies pay in addition in order not to put this mark. However they are still lying to the reader even if they do not put this mark. The true PR articles do not need to be paid, because they are interesting and useful for the public and the name of the company is mentioned in the article in a positive way. In our country the most primitive PR articles are written, where the companies are praised. They are not interesting to read.

The Head of press service of the government Ministry explained the practice of paid PR in the country in this way:
PR can be open and hidden. It is better to write that it is PR article and to put a mark on it in newspapers or in any media instead of hiding it. I think that it is better to pay for this publication or coverage and openly say that it is PR.

The head of the Institute of Policy and Development in Kyrgyzstan explained this practice the following way:

As for the media relations, most editors of mass media do not have an understanding of what is public relations and advertising. They think that every mentioning of the name of organization must be paid. Most editors were appointed during Soviet time and there are few young editors. They were brought up during Soviet time and they have totally different understanding of journalism and even if they express that they understand market economy, deep in their souls they reject it. May be some of them have learned how to earn money, but their ideological nostalgia of their youth years does not give them to accept this. That is why they do not like market economy and there is a lack of materials about economy in most media in the country.

Public Relations manager of the well known local corporation explained the paid PR practice this way:

Most PR practitioners even do not know the difference of PR and advertisement. Paid PR is one of the tools. The easiest way is to pay to a journalist and he/she writes and publishes it and you go to the executive and say that this is your work. However it can be done without money by creating informational reason to your article to get publicity. In the West it is practiced this way, publicity is practiced widely. Because their media are different from ours. Our media are surviving. Law on advertisement in our country does not allow publicity. In the West it is easier for a PR practitioner to get publicity by organizing interesting events. It is difficult in our country to do this, because the people immediately begin to search for the benefit. Even if you organize a charitable work and give out millions of dollars, nobody writes about this event for free, except for if this is a public figure or a politician who is organizing this event. Everything is paid. It is rude, but it is practiced in our country. I also pay for journalists to get published. The price is agreed depending on the price list and your personal contact with the journalist.

Another practitioner who works at the PR department of a leading Bank in Kyrgyzstan stated the following:

Journalists as a rule do not see us as the carriers of valuable information. They perceive us as the source of advertising money. Most newspapers have such a practice when journalist writes paid PR material they give him/her some percent of this money.

She continued explaining the difficulties in building media relations as a representative of a commercial bank this way:
Another difficulty is a lack of sectored media, in our country media is not divided into sectors. Media is universal in our country. And it is very difficult to explain the journalist how financial organizations like banks operate because this journalist writes about sports, criminal, social problems at the same time. The other important difficulty in our work is the inability of the journalists to distinguish business information from the advertisement. For example, when I send a newspaper a press release, advertisement department of this newspaper calls me and they think that my press release is advertisement and consequently it should be paid. They think that our department is advertising department. This lack of distinguishing PR and Advertisement in the minds of journalists is the most important barrier in the development of PR in our country. In our country it is still considered to be a commercial information and every press release where there is mentioned a brand is perceived to be advertisement. It depends on the type of the organization, too. Banks are usually associated with finance and money that is why we are expected to pay for media coverages, but if you work for government organization like City Hall for example, it is easier to get free media coverage because they are a government organization.

PR practitioner who works for the press service in City Hall of Bishkek (the capital of Kyrgyzstan) expressed her opinion concerning the paid PR in this way:

As for the paid publications, you can get free publications if you write it intelligently and you do not have to pay for it. PR specialist exists for this reason. In our country most people think that hiring a PR specialist is expensive, however if this is a professional practitioner he/she cheapens your publication and you do not have to pay for the publications. In order to get free publications you have to organize special events. Journalists write for free about any event. If you want to write just about yourself (your organization), about “how beautiful you are (your organization)”, then you have to pay 72 000 soms ($1600) for one strip in a popular newspaper in Kyrgyzstan.

This study also revealed through qualitative interviews that, in the country public relations practice is perceived to be manipulation or propaganda as stated below:

It may be a legacy of the Soviet past which was propagandistic where most people adored neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) where it is possible to lie and swindle everybody. If you do PR activity that they like to call ‘black PR’ or not ‘black’, just PR, but ‘somewhere I have lied to you’, e.g. here exists not public information model, but a persuasion model where ‘it is not important am I right or not, my task is to persuade you’. May be not to persuade negatively, but nevertheless by not disclosing full information’.

Russian PR technologies were preferred by local PR practitioners more than Western PR techniques. It was explained by the following practitioner who also conducted tranings on public relations for businessmen in the country this way:
Russian public relations methods and technologies work in Kyrgyzstan. For example, take Anton Vuyma’s book ‘Black PR: methods of protection and attacking’. There are a lot of methods of public relations. I have taken from this book a lot of methods when preparing training for businessmen. I do not know the theory of public relations, but I think that PR is a tool; it is a set of tools and technologies. But if you are comparing us with the West, then there are big differences. The system of interactions is different. Lying is considered to be a gallantry in our country, and in the West it is considered to be meanness. Public relations is related to the moral values of the society. As far as the morals are different, consequently the public relations will be very different. In western countries the corporate management, financial transparency, including external directors to the management is developed. One of the main components of corporate management is public relations which is based on the openness and truthfulness and on the 'social responsibility' of business. Here in Kyrgyzstan may be somebody have heard about 'social responsibility' of business, but few understand it. One of the problems of big business and public relations activities in our country is the lack of 'social partnership' projects. Except for the extortion by the government, when with the order method the government obliges the business sector to give money for social events, but it is not possible to call this neither a 'social partnership', nor public relations.

The head of PR department of Communications Agency in Kyrgyzstan expressed her opinion about manipulation this way:

The journalists and the public think that PR practitioners are liars that they use people and think only about the interests of their organizations. Yes, PR practitioners sometimes lie or hide information; I think that it is a part of our profession.

Although as a whole the public relations activities in Kyrgyzstan can be categorized using J. E. Grunig and Hunt’s models of public relations, the models do not fully capture the spectrum of public relations activities in the republic. Personal influence model can be used in order to define the local practice in the country.

**RQ4: KNOWLEDGE POTENTIAL OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS IN KYRGYZSTAN**

The knowledge potential for practicing strategic public relations was relatively low. As a result, public relations practitioners in Kyrgyzstan enact the technician role more often than the managerial role. As far as the technician role was concerned, practitioners in the sample had higher levels of skills and knowledge in coordinating press conferences ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.81$), understanding the news value of journalists ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.94$) and producing communication materials such as writing press releases and other in-house publications ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.03$) as reflected in the quantitative data displayed in Table 3.
## TABLE 3
Knowledge Potential of Public Relations Practitioners in Kyrgyzstan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge potential for technician role</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce communication materials</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate a press conference</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convince a reporter to give publicity to an organization</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand the news value of journalists</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge potential for managerial role</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct research to segment publics</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct evaluation research</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a departmental budget</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop strategies for solving public relations and communication problems</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help management understand the opinions of particular publics</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help management scan the environment and identify issues that may be</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potential threats or opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiate with an activist group</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write and publish research materials in public relations or other</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication related journals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish ties or joint ventures with accredited public relations</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 64. All items are measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (poor), 2 (fair), 3 (neutral), 4 (good), to 5 (excellent).*

As for the managerial role, practitioners in Kyrgyzstan possessed higher levels of knowledge and skills in developing strategies for public relations and communication problems \((M = 4.17, SD = 0.88)\), drawing a departmental budget \((M = 4.15, SD = 0.83)\), helping the management to understand the opinions of the organization’s publics \((M = 4.07, SD = 0.91)\), and writing and publishing research materials in public relations or other communication related journals \((M = 4.03, SD = 0.97)\). Practitioners were less skilled in performing research to segment publics, negotiating with activist groups and evaluating public relations programs.

Across all sectors, it was observed that most practitioners did not have formal education in public relations, thereby explaining why knowledge potential for the managerial role was relatively low. Many also did not receive formal in-house training, which respondents attributed to a lack of budget and commitment from the dominant coalition.
Conclusions and the Future

As a whole the public relations activities in Kyrgyzstan can be categorized using J. E. Grunig and Hunt’s models of public relations, but the models do not fully capture the spectrum of public relations activities in the republic.

Although the respondents answered to the questionnaires that they were contributing to the strategic management, counseling the management in taking important decisions for the organization, conducting evaluative research and using two-way symmetry model in their practice, the findings from in-depth interviews contradicted to the findings from quantitative data. The discrepancy between the findings emanating from quantitative and qualitative data can be explained by the social desirability bias of the interviewees. The desire to portray themselves and the organization they represent in a more positive light might have prompted practitioners to indicate how public relations ought to be practiced rather than the way public relations is actually practiced in their organization.

The data indicated that the press agentry model was the most predominant model practiced in most organizations in Kyrgyzstan. However some governmental ministries and NGOs used also public information model. Two-way asymmetrical model was used mostly by international organizations and private corporations such as financial organizations, commercial banks, mobile phone operators. Two-way symmetry is not practiced by organizations in the country. Although practitioners answered to the questionnaires that they use it, in-depth interviews revealed that they do not use it and they even do not know what it is.

Public Relations practice in Kyrgyzstan can be described well by the personal influence model of public relations. Almost all respondents of this study used the personal influence model to a large extent when they conducted public relations. Most respondents for this study reported that they made it a point to have personal friendships with important publics such as analysts, economists, industry experts, and government officials, which in turn contributed highly to their success as strategic managers. The use of personal influence model was most apparent in the area of media relations. Most interviewees articulated that good relations with representatives of the media are especially critical as practitioners could persuade these gatekeepers to generate publicity favorable to their organizations. According to practitioners, gift giving, media luncheons, cocktail receptions, and sponsored trips are some examples of building good relationships with the media and other stakeholders.

The presence of knowledge deficiencies among practitioners suggested the need for organizations to invest in training toward increasing the knowledge levels of their public relations practitioners.

For a more comprehensive picture of whether the public relations practice in Kyrgyzstan can be explained by the excellence theory, future studies could further examine whether the other five generic principles also contribute to public relations excellence in the Kyrgyz Republic. Future research should also link public relations in Kyrgyzstan with specific environmental factors such as culture, economic system, and political structure, level of development, media system, and extent of activism. Future researchers could also explore cultural and societal values influencing public
relations practice in Kyrgyzstan by using the Circuit of Culture model of the British Cultural School and compare the results to the similar research conducted by Terry (2005) in Kazakhstan. Such comparative research can also be conducted in all Central Asian countries.
References


Clarke, T. M. (2000). An inside look at Russian public relations. *Public Relations Quarterly, 45* (1);


MCA, (Marketing Communication Agency),(2008). There is a shortage of PR- agencies in Kyrgyzstan, Russian PR-portal;

Poletaev, E. (2009). This is such a specialization where it is very difficult to do rating or exam on the corresopondence to standards, [http://www.bpc.kg/news/20-11-09](http://www.bpc.kg/news/20-11-09)

Raimkulova, N. (2009). At the moment only some politicians and businessmen understand how it is important, [http://www.bpc.kg/news/24-11-09](http://www.bpc.kg/news/24-11-09)
Shikmambetov, A. (2009). We are PR practitioners, image makers, lawyers and even journalists for ourselves, when it is necessary to write the texts of public speaking, http://www.bpc.kg/news/19-11-09


APPENDIX
Interview Guide

1. Please share with us a brief historical background of your PR/communications department.
   • When was it set up? What is the staff strength of your PR department?
   • What is the nature of your business?
   • Who are your clients/stakeholders/the publics your organization’s policies will affect?
   • Are you represented by any PR agency for your communications program or do you outsource projects to any agency? If so, please share which agency you work with (local or MNC).

2. What do you think is the chief purpose of public relations, i.e., what role can PR play?

3. Briefly describe how your organization would usually conduct a PR program or campaign. Also, describe what kind of public relations activities you conduct for your organization.

4. If you do perform extensive research prior and/or after a campaign, please state which kinds of research tools (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews) you use. If you don’t conduct research, perhaps explain which are the constraints (e.g., time, budget, etc.) you face.

5. How many years of experience do you have in PR? Do you have formal education in PR?

6. What forms of training does your organization provide to the PR staff? Are there opportunities for PR practitioners to advance further into postgraduate PR courses/degrees?

7. Do you consider yourself as part of the senior management/dominant coalition? Who do you report to? How much support do you receive from the top management?

8. How does senior management rate the value of your PR work?

9. What do you think are some of the challenges facing PR practitioners in Kyrgyzstan on an organizational and industry level? (e.g., image of the profession/industry, common misconceptions about what PR is, lack of support from top management in PR, etc.)

10. Are there any cultural, economic, or political factors that affect the way PR is practiced in Kyrgyzstan?

11. What are some of the particular characteristics of the local PR industry that you would like to highlight? If you have practiced PR in other markets, please feel free to make industry comparisons.

12. What is the current image and status of PR professionals?

The questions were used only as a guide and were often rephrased, asked in a different order based on the nature of conversation, or substituted entirely by a different question seeking similar information. Follow ups were used as needed.
PR = public relations; MNC = multinational corporation.
The Impact of Public Relationship Outcomes on the Reputation After an Organizational Change: A Case Study of a Public Hospital in Istanbul, Turkey

Ebru Ural
Associate Professor in Public Relations
Istanbul Commerce University
Selman-ı Pak Cad. Uskudar/Istanbul 34672
Tel: +90 216 553 9422
E-mail: eural@iticu.edu.tr

Aslı Erim
PhD in Management
Istanbul Commerce University

Abstract

We are in a century of change. Whatever the circumstances are organizations need to keep up with these changes in order to survive in 21st century. As mentioned by Bursalioglu (1987), the job of developing a new system in an organization is a very difficult and dangerous operation whose success is doubtful. During this tough and uncertain period, by the help of well planned and managed public relationships, organizations can go thru this stage not only smoothly but also successfully. In this study, our aim was to investigate the effects of public relations outcomes on the reputation of one of the biggest hospital in Istanbul, Turkey after having applied Total Quality Management. The model was applied to 176 patients and the results of the analyses showed that public relations outcomes have a significant impact on corporate reputation with an explanatory power of 51%. The results are discussed by emphasizing the significance of public relations and reputation for organizations in today’s highly competitive business world.
Theoretical background and model development

Organizational change

In today’s turbulent environment of organizations, change has become synonymous with standard business practices as long-term organizational ends have to be reformulated on an ongoing business. With this mind, if anything has remained constant in the history of organizations, it has been change. The first decade of the new millennium has been forecasted to be a period of tremendous change in the workplace (Gordon et al., 2000).

Changes occur within the organization and in the environment outside the organization that force an organization to alter the way its affairs are managed (Zener, 1991). In literature, at least four general environmental trends have been recognized and discussed as bringing about today’s organizational change: increasing competition; technological development; legal circumstances of organizations and changing expectations of stakeholders. Within the organization, organizational change is comprised of those processes that break down existing structures and create new structures—often new organizations, cultures, business strategies and ways of working (Hutchison, 2001). Clearly, it will not be sufficient to operate with traditional organizational structures in this complex and fast changing global market (Aksu and Özdemir, 2005, 422). Therefore, in today’s business environment, an organizational change is one reality with which individuals, groups and organizations must constantly cope in order to survive.

In global arena, Turkey is one of the rapidly growing countries in its region; therefore, business environment is changing. Recently, main sectors in the economy such as health care have been under construction to function more efficiently and effectively. After the Ministry of Health implemented a national health policy to attract private sector investment in health services, government incentives for private hospital investment have resulted in the building of many private hospitals in the last 15 years and providing by public, quasi-public, and private organizations (Savas et al., 2002). Health care organizations are constantly undergoing major changes to innovate and improve their technical/clinical and service aspects like never before and making sincere efforts to establish quality management practices. In this high competitiveness, public hospitals not only have been developing new public relationship strategies in order to stay rivalry and protect /develop their reputation in health care sector, but also trying to do everything in their power to build long term relationships with their key constituencies. During this process, they strengthen their ethic values such as honesty, openness, respect and forthright communication with all their stakeholders. Following this path, S. B. İstanbul Göztepe Eğitim ve Araştırma Hastanesi (IGEAH), one of the biggest public owned and operated hospitals in Istanbul, took series steps and established Total Quality Management (TQM) and developed other major public relationship strategies to handle their internal problems, collect relevant data, implement solutions, provide efficient feedback to employees and expand hospital’s reputation by providing better service quality, warmer welcoming to their patients, etc. This process was unavoidable for this hospital as the health care industry presents a very dynamic, unexpected, ambiguous and uncertain environment in which “quality issues” have occupied a central position. Quality of care is related to all issues vital to health care reform—to the question of access and to the problems associated with ineffective and inappropriate care, patient preferences and patient choice, is inseparable from the issue of efficiency (Koeck, 1997);
therefore, concepts of total quality management (TQM) and continuous quality improvement (CQI) have taken a central role in the health care quality management (McLaughlin and Simpson, 1999). According to Lakhe and Mohanty (1994), TQM is a solution for improving quality of products in developing economies. By adopting the concepts of TQM or CQI, a health care institution can move away from an inspection-oriented quality improvement system to one that orients itself to a systematic transformation of an organizational culture thru a roll-out plan involving customer focus, key-process monitoring, data-driven tools and techniques, and team empowerment (Klein et al., 1998).

Hospital profile

S. B. Istanbul Göztepe Eğitim ve Araştırma Hastanesi, 660-bed highly equipped public hospital with its 100 doctors, 400 employees, and 10 operating rooms, was established in 1972 on 162 square meters area in the heart of Istanbul. Today, it boast of over 17 specialty departments with various walk thru clinics and a total staff of about 2,500 including 650 doctors specialized in various fields with a 800 bed capacity constantly expanding. The hospital offers a wide range of medical and surgical specialty areas including kidney transplantation, infection treatment facilities, etc. and also has obtained ISO certification and strives for continuous improvement based on TQM principles including committed leadership, customer focus and satisfaction, process improvement, service design, human resource management and social responsibility. They also provide internships for many graduated med students (http://www.sbgoztepehastanesi.gov.tr/).

Public relationship outcomes

Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985, 4) defined public relations as “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”.

Relationships are distinguishing public relations from marketing. Heath and Coombs (2006) state that today’s practice of public relations is helping organizations build relationships. Grunig et al. (1992) propose that one characteristic of effective organizations is their ability to achieve their goals through the development of relationships with their publics. On the results of the excellence study, Grunig and Hung (2002) suggested that the quality of relationships determines reputation, that quality relationships and reputation result more from the behavior of organizations than from messages disseminated, and the value of relationships include the value of reputation. Bronn (2007) stated that it is important for an organization to work on relationships as the quality of the relationship impacts different stakeholders’ impression of the firm.

Grunig, Grunig and Ehling (1992) suggested that reciprocity, trust, credibility, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction and mutual understanding were the key elements of an organization-public relationship and recommend that researchers and practitioners use these concepts when measuring the quality of strategic relationships. Hon and Grunig (1999) developed a measure of organization-public relationships. They suggested that six relational dimensions could measure the relationship perceptions between an organization and its publics:
trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, communal relationship, and exchange relationship.

Ledinham and Bruning (1998, 62) suggested that an ideal organization-public relationship is the “state exists between an organization and its key publics that provides economics, social, political, and/or cultural benefits to all parties involved and is characterized by mutual positive regard”.

*Corporate reputation*

Topalian explained (1984) “Corporate reputation refers to the expectations, attitudes and feelings that consumers have about the nature and underlying reality of the company as represented by its corporate identity.” According to Dowling (1986), reputation is the set of meanings by which a company is known and through which people describe, remember and relate to it.

Fombrun (1996) and Roberts and Dowling (2002) defined reputation as a perceptual representation of a company’s past action and future prospects that describe the firm’s overall appeal to all its key constituents when compared to other leading rivals. In other words, this definition suggests that corporate reputation is a general organizational attribute that reflects the extent to which external stakeholders see the firm as good and not bad. A company’s reputation can be not only the primary basis for a consumer’s purchasing decision but also everything from stock value of the company to employee satisfaction or attitude toward the brand or product itself.

A good reputation helps a company attract the people necessary for its success analysts, investors, customers, partners and employees (Chajet, 1989). Jones explains (2000) that a good reputation can serve to buffer a corporation from economic loss in specific types of crisis.

In literature, reputation is measured by different scales. There are a number of general measures of corporate reputation, many focusing on the ranking of corporation. The most widely known is from the business magazine, *Fortune*, which regularly polls business executives and analysts as to the reputation of leading companies. The Harris-Fombrun reputation quotient is a relatively new alternative to the most admired list. The quotient is calculated from a list of twenty attributes representing six dimensions and well used in many studies. In 2005, The Reputation Institute introduced “The Reputation Institute’s Rep Trak System” to track and analyzed corporate reputation. It tracks 23 key performance indicators grouped around seven core drivers that were created from qualitative and quantitative research conducted in six countries (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007).

*The link between public relationship outcomes and corporate reputation*

In the beginning of 2000s, both theory and the results of empirical studies (e.g. Grunig and Hung, 2002) suggest that there is a strong link between organizational public relations and corporate reputation. We believe that if an organization communicates successfully, builds and maintains a strong connection with its stakeholders by using well designed media/investor
relations, social responsibility and community affairs, delicately handled crisis management strategies, that organization will be able to shape and influence the stakeholders’ attitudes towards itself positively and that organization will be credible, reliable, responsible and trustworthy in the eye of its public. As Van Riel and Fombrun once mentioned that all communications influence to some extent the perceptions of participants and observers about the organization and its activities and so affect the organization’s image, brand and reputation.

It is well established in the literature that by developing quality relationships with public, public relations can have long-term value to organizations (L. Grunig, J. Grunig and Dozier, 2002). As J. Grunig and Huang (2000, 35) mentioned before: “Corporate reputation is highly connected with behavioral relationships because reputation essentially consists of the corporate behaviors that publics remember”. If organizations have successful public relations, stakeholders will trust the corporation’s reputation. Fombrun (1996, 57) emphasized the role of organization-public relations as an important precursor of corporate reputation: “To acquire a reputation that is positive, enduring and resilient requires managers to invest heavily in building and maintaining good relationships with their company’s constituents”.

Summing up the above discussion and review of the literature, we suggest the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Public relations outcomes will have a positive impact on corporate reputation.

Method

Instrumentation

The questionnaire used in this study was 2 pages long and included three sections. Section one was the cover page explaining the purpose and the nature of the study, also assuring confidentiality of the subject. Section two included 45 items which consisted of the measures of public relations outcomes and corporate reputation. Section three included a six-item demographic questionnaire (asking for the participant’s age, gender, marital status, number of children, occupation, the frequency of hospital visitation). All the scales were translated from English to Turkish. All of the translated items of the survey were examined by two bilingual English Language instructors working at Istanbul Commerce University and the dissertation advisor for semantic and syntactic equivalence. These items were then back translated to see how the two versions compared. The wording of some items was changed according to daily uses of Turkish language. After all the necessary corrections were made, the questionnaire was finalized.

Data Collection

The primary data in this study were collected via surveys in one hospital. Paper surveys were distributed during the period of November and December, 2009. The paper surveys were handed out to participants by the researchers and collected immediately.

Participants
Participants completed the study’s instruments on a voluntary basis. The sample of this study included 176 patients; 100 female (56.8%) and 76 male (43.2%). 61.6% (N=108) of the participants were married and 38.4% (N=68) were single. In terms of their visitation, 67.9% of the participants (N=120) were regular patients who always prefer this hospital, whereas 32.1% (N=56) of the participants have been coming occasionally. 16% of the participants were housewife, 8% of them were retired and the rest were full time employee such as teacher, banker, driver, etc.

Measures

Public Relations Outcomes was measured by twenty-six item Organization- Public Relations Outcomes Scale which was designed by Grunig and Hon (1999). Corporate Reputation was measured by nineteen-item Harris-Fombrun’s Corporate Reputation Quotient Scale (2004). This study used Likert Scale illustrated as: 1= Strongly agree; 2= Agree; 3= Neither agree nor disagree; 4= Disagree; 5= Strongly disagree; for both variables.

Findings

The first step of the analysis was to examine the correlation and it was found that there was no multi-collinearity problem regarding the variables. The mean and standard deviations of the variables of the sample size is depicted in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization Public Relations Outcomes</td>
<td>2.588</td>
<td>0.992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Mutuality</td>
<td>2.371</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>2.436</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>2.464</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Satisfaction</td>
<td>2.454</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Relationship</td>
<td>2.550</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange Relationships</td>
<td>3.248</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Reputation</td>
<td>2.647</td>
<td>0.8178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Appeal</td>
<td>2.629</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product/Service</td>
<td>2.591</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Environment</td>
<td>2.569</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Performance</td>
<td>2.620</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision/Leadership</td>
<td>2.685</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>2.783</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to test Hypothesis 1; “Public relations outcomes will have a positive impact on corporate reputation”; a simple regression analysis was conducted to examine the contribution of the independent variable to dependent variable of the model. As all variables has factors, each variables is total scored for this analysis.
It was seen that public relations outcomes has a significant impact on corporate reputation with an explanatory power of 51% (Beta=.804; p=.000). The result of this analysis is presented in Table 2. This finding provides full support for Hypothesis 1.

**Table 2: The Impact of Public Relations Outcomes on Corporate Reputation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>Adjusted R²</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL THE VARIABLES</td>
<td>51,176</td>
<td>239,256</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLIC RELATIONS OUTCOMES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.804</td>
<td>15,468</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: PUBLIC RELATIONS OUTCOMES**  
**DEPENDENT VARIABLE: CORPORATE REPUTATION**

**Conclusion**

Organizations in the twenty-first century are faced with a major challenge of change in both internal and the external environment. For organizations to develop, they often must undergo significant change at various points in their development. In today’s complex structured and expensive health care system, there is no doubt that most people seek for trustworthy and reliable hospitals and health care givers that they can count on. At this point reputation of a hospital becomes the key variable for individuals.

Corporate reputation has always been one of the most popular subjects to be searched in literature as it carries an important and strategic meaning for all kind of organizations in all sectors. It is clear that there are many organizational and environmental antecedents affect a corporate reputation. In this study, public relationship outcomes were specifically chosen as an independent variable, as recently, health care sector including most of the hospitals, clinics and etc. have been under heavy construction in order to function more efficiently and effectively all around the world. In order to compete successfully and be more reputable, public relationships management for hospitals became more important than ever, as it is all about persuasiveness.

Previously, J. Grunig and Hung (2002) studied the effect of organization-public relationships on organizational reputation. They identified those relationships in two ways: firstly, direct/ experimental relationship which individuals have personal experience with an
organization; therefore, they form a reputation for the organization based on what they know and understand. Secondly, indirect/reputational relationship with an organization; therefore, they form a reputation based solely on what individuals have read or heard from others. In our study all our participants partake in both groups mentioned above, as they were patients of this hospital and also listened the others’ experiences about this hospital and followed the news.

In her doctoral dissertation, Hagan (2003) explained how strategic public relations influence the behavior of an organization to improve relationships with the organization’s constituents and thus affect reputation. Her quantitative and qualitative research showed that in the automotive industry, organization’s relationships with its public influences the way publics assign a reputation. Similar to her study but in a different sector, our study also has demonstrated quantitatively support for a positive effect of public relationship outcomes on corporate reputation and suggest that organizations benefit when public relations practitioners develop successful programs and initiatives. In fact, seen from the background of conclusions found in several studies, the strength of the impact of public relations outcomes on reputation in this study merits some further comment.

This result is relevant for judging the public relations outcomes is a critical antecedent of corporate reputation. As once Davies et al. (2002) said “reputation is at the heart of a company’s success”, our research suggest that by improving public relations outcomes, a corporation can improve its reputation. In recent years, companies achieve competitiveness from being better regarded than their peers—from reputation. In this view, managers build strategic advantage by generating favorable perceptions about the company in the minds of key stakeholders (Fombrun, 2002). Especially after the financial crisis we witnessed all around the world consecutively in the last decade, we experienced that a corporation’s reputation enables corporations to survive and managers to act in a positive manner, defusing potentially difficult situations. Lastly, it is worthwhile to point out that public relations is more than disseminating the information and press agentry; it is an important management function which manages the relationships between organizations and all actors in its environment and should be considered as a strategic function.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

In this study, our aim was to collect more survey however due to the contagious swine flu; we were not allowed to visit hospital, therefore, the participant number was limited to 176.

Future research should attempt to search which factors of public relations outcomes (such as control mutuality, trust, etc.) have more impact on corporate reputation factors (emotional appeal, product/service and etc.). Public Relations Department in any organization can benefit from these results. We believe that future research could greatly benefit from including more objectively measured variables as mediator or moderator in this model. In all these streams of research, our understanding of the impacts would be enhanced by longitudinal studies. For instance, in this case the impact of public relations outcomes on corporate reputation could be measured before TQM is applied and after TQM is in process in the hospital. This observation at different points in time may reflect that stakeholders may prefer to evaluate reputation differently. Therefore, it remains unknown whether the relationship needs manifest in this investigation would be consistent across time. Finally, future research should examine the view
of different stakeholders to determine the relationship between variables (In this study, only customers’ opinions were taken in consideration.)
References


Branding a Nation on YouTube: The Ethical Implications of a Promotional Choice

Chiara Valentini, PhD, Assistant Professor
Department of Language and Business Communication,
Aarhus School of Business,
University of Aarhus,
Fuglesangs Allé 4, DK-8210 Aarhus V,
Denmark
Email: chv@asb.dk

Irene Pollach, PhD, Associate Professor
Department of Language and Business Communication,
Aarhus School of Business,
University of Aarhus,
Fuglesangs Allé 4, DK-8210 Aarhus V,
Denmark
Email: irpo@asb.dk

Keywords: Social media, PR ethics, nation branding, stealth marketing
Introduction

The development of new technologies of the last twenty years has introduced essential changes regarding how people access, share and create information (Pavlik 2007). Especially, social media have opened up new ways of interactions between organizations and publics. Several scholars have pointed out the relevance of social media for public relations in fostering two-way communications but also in terms of issues management, relationship management, environmental scanning, and story placement (e.g. Hallett 2008; Kent 2008). However, little is known about the implications of social media use in relation to organizations' promotional activities and specifically in respect to the tourism sector (L'Etang et al. 2007). Studies on viral marketing have emerged in order to explain the relevance of person-to-person conversations in consumer behaviors and attitudes towards products and brands (Dobele 2005). Along with this line of work, Kaikati and Kaikati (2004: 7) and others refer to the "growing popularity" of stealth marketing as a way to capture consumers' attention, including highly successful emotional branding campaigns (Martin & Smith 2008). However, this approach is frequently criticized for being unethical and damaging consumers' rights (Langer 2006).

Not only firms and corporations use stealth marketing approaches, but also government agencies. One recent case of covert marketing through social media is a campaign launched by VisitDenmark, the Danish National Tourism Board, which is a government agency, seeking to promote Denmark as a tourist destination. VisitDenmark posted a video on YouTube that was seemingly created by a single mother who was looking for the father of her baby boy, the result of a one-night stand with a foreign tourist. A few days after the video was posted on YouTube, it turned out that VisitDenmark was behind the campaign. While the campaign drew enormous attention of YouTube users and received coverage in Danish and foreign news media, VisitDenmark faced criticism from the Danish media on a number of issues. The goal of this paper is to illustrate the ethical implications of stealth marketing via social media and discuss the implications for VisitDenmark's relations with its primary stakeholders.

The paper is structured as follows: We will first review the literature on social media, viral and stealth marketing, in relation to tourism sector and public relations' perspectives. Next, we present the methodology behind the data collection and analysis, before we describe the case in detail and present the findings of a content analysis of news coverage of the case. Ultimately, we discuss the implications of our findings for theory and practice.

Public Relations in the Tourism Sector

According to L'Etang and others (2007: 69), tourism has a “massive social, political and environmental impact on global, national and local arenas” and consequently on “community relations and social responsibility”. Nevertheless, studies on tourism and public relations are very few (L'Etang 2006; Fall & Lubbers 2004; Piggott et al. 2004) and have focused more on risk and/or crisis situations (Gonzales-Herrero & Pratt 1998; Lerbinge 1997; Beck 1992) and relate to events and their sponsorship (cf. Roche 2000; Stipp 1998). Some public relations studies have dealt with the role of tourism agencies' communication activities in promoting and marketing destinations, funding of media campaigns abroad, sustaining trade centers, promoting tourism offices and supporting the most important initiatives and facilities to attract tourism (L'Etang et
al. 2007; Tilson & Stacks 1997; Gold 1994). Besides the little literature on tourism and public relations, at present there is no scholarly contribution on the use of social media for tourism purposes. Public relations studies in social media have mostly focused on practitioners' adoption of social media (Eyrich et al. 2008; Kelleher 2008), the main characteristics of users of social network sites and social media tools (Diga & Kelleher 2009), and discuss the influence of the blogosphere on mainstream media and vice versa (Wallsten 2007), or investigate the attributes and trends of blog posts, comments, and trackbacks (Trammell 2005).

Public relations scholars have not yet deeply explored the dichotomy ‘tourism sector’ and ‘social media’ although today more and more travel and tourism companies have started to integrate social media into their promotional strategies (New Media Age 2009; Murray 2009). Scholarly works in this regard come from viral marketing and online advertising. In these fields, research on social media sites, such as YouTube, Facebook and MySpace, shows that social media are an ideal platform for ads and marketing because of their characteristics and their influence on purchasing behavior (Kim et al. 2008). Among the most common reasons for using social media for marketing purposes, scholars point out their inexpensiveness and easy-to-use characteristic, their capacity to reach different virtual communities and their 'reputation' of providing 'unfiltered', as opposed to 'slick', information (Grossman 2006).

It is important to underline that, within the tourism industry, public relations and marketing are frequently conceptualized as two sides of the same coin and the functions of public relations often support marketing as publicity (Dore & Crouch 2003; Jenkins 1999; Gladwell & Wolff 1989). Hence, an organization's public relations and marketing communication efforts are frequently integrated, so that promotional activities do not clash with relationship building. In order to seize the contribution of public relations for the tourism sector, we shall look at the role of marketing strategies in relation to social media environments.

**Publicity in viral environments**

Marketing activities in online networks are classified as viral marketing when they are “unpaid peer-to-peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor using the Internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others” (Porter & Golan 2006: 33). The goal of viral marketing is to “manufacture a marketing message—typically online and in a tangible format such as a video clip or e-mail—that can spread among consumers quickly and exponentially” (Balter & Butman 2006: 49).

Viral marketing strategies have encountered certain popularity not only by profit-making organizations. According to some recent studies on political campaigns and the use of ‘viral videos’ had somehow influenced the campaign agenda as well as persuaded undecided voters and mobilized supporters to take decisions (Heldman 2007; Gueorguieva 2008; Wallsten 2008). Previous research on the use of the Internet as a tool to promote and facilitate political participation have focused on issues of trust and intimacy in online networking (Boyd 2003), participants’ strategic representation of their selves to others (Boyd 2004; Donath & Boyd 2004), and harvesting online social network profiles to obtain a distributed recommender system (Liu & Maes 2005). However, no research has been conducted so far on the use and impact of viral contents on tourism in social network sites.
A parallel marketing approach is stealth marketing, also known as shill, undercover, or masked marketing (Balter & Butman 2006; Petty & Andrews 2008). Stealth marketing is defined as all hidden marketing activities that fail to disclose information on the relationship between the sender of the message and the company that produces or sponsors the marketing message (Martin & Smith, 2008; Balter & Butman 2006; Kaikati & Kaikati 2004). The goal of stealth marketing is to create a buzz about a product or service, by making people talk about it and by making conversations easier to take place.

To a certain extent, stealth marketing has a lot in common with the press agentry/publicity model of public relations. Langer (2006) argues that Berney’s staging a march of cigarette-puffing debutantes at the New York’s Annual Easter Parade in 1929 without revealing his tobacco client can be considered a stealth marketing activity. The press agentry/publicity model, although still practiced around the world, is considered to be the least ethical and socially responsible approach of public relations (Grunig 1992). In today’s business world, organizations are asked to be more and more socially responsible and ethical in their actions (Stohl et al. 2009). An extensive use of the press agentry/publicity model is thus not suitable for responding to these concerns. On the other hand, pressures from globalization and more skeptical stakeholders have led towards a revival of stealth marketing. Johansson (2004) and Wells (2004) claim that the popularity of stealth marketing has increased in correspondence with the growing resentment of consumers to being targeted by companies with different types of publicity. Many companies have responded by using more and more stealth marketing in order to grab consumers’ attention, including highly successful emotional branding campaigns, wild publicity stunts, and creative product placement and awareness generation tactics (Martin & Smith 2008). How effective stealth marketing is in achieving ‘publicity’ goals is still questioned, especially if organizations are worried about their reputation (Walker 2004; Creamer 2005). Martin and Smith (2008) analyze three companies’ stealth marketing activities and concluded that covert marketing is unethical along multiple dimensions and detail possible consequences of these techniques to firms and consumers. As for viral marketing, we were not able to track specific studies that have looked at implications and consequences of using stealth marketing for the tourism sector using social media.

**Conceptual Framework**

Conceptually, this paper is grounded in a stakeholder perspective. When analyzing the case presented in this paper, we will consider the stakeholders of the campaign that was launched by VisitDenmark and their stakes. To this end, this section will present our approach for classifying VisitDenmark stakeholders\(^{88}\) and outline the role of media as one of the main stakeholders of the organization. In our analysis, we decided to focus only on one stakeholder, namely print and online media, as the mass media played a critical role in the VisitDenmark case by increasing the rumor around this stealth marketing campaign, by drawing public attention to the campaign and by raising ethical concerns among different groups. Our point of departure is to examine whether or not and to what extent media coverage was the driver of the development and expression of stakeholders’ concerns on their ‘stakes’.

---

\(^{88}\) Although 'stakeholder' and 'public' are not exactly the same concepts, we use the terms interchangeably in this paper since we intend to draw our conceptual framework from both the management and communication schools.
Furthermore, in order to grasp better the implications of the *VisitDenmark* campaign for media coverage and for its different stakeholders, we needed to look for a model for classifying *VisitDenmark* stakeholders that allows us to explain stakeholder concerns about their ‘stakes’ and their relevance vis-à-vis the organization’s choice of campaign strategy. Thus, we decided to combine McCombs & Shaw’s agenda setting theory (1972) with Mitchell et al.’s model of stakeholder salience (1997). While the former provides a framework for explaining how the campaign became an issue of importance for the public agenda and consequently how the media have mobilized other stakeholders to participate in the public discussion, the latter helps us to classify *VisitDenmark*’s stakeholders according to their power, urgency and legitimacy.

Mitchell et al.’s (1997) model of stakeholder salience is a useful classification model for studying stakeholder relations and their stakes in organizations. It takes departure in three attributes: *power*, *urgency*, and *legitimacy*. Power denotes the stakeholder's control over financial or material resources or their ability to command the attention of the mass media. Urgency means that the stakeholders have claims for which they demand immediate attention from the organization. Lastly, stakeholders that have legitimacy make claims that are appropriate and acceptable within the framework of the social system in which the stakeholder group and the organization interact. Each stakeholder group can be characterized by one or more of these characteristics, which results in seven different kinds of stakeholder groups.

Before presenting *VisitDenmark*’s primary and secondary stakeholders, we shall briefly discuss the role of mass media in selecting and defining issues. Mass media play an important role as organizational stakeholders, as they often act as intermediaries between the organization and its other stakeholders through news reporting. Given that their main activities are investigating and reporting, the news media transmit information from the organization to the stakeholder and vice versa (Friedman & Miles 2006). Agenda setting and framing theories tell us that news media play an important role in setting the public agenda and shaping public opinion through the selection of news stories and the evaluation of the content they publish (McCombs & Shaw 1972). Therefore, by shaping public opinion, the media contribute to increased public attention to specific situations and actions and/or behaviors of organizations.

In their discussion of issues management, Bridges and Nelson (2000) argue that the concept of framing within issues management suggests that an issue for media audience is defined by what is said about it, what is omitted, and the language used in media coverage (ibid: 100). For organizations, this means that potentially any communication about actions and activities can become an issue for some of their stakeholders when media coverage frames them as such. When organizational actions and/or behaviors have become an issue for certain publics, then organizations cannot control and interact with this stakeholder group the way they interact with other groups. Also, attempts by the organization to control the issue may even backfire (Friedman & Miles 2006).

Moreover, the mass media play a critical role in drawing public attention to specific frames and therefore have an impact both at the level of awareness and at the level of stances taken. Entman (1989) found a correlation between media coverage and public attitude. Although certain organizational actions/behaviors affect the influence of the media on those actions/behaviors, media coverage of organizational actions/behaviors can make the media audience larger and also increases the group's perceived importance and/or consequences of the organizational actions/behaviors (Bridges & Nelson 2000). Communication campaigns, thus, can also contribute to increase the level of awareness among different types of publics, thereby moving
them from latent to aware and on to active publics (Grunig 1989). Hence, the mass media are not only important stakeholders per se representing the Fourth Estate in societies (Burke quoted in Carlyle 1866), but also as an entity influencing the attitudes and perceptions of other stakeholders. As we will discuss later in this paper, one of the outcomes of the VisitDenmark campaign was that latent publics turned into active ones and this was enhanced by media framing.

Methodology

A case study was chosen as the main research strategy, supported by content analyses of news articles and blog posts to capture how audiences evaluated VisitDenmark's campaign. This section describes the research approach and the data collection procedures.

Case Study Research

Broadly, a case study is defined as "an intensive study of a single unit or a small number of units (the cases) for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units (the population of cases)" (Gerring 2007: 37). Case studies, which have been conceptualized as a "research strategy" (Yin 1981a: 98), are suitable when the research wants to examine a particular phenomenon together with its real-life context (Yin 1981b). Case studies are a powerful research strategy when one wants to gain an in-depth understanding of a complex issue or phenomenon that would be difficult to capture in quantitative variables. This paper studies stealth marketing via social media. Given the complex and multi-faceted nature of this topic, a case study appeared to be an appropriate strategy in order to gain a better understanding of success factors and potential pitfalls for such campaigns.

The results of case study research are often unduly criticized for not providing opportunities to generalize from the case findings. To counter this criticism, Flyvbjerg (2006) recommends that a very atypical or extreme case is selected in order to ensure that the case is rich in detail and involves more actors and mechanisms than a less extreme case. We therefore chose the case of VisitDenmark and its stealth marketing campaign via YouTube, for which it was heavily criticized. This case paints a rich and colorful picture of how critical stakeholder relations are in such an endeavor.

Within a case study, a researcher can employ various data collection procedures in order to gather as much evidence as is needed to examine the phenomenon under study. Such data collection procedures can include observation, document analysis, surveys, or interviews. These data can then be used for comparison within a case or across cases (cf. Yin 1981a; Yin 1981b; Yin 1994). The case presented in this paper was researched using two sets of data. First, the case narrative describing the events was compiled using Danish news coverage, Danish blogs, and press releases from VisitDenmark. The blog posts used to write up the case were quoted from in the media coverage and subsequently retrieved from the original blogs. The second set of data consisted of a systematic content analysis of Danish and international news coverage in order to gain an understanding of how the events were received by the media. This is important, given that the media set and shape the public agenda (cf. McCombs & Shaw 1972) and therefore have a crucial impact on how the public perceives the campaign. The content analytic procedure is described in more detail in the section below.
Content Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze how the campaign was commented on in the media. The merit of content analysis is that it systematically condenses texts into content categories by applying a coding scheme that produces quantitative indices of textual content (cf. Krippendorff 1980; Weber 1985; Kolbe & Burnett 1991; Neuendorf 2002). Content analysis was applied to articles from the Danish press and articles from the English-language foreign press.

The coverage of the affair in the Danish press was limited to the five major Danish newspapers. They include Ekstra Bladet, Berlingske Tidende, Jyllands-Posten, Politiken, Kristeligt Dagblad. The articles were retrieved through Infomedia, a database for Danish news coverage, based on searches for various combinations of the terms "VisitDenmark", "YouTube", "Karen", "mor" [mother], and "far" [father]. To ensure that the unfolding of the story was captured in its entirety, the print articles were compared to the online editions of the newspapers. As it turned out that the online content was different from the print content, the articles published online were included as well. They were found by accessing each newspaper's website and searching their archives with the search words listed above.

English-language foreign news coverage of the affair was retrieved through Lexis-Nexis, based on searches for various combinations of the terms "VisitDenmark", "Denmark", "Danish", "YouTube", "Karen", "mother", and "father" in the months of September and October 2009. The 15 articles found were published between September 15 and October 20, 2009 and include newspapers, magazines, and news wire services from the US, Canada, the UK, Ireland, and Australia. The articles were compared against the online editions of the newspapers that had published these articles, yet no additional content was found. The articles either appeared in the same format as the print articles or no online content about the story was available. Therefore, foreign news coverage contains online print articles.

Overall, the sample consisted of 27 articles from the Danish press, 15 articles from the foreign press, and 65 online articles from the Danish online press. With no existing coding scheme available to code these data, the coding scheme was developed from the data using an inductive coding strategy. Inductive coding begins with the close and thorough study of documents in an unrestricted manner to open up the inquiry and identify relevant categories that fit the data (Strauss & Corbin 1990). A preliminary coding scheme was drawn up by examining all English-language and Danish print articles. This produced a coding scheme of nine content categories, 20 evaluative content categories, and ten sources. The nine content and 20 evaluation categories are listed in Table 1 and Table 2 together with the results. The ten different sources of the content categories and the evaluation can be found in Table 3. The coding was performed by two different researchers. As a check on inter-coder reliability and consistency, a random sample of 14 texts (25% of the total amount of articles) was coded by both coders (cf. Bauer 2000; Stempel & Wesley 1981). Cohen's kappa was 0.72.

The Case

The present case study focuses on a stealth marketing campaign launched by VisitDenmark, the Danish National Tourism Board. VisitDenmark is a government agency, headed by the Danish Minister of Economic and Business Affairs, and receives the majority of its funding from the country's national budget, but also generates revenues through partnerships
with private companies. *VisitDenmark* was set up to increase awareness of and promote Denmark as a tourist destination (*VisitDenmark* 2010). Accordingly, its vision is to "attract tourists to Denmark and enhance their experiences", while its mission is "to bring world recognition to Denmark for its engaging and easily accessible experiences all year round" (*VisitDenmark* 2010: 3).

Inspired by its mission, *VisitDenmark* uploaded a video on YouTube on September 10, 2009, without disclosing that it is behind the video. Rather, the video was published by 'Karen26', a single Danish mother, who is using YouTube to look for the father of her baby. In the video, Karen is seen holding her baby boy August. She introduces herself and talks about a one-night stand with a foreign tourist, who she claims is the father of August. She says that she cannot remember the name or home country of this man, but she wants to let him know that Augusts exists. At the end of her video, Karen publishes her e-mail address (danishkaren26@gmail.com) and the address of her website (http://karen26.mono.net/).

In the first 24 hours, 282,000 people see the video clip and 2,000 people comment on it (DR 2009a). On September 11 and 12, Danish media report the story of Karen's search for her son's father in their online and print editions (DR 2009a; TV2 2009a; Jyllands-Posten 2009b; Ekstrabladet 2009a). The story is also covered in Sweden (Aftonbladet 2009a) and the UK (Sunday Star 2009). *Danmark Radio*, the Danish national broadcasting station, points out that some of the people commenting on the video on YouTube think that the video might be fake (DR 2009a).

On September 12, Danish bloggers also begin to question whether Karen is real. They bring up the idea that a condom manufacturer, the Danish National Health Agency, or the Danish National Tourism Board could be behind the video (Bæk 2009; Colding-Jørgensen 2009). Also on 12 September, communication consultant Morten Saxnæs (2009a) reveals via Twitter that *VisitDenmark*, the National Tourism Board, is behind the video. His post reads: "Many people think that this is a condom commercial, but it is for *VisitDenmark*. Sign up for their newsletter" (Saxnæs 2009b). On the evening of September 12, *Jyllands-Posten* picks up the story again, reporting that there are many voices in Denmark believing that Karen's search for the father of her son is fake, primarily because the campaign is done too well to have been produced by a young single mother. On September 13, *Jyllands-Posten* reports that 'Karen' is a fictitious character played by an actress. This information has been leaked to the press by people who have recognized the actress. At this point, the video has already been seen by 700,000 people (Jyllands-Posten 2009c).

On the evening of September 13, the television news channel TV2 discloses that *VisitDenmark* is behind the YouTube video. In an interview, the executive director of *VisitDenmark*, Dorte Kiilerich, explains the rationale behind the campaign as follows: "The story shows that Karen is a Danish woman, who lives with dignity and independence in a free society that gives her the space to choose how she wants to live her life. We market Denmark as a free country, and we are happy that so many people around the world have chosen to see this" (TV2 2009b). On September 14, *Extra Bladet* publishes an interview with Dorte Kiilerich, where she is asked whether she thinks that it is acceptable to lie to people all over the world. Dorte responds:

89 The video has been removed from YouTube, but is available from: http://www.wimp.com/seekingfather/.
"That depends on which media you use. This is why we have chosen to use YouTube. Here, you are in a social universe, where some stories are true and some stories are false" (Ekstrabladet 2009b). In response to the negative reception of the story in Danish media, VisitDenmark issues a press release on September 14, admitting that the story about Karen's search for the father is fabricated. They say that they are sorry that the video has offended many people, which was not their intention, as the goal had been to create positive awareness and discussions about Denmark. The chairman of VisitDenmark, Georg Sørensen, is also quoted in VisitDenmark's press release, stating that he believes the campaign was a mistake (VisitDenmark 2009a). In addition to removing the video from YouTube, VisitDenmark also deletes the website that was set up for 'Karen26' (VisitDenmark 2009a). By the time the video is taken off YouTube, over one million people have seen it (Berlingske Tidende 2009).

Peter Helstrup, strategic director at advertising agency Grey's in Copenhagen, who produced the video, is asked by the press to comment on the campaign. He says: "This is the most successful viral advert ever. We have got through the media noise and it cost the same as a 30-second spot shown a couple of times on TV2 [Danish national television]" (Politiken 2009). In response to the video, the Danish Minister for Economic and Business Affairs, Lene Espersen, who is also responsible for VisitDenmark, states that the representation of Denmark in the video is inappropriate and not well though-out and that she is glad the video has been removed (Jyllands-Posten 2009a). In the days and weeks after the events, the story is covered by news media all around the world, including for example the US (USA Today 2009), Australia (NineMSN 2009), Great Britain (BBC 2009), Germany (Der Stern 2009), Sweden (Aftonbladet 2009a), Italy (Corriere della Sera 2009), Austria (ORF 2009), and Romania (EVZ 2009). In the aftermath of the story, numerous mock and spoof videos appear on YouTube. They show, for example, men claiming to be August's father90, men seeking the mothers of their child91, or August's side of the story92.

On September 25, VisitDenmark announces that executive director Dorte Kiilerich has decided to resign from her position, but does not state that this has anything to do with the campaign (VisitDenmark 2009b).

**Results from the Content Analysis**

The content analysis recorded content categories, sources, and evaluation in the 107 news articles. Table 1 shows the percentage of articles in which the nine different content categories occurred. Next to all articles mention the video, VisitDenmark, and the campaign. Most of the articles also mention people's reaction to the campaign. To lesser extent, the country image, sex, women, and tourism are brought up. The Danish concept of "hygge"93, which Karen talks about in the video, is taken up only by a fraction of the news articles. A chi square test of significant

---

90 Danish mother seeking (The father's story), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Amsk2ixS_cc
91 Brooklyn Father Seeking, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXdbNWJaif4
92 August's story, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWR-o8bTFrI
93 Hygge" is an important part of Danish culture and denotes "a complete absence of anything annoying, irritating, or emotionally overwhelming, and the presence of and pleasure from comforting, gentle, and soothing things" (Wikipedia 2010, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Denmark)
differences revealed highly significant differences for category "Sex" (p<0.001) and significant differences for category "Country image" (p<0.01), both of which are used significantly more often in the English news articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content category</th>
<th>Total (n=107)</th>
<th>English (n=15)</th>
<th>Danish (n=92)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YouTube video</td>
<td>98.1%</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>98.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VisitDenmark</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People's reaction</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country image</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Hygge&quot;</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Frequency of Content Categories

The 20 evaluation categories were found in 102 (90.5%) of the articles. Thus, the overwhelming majority of the articles in the sample contain either positive or negative evaluative statements, and only 5 articles were completely neutral in tone. Overall, 485 instances of evaluation were identified as part of the coding. The English articles contained 60 evaluative statements, of which 4.3% were positive and 95.7% were negative. In the Danish news coverage, 14.9% of the evaluative statements were positive, while 85.1% were negative. A chi square test of independence revealed significant differences (p<0.05) between Danish and English news coverage, with the English news coverage being slightly more negative than the Danish ones.

Table 2 shows the percentage of articles in which the different evaluation categories were found. The most frequent categories in the English news coverage were "Danish women promiscuous", "Offensive", and "Lying". In the Danish coverage, meanwhile, the most frequent categories were "Lying", "Offensive", and "Unsuccessful". A chi square test of independence revealed significant differences for the categories "Denmark made a fool of itself" (p<0.05), "Lying" (p<0.05), and "Danish women promiscuous" (p<0.001). This means that Danish articles mention more frequently that VisitDenmark has lied to its audience, while English articles report significantly more often that Denmark made a fool of itself and that the campaign presents Danish women as promiscuous. It is also interesting to note that the category "Dark-skinned baby" occurs in a third of the English ones, but not in a single Danish one. The baby in the video is in fact not dark-skinned at all, but an error in one foreign news source must have resulted in a number of articles covering this aspect. This also shows that the English journalists did not watch the video, as they otherwise would have noticed that the baby is Caucasian. The category "Incompetence of VisitDenmark" occurs in a quarter of the Danish ones, but not in the English ones. This stands to reason somehow, given that VisitDenmark is partly financed through Danish taxes, which is an aspect that is not relevant abroad.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluative content</th>
<th>Polarity</th>
<th>Total (n=102)</th>
<th>English (n=14)</th>
<th>Danish (n=88)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grotesque</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste of tax money</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low costs</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong picture of Denmark</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong picture of &quot;hygge&quot;</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ironic use of &quot;hygge&quot;</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark made a fool of itself</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark as a sex paradise</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark is liberal</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in tourism</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish women promiscuous</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespect towards single mothers</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark-skinned baby</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful Danish women</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VisitDenmark incompetent</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Frequency of Evaluation Categories

Table 3 cross-tabulates evaluative statements by source and polarity. The results indicate that the overwhelming majority of negative statements are provided by the journalists writing the articles, followed by quotations from experts and quotations from VisitDenmark. Positive statements, which are used substantially less frequently, are provided mostly by VisitDenmark when outlining their viewpoint of what the video presents, and by the journalist writing the article. These results also show that quotations from experts were mainly used to provide a negative evaluation of the campaign.
Table 4: Breakdown of Evaluative Statements by Source and Polarity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Negative (n=420)</th>
<th>Positive (n=65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VisitDenmark</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency producing the video</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media consultants</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other media</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen (in the video)</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis above has shown that the two most important sources of evaluative content are the journalist writing the article and quotations from VisitDenmark. These two sources of evaluations were therefore subjected to a more detailed analysis of the evaluative categories they provide. Table 4 indicates how the positive and negative evaluations provided by journalists and VisitDenmark are distributed over the various evaluation categories. Categories for which the frequencies for both sources is below 3% were aggregated as "other".

Table 5: Breakdown of Evaluations Provided by Journalists and VisitDenmark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Journalist</th>
<th>VisitDenmark</th>
<th>Polarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offensive</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish women promiscuous</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark as a sex paradise</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong picture of Denmark</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste of tax money</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetence of VisitDenmark</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark is liberal</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in tourism</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 4 shows, the journalists' evaluations of the campaign are mainly that VisitDenmark lied to its audience, that the campaign is offensive, and that Danish women are presented as promiscuous. To a lesser extent, journalists claim that the campaign was unsuccessful, that Denmark is presented as a sex paradise, and that the campaign presents the wrong picture of Denmark. The results further illustrate that VisitDenmark is mostly quoted, using the evaluation categories "Offensive", "Denmark is liberal", and "Successful". These evaluations occur when VisitDenmark's executive director acknowledges that the campaign has offended many people, but still perceives the campaign to be successful, as it presents Denmark as a liberal country. In some instances, the chairman of VisitDenmark admits that the campaign was not successful. In a few cases, VisitDenmark is quoted to talk about an expected increase in tourism. Overall, journalists provide very few positive evaluations relative to their number of negative evaluations, while evaluations made by VisitDenmark are split more or less equally between positive and negative.

Discussion

This paper has presented the case of VisitDenmark, the Danish National Tourism Board, who tried to promote the country by publishing a video on YouTube, in which a single mother was looking for the father of her son. When it came to light that VisitDenmark was behind the video, news coverage in Danish newspapers and abroad followed. While Danish news coverage was quite substantial, the amount of English-language news coverage abroad was moderate. Departing from agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw 1972) and the stakeholder salience model (Mitchell et al. 1997), we chose to focus our analysis on the media, as they play an important role as drivers of public opinion and have the power to determine whether a story results in a crisis situation for an organization or not.

The content analysis of the newspaper articles has shown that almost all articles that covered the affair contained positive or negative evaluations of the story. The Danish media emphasized that VisitDenmark has offended and lied to the Danish population by pretending that Karen's story was real. Foreign media found that the campaign suggests that Danish women are promiscuous. The finding that evaluative content was most commonly included by the journalist themselves, illustrates the prevalence of framing in the news coverage.

Moreover, both the national and international media considered two issues important: the image of Denmark and the Danes and people's reaction to the campaign. VisitDenmark aimed at creating a specific symbolism by associating the idea of a liberal country with that of 'liberal sex'. As the executive director of VisitDenmark stated, the idea behind this campaign was to create an image of Denmark as a free country where "a grown-up woman … accepts the consequences of her actions" (TV2 2009b). However, our findings show a different symbolism. The national and international media interpreted the campaign in a way that Denmark is a country with promiscuous women willing to have one-night stands with foreigners. The

94 Here for symbol and symbolism we intend “objects, acts, relationships, or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings, evoke emotions, and impel men to action” (Cohen 1974: 23).
campaign also reinforced this symbolism by choosing a blond and beautiful actress to play the role of Karen, supporting the stereotype of Nordic women. The idea of promiscuity associated with the main character of VisitDenmark’s video was transferred to the image of the country by most of the journalists, which becomes evident in the prevalence of negative tones in both international and national news articles.

The second issue, people’s reaction, represents the concerns of Danish population. The mass media chose to cover this specific issue, because of the potential controversy behind the campaign. Journalists, in fact, often privilege contents that have conflict frames that accentuate controversies among issues or event actors (Reber & Berger 2005; Hertog & McLeod 2001). Being deceived at first, the mass media doubted the trustworthiness of VisitDenmark’s intentions to the point that discussions on mainstream media became a space for expressing discontent. The data presented in this paper are not sufficient to assess the actual influence of the media on VisitDenmark’s decision to remove the video from YouTube and to apologize to its different stakeholders. However, as other studies pointed out, the media have a great potential to exert powerful influences on public policy definitions, choices, and outcomes (Cobb & Elder 1981). One point of interest is that the only negative evaluative content that news media reported as VisitDenmark official source was VisitDenmark's admission that the video may have offended people.

In order to understand why people were offended by VisitDenmark's campaign, we need to look at the images that the video has created in people’s mind. Gold (1994) argues that the image of places, people and issues are based on knowledge, and the more knowledge a person has, the more accurate his/her perception of the place or issue generally will be. As other studies show when an individual has no information about a distant place that he/she has never visited, the media provide the basic information that constructs that place’s stereotype and image (Dahlgren & Chakrapani 1982; Gold 1994). However, if this knowledge received is ‘altered’ by specific commercial purposes, also the image of places, people and issues are fallacious. From our analysis, it appears that more Danish media than international one reflect upon the consequences of the campaign's symbolism on the country image. By underlining how VisitDenmark's campaign has affected the country image and the image of Danes abroad as well as how it has offended the people that it intended to represent, the national media express their disapproval of VisitDenmark's actions. In this respect, the Danish media were not only aware of Denmark’s image problem, but were actively engaging within their sphere of power to solve it. The video also had an impact on VisitDenmark's stakeholders because of the mass media's engagement in discussing the issue. Since more than 90% of the coded news articles dealt with the video, VisitDenmark and the campaign, it is not a surprise to find that the government and the general public became more aware of the campaign because of its increased visibility in mainstream media. In this respect, the media as stakeholders were more active in engaging in communication behaviors that raise the awareness levels of latent and aware publics, thereby helping to elevate at least some politicians and citizens to become activists in this affair.

With the purpose of identifying the salience of VisitDenmark's stakeholders we consider Mitchell et al.’s stakeholder salience model (1997) before and during the first month of campaign, when media coverage was most extensive. The primary stakeholders of VisitDenmark are the Danish government and the population of Denmark, both of which are interested in the creation of a positive country image and the efficient use of tax money, and tourists, whose trips to Denmark represent a return on the government's expenses for running VisitDenmark.
Secondary stakeholders include, inter alia, partnering companies and all other companies in the tourism sector, all of which are interested in an increase in incoming tourists. In addition, there are employees, whose stake is their job, and the media, which are interested in newsworthy stories. As a government agency that has entered into partnerships with the private sector, two stakeholder groups have legitimacy: the government and the partnering companies. Power can be attributed to the Danish government, which can withdraw or reduce funding; tourists, who may or may not come to Denmark; and the media, which can report negatively about VisitDenmark. The other stakeholder groups do not have power to an extent to which they can threaten the existence of VisitDenmark. In general terms, no stakeholder group has urgency, as long as VisitDenmark does what it is supposed to do. If it faults on that, any stakeholder group can have urgency.

After VisitDenmark launched its campaign and the media unfolded the story behind the campaign, three stakeholder groups had claims that required immediate attention and therefore represent urgency. These three groups were the Danish population, which was offended by and angry about the campaign, and the Danish media, whose continued coverage of the case eventually led to Dorte Kiilerich's departure, and the Danish government, who did not approve of the campaign and therefore also put pressure VisitDenmark, although the extent of this pressure is not known. It seems that VisitDenmark underestimated the power of the media in setting the public agenda in Denmark. While international news coverage was modest, the news coverage in Denmark was quite substantial and mostly negative. Given that the goal of any stealth marketing campaign is to create conversations, VisitDenmark has achieved this both on YouTube and in the mass media. However, journalists turned the affair into a story where VisitDenmark was presented as a liar and where the independence and freedom of Karen were interpreted as promiscuity. Although VisitDenmark may have achieved its goal of increasing awareness of Denmark, as the 770,000 hits on YouTube (Ekstrabladet 2009b) suggest, it nevertheless alienated the Danish population by projecting a country image that is not consistent with the favorable country image desired by the population. Clearly, VisitDenmark had never gotten this kind of attention on YouTube, if its video had not been so novel, unique and engaging. A video broadcasting Denmark’s beautiful landscape would obviously not have garnered the same level of attention on YouTube. Therefore, VisitDenmark seems to have consciously sacrificed ethics and stakeholder trust for international attention.

A final note should be given to the use of social media for stealth marketing activities. While VisitDenmark's strategy for branding Denmark is to use YouTube as a platform to foster stakeholders’ discussions and awareness into their campaign – thus considering the dialogic aspect that social media can provide in communicating with publics – the choice of a stealth marketing approach turned out to be detrimental to the organization’s image. Clearly, VisitDenmark has not embraced social media as a new way to interact and engage in mutual and beneficial relationships with its different stakeholders, but rather as a tool for merely getting attention and transmitting ‘publicity’.

The implications of this approach are twofold: first, by using stealth marketing VisitDenmark has encountered great ethical problems vis-à-vis to its primary stakeholders. People’s expectations of public institutions are to serve public interest (Hoggett 2006). Accordingly, VisitDenmark campaign did not meet this interest since it used ‘tax payers’ money’ for being irresponsible and untruthful – by showing a misleading portray of Denmark in a deceived way -, without being necessarily successful in economical terms. Second, there is a
substantial problem in the approach towards social media in the tourism sector which encompasses the role of marketing communications and public relations. Social media are conceived in public relations as environments for dialogue, where great attention is given to personal engagement and ethical aspects, such as disclosing the relationship between persons interacting in social networks and their belonging to specific organizations (Kent 2008). Whereas in marketing communication terms social media are another tool for publicity. In this viral environment sensationalization, polarization of ideas, amplification and rumors are some of the strategies to brand a product, service and even a country. Accordingly, the ‘ends justify the mean’. This is probably what Grey, the Copenhagen’s agency in charge of the creation of the video, thought about when developing this campaign for Denmark.

Conclusion

This case highlights how using social media in branding a country through a stealth marketing approach is not the best strategy for a public institution. When using social media with the intention of generating publicity and getting attention at any cost is the primary goal, organizations like VisitDenmark can encounter severe disruptions in their stakeholder relations. VisitDenmark has sacrificed its positive relationship with the Danish government and the population of Denmark for an increased awareness of Denmark. The consequences of this decision were dear in that the executive director lost her job and Denmark was perceived to have made a fool of itself. Further, the mass media, which were initially fooled by VisitDenmark’s stealth marketing campaign and reported Karen's story, turned against VisitDenmark and reported negatively about the case, perpetuating arguments that questioned VisitDenmark’s competences and eventually led to the departure of the executive director.

Although the case was not chosen to illustrate the particular situation of a public relations campaign launched by public bodies, it also illustrates the constraints under which public organizations operate, in that they have a different set of stakeholders than companies. The case demonstrates the importance of a careful analysis of stakeholders and their stakes before public relations campaigns are launched. In particular, the power/urgency/legitimacy model (Mitchell et al. 1997) can assist organizations in identifying potentially critical stakeholders also in the tourism sector. Further research in the field of tourism and social media is needed in order to understand better the practices and implications of social media in this industry.
References


Diga, M. & Kelleher, T. (2009), Social media use, perceptions of decision-making power, and public relations roles. Public Relations Review, 35(4), 440-442


Gold, J. R. (1994), "Locating the message: place promotion as image communication", in J. R. Gold and S. V. Ward (eds.), Place promotion: the use of publicity and marketing to sell towns and regions (pp. 19-37), Chichester: Willey & Son.


Murray, R. (2009), "Twitterati: Industry Gets to Grips with Social Media", Travel Trade Gazette UK & Ireland, March 20, 11.


New Media Age (2009), "Visit London Ramps up Social Media, Search and Mobile Marketing, New Media Age, July 9, 7.


Saxnæs, M. (2009b), "Mange tror at det er", 12 September,
http://twitter.com/mortensax/status/3932702350
Sunday Star (2009), "Dane is tot stuff", 13 September, UK print edition.
TV2 (2009a), "Karen søger sit barns fær på YouTube", 11 September 2009,
TV2 (2009b), "VisitDenmark bag løgn på YouTube", 13 September 2009,
VisitDenmark (2009a), "VisitDenmark beklager film på YouTube", 14 September,
VisitDenmark (2009b), "Adm. direktør i VisitDenmark stopper", 25 September,
VisitDenmark (2010), "About VisitDenmark",

Constructing European public relations in transnational research

Dejan Verčič, Ph.D.
Founder & Associate Professor
Pristop & University of Ljubljana
Trubarjeva cesta 79, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija
Phone: +386 1 23 91 444
dejan.vercic@pristop.si

Prof. Dr. Ansgar Zerfass
Institute of Communication and Media Science
Department Communication Management and Public Relations
University of Leipzig
Burgstr. 21, D-04109 Leipzig, Germany
Phone: +49-341-97-35040
zerfass@uni-leipzig.de

Abstract

European public relations is appearing on a world scene with its own identity that is emerging out of a decade long research endeavor in empirical transnational research in public relations. This started as a European Public Relations Body of Knowledge project in 1998 (van Ruler, Verčič, Buetschi, & Flodin, 2004; Verčič, van Ruler, Buetschi, & Flodin, 2001), and was supplemented by an annual survey starting in 2007 as a European Communication Monitor (ECM) (Zerfass, van Ruler, Rogojinaru, Verčič, & Hamrefors, 2007). The third ECM survey that was completed in May of 2009 and consisted of a questionnaire with 17 sections based on hypotheses and instruments derived from previous research and literature. Over 20,000 practitioners all over Europe were invited to participate in an on-line survey and 1,863 completed questionnaires from 34 European countries were received on time to be included in analysis (Zerfass, Moreno, Tench, Verčič, & Verhoeven, 2009).

Although public relations in Europe exists at least as long as it does in the USA, its character and identity are still ill-defined and obscure. This is partly because public relations in Europe is embodied in practices of different European countries with different traditions, cultures and languages, but partly also because of insufficient research in commonalities and common differences from public relations traditions of other continents, like e.g. the Americas and Asia. The paper reviews what has been learned about European public relations in the past decade and presents the results of the 2009 ECM.
Introduction

On 10 December 2009, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management posted a notice on its website that Centre Européen des Relations Publiques (CERP), that is in English the European Public Relations Confederation, an association of European national public relations associations, on its Extraordinary General Assembly on 12 November 2009 in Catania, Italy, dissolved itself and fully integrated its assets and resources into the Global Alliance (http://www.globalalliancepr.org/content/1/434/centre-europeen-des-relations-publiques-cerp-dissolution/). One could easily understand that massage as an obituary for European public relations melted in a globalised practice. But following Mark Twain we should note that the report of European public relations’ death was an exaggeration. As the 2009 European Communication Monitor, based on a sample of 1,850 professionals from 34 European countries, one of the most comprehensive transnational studies ever conducted in the field of public relations worldwide, shows: public relations is very well in Europe.

In this paper we report a decade long string of transnational research in European public relations. We review the European Public Relations Body of Knowledge (EBOK) project and its successor, the European Communication Monitor (ECM) project. We present the key results of the 2009 ECM, and conclude with limitations of the current projects and its future prospects. In the final section we will also give our views on why Europe is currently without a proper public relations practitioners association and where may the seeds for its rebirth germinate.

The European Public Relations Body of Knowledge project (EBOK), 1998-2004

The European Public Relations Body of Knowledge (EBOK) project ran from 1998 to 2004. It was the first large-scale transnational research project initiated by European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) which in 1998 split from CERP and re-named itself from CERP Education into EUPRERA. The EBOK project started with a Delphi study with participants from 29 European countries. This was conducted in 1999 and 2000 through three consultation rounds. The method and its results were reported in van Ruler and Verčič (2002, 2004a, 2005a and 2008), van Ruler, Verčič, Büetschi, & Flodin (2000 and 2004), and Verčič, van Ruler, Büetschi, & Flodin (2001). The EBOK project was the focus of the 2002 BledCom Symposium in Bled, Slovenia, that was simultaneously also annual congresses of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association and the European Association of Public Relations Students. With publication of The Bled manifesto on Public Relations (van Ruler & Verčič, 2002) it acquired a programmatic level. The project effectively culminated and ended with a publication of Public Relations and Communication Management in Europe (van Ruler & Verčič, 2004b), an edited book in which 27 experts from different European countries reported on the status of the profession, practice, research and teaching in their respective countries. The book also contains five conceptual Intermezzos between country chapters presenting key contributions of public relations theorizing in Europe: constructivism, reflexivity, a transitional approach to public relations, public sphere as a central concept of public relations, civil society and public relations, and consensus-oriented public relations.

Although both public relations academia and practice in Europe wholeheartedly accept and build on foundations laid down in the United, the EBOK project brought at light at least two distinctive features of public relations in Europe (as compared with the US practice): firstly,
public relations in Europe is conceived, practiced and studied not only on an organizational, but simultaneously also on a societal level. Van Ruler and Verčič (2008: 299) explained:

“In this societal approach, public relations serves the same kind of (democratic) function that journalism does, since they both contribute to a free flow of information and the interpretation of that information and to the development of the public sphere: in size (“How many people are involved in public life?”), in level (“What is the level at which we discuss public matters?”), and in quality (“What are the frames used in the debates?”). This echoes what James W. Carey called a cultural approach to communication. Theory building in public relations is closely related to journalism in many European countries, not because the practitioners must deal with journalists, but because of these overlapping functions in society.

For many European scholars, public relations produces social reality and, therefore, a certain type of society. That is why many European scholars look at public relations from a sociological perspective instead of economic, psychological, or organizational perspective. In this respect, the European use of public and public relations can mean something totally different than it normally does in the United States.”

Secondly, public relations is characterized not only with managerial and operational (technical) work, but also with reflective and educational. Reflexivity places public relations directly into the strategic apex of an organization: it is about the values, visions, missions and normative standards of operations that co-produce their licenses to operate – public relations core responsibility is to preserve legitimacy of organizational existence. Public relations is concerned with a public, outside-in view on organizations, and for organizations to be able to be communicatively competent, more and more managers and other employees need to achieve higher levels of communication competence. Growing and developing that competence is responsibility of public relations and more and more public relations practitioners, both in-house and in consultancies, are involved in training and cognitive educational activities (van Ruler & Verčič, 2005b).

Identification of distinctive features of European public relations has stimulated further research on identities of public relations in Afrika (Rensburg, 2002), Asia (Sriramesh, 2002 and 2004), Latin America (Ferrari, 2002) and around the world (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003 and 2009).

The European Communication Monitor (ECM), since 2007

There is a great recognition in Europe that public relations is a quantitative concept that needs empirical research (Bentele, 2005; van Ruler, Tkalac Verčič, & Verčič 2008). The European Communication Monitor (ECM) had been stimulated by the existence of the US Public Relations Generally Accepted Practices (GAP) studies (Swerling, Gregory, Schuh, Goff, Gould, Gu, Palmer, & Mchargue, 2008). Methodologically, the EBOK was a qualitative study that enabled some comparative research, yet what European public relations badly needed was transnational quantitative research. However, it is important to recognize that Europe is a continent of 50 countries, 27 of them belonging to the European Union. Even the EU can’t be conceived as the United States of Europe as it is not a federation, it is not a confederation, but a sui generis economic, social, and political organization in progress. In that sense there is no
European public relations in the same way as we can talk of the US public relations, where the mainstream paradigm can clearly be identified in the form of “Symmetry/Excellence approach” (Botan & Hazleton, 2006: 8-9; see also Dozier, L. Grunig & J. Grunig, 1995; Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 2008; J. Grunig, L. Grunig & Dozier, 2006; L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Public relations in Europe is divided by linguistic, cultural and administrative barriers (Verčič, 2000), and this affects both practice and research.

The European Communication Monitor (ECM) was initiated in 2007 to build on insights from the EBOK project. It shifted the focus from qualitative methodology used in the EBOK to quantitative methodology in the ECM. The ECM is a large survey based on multi-dimensional theoretical framework. It also shifted from comparative research that was at the core of the EBOK project studying emergencies, identities and differences in public relations between different European countries, to longitudinal trans-national research of European public relations as a phenomenon in itself. From its start in 2007 (Zerfass, van Ruler, Rogojinaru, Verčič, & Hamrefors 2007), the ECM has so far been done annually in 2008 (Moreno, Zerfass, Tench, Verčič, & Verhoeven, 2009; Zerfass, Moreno, Tench, Verčič & Verhoeven, 2008; Zerfass & Verčič, 2008) and 2009 (Verhoeven, Tench & Zerfass 2009; Zerfass, Moreno, Tench, Verčič, & Verhoeven, 2009; Moreno, A., Verhoeven, P., Tench, R., & Zerfass, A., 2010), and fieldwork for the fourth run has already been conducted in March 2010.

The ECM project is lead by Ansgar Zerfass at the University of Leipzig, Germany. The initial research team that started the project in 2007 included Betteke van Ruler (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands), Adeja Rogojinaru (University of Bucharest, Rumania), Dejan Verčič (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia), and Sven Hamrefors (Mälerdalen University, Sweden). Since 2008, the research team is composed of Ansgar Zerfass (University of Leipzig, Germany) as the coordinator, Angeles Moreno (University Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, Spain), Ralph Tench (Leeds Metropolitan University, United Kingdom), Dejan Verčič (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) and Piet Verhoeven (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands). The University of Leipzig, Germany, provides statistical analysis and organizational support. The research team has support by an advisory board by Emanuele Invernizi (IULM University, Milano, Italy), Valerie Carayol (University of Bordeaux 3, France), Francesco Lurati (University of Lugano, Switzerland), Sven Hamrefors (Mälerdalen University), Øyvind Ihlen (BI Norwegian School of Management, Oslo, Norway) and Ryszard Ławniczak (Poznan University of Economics, Poland). In the first three years the ECOM project directly involved thirteen researchers from twelve universities in twelve European countries. The ECM started as an EUPRERA project and is today supported also by The European Association of Communication Directors (EACD).

In 2008, the researchers developed a model that is the backbone of the survey, defining the framework and helping generate questions. It consists of five elements defining the state of public relations in Europe in a given moment. The questionnaire asks respondents questions about a) the person (demographics, job status, education and self-perception), about b) the organization in which he or she is employed (structure, culture, country), about c) the current situation in which one operates (the present), d) a perception about the future and e) the position of the practitioner has in his or her organization. The model is presented in Picture 1.
The ECM research team also works with the US GAP study team and some questions appear in both studies, allowing for US-European comparisons.

Each year, after pre-testing the questionnaire on more than fifty respondents in more than ten countries the survey is electronically sent via e-mail to over 20,000 public relations practitioners throughout Europe. The core package of addresses is provided by the European Association of Communication Directors and Communication Director magazine. Additional invitations to participate are distributed by national public relations associations and through researchers’ own network. Nearly 2,000 fully completed questionnaires are returned from over thirty countries each year. Replies from non-practitioners (academics, students…) non-European countries and not fully completed questionnaires are not entered into analysis.

The ECM gives the most comprehensive overview of the public relations profession in Europe. It is an enormous enterprise, but it has its limitations. Firstly, the survey can’t be treated as a representative survey as there is no clearly defined population to statistically sample. The exact number of public relations practitioners in Europe is unknown (indeed: the borders of the profession that would allow one to define its members are fuzzy) and there are no comprehensive lists of its members. Secondly, the survey is executed in English language though e-mail invitations and on the Internet, and it is thus restricted to English-speaking and Internet-literate members of the profession only. Although English is practically universally spoken and the Internet used among educated Europeans today, we conclude that the survey overrepresents higher, better educated, better positioned and better paid members of the profession in Europe. Thirdly, representation of different parts of Europe is uneven, with Western and Northern Europe overrepresented and Southern and Eastern Europe underrepresented; the ECM divides Europe according to United Nations Statistics Division (2008) classification. Notwithstanding this limits researchers have to take into account when interpreting data, the ECM is the best available and the most useful overview of the public relations profession in Europe.

Picture 1: ECM research model – framework and questions
The 2009 European Communication Monitor results

The 2009 European Communication Monitor survey was executed in May 2009. Over 20,000 practitioners from around Europe were invited to participate and 1,863 valid responses from 34 countries were received and entered into analysis. The average age of respondents was 42 years, 83 per cent of respondents were senior professionals working as heads of their departments, unit leaders or agency managing directors. 68 per cent of respondents held masters degree, MBA or a Ph.D. Nearly 60 per cent of respondents had more than ten years of experience in applied communication. Gender representation was balanced, but higher positions in hierarchy are still dominated by men (54.2 per cent of heads of communication or agency CEOs are men, while 45.8 per cent are women, compared with 41.9 per cent of team members or consultants being male, while 58.1 per cent female). Three quarters of respondents came from companies, government or non-governmental organizations, and a quarter from communication agencies. The largest geographical area represented is Western Europe (41%), followed by Northern Europe (31%), Southern Europe (19.0%), and Eastern Europe (8.5%).

Roles and contribution to organizational objectives

Communication specialists contribute to organizational objectives in two different ways: they can be involved in strategic decision-making, thus being co-responsible with other members of the dominant coalition for communicative aspects of organizational functioning, or they can be responsible for communication support to predefined organizational objectives and functions. In the 2009 ECM, 85 per cent of respondents reported to be involved in supportive communication activities, and 61 per cent in strategic decision-making. Five per cent saw themselves primarily as business councilors, 29 as operational supporters or technicians, while 56 per cent said that they practice both roles, strategic and operational (called ‘strategic facilitators’ in the study). It is interesting to note that ten per cent of respondents didn’t see a clear link between their work and organizational objectives, thus being somehow isolated ‘experts’.

There are two possibilities for interpretation here: one can say that with 61 per cent of respondents involved in strategic decision-making public relations really stands firmly at the center of organizational action; but then a question emerges about who does all the work. (As a kind of comparison: a hospital with 61 per cent of employees being physicians and only a minority in other medical and supportive functions would probably be seen as dysfunctional or badly managed.) But if we take into consideration our assumption of overrepresentation of the top layer of the public relations profession in Europe and with over 80 per cent of respondents claiming top communication position in their organization, we can also see the result as saying that a significant number of top communications still lack access to what really makes their work worth: organizational decision-making.

Public relations and management decisions

Although the 2009 ECM found a rising influence of communicators in European organizations compared to the previous year (2008 ECM), this was still significantly lower than in the US as reported in the GAP V (Swerling et al. 2008). On a 1 to 7 Likert-type scale,
advisory self-reported influence on senior management in Europe was 5.13 as compared to 5.67 in the US, and self-reported executive influence was 4.82 as compared to 5.33 in the US.

Statistical analysis revealed that the overall influence of practitioners in 2009 in Europe depended on the roles practitioners enact (strategic facilitators being more influential than others), their geographic location (practitioners in North being more influential than their colleagues in South), hierarchical position in an organization (being higher in hierarchy helped) and years of experience (more experienced are more influential).

This results clearly support theoretical findings and results of previous research on how can practitioners gain power in their organizations, e.g. in the Excellence project (Dozier, L. Grunig & J. Grunig, 1995; Grunig, 1992; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 2008; J. Grunig, L. Grunig & Dozier, 2006; L. Grunig, J. Grunig & Dozier, 2002), a hypothesis on correlation between levels of economic development and the importance of public relations practices and profession (North and West of Europe being economically more developed that South and East; cf. Verčič & Grunig, 2000; Verčič, Razpet, Dekleva, & Šlenc, 2000).

Impact of the recession and media crisis

The recent economic crisis affected public relations profession in Europe: 47 per cent of respondents reported budgetary cuts (in Southern Europe, and in private companies and corporations much higher than in governmental and non-profit organizations) and 22 per cent also reductions in staff. Yet, 80 per cent of respondents were optimistic for the year to come.

Three quarters of respondents saw themselves as capable of adapting to new media and journalism realities, with 41.8 per cent believing that the mass media surviving the crisis will be more influential than ever and 18.7 believing that being reported in the media is becoming less important.

It seems that the majority of practitioners saw the current economic crisis as being a temporary phenomenon that is to pass this year; if this is to be so and if there are really going to be only negligent consequences for the profession as a result of it is something to be seen empirically this year and n years to come.

Development of disciplines and communication channels

For the first time in 2009, corporate communication overtook marketing/brand communication (being on the top spot in 2007 and 2008) as the most important public relations function or discipline. These were followed by crisis communication on the third spot, internal communication and change management in the fourth, and public affairs/lobbying in the fifth.

Respondents expressed their conviction that corporate communication will be still the most important public relations function in 2012, while marketing/brand communication will fall further to the third place, being replaced on the second by internal communication and change management. Crisis communication will leave the top five table and corporate social responsibility and sustainability will enter the table on the fourth position. Public affairs/lobbying will remain where it was.

Internal communication/change management and social responsibility/sustainability were expected to be the fastest growing practices within public relation in Europe at least until 2012. As this result was consistent with the findings in the previous two ECMs, notwithstanding short period of observation we can tentatively describe these to be trends. Also expected to grow were
personal coaching of management and other employees on communication skills and competencies.

Among communication channels, social media are on the rise. Respondents reported print media press relations still being in the lead, but expected them to lose that position to online communication by 2012. On the third place communicators saw face-to-face communication and they expect it to remain there until 2012.

These results support a finding from the EBOK phase of research in public relations in Europe that education and reflection are becoming core characteristics of the profession on the Old Continent.

**Interactive communication: overall trends and online communities**

Nearly all respondents (85 per cent) were members of social networks, with professionally preferring LinkedIn and privately Facebook. But only 32.8 per cent of respondent evaluated online communities (social networks) as being important for contemporary public relations practice. But they expect over one hundred per cent increase of the importance in one year. By the end of 2010 over two thirds of respondents predicted that social networks will become important for public relations practice (the same for online videos). Weblogs, RSS feeds, podcasts, microblogs (Twitter) wikis and virtual worlds are lagging well behind.

There was a gap between private behavior of public relations practitioners (being socially networked) and the way they saw this as relevant for the current practice – but they expected that to change very soon.

**Strategic issues**

The most important issues as seen by respondents in 2009 were: linking business strategy and communication (by 47.3 per cent), coping with the digital evolution and the social web (45.0 per cent), dealing with sustainable development and social responsibility (38.0 per cent), building and maintaining trust (34.6 per cent), and dealing with the demand of new transparency and active audiences (30.5 per cent).

**Evaluation and communication performance**

Practitioners in Europe reported opportunism in measurement and evaluation: 84 per cent measure their impact on media, which can be done easily based on wide offering of clipping and media monitoring services. But only one third of respondents track effects of their work on their employer organization. Situation is not much better on monitoring and evaluation of input costs: only 38.3 per cent of respondents see that as a necessary measure. Based on a framework presented in Zerfass (2010), this is a picture of public relations evaluation and measurement work as reported in the 2009 ECM:
Internal communication trends

In internal communication, the major challenges were linking internal communication to corporate strategies (68.8 per cent), supporting organizational change and restructuring (66.1 per cent), and dealing with information overload (54.7 per cent). It is interesting to note what were seen as important future actions in internal communication: training managers to act as communicators is with 74.3 per cent at the top, followed by spreading authentic content instead of polished messages with 65.0 per cent and using online communities for internal dialogue with 53.8 per cent.

Salary and qualification needs

Salaries and remuneration widely differ across Europe. Western and Northern Europe are on the top side and Southern and Eastern Europe at the bottom. Women were underrepresented in the higher layers of income, and membership in international communication associations such as the EACD correlated positively with a basic salary of 100,000 Euros or more. Being in a position of a strategic facilitator also paid.
Conclusion and a look forward

Public relations is clearly a thriving practice in Europe today. The European Communication Monitor survey registers its evolution through the past three years (into the fourth this year). It gives an impressive transnational overview of the state of the profession, although imprecise. One needs to bear in mind that the survey is done electronically, in English language and on a purposive sample. It is therefore an elite survey that gives a qualified insight into where the profession in a given moment is and where the respondents think it is evolving. However, it is interesting to note that its findings are consistent with previous research and theoretical understanding of the field: for public relations to be of use for organizations, it needs to be involved in both strategizing and enactment of organizationally relevant activities, relations with both internal and external publics are gaining on importance and that communication competence is becoming equally important for organizational leaders as other core organization (business) competencies are.

This ECM research enterprise is even more impressive if we bear in mind that there is no trans-European public relations practitioner association and that the only association of the national organizations had recently been dissolved. The closest to an individual members pan-European association is at the moment the European Association of Communication Directors (http://www.eacd-online.eu), although from its statutes follows that its aim is to represent only persons employed as communication directors, press spokespeople or individuals in similar functions in multinationals with a seat in one of the member states of the European Union, in a European institution or intergovernmental body or a European association or in a public body in one of the member states involved in cross-border activities – its aim is thus far from being representative of the whole public relations profession or even the whole European continent. A genuine trans-European association is the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (http://www.euprera.org). Students of public relations in Europe have their own association that appears and disappears under different names as generations replace one another. International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) has its IABC Europe/Middle East regional board and events (http://europe.iabc.com) and that is more or less it. Public relations professional organizations thrive as national public relations associations, with the British Chartered Institute of Public Relations having over 9,500 individual members (http://www.cipr.co.uk/) and the Swedish Public Relations Association having over 4,650 members (http://www.sverigesinformationsforening.se/in-english.aspx) being the two largest among them. But as the European Union grows and develops not only horizontally (in number of its members) but also vertically (in depth), so will public relations profession in Europe need to find a new forum that will replace the dissolved CERP as a representative body for the profession in Europe.
References


The Translucency Corollary: Why Full Transparency is not always the Most Ethical Approach

Robert I. Wakefield and Susan B. Walton, BYU

Abstract

Rawlins (2008) advocated “transparency through every aspect of corporate communications” (p. 2) that embraces open, authentic communication of organizational successes and failures; facilitates ongoing discussion; and relinquishes a seemingly incessant institutional drive to maintain the image of perfection. Transparency is a critical addition to the literature and practice of ethical public relations, as some entities have suffered major damages or have even been forced to close after deceptive withholding of information that was vital to stakeholders. The purpose of this paper, however, is to show that the term transparency has been so broadly interpreted, invoked, and abused that it risks losing its intent of open communication that enhances dialogue and benefits both organizations and society. The paper argues that the term transparency has two flaws that need to be clarified to strengthen its usage in public relations: (1) Transparency increasingly is interpreted as being completely open at all times, but the authors argue there are times when it is in the best legal and logistical interest of the entity to not disclose, and in such times this is the most ethical stance for both the organization and its stakeholders; and (2) Entities increasingly are spouting self-proclaimed “transparent” communication, when investigation reveals that those claims are smokescreens to deflect an actual disdain for transparency.

Balkin (1999) identified categories of informational, participatory, and accountability transparency. Others have linked transparency with trust (Jahansoozi, 2006; Gower, 2006). While useful, these linkages and categories do not go far enough in guiding entities toward ethical functioning in today’s society. This paper therefore muses over the questions: Under what specific circumstances is transparent communication necessary and beneficial? When is it better to not disclose information, even given today’s expectations of instant, complete messaging? In which situations does absolute transparency actually harm stakeholders and societies? The paper argues that in these circumstances, a stance of translucency may be more appropriate than actual transparency. Translucency occurs when light passes through a medium, such as frosted glass, in sufficient quantity that the viewer can discern the outline of objects and see in which direction they are moving but they are not completely visible to the eye. With this paper providing parameters under which translucent communication must take place—and why—organizations can offer an outline and shape that will ethically inform, guide, and engage key publics, even when full disclosure is not the best option.
**Introduction**

In 2009, the United States government encountered a dilemma over the concept of transparency. Members of Congress joined the increasing public demand for the release of photographs that would detail alleged abuses during the interrogation of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. military personnel in Baghdad. Newly elected president Barack Obama and his administration had to decide to what extent releasing the photos would jeopardize future interrogative needs while at the same time risking greater deterioration of the nation’s reputation around the world.

This dilemma was reported by CNN.com as follows:

The notorious Abu Ghraib photos showing U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi detainees were used by jihadists and cost "a lot of American lives," says Brig. Gen. David Quantock. That's why the head of detainee operations in Iraq agrees with President Obama that more photos of alleged detainee abuse shouldn't be released, *despite promises of transparency*[from the new U.S. administration] (CNN, May 14, 2009—italics added).

Today, we live in what Holzner and Holzner (2006) called “the open society” (p. 2), a global movement toward “the rise of transparency” (p. 5). Transparency increasingly is championed in democratic society and particularly in the public relations field (Rawlins, 2008). It is easy to support the growing need for more openness and honesty in institutional and individual communication. The public relations debacles of Enron’s “cooked books,” (Calkins, 2004), the accounting fraud of Worldcom (Romar & Calkins, 2006), Bernie Madoff’s Ponzi scheme (Keith, 2009), the Tiger Woods fiasco, and many other cases have clearly shown the devastating consequences of individual and corporate deceit. Therefore, clarion calls for transparency are critical. “The message to CEOs is that integrity is very important,” said former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, “and that the falsification of … any documentation that relates to your company is a serious matter” (Keith, 2009, p. 1). Public relations professionals are encouraged to serve as the moral conscience of the organizations they serve, and the few treatises advocating transparency have been vital additions to the field’s literature and guidelines for ethical practice.

On the other hand, the Abu Ghraib example above is just one of many which indicate that the need for transparency is not beyond debate. It could be argued that transparency has become so prevalent and so frequently discussed that it has entered the realm of “latest buzzword” or overworked cliché. Early in 2010, Lake Superior State University included the term in its 35th annual listing of words that need to be banished for overuse (LSSU, 2010). More importantly, the concept has been advanced with minimal challenge to its moral basis in given circumstances or scenarios. The U.S. interrogation dilemma shows that much more thinking needs to be devoted to the transparency issue, not to determine *whether* it is appropriate but rather *when* it is appropriate and when it may not fully satisfy the demands of a situation.

Dezenhall (2009) addressed the moral dilemma behind the term transparency. He said, “The thirst for transparency and full-disclosure is warranted. We rightly want to know what’s under the fingernails of those who have power over our lives. The problem is that transparency has become the insipid new shibboleth for all that is good and noble—a mere bit of corporate and political theater.” (p. 1). Lord (2006) also argued that, fundamentally, transparency is “morally right” (p. 21), but explained why it should not continue to be advocated for all circumstances without question:

Comprehensive analyses about the impact of greater transparency are relatively rare. Analysts mention transparency as part of a solution to particular problems…but do not
take a broader perspective. The result is that discussions of transparency are often one-sided and are focused on its positive effects with little, if any, discussion of costs. Such analyses are not necessarily wrong, but they are incomplete. The cumulative effect is an overwhelming focus on the positive aspects of transparency (p. 16).

The purpose of this paper, then, is to foster additional conversation around the definitions and implications of transparency. As Dezenhall (2009) wrote, “Let us consider the rhetoric of ... William Goldman’s *The Princess Bride.* Throughout the narrative, the cunning Sicilian, Vizzini, shouts ‘Inconceivable!’ whenever a plot doesn’t work out. His sidekick ... Inigo Montoya, finally counsels Vizzini: ‘You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means’” (p. 1). Perhaps the same could be said of the word *transparency.* The authors of this paper believe that the term suffers from two basic mischaracterizations. First, it seems that transparency increasingly is interpreted as being completely open *at all times and in all communication situations.* We believe, however, that there are times when it is in the legal and logistical interest of the entity to *not* disclose information, and in these times not disclosing is the most *ethical* stance for both the organization and its stakeholders. Second, and more alarming, is when organizations proclaim their own “transparent communication” behaviors only to have it revealed through subsequent external investigation that those claims are simply smokescreens to deflect a complete and purposeful eschewing of transparency.

Some conversation on the topic has already begun. Jahansoozi (2006), Gower (2006), and Rawlins (2008), for example, all have correlated transparency with stakeholder trust, and Balkin (1999) identified dimensions of transparency. While these treatises help to enlighten the concept, more examination and discussion is needed in order to adequately guide entities toward more ethical communication. This paper, therefore, raises questions that perhaps have not been asked before, questions particularly related to the daily decisions that public relations people face concerning this issue. For example, when is transparent communication necessary and beneficial? Are there inherent limitations to transparency? If so, under what circumstances would it be better to not disclose information, even given today’s expectations of instant and complete messaging? Perhaps most importantly, in which situations is it possible that absolute transparency could actually harm stakeholders and the societies in which organizations operate?

In this paper, an analysis of transparency has been undertaken through three main methods. The first was a review of foundational literature on transparency, not just in public relations but in business, political science, and other fields as well. The second was a review of specific cases wherein (1) transparency went too far and upset the mutual benefits equilibrium between an organization and its stakeholders or (2) some other problem occurred when attempts at openness did not unfold according to the ideal conceptions of transparency. The final mode of investigation came through in-depth interviews with nine senior professionals in public relations and business consulting to seek their thoughts on the topic and particularly to probe for actual experiences with the implementation of transparent communication. These interviews generated several more specific examples where the basic principles of transparency were challenged by practical realities and the weight of competing moral dilemmas.

The examination of this issue has led to our proposal of a new term for those communication situations wherein honesty is critical but where total transparency would not mutually benefit organizations or their stakeholders. The new term is not intended to be a new or replacement theory because we concur that the theory of transparency is one of the critical foundations of ethical public relations. Rather, this new addendum is what may be called a *corollary*—or, in this case, the *translucency corollary.* A corollary follows from an existing
proposition (datasegment.com, 2010), so the term fits here because it expands, rather than replaces, the existing transparency theory. This will be explained further below.

**Theoretical Framework**

With the term *transparency* bantered around considerably today, it is easy to jump into the discussion; but the more difficult task is to dissect what transparency really means. Does transparency entail full disclosure of all information to all people at all times from every organization? Does transparency mean complete honesty and accuracy in information that should be disclosed? If so, what information should be disclosed and how or when that disclosure should take place? How are we to discern those conditions and boundaries?

Simply defined, transparency entails “openness,” or honest and readily accessible information coming particularly from business and government entities (Rawlins, 2008, p. 6). Florini (2000) noted that “Transparency is the opposite of secrecy. Secrecy means deliberately hiding your actions; transparency means deliberately revealing them” (p. 13). Holzner and Holzner (2006) said that although it would be a mistake to equate transparency with democracy, the concept of transparency arose out of early democratic movements toward an “open society,” and, in today’s Internet era, pressures for transparency are not just American but global. They described transparency as “the social value of open, public, and/or individual access to information held and disclosed by centers of authority (p. 13). Lord (2006) similarly viewed the connection between transparency and those in power. She defined the concept as “a condition in which information about the priorities, intentions, capabilities, and behavior of powerful organizations is widely available to the global public … a condition of openness enhanced by any mechanism that discloses and disseminates information such as a free press, open government hearings, mobile phones, commercial satellite imagery, or reporting requirements in international regimes” (p. 5).

If transparency is equivalent to openness and honesty, it seems inadvisable to argue against this moral imperative. Indeed, in the most recent Edelman Trust Barometer (2010), “transparent and honest practices” was listed by respondents worldwide as the most important factor in organizational reputation—more critical than high quality products or services, fair prices, the way an institution treats its employees, its innovation and leadership, and its annual revenues or financial returns (p. 6). Furthermore, two-thirds of the respondents indicated that an organization needs to communicate information to them at least three to six times before they will “believe that the information is likely true” (p. 7). This indicates not only a widespread desire for open and transparent communication but also the need for that information to be disseminated in a continual flow. As Tapscott and Ticoll (2003) explained, “in a world where trust is in deficit [all stakeholders in society] have seized the tools at their disposal to shed the bright lights of transparency on the corporation like never before” (p. 10).

The world of social media exponentially increases the impetus for transparency. The Internet spreads information instantaneously to every region of the globe. Web sites, the collective actions of e-mailers and bloggers, videos posted on YouTube or other viral sites, tweeting and texting, and all other forms of real-time interactions expose thoughts and behaviors in historically unprecedented ways. All of this instant genuflection expands the information flow and renders it virtually impossible for any individual or organization to withhold information even when they would desire to do so. As Gower (2006) wrote, the Internet “has fostered a constant expectation of access (p. 92). Lord (2006) added that the Internet promises the potential for equalizing influence between organizations and individuals. “In an age of transparency, any
organization or individual that can command broad attention and support has the potential ... to influence the relationship between people and information. Groups can marshal evidence and persuade people to change their minds,” she said. “They can influence what people think is right or good and what sorts of behavior are appropriate” (p. 116). Because of this expanded openness through social information exchange and its potential outcomes, the idea of transparency has countless advocates, or “transparency optimists,” as Lord (2006, p. 13) calls them.

Among the advocates for transparency are many scholars and practitioners in public relations. This should not be surprising, because long before the term transparency became a recent buzzword the public relations industry was, to some extent, advocating for open, honest communication between organizations and their various publics. Early in the 20th century, public relations advisor Ivy Lee developed a “new policy of information,” declaring that his firm would not be a “secret press bureau” but would disseminate information in a factual, accurate manner (Bernays, 1988, p. 20). More recently, Newsom et al. (2007) characterized the more traditional imperatives of public relations: “The [public relations] practitioner ... distributes information that enables the institution’s publics to understand its policies” (p. 2), dealing “with reality, not false fronts” (p. 3). This means, the authors added, that “[public relations] practitioners should never lie to the news media, either outright or by implication” (p. 3). While not specifically mentioning transparency, the intent of the authors reflected what is generally believed among public relations scholars—that it is not ethical for public relations practitioners to hide or obfuscate communication on behalf of their organizations.

In the past five years, the public relations industry has addressed the expanding concept of transparency—sometimes substituting the term with the word openness (Rawlins, 2008). One of the industry’s strategic management publications, The Strategist (2005), for example, reported a study which concentrated on employee communication alone, but nevertheless indicated that employees prefer open and honest exchange of information, whether it is positive or negative. Last year, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) added a provision to its code of ethics that censures “pay for play.” This is a tactic that, as PRSA Board of Ethics and Professional Standards chair Robert Frause explained, “Occurs when professionals make undisclosed payments to journalists or media companies to publish or broadcast a client’s story, or when professionals allow placement of stories that appear to be earned media where compensation was provided in exchange for publication or broadcast” (PR Tactics, 2009, p. 1). In a specific attempt to encourage communication transparency, PRSA’s new provision states that practitioners must fully disclose any such activities that result in editorial coverage.

A few public relations scholars have connected transparency with organizational trust. Gower (2006) reported that “corporate transparency is seen as a deterrent to illegal or unethical behavior” (p. 92). Therefore, “embracing the concept of transparency improves a company’s reputation and helps restore trust” (p. 92). In an article focusing on stakeholder relationships, Jahansoozi (2006) noted that when trust in organizations declines due to crises or misbehaviors, that trust can be repaired with efforts of transparency that accept organizational accountability and promote cooperation with stakeholders. Rawlins (2008) explained that crises involving companies like Enron, WorldCom, and Arthur Anderson “resulted in a flood of demands for more transparency to restore trust in corporate America” (p. 2). And, he added, “To increase trust, organizations must be more open and transparent” (p. 1).

Rawlins (2008) offered a definition of transparency that highlighted the societal desires for openness. He described transparency as “the deliberate attempt to make available all legally releasable information—whether positive or negative in nature—in a manner that is accurate,
timely, balanced, and unequivocal, for the purpose of enhancing the reasoning ability of publics and holding organizations accountable for their actions, policies, and practices” (p. 7). Such a definition suggests that attempts to make all “legally releasable information” available to are generally driven not by organizations which may automatically desire to release the information but by stakeholders representing broader societal virtues and holding the organizations accountable to those virtues. Still, despite these societal mandates for openness, organizations, and corporations in particular, are generally reluctant to disclose information (Fung et al., 2007). There is constant tension between the goals of society and of specific corporations operating within that society towards information and its dissemination. Lord (2006) explained this distinction between voluntary transparency, where organizations see the benefit of completely disclosing information, and involuntary or forced transparency, where society imposes the release of information through specific “investigative reporting by the global media or reports by NGOs” (p. 17) or through any one of the expanding social media outlets.

Sometimes when organizations do not satisfy societal expectations of transparency, governments create legislation to fulfill these informational needs. In this regard, Fung et al. (2007) characterized transparency as “mandated public disclosure by corporations or other private or public organizations of standardized, comparable, and disaggregated information regarding specific products or practices to further a defined public purpose” (p. 6). They recounted several instances where governments have legislated what they call “targeted transparency” to protect segments of society from some form of potential harm (p. 2). After the deadly chemical accident in Bhopal, India, in the 1980s, the United States government required that manufacturers report every toxic pollutant released by each of their plants. Legislation passed in 1990 compelled food producers to include ingredient listings on packaging to inform consumers about potentially harmful levels of fat, sugar, and other nutrients. In 1996, three years after microbes invaded the water system of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, killing 110 residents and sickening 400,000 more, municipalities were mandated to start informing citizens of contaminants in their water supplies. And the list goes on (Fung et al., 2007).

Given examples of imposed transparency like these, it may be easy to conclude that organizations are simply being recalcitrant and thus such government action is necessary to protect society. As Lessig (2009) asked, “How could anyone be against transparency? Its virtues and its utilities seem so crushingly obvious” (p. 1). However, Lord (2006) argued that such simple judgments and frameworks are hallmarks of the transparency optimists. They examine all of the reasons why transparency is needed in society while simplifying or ignoring the complexities of transparency and possible reasons or situations when transparency may not be advisable. And Lessig (2009) added, “I have increasingly come to worry that there is an error at the core of this unquestioned goodness. We are not thinking critically enough about where and when transparency works, and where and when it may lead to confusion, or to worse” (p. 1).

Perhaps, then, rather than simply dismissing organizations as recalcitrant and self-serving, the question needs to be asked: Why might it be important to withhold information under certain circumstances? Certainly, as already shown, there are times when corporations, in particular, purposefully stonewall information at the expense of stakeholders who are negatively affected by subsequent corporate actions. Certainly, there are many observers who argue that it is the nature of corporations to want to work in secrecy. Yet, perhaps something more is going on related to this more complex nature of transparency. In fact, some authors argue that

95 The authors listed these characteristics of transparency as bullet points, but the wording is verbatim.
transparency is not as simple as being open and accurate in information. A search of scholarly and practical literature reveals circumstances in which any organization has a legitimate and moral responsibility to withhold information (Lord, 2006; Dezenhall, 2009; Lessig, 2009).

Much of the rationale against unfettered transparency centers not on any criticism of the concept, per se, but on weighing the virtues of transparency against other societal values, such as a person’s right to privacy or the benefit of fair trade. Compromise between these virtues and transparency can be seen through government regulation and other means. For example, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) mandates that no information about a student can be made public without the student’s permission (FERPA, 2010). The Employee Privacy Act also prohibits the disclosure of personal information to third parties without consent of the employee (Employee Privacy, 2010). To preserve fair trade, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) requires regular release of information to investors and shareholders. However, the SEC prohibits disclosure during the quiet periods surrounding initial public offerings, as well as “insider trading”—giving information to certain individuals before public release so as to foster an advantage over other potential investors (Newsom et al., p. 186). Even the PRSA code of ethics requires “appropriate protection of confidential and private information” and counsels against leaking “proprietary information that could adversely affect some other party” or using “confidential information from your previous employer to benefit the competitive advantage of your new employer” (cited in Wilcox & Cameron, 2009, p. 78).

Other implications of transparency move beyond legal constraints and into the more ambiguous moral realm. Lord (2006) argued that information is not neutral and that sometimes, rather than adding to social discourse or protecting citizens from organizational misbehaviors, transparency fans the flames of mistrust and discrimination. She said:

Greater transparency is not an unmitigated good…. Greater transparency can highlight hostility and fuel vicious cycles of belligerent words and deeds. It can highlight widespread prejudice and hatred, encourage victimization of out-groups and by showing broad acceptance of such behavior without repercussions, legitimize it. Greater transparency can undermine efforts at conflict resolution and, when conflicts do break out, it can discourage intervention by third parties. Transparency sometimes can make conflicts worse (Lord, 2006, p. 3).

Transparency also has the potential to permanently damage reputation—at times, even the reputations of those it is designed to protect. Lessig (2009) described a long-standing policy by The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) concerning conflicts of interest between authors published in JAMA and the medical industry. This policy came about in part because, as Lessig noted, charges of failing to disclose such affiliations “is enough to stain a reputation. As with a charge of sexual harassment, the establishment of innocence does not really erase its harm (p. 1)”

Because of the potential of such charges to permanently damage reputations, JAMA put into place a requirement that anyone filing a complaint with JAMA about such a potential conflict must remain silent until the complaint was investigated. Late last year, however, an individual who filed such a complaint published his charges in another journal after waiting several months for JAMA to investigate. At that point, Lessig (2009) noted:

“…once the story of JAMA’s effort to silence a critic had been made public, that "gag rule" was of course doomed. After an internal review, the journal reversed its policy. Any effort to protect the accused against unjustified criticism was
abandoned. Unfair complaints would have to be tolerated—as they would have to be in any similar context. The age of transparency is upon us. The need to protect the whistleblower is unquestionable—driving off even modest efforts to cushion the blows from a mistaken accusation” (p. 1).

A society that insists upon transparency also would do well to wrestle with the potential consequences of extreme information overload. What if all information were accessible to everyone at all times, from every possible source? The consequence of this could easily be a cognitive and practical nightmare for both individuals and society as a whole—ever more information piled upon people who already are overloaded by massive amounts of data. When scholars or practitioners advocate for full transparency, this factor generally has not been added into the equation. As Lord (2006) explained, “Humans often have trouble processing information and even more trouble processing large amounts of information…. Thus, even when the information we receive because of greater transparency is excellent and unbiased, we may not interpret it accurately. We may fail to recognize important information amid the ‘noise’ of constant information streams or we may fail to recognize its implications” (p. 11).

When people try to resolve these problems of information overload, they resort to their own cognitive perceptions to sift through the information. Each person does this through differing perspectives of culture, religion, personal experiences, and other factors. Therefore, the differing perspectives between the sources of information and their recipients also can cause problems for transparency. No matter how many facts or bits of information are offered to stakeholders, the individual’s or group’s frame of reference generally remains the same. Lord (2006) stated “We form theories about the way things work and we may resist new information that does not fit our preexisting views. Though these cognitive processes help us to cope with information and form opinions, they can also lead us astray” (p. 11). Newsom (2007) used the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 as an example:

… when people in other countries watched the televised attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, they interpreted the events in so many different ways …. Some were told, and believed, that this was a scene created by Hollywood as propaganda, and not real. Others who did accept what they saw on television as real thought all of the people in the towers were white Americans, probably Christians and Jews and thus perpetrators of members of their faith, so this was in a sense deserved and perhaps an act of divine intervention. Some Caucasians who remember that Americans leveled their cities during World War II thought perhaps it was the USA’s turn to experience such a disaster. Those who resent the USA’s global leadership were not unhappy to see the giant attacked (p. 4).

Despite this potential for misinterpretation or misuse of information, there seems to be a widespread assumption that when organizations send out as much information as possible, this certainly will foster understanding and goodwill. Lord (2006), however, noted that there are circumstances in which people prefer to not have all the information that is available. As in the case of the health care debates, most citizens do not want all of the details of the deliberations—they just want a satisfactory solution to the spiraling costs and seemingly random
implementation of insurance coverage. Similarly, in corporations, most employees do not expect to be involved in all managerial deliberations; they just want good decisions to be made.

Instances where perhaps too much information is doled out are not hard to find. Tapscott and Ticoll (2003) noted that “few companies publish financial reports that the average investor can readily understand, even less identify and interpret critical nuggets buried in footnotes. If anything, there is too much information, presented in a confusing manner. This is opacity in the guise of transparency” (p. 16). A stark example of these attempts to confuse occurred during the litigation around the Enron debacle, at which time the company produced 12 million pages of information, according to the lead paralegal from a law firm spearheading efforts to develop a litigation support database. The paralegal reported that “The documents arrived in PDF format on hard drives with “no index and no organization” (CT Summation, 2009, p. 1). A final example of “opacity in the guise of transparency came last year when Kellogg Company gave a detailed explanation of its sudden shortage of Eggo Waffles, reporting that a rainstorm caused flooding in its Atlanta warehouse. But Kellogg’s failed to state that the warehouse was first ordered closed by the Georgia Department of Agriculture due to possible food contamination. “In this case,” said PR News blogger Scott Van Camp (2009), “Kellogg and Eggo got a pass” when neither the traditional nor social media challenged the explanation (p. 2).

In another example, in 2009, a teller at national banking chain insisted that a would-be robber show his weapon. When the intruder started to run away, the teller chased him down, tackled him, and called the local police. The teller was then fired for placing everyone in the lobby in danger. When questioned about the incident, the bank’s spokesperson stated that the “highest priority is to protect the safety of our employees and our clients .... Our policies and procedures are in the best interest of public safety and they're consistent with industry standards” (CNN, 2009, p. 1). Certainly an industry policy that prioritizes lives over money is admirable, but to reveal the policy in the national media could serve as a “transparent” invitation to all potential robbers to enter a bank and get away with a crime. This perhaps undermines the very safety of bank clientele that the spokesperson desired to protect.

A final concern about complete transparency that the literature revealed is its potential to stifle situations where honest deliberation is critical. A stark example of this came after the recent health debates in the U.S. Congress had ground to a rancor-induced stalemate. President Barack Obama called for a summit on the issue and decided to fulfill a campaign promise to televise the debates in the name of transparency. While the summit seemed to proceed with civility and respect, senior public relations counselor Roger Bolton (2010) argued that perhaps more could have been accomplished without public scrutiny:

I suggest you might want to try to have some of these conversations behind closed doors. (I know, we’re all for transparency, but a little secrecy won’t hurt as long as no back-room deals are cut. With the cameras turned off, maybe you can make some quiet attempts to find a little common ground – something that can best be done without the posturing and the talking points) (Bolton, 2010, p. 1).

To this point, then, while agreeing with the basic principle of transparency, we have tried to show the problems inherent with unrestrained transparency. In some regards, this reluctance to fully advocate transparency represents the difference between what J. Grunig and White (1992) would call the normative ideal of complete disclosure versus the practical and sometimes moral realities of the construct. There certainly is a need to draw more useful distinctions between the majority of occasions when full transparency is desired and those occasions where it may not be
appropriate. Therefore, we embarked on this study by conducting in-depth interviews of identified experts in the arena of communication or public relations.

As mentioned in the introduction, we set out to address three main questions:

**Question #1:** Under what specific circumstances is transparent communication necessary and beneficial?

**Question #2:** When is it better to not disclose information, even given today’s expectations of instantaneous, complete messaging?

**Question #3:** In which situations does absolute transparency actually harm stakeholders and societies?

**Research Method**

Having established the theoretical framework for these questions, the authors of this paper decided to pose them to a group of nine senior public relations professionals. We approached an examination into the questions qualitatively because theory-building in the area of transparency has been relatively sparse; therefore we believed that attempts to understand the construct are still exploratory in nature, and therefore qualitative research is appropriate (Pauly, 1991). Because we sought from the outset to interview highly respected professionals in the field (most of these respondents have been serving as authors, consultants to executives of major firms, or both), we believed that nine interviews would provide the requisite data to satisfy reliability in a qualitative study. The interviews we conducted were designed to address the theoretical assumptions of this paper and to better understand the practical applications and potential limitations of transparency in the practice of public relations.

One important aspect of a qualitative investigation is that it allows data to emerge from those who are being studied, rather than having perspectives imposed upon the sample. While the authors of this paper did enter the research believing that there are holes in the argument of unquestioned transparency, it was important to gather data as objectively as possible—to allow for contradiction to our own worldviews. Each of the interviews unfolded over an average of about 40 minutes. Some of the respondents generally had strong opinions in favor of transparency, others had considerable concerns about the concept and its application, and some sat clearly in the middle of the spectrum. Nevertheless, as the interviews proceeded, ample information was revealed that provided support for, contradiction toward, and further enlightenment of the concept of transparency.

**Interviews and Observations**

In all nine of our interviews, the themes of ethics, honesty, and responsibility to share information with the public were expressed and regarded as being highly important. At the same time, all the professionals interviewed had experienced distinct limitations to the traditional doctrine of transparency and the ability to invoke it all of the time in a real-world environment. Results of these interviews, including specific relevant quotes from some of the interviews, are included in the pages to follow. It is important to begin with why the respondents viewed transparency as crucial in today’s society, and then there will be subsequent discussion on the practical and ethical limitations of the concept.
The Imperative for Transparency

The professionals who were interviewed generally agreed that the notion of transparency—and the increasing pressure on society and its various organizations to become and remain more transparent—has been accelerated due to modern technologies such as the Internet and social media. They also concurred that the concept is here to stay. “More and more,” one of the respondents explained, “it’s not as hard to convince people that they need to be transparent, to the degree that it’s appropriate.”

Many of the individuals interviewed also linked the concept of transparency to honesty and to professional and organizational ethics. Despite the complications and dilemmas sometimes presented by completely transparent behavior, the large majority of the interviewees agreed on and cited specific circumstances under which transparent communication is necessary and beneficial for society. Said one professional, “A fundamental principle is never to mislead. Be as honest as you can under the circumstances that you face…and it should be the same thing for organizations.” Another added that, “Transparency is important in acknowledging and responding to stakeholder concerns.” And, an additional comment was made that, “We need to get out of the paradigm in which organizations thought they controlled everything.”

This demand for honest, open communication is particularly important in times of crisis or negative publicity. One respondent explained, “When there are gaps in the correlation between what is wrong and what you tell people about how you’ll fix it, that’s when transparency comes into play. The advice is, ‘Don’t keep your secrets. Share.’ The world knows better [than to purposefully withhold information]—especially this generation of workers who will be taking over the boardroom in a few years.”

Limitations of Transparency

At a fairly early point in each of the eight interviews, however, the limitations of transparency—and of creating or maintaining an organizational policy of providing information to all parties at all times—were identified and described. Analysis of the responses revealed a distinct pattern for these limitations of transparency. They fall into five categories.

1. **Transparency is not the same thing as truth.**

   All the senior public relations professionals agreed that the primary objective of transparency should be to get at the truth. They all also agreed however, that in actuality transparency reveals *fact* much more often than it reveals *truth.*

   One interviewee used this example: Suppose that Joe is applying for a job and the hiring manager contacts Joe’s former boss for a recommendation. In response to an inquiry about Joe’s overall performance, the former manager explains that Joe was always on time, that he didn’t shout at work, and that the manager never smelled any alcohol on Joe’s breath. It’s highly unlikely that Joe or any other job candidate (or hiring manager) would be happy with a reference like this, because, while every statement is true, each can also cast a false or negative light. The problem with transparency, said the interviewee, is that “each statement was a fact, but collectively it was not the truth. And the danger is that some might take transparency for truth, when in fact, it’s only fact.”

2. **Perspectives on transparency can vary significantly from culture to culture.**

   This area was one that epitomized the way in which, in a qualitative study, data can emerge from the respondents. Other than the notion discussed briefly in the literature review, that information is viewed from differing perspectives, the authors had not considered the cultural variations on transparency until the interviews were conducted. A few respondents emphasized
the salience of these cultural differences, explaining why transparency is valued so much more among groups in the United States than in other countries or cultures.

As an example of this, one interviewee from Japan distinguished between the Japanese view of transparency and how it is seen in the United States. The respondent referred to the historical melding of many cultures within the U.S., a melding which has created the “low-context” environment described by Edward T. Hall (1976). A hallmark of this low-context culture is the need for precise words and information in order to negotiate and clarify the differing meanings between the various cultural perspectives. Such an environment fosters demands for transparency. A respondent from Australia added, “The U.S. is a melting pot—transparency is more important because there is no dominant culture. It’s such a melting pot that people might not understand you unless you disclose everything.” By contrast, in historically homogenous, high-context cultures such as Japan, meaning and understanding takes place implicitly in interactions, without a need for many words and much precision. Therefore, not only is there little desire for transparency but also considerable puzzlement in many cultures over why Americans place such great value on the concept.

The same interviewee from Australia also raised the notion that many of these differing cultural views of transparency are embedded in a fundamental difference in the “shame-faced” approach of many other cultures versus “guilt-based” approach of American culture. The individual explained, “In other cultures, values such as dignity of the individual (the avoidance of shame) have a much higher value that they do in a “guilt space” culture like the U.S.” Consequently, the preservation of such individual dignity may trump the expectation of total and complete transparency in a given situation.”

3. **Transparency may not be the best ethical or emotional choice.**

Although the idea of transparency is strongly linked to ethics, the results of the field professional interviews raised the idea that complete transparency may not always be the best ethical decision. In some cases, for example, the prevailing ethical consideration may be privacy issues, not transparency. Said one interviewee, “There are things you don’t say yet, things you don’t tell some people at all. Use ethics principles to guide your selection.” By not revealing the identities of deceased persons, for example, organizations are operating out of consideration for their families—and it is obvious what devastating consequences may occur when this type of information is revealed too quickly. In a workplace environment, managers don’t share information about employees’ performance or salaries with fellow employees or external publics. If they do, they risk creating embarrassing rivalries and morale issues.

At times, the motives for withholding information can actually be altruistic. One professional relayed an example that occurred when a business was considering closing some of its manufacturing facilities. During the time the company was evaluating which facilities to close (a fact known to the public), employees would often ask, “Will my plant be closed?” Even though management had a fairly good idea at the onset which plants might close, they waited until the complete results of the financial analysis were available before making the final decision and answering that question. A traditional definition of transparency might have dictated that management offer its best guess as to which plants would close, even before making the final decision. However, noted the interviewee, in this case it was determined that the best ethical decision was to refrain from such an announcement—in part because an advance knowledge of the plant closings would have enabled competitors to stir up “no confidence” fears among customers and seize the business—thus costing more employees more jobs, more quickly,
than the closing process would have otherwise inflicted. It also would have stirred up an even greater amount of emotional stress among those who would not have needed to worry.

Another interviewee noted that it depends on the motive. If a company’s motive for not disclosing is that it hasn’t made a decision yet (e.g., the business knows it’s considering pulling its operations out of a specific community), it would be inappropriate to notify any of the affected stakeholders until a decision is made. “However,” he continued, “there might be a case for transparency at that point if your motive is to encourage the local community to provide incentives that would make it more financially viable for you to stay.”

4. **Transparency—when it provides information that is incomplete or out of context—can diminish, rather than improve, understanding and effectiveness.**

Some professionals felt that information offered in the name of transparency, particularly when overwhelming and under-explained, served to obfuscate rather than clarify issues and facts. This concern is reflected in a blog written by a humanitarian aid worker. While this writer was not one of the nine individuals interviewed for this article, the examples concerning the results of transparency without context are instructive.

It [transparency] will not result in more effective, more efficient aid. On more than one occasion I have seen unfiltered program performance and financial data in the hands of people not trained to understand it is completely misunderstood [sic]. The results in all cases amounted to long, costly and tedious distractions for my employer at the time. The amount of staff time and level of effort expended in one instance to placate a self-righteous reporter who failed to properly understand the meaning of the term “audit” was immense and in the end lowered program quality. In another instance, the level of effort required to convince a wealthy but clueless supporter that a FAX machine for the field office (this was in the days before email) was a reasonable cost to incur under a “miscellaneous office equipment” line item, when we costed it out, was more expensive than the FAX machine that had caused the uproar to begin with. In both instances (and a great many others) transparency unaccompanied by discreet selection or filtering of information led to diminished effectiveness and efficiency.

The underlying concern in this situation seems to be that, once presented with a plethora of information, key publics may decide that is all they need, and work directly to a conclusion that may turn out to be inaccurate. In other words, as noted in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* instance cited earlier (Lessig, 2009), transparency sometimes becomes about volume and speed of information—not quality of information. One professional explained: “Employing organizational thought to arrive at the right conclusion will cause people to think broadly. But with transparency, you go to the single, most obvious option.”

Several interviewees stated that one way to avoid the trap of “leading the witness” by providing seemingly-comprehensive (but actually incomplete) information is to make a greater effort to determine what the audience needs to know, in advance of the communication. One respondent remarked that, “Most PR people think transparency is ‘You’ve always got to tell the truth.’ That’s not what transparency is. It is nothing more than Jim Grunig (1992) said years ago—transparency is the symmetrical form of communication—you listen, adjust, listen again, and adjust again.”

5. **An attitude of authenticity is more important than an act of transparency.**
The professionals interviewed agreed in general that a “technical” compliance with transparency (e.g., producing large volumes of uncontexted documents in response to a request for information) is not helpful in establishing long-term trust with stakeholders. In such cases, the act of communicating may leave the stakeholders feeling that their needs weren’t considered at all. Consequently, while the approach might have been very transparent, it was not at all authentic—and, said the professionals who were involved in this study, authenticity counts the most when trying to build trust.

One professional recalled a situation in which an organization was forced to confront a scandal involving an employee. The organization went into what the respondent called “full transparency mode,” turning the investigation over to an internal management team who already had an axe to grind with the employee in question. The interviewee reported that the investigation was extremely one-sided, with no clear messaging or communication strategy from management. This led to greater confusion and anger among employees and diminished credibility for the management team.

The key to achieving authenticity, according to several of the professionals interviewed, is not only to talk, but to listen—and then adjust when appropriate. The power of authenticity lies in the fact that the communicator listens to feedback from stakeholders—and demonstrates to those stakeholders that what they said matters. Noted one senior manager: “We have a tendency to do too much talking and not enough listening. Management tends to have biases in terms of how they think people feel about things—and more often than not, they’re a little off-kilter...” The interviewee went on to explain that, “The difficulty is changing and adjusting based on what you hear. That’s where it falls apart—because management doesn’t always accept and act on that.”

Based on the patterns in these responses, it is apparent that the concept of transparency needs more clarity. The data has led us as authors to an expansion of the definition and a new term to more comprehensively address the concept: the translucency corollary.

Towards an Expanded Construct: Translucency

Given these observations around the three questions posed in the study, we turn to establishing this modified framework for communicating openly, honestly, and ethically with stakeholders. As noted earlier in the paper, we propose that a stance of translucency may be more appropriate in certain circumstances. As a means of light conduction, translucency occurs when the light passes through a medium, such as frosted glass, in sufficient quantity that the viewer can discern the outline of objects and see in which direction they are moving, but they are not completely visible to the eye.

With this article providing parameters under which translucent communication must take place—and why—organizations can offer an outline and shape that will ethically inform, guide and engage key publics, even when full disclosure is not the best option. In this respect, the notion of transparent light conduction shares several key characteristics with translucent communication in organizations:

• It is based on the premise that there will be some line of vision or illumination into the organization.

• The purpose of the translucency is to provide sufficient illumination to guide and inform the external audience (“Is anyone home here?”) while maintaining a position of prudence and mutual respect between the parties (safety, privacy, etc.)
- There is sufficient illumination to determine basic organizational action responses and directions (the shapes can be seen moving through the glass pane).

- When circumstances dictate, the line of vision can be expanded into a more transparent view (e.g., the door can be opened).

In addition to expressing the need for translucency, this paper further proposes several key considerations under which translucency can and should occur when organizations are building relationships with their key publics—not in any effort to hide information, but to reveal it at the right time and under the right circumstances:

1. **Translucency is a commitment to communicate with stakeholders—not an advance commitment to what that communication will contain.**

   Committing to communicate with stakeholders doesn’t promise a particular volume or content of information; it is simply a promise that, as one interviewee noted, “We will tell you as soon as we know the answer, we’ll tell you the answer and the implications for you. The commitment is, I will engage and understand your needs. When we have the information you need—when it is accurate, stable and actionable—we will open the door.”

2. **Translucency occurs only when credibility has already been established.**

   Communication is a two-way street—light must be conducted through both sides of the glass. In communications relationships, translucency—a state in which the basic outline and intent of actions is clear, though all the details may not be so clear—can work only if the perceiver of the actions trusts the sender and believes that sender has their best interests at heart. The higher the trust level in these situations, the greater the acceptance of a lack of specific detail. One respondent to the study, a professional who is highly experienced in crisis communications, noted that this trust is often the force that preserves stakeholder relationships even when little information is available. And to have trust and translucency, organizations must be willing to step up and acknowledge this. Says the interviewee, “In the event of a rail accident that releases a hazardous chemical, for example, perhaps all the company can say is, ‘We can confirm there’s a release. We don’t know much. But we’ll give you more information as we have it.’ There is always a need to converse with stakeholders.”

3. **Translucency might be most effective when there is reason to believe that an organization’s arguments and data are rock-solid, but not persuasive.**

   A translucent approach is common-place in the arena of issues communications, where the information being communicated can often be associated with fear, confusion, or lack of understanding. One professional in our study described the process of sensitive communication in this way: “Communicating scientific information to a lay audience requires that you not get into all the details of the science, which might be required in transparency. But what if seven research studies support that the product is safe, and one raises questions? What is the most accurate way to portray this in a balanced way? Rather than listing all the details of each study, the most effective and translucent approach might be to say, ‘The weight of the evidence’ or ‘the totality of the science’ supports this or that. Then if someone wants more, you’d go to another layer of information.”

4. **Translucency is most effective when an organization already has in place a process and structure for bringing more light of information through the glass.**
Organizations which are striving to maintain translucent communications with their stakeholders will likely succeed only if they have built up a trust bank based on past communication behavior—in other words, if they have responded promptly and openly across all levels over an extended period. This organizational predisposition to openness can, according to one respondent, be assessed by asking a few key questions:

- Is the CEO accessible and communicative?
- Has the company shared a clear vision?
- Is the organization precise (rather than vague) in its communications? As one interviewee admonished, “Deliver the right amount of communication. If you make too much information visible, it dilutes the power of your message. Openness has to cut both ways if it is going to work.”

It is important to note here the role that precision in or of communication plays in this process. Traditionally, transparency is equated to volume of information offered—the more information we provide, the more transparent we are. The translucency corollary, however, espouses the idea that it is the quality of information—not necessarily quantity—that counts. The corollary further proposes that it may often be better for both sender and receiver to wait longer and receive less information at the outset if that information can be more precise and accurate as a result.

**Conclusion**

As in any balancing act between scholarship and practice, there is always a tension between the normative and practical reality. Normative theory proposes what would be the ideal in any given situation, or how it should be. Practical reality, of course, represents what is actually happening within society or in an organization (J. Grunig & White, 1992). Both of the authors of this paper had been involved in practical implementation of public relations for more than two decades before joining the academic ranks full-time. When introduced to the scholarly writings on transparency, it seemed to us that certain practical realities were not being addressed, that some of the nuances behind the imperatives of transparency had not been explored. Therefore, we determined to explore these nuances so as to provide a more complete understanding of the concept of transparency and to offer practitioners are more comprehensive and accurate roadmap for performing their daily duties.

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this paper was to address three main research questions: (1) Under what specific circumstances is transparent communication necessary and beneficial; (2) When is it better to not disclose information, even given today’s expectations of instantaneous, complete messaging; and (3) In which situations does absolute transparency actually harm stakeholders and societies? From the literature review and the interviews of nine senior professionals in the communications industry, we should have shown that transparent communication is indeed beneficial in theory and in most circumstances. We also indicated, however, that there are situations where completely transparent communication has its limitations and negative consequences on both organizations and stakeholders. The interviews and the literature also brought forth some specific examples of harm that can come when transparency is misapplied.
**Why a Corollary Instead of an Alternative Theory?**

In developing this paper, we did not set out to demolish the importance of transparency; we believe that the necessity of open, honest communication is indisputable in public relations. However, the term should not receive a free, unquestioned ride. While transparency is needed in the large majority of situations, public relations scholars and practitioners can gain much greater benefit by understanding what is meant by the term, when it is most appropriate, and under what circumstances complete openness, or “spilling all the beans,” may not be appropriate at all.

In datasegment.com (2010), a *corollary* is defined as, “Something which follows from the demonstration of a proposition; an additional inference or deduction from a demonstrated proposition” (p. 1). A corollary, then, might be observed as a certain Proposition B flowing out of an original Proposition A, but instead of forging an outright denouncement of the original theory the corollary could be considered a secondary element offering added insight or expansion to the original. In this case, then, it is possible that *transparency* is Proposition A, and *translucency* serves as a Proposition B which sheds more light, as it were, on communication transparency rather than replacing the theory altogether. As a result, we have selected the term *corollary* as appropriately clarifying the original concept of transparency.

This is not dissimilar to the evolution of media issues and agenda theories. McCombs and Shaw (1972) introduced *agenda setting* theory, which proposed that the media do not tell us what to think but what to think about—that by reporting certain issues, media set the agenda for public debate and subsequent action. Lang and Lang (1983) then determined that “the original notion of agenda setting needed to be expanded” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 230)—that the original idea did not explain what really occurs thoroughly enough. They proposed a theory of *agenda building*, “a collective process in which media, government, and the public influence one another in determining what issues to be considered” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 230).

Lang and Lang (1983) apparently did not sense any need to dispute or overturn agenda setting theory; rather, they strengthened the research and propositions behind the theory so as to further clarify and expand the concept of agendas in society. That is what we have attempted to do with the translucency corollary—not to displace the original theory of transparency, but to enhance and to clarify it. With this paper providing parameters under which translucent communication must take place in given circumstances—and why—organizations can offer an outline and shape that will ethically inform, guide, and engage key publics, even when full disclosure is not the best option.
References


PRSA speaks out on Pay for Play strengthens Code o


The Senior Communicator of the Future – Competencies and Training Needs

Dr Tom Watson & Dr Chindu Sreedharan,
The Media School, Bournemouth University, Poole, Dorset, UK
**Introduction**

Paul Sanchez has proposed the future leading communicator as: “the true professional [who] will be an adroit strategist, a creative technician and a skilled facilitator – a friend of technology and an exponent of life-long learning. The future is a global voyage into the art and science of communication, where the successful communicator will be like the men and women of the Renaissance, pulling it all together, but in the high tech environment of the 21st century” (2005, pp.10-11).

Since the 1980s, starting from Broom and Dozier’s seminal studies on the nature of public relations employment and professionalism, there has been discussion of the career paths, competencies and training needs of public relations and corporate communication professionals. More recently, the Arthur W. Page Society (2007) has scoped the role of the Chief Communication Officer’s role in the Authentic Enterprise which placed the communicator at C-Level (Executive Board) or close to it (the so-called ‘marzipan layer’) of the corporation.

The research reported in this paper analyses the responses of leading European and international senior-level communicators as to the knowledge, skills, relationships, 360-degree vision, and managerial abilities that senior communications professionals will need in five years’ time, and what it takes to prepare the next generation of leaders in globally integrated organizations. It also reflects on recent academic and practice literature about the nature of these competencies and discusses the potential methods and routes of their delivery. The outcomes include recommendations for consideration by educators and employers, especially those operating in cross-cultural environments.

So why are there so few truly international, senior level communication advisers who operate with some confidence across cultures? How can they be developed? These are questions that have been researched for the IPR. The aim of the research is to guide the public relations industry on what it takes to prepare the next generation of leaders in globally integrated organizations. The reputation of organizations is increasingly challenged in this age of rapid response. Communicators need to be educated and trained on higher skills than ever before and this research will help identify the most important skills and knowledge areas.

The situation is that communicators are now operating in Thomas Friedman’s ‘flat world’ (Friedman 2005) of working without borders for corporations that are global entities with new engagement rules. It is also an information age that is ever more intricate and more complex. The review of recent academic and professional literature (Bronn 2001, Clausen 2007, Dozier & Broom 1995, Gregory 2008), Hogg & Doolan 1999, Mintzberg 2009, Moss & DeSanto 2005, Murray & White 2005, Page Society 2007) has given these headlines on the challenges and the future needs of corporate communicators:

- PR and corporate communicators are “behind the curve” on social media. They have been slower to adopt more technologically complicated tools. (Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser 2008)
- There is urgent need to change PR and corporate communications from being a broadcast machine to building stronger relations with stakeholders.
- Greater importance will be given to ethics, corporate social responsibility and sustainability (Pollach 2003)
- More and complex demands for communication are arising from ‘internal audiences’.
- Culturally-sensitive communication needs to be operationalised in a changing world. (Clausen 2007, McDermott & O’Dell 2001)
- Corporate communicators increasingly seek C-Level roles.
• Proof of PR and corporate communication's contributions to strategic decision-making, strategy development and realisation, value creation and organisational functioning is increasingly sought.

Future communicators need to:
• Be flexible communicators, capable of adapting quickly; “one key role of our profession in the decades ahead will be to master the skills and dynamics of these new media”, as the Arthur W. Page Society says.
• Able to interpret changes and trends in communication practices and technology; guide implementation, but not necessarily be a communication technologist.
• Have broader analytical and critical skills in order that they become respected at C-Level.
• Become closer to trends and policy-making, especially on CSR/sustainability; often actively participating in the discourse.
• Possess a wider inter-disciplinary set of competencies so they can act as advisors with equal standing to other senior operational colleagues.
• Have negotiation and relationship-building and management skills.
• Coach and mentor senior management to communicate, manage relationships and deal with new demands.

The study to test these propositions was undertaken amongst senior communicators in Europe and North America and other markets. They were emailed a set of 12 propositions and asked to rank them in order of importance from 1 (most important) to 12 (least important). There was an option to add other priorities, if they did not agree with those offered. Respondents were also offered the opportunity to make a narrative comment on the propositions before ranking them. Most used the ranking scale but some ranked propositions as equally important or as being 'core' and 'non-core'.

Response to the survey came from the UK, France, Germany and the Netherlands and from senior communicators in North American corporates and consultancies with international operations. Despite considerable efforts through a wide range of communication channels, 18 responses were received. The typical role of the respondents was that of a board or near-board director.

Table 1: Propositions in ranked order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Proposition</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Communication strategy will be ever-more tightly linked to overall business strategy and less on organisational publicity. Competencies in strategic management will be part of the senior communicators’ portfolios.</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Senior communicators need to have broader analytical and critiquing skills in order to become trusted senior advisors.

A more inter-disciplinary set of skills, knowledge and competencies is needed for senior communicators in order that they act as advisors of equal standing with other senior operational colleagues.

Senior communicators will become the cross-discipline Chief Reputation Officer in their organisations. This will involve higher level internal networking and communication skills and organisational knowledge in order to be effective.

Senior communicators should focus more on engagement with stakeholders and less on media relations. Skills of negotiation and relationship management will need development.

Proof of Performance (the demonstration of the value of communication strategy to the organisation) will require higher skills of analysis, planning and measurement of outcomes.

Future senior communicators need to be able to interpret changes and trends in communication technologies and practices. They will be able to measure and evaluate the real value of evolving media forms, including social media, not just the traffic.

The creation of social capital and the maintenance of the organisation’s ‘operating license’ will be an increasingly important role for senior communicators.

The increasing internationalisation of corporations will require greater competency amongst senior communicators in culturally-sensitive communication, its management and coordination.

Senior communicators will need to be closer to public policy-making, particularly on sustainability and corporate social responsibility issues. This may need additional education in public affairs.

Succession planning should involve mentoring for mid-level staff in on current and future organisational demands by senior communicators in order to develop them as trusted counsellors, not just superior communications technicians.
There should be greater emphasis on senior communicators developing coaching and mentoring skills so they can aid senior management in problem-solving and presentation.

The top ranked proposition identified training and education in strategizing as being very important, as communication is linked more closely to business strategy. The next two highly ranked competencies aligned with that thought, too.

1) Communication strategy will be ever-more tightly linked to overall business strategy and less on organisational publicity. Competencies in strategic management will be part of the senior communicators’ portfolios. (2.4)
2) Senior communicators need to have broader analytical and critiquing skills in order to become trusted senior advisors. (3.4)
3) A more inter-disciplinary set of skills, knowledge and competencies is needed for senior communicators in order that they act as advisors of equal standing with other senior operational colleagues. (3.7)

Comments on these propositions from respondents included “senior comms people should not be a mentor of the senior management, they should be part of it” and “It’s no longer sufficient to have a communications background only. Senior communicators need to understand business environment and management styles to be seen as trusted advisors.” There was general agreement amongst the respondents that senior communicators must have a multi-disciplinary background and that reliance on media relations or public relations skills alone would be a de facto barrier to progression.

After the initial three priorities, there was a small gap to two competencies which share an equal ranking. They have similarities in that they focus on the building and the creation of mutually beneficial relationships.

4=) Senior communicators will become the cross-discipline Chief Reputation Officer in their organisations. This will involve higher level internal networking and communication skills and organisational knowledge in order to be effective. (4.3)
4=) Senior communicators should focus more on engagement with stakeholders and less on media relations. Skills of negotiation and relationship management will need development. (4.3).

Although the study had some debate about the extent to which media relations is important, there was a general trend that the senior level communicator had to take a much broader view of landscape of his or her organisation’s operations. This was encapsulated by this comment: “Senior communicators should drop out of the media world; that’s just one aspect next to many, many others.” Although “drop out” may be an over-statement, the sentiment is that this is a task best operationalised by middle level communication managers.

Perhaps the most surprising outcome of the study is that the perennial favourite priority of measuring communication and expressing its value (Watson 2008) only ranked sixth. This finding had been foreshadowed by Murray and White (2005) who found that CEOs were less interested in measuring PR effectiveness than in getting messages to key stakeholders and integrating communication objectives with those of industry. One notable comment from a European corporate communicator was “no management function escapes evaluation. We should forget ‘measurement’ and focus on value and how to grasp and express it.” This, and other
comments, indicates that evaluation could be moving on to a higher, more strategic plane by 2015.

It was also notable that the emphasis on the impact of digital technology upon communication, which was highlighted in the ‘Authentic Enterprise’ report (Arthur W. Page Society 2007) as fundamental to a reconsideration of the operation of future public relations and corporate communication ranks seventh only. Respondents considered that the competency (in part) of “future senior communicators need to be able to interpret changes and trends in communication technologies and practices” was much less important than the abilities of strategising and being part of the senior management team with cross-disciplinary skills and knowledge. This indicates that management and exploitation of social media and other technology are competencies that by 2015 will be undertaken by middle level communication managers.

The eight to tenth ranked competencies could perhaps have been expressed as sub-sets of the more strongly supported first to equal fourth competencies, rather than as stand-alone factors. They included (eighth) “the creation of social capital and the maintenance of the organisation’s ‘operating license’”; (ninth) the increasing internationalisation of corporations will require greater competency amongst senior communicators in culturally-sensitive communication, its management and coordination; (tenth) senior communicators will need to be closer to public policy-making, particularly on sustainability and corporate social responsibility issues. This may need additional education in public affairs. The eighth and tenth priorities align with the fourth priorities of responsibility for reputation management and engagement with stakeholders.

The final two priorities, which focused on succession planning and mentoring skills, were consistently given low support as befits their ranking and, whilst they appear in literature, are peripheral or minor skills compared with those ranked first to sixth.

**Outcomes**

In summary, the outcomes from the study were:

1. The primary focus for future senior communicators is for training and knowledge of competencies in strategic management, organisation knowledge and cross-disciplinary skills. This links with many previous studies.
2. There was strong support for senior corporate communicators to undertake the role of cross-discipline Chief Reputation Officer; also to lead on stakeholder relationship development and management.
3. The sixth ranking for Proof of Performance is lower than previous studies where it is normally ranked as 2nd or 3rd. The emphasis was away from clip counts and social media traffic and towards the impact of communication upon business objectives and of value creation.
4. Social media is seen as important development but senior communicators will be the interpreter of trends, not the implementer.
5. Media relations is perceived to be a mid-level communication manager task, other than in times of crisis or major change when the C-Level voice must be evidenced.
6. The low rank (9th) for culturally-sensitive communication was counter-intuitive, especially as many of the respondents operate already across many countries and continents.
Preparing for 2015

After considering the outcomes of the study, three areas of development are indicated. These are in practice, training and development, and proof of performance. These developments are vital for senior corporate communicators to achieve personal progression to C-Level and for higher levels of business effectiveness.

**Practice**: Communication strategy must be linked to or part of business strategy. The days of communication or public relations activity as a publicity-only activity are both past and constantly threatened with budget cuts. Communicators should understand the whole business environment, not just media and communication. Operational experience across the whole of a business, not just the communication areas, is needed in order that senior communicators can represent the organisation externally with authority. They must “speak language of the business” with fellow senior managers.

**Training and Education** – The key investment subjects for senior communicators are business strategy, financial literacy, economics, public affairs and public diplomacy, and relationship management. These can be delivered through training programmes or via executive programmes in universities. There also needs to be a “stronger focus on research skills” and more training on market and business analysis methods such as PEST and qualitative data interpretation.

**Proof of Performance**: The ability to interpret and apply the most appropriate research methods is more important than technical measurement skills, which can be undertaken by middle or junior communicators or external suppliers. Evaluation frameworks, said the respondents, need to be developed for judgement on organisational impact, not clip measurement. With these more powerful, interpretive methods, communication planning skills will improve and offer more effective implementation of communication that is fully integrated with business strategy.

**Conclusion**

This report opened with Sanchez’s recipe for the future corporate communicator as “an adroit strategist, a creative technician and a skilled facilitator – a friend of technology and an exponent of life-long learning”. This study agrees with most of these characteristics, with the exception of the senior communicator as a “creative technician” which is a role that others will undertake by 2015 as the future communicator will have more focus on relationship development, reputation management and the integration of communication strategy within the broader business strategy. It is an exciting and challenging future and one that corporate communicators have to drive forward themselves.
References


* The research is being made possible by a grant from the Coca Cola Company to the Institute for Public Relations.

Dr Tom Watson is Deputy Dean of the Media School at Bournemouth University in England. A former consultancy MD and chair of the UK’s Public Relations Consultants Association from 2000 to 2002, Tom is a member of the Commission on the Measurement & Evaluation of Public Relations.

Contacts: twatson@bournemouth.ac.uk; Tel: +44 1202 961986

Dr Chindu Sreedharan is a Lecturer in Journalism at the Media School at Bournemouth University.

Lauren Edwards, a final year BA (Hons) Public Relations student at Bournemouth University, undertook data entry of the survey responses for the project.
The Role of Activists in the Ethical Debate about VNRs: Policy and Regulation

Candace White, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
School of Advertising and Public Relations
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Contact Information:
476 Communications Building
Knoxville, TN  37996
865 974-5112
white@utk.edu

Key Words:
activist organizations; activism, ethical public relations; video news releases; FCC sponsorship policy

Abstract

The purpose of the study is two-fold. It reviews the ethical arguments about video news releases (VNRs) and the current status of FCC policy, and looks at the activist efforts of the Center for Media and Democracy to change FCC policy. The FCC rules about VNR use are clear: stations are not obligated to identify the source if there are no sponsorship issues (payment for placement) unless VNRs concern political or controversial issues. The basic argument is whether source identification of VNR material should be self-regulated by journalists or regulated by the government. The study used an activist-centric approach to examine the role of activism in the debate by assessing the efficacy of strategies used by CMD. The study found that the strategies of CMD served a problem recognition function and had an agenda-setting effect, resulting in news coverage and success in instigating an FCC investigation of VNR use, but were not successful in the attempt to change policy. For future theory building, communication strategies of activism, rather than of activists, should be the unit of analysis.
Introduction

Despite the mutual benefits of video news releases (VNRs) to both the corporations that produce them and the television stations that air them, and despite the clarity of the policies of the FCC and professional associations, VNRs remain at the center of ethical controversy. In recent years, the controversy has been fueled by the activist group, the Center for Media and Democracy (CDM), which considers all video news releases to be “fake news” and calls for increased FCC regulation of their use.

The purpose of the study is two-fold. First, it reviews the recent ethical arguments about video news releases and the current status of FCC policy. Second, it looks at the activist efforts of the Center for Media and Democracy to change FCC policy, and examines the role of activism in the ethical debate. The study investigates the efficacy of strategies used by CMD by examining discourse and calls for action on its Web site, responses by other organizations, and resulting FCC actions. Rather than viewing activism from the perspective of the organization or industry being acted on (the FCC as an organization and public relations as an industry) or viewing activism as negative or dangerous, the current study attempts to objectively understand activists’ strategies and their effectiveness, which is important for relevant theory building.

The Ethics of Video News Releases

Video news releases are an important public relations tactic for private, nonprofits and governmental organizations. The widespread use of VNR material is an effect of free markets. Television stations are increasingly owned by media conglomerates that, like all corporations, are expected to make a profit. News room budgets are shrinking and news holes are large; most stations are increasing their hours of local news coverage while decreasing the number of reporters. Consequently, local news could not exist without third-party material (RTNDA, 2006). VNRs, which are electronic versions of written press releases, are third-party source materials that provide television journalists with story ideas, expert testimony, images, and background information at no cost to the stations. They often contain video footage which could not otherwise be obtained (Harmon & White, 2001). VNRs are used if and when they are deemed credible and newsworthy by television news directors. Journalists use VNRs for the same reason they use press releases – they contain news that may be of interest to their viewers (Stoker, 2005).

VNRs often are packaged with extra video, sound bites, split audio and mixed versions (B-roll), and scripts to facilitate editing. There is no expressed or implied agreement regarding their use, no payment for use is expected from either party, and broadcast journalists are under no obligation to use them. Few stations use VNRs in their entirety as produced by the client, but rather select segments from the video feed. Academic studies have found that when VNRs are used, they are heavily edited with most of the footage used coming from the B-roll (Blount & Cameron, 1996; Harmon & White, 2001). The most common use by local television stations is as a voice-over story on the evening news (Harmon & White, 2001).

Despite their utility, the controversy surrounding the use of VNRs has not subsided since TV Guide published its notorious article, “Fake News,” on Feb. 22, 1992 that called for continuous on-air graphics to label the VNR as such. The article contended viewers are led to believe that stories from VNR materials originated with the journalists presenting them, and therefore are fake news, even though they may contain factual and newsworthy information. The fake news cry was taken up by the Center for Media and Democracy (publishers of *PR Watch*), a special interest group that according to its website, “examines how PR experts concoct and spin
the news, organize front groups, manipulate public opinion and manage public policy for powerful special interests.” The CMD describes video news releases as “pre-packaged news” and contends that verbatim use of information from VNRs without identifying the source is plagiarism (John Stauber, executive director of CMD, quoted in Chepesiuk, 2006).

**Ethical Issues**

Video news releases are not inherently unethical, but how they are used and the consequences of use have spurred ethical debate. The central concerns in the ethical debate about video news releases are the issues of transparency and disclosure. Transparency as an ethical construct includes not only what is said, but how it is said. It includes values such as accountability, credibility, trust, respect, honesty, and duty (Plaisance, 2007 cited in Aiello & Proffitt, 2008). The question from this point of view is not whether VNRs contain accurate and newsworthy information, but whether journalists have an ethical obligation to viewers who “trust” television news and have a right to know the source of information. This argument includes concerns that it is deceptive on the part of journalists to present information from VNRs as original, as well as concerns that information provided by a public relations firm on behalf of clients and presented as news is also deceptive. At issue is not only the content of the VNR, but also the method by which the information is conveyed and whether or not viewers are intentionally deceived, either by VNR producers or by journalists (Aiello & Proffitt, 2007). The concept of trust, both between television journalists and television audiences and between publics and organizations, is at stake.

A second ethical concern about the use of VNRs is whether or not source disclosure affects viewers. There seems to be an assumption in the ethical debate that television viewers are harmed in some way when VNR material is used without disclosing the source (Calvert, 2008). The ethical question from this perspective is whether not disclosing the source affects the audience’s ability to reason. Several academic experiments have found that labeling has little effect on viewers; there was no significant effect on understanding, credibility, or visual recognition of the stories when they carried labels in an experimental setting (Reece and Cameron, 1992; Owen & Karrh, 1996). Tuggle & Ferguson (1994) conducted an experiment to see if the credibility of the news story, retention, and recall were affected by labeling. They found that labeling made no difference in perceived credibility nor held any advantage of for viewers. While viewers expect journalists to confirm the accuracy of the information, it is doubtful that viewers today, who are accustomed to seeing new stories containing video shot with personal video cameras by bystanders, believe or care that all news is entirely independently-produced.

A third ethical concern is the moral obligation of journalists to provide objective information. The use of VNRs without disclosure means that viewers may not be getting the objective information they expect (Linn, 1992). Lieberman (1992) contended that the use of VNRs without identification is a breach of covenant between news producers and audiences that assume the news will be independently gathered and produced, and it is the moral obligation of journalists not to promote the interests of governments, corporations, or special interest groups. Aiello and Proffitt (2007) contend the role of the news media in a democracy is to inform the citizenry, which includes informing them about the source of information. However, Wyatt (2005) argues the important issue is not where news originates, but how it contributes to the public discourse. For example, recent VNRs distributed by Medialink Worldwide, Inc. included a product recall produced by a toy manufacturer in cooperation with the Consumer Products Safety Commission, information about the dangers of texting and driving produced by an
insurance company, and information about a new children’s fitness program at Boys & Girls Clubs. The news values, accuracy, and contribution to public discourse of the segments would not be changed by the origination point.

**The Legalities of Video News Releases**

The two key legal issues in the VNR debate are the definition of sponsored content and the greater obligation of disclosure in connection with political or controversial program matter. Recent controversy about VNRs, including charges made by the Center for Media and Democracy, has stemmed from an unclear understanding of FCC rules, particularly about regulations of political and controversial issues, and disagreement and misunderstanding about what constitutes sponsorship as stated in the FCC rules. Closer examination of government-produced VNRs was spurred by the “Karen Ryan offense,” which was the release of VNRs from the U.S. government during the Bush administration that appeared as news stories.

In 2003, television viewers across the country, in an estimated 22 million households, watched what appeared to be a news report, narrated by what appeared to be a reporter named Karen Ryan who explained changes to Medicare resulting from the Medicare Drug Improvement and Modernization Act. Ryan, in fact was not a journalist, but owned a public relations firm in Washington, D.C. that produced the VNR on behalf of the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (Chepesiuk, 2006). Ryan was paid to produce about a dozen reports for seven federal agencies between 2003 and 2004 (Barstow & Stein, 2005). According to *The New York Times*, at least 20 federal agencies including the Defense Department, State Department, Census Bureau, the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture had distributed hundreds of pre-packaged news segments for the Bush administration. The segments appeared to be news coverage by reporters, and most were broadcast on local stations throughout the country without acknowledgement that they were produced by the U.S. government (Barstow & Stein, 2005). The segments were designed to fit seamlessly into local news broadcasts and the “reporters” did not state they were paid by the government.

Government-produced VNRs, if aired without disclosure, violate not only the FCC rules, but also the law against covert propaganda by the Government Accountability Office. The Karen Ryan offense and let to a ruling by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) that the Bush administration had also broken propaganda regulations by producing pro-administration VNRs by the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the Department of Health and Human Services, and other agencies that were staged to appear to be news segments (Aiello & Proffitt, 2007; Peabody, 2007). In three separate opinions, the GAO held that government-produced news segments may constitute improper “covert propaganda.” The GAO said government agencies could not produce the segments unless they clearly identified the source for the stations and viewing audiences. While the VNRs were labeled by the government as such for television stations, the stations, for the most part, did not pass this information on to viewers (Barstow & Stein, 2005).

Section 317 of the Communications Act of 1934 (FCC, CFR 73.1212 d) requires identification for “political broadcast matter or discussion of a controversial issue of public importance for which any film, record, talent, script is furnished…” as well as for “advertising commercial products or service, when it is clear that the mention constitutes a sponsorship identification…” In April 2005, the FCC required television stations to label all government-produced VNRs during broadcasting; however, it was not clear on what constitutes “public
matter.” The rules require different forms of identification depending on the length of the broadcast (Aiello & Proffitt, 2007).

In April 2005 the Truth in Broadcasting Act, sponsored by senators John Kerry and Frank Lautenberg, was introduced in Congress. Its purpose was to insure that “pre-packaged news stories” contain announcements that inform viewers that the information within was provided by the United States Government. The act specified how and for what period of time viewers would be informed. The bill was amended in the U.S. Senate to the point that it did not require more than current FCC rules requires. It was not enacted during the 109th session of Congress and was not re-introduced in the 110th Congress (Peabody, 2007).

The issue of sponsorship has been at the center of the CMD arguments and formal complaints. The FCC rules about corporate VNR use, however, are very clear: stations are not obligated to identify the source of the video material when there are no sponsorship issues (payment for placement). The rules state that sponsorship identification is required “when a broadcast station transmits materials for which money, service or other valuable consideration is paid, promised or accepted…” (FCC, 47 CFR 73.1212 a). They go on to say, “for the purposes of this section, the term ‘sponsored’ shall be deemed to have the same meaning as ‘paid for’” (FCC, 47 CFR 73.1212 i). The vast majority of VNRs are not sponsored content as defined in the FCC rules. Like print news releases, VNRs are distributed free and without obligation for use. Televisions stations pay nothing to use them, nor are they paid anything if they use them. Since no payment is exchanged for the use of VNRs produced by corporate and nonprofit clients, there is no legal requirement for labeling unless the topic of the VNR could be considered political or controversial, regardless of how “commercial” the resulting news segment may appear.

The Role of Activists in the VNR Debate

Much of the recent debate about the ethics of video news releases and ensuing FCC activities and media coverage has been spurred by Center for Media and Democracy. However, rather than focusing its efforts on the issue of political broadcasts from government-produced VNRs that had garnered media attention (section d), it appealed to the FCC to investigate violations of sponsorship rules by private corporations (section a). CMD is a nonprofit special interest group that examines, according to its Web site, “how PR experts concoct and spin the news, organize front groups, manipulate public opinion and manage public policy for powerful special interests.” It purportedly strengthens participatory democracy by investigating and exposing public relations spin and propaganda, and by promoting media literacy and citizen journalism (www.prwatch.org).

The following section first looks at academic studies about the roles of activists in public relations, followed by an examination of the objectives and activities of the Center for Media and Democracy in order to explore activist strategies by examining how the CMD attempted to affect the practice of public relations through pressure to regulate video news releases.

Activism and Public Relations

Activism is the process by which groups exert pressure to change policies, practices, or conditions that the activists find problematic (Smith, 2005). Activists can be a loose association of like-minded individuals or formal organizations whose mission is to address public issues (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000). Earlier studies in the public relations literature look at activists from the point of view of the organization being “acted” on and seek to discover how organizations “respond” to activism. In this sense, activists are viewed as a public external to the organization of interest and are often seen as problematic to the organization (Grunig, 1992). The dominant
paradigm expressed in excellence theory puts the corporation at the center of the examination and the activist group at the margin, while more recent critical studies recognize activist organizations as both a public as well as organizations that have their own publics and are practitioners of public relations. Dozier and Lauzen (2000) note the corporate-centric view can lead to intellectual myopia in the study of public relations.

The recent studies that look at activists as the unit of analysis have done so from the perspectives of resource mobilization (McCruskey, 2009; Sommerfeldt, 2009); framing (Zoch, Collins, Sisco, & Supa, 2008; Reber & Berger, 2005), and the use of media relations and online news rooms (discussed below), but have found no real differences in activists’ use of public relations tactics compared to public relations practices of “traditional” organizations.

Activist organizations, like many other types of organizations, practice public relations to influence public opinion and to implement efforts to achieve their goals, and often execute media strategies that prompt journalists and have an agenda-setting effect (McCluskey, 2009; Reber & Kim, 2006). News coverage is a political asset for activist groups. McClusky (2009) found that environmental groups can have a media agenda-building effect, and not surprisingly, groups with resources to provide more information subsidies received more positive coverage. Publicity gives activist groups fuel to influence public opinion and potentially change public policy. Therefore, activists often to make an “issue” out of the condition they find problematic by drawing attention to it through publicity.

The Internet and availability of Web sites has revolutionized activism (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001; Reber & Kim, 2006). Many recent activist-centric studies examine media relations strategies, with focus on the online environment. Kent and Taylor (1998) examined conditions that constitute the creation of a dialogic loop between activist organizations and their key publics, which includes the media. They found a Web site must generate a dialogic loop that is useful and should generate return visits. It must be easy to navigate and should not lead users away from the sites. They later examined the dialogic nature of activists’ Web sites by examining how environmental groups used their sites to foster two-way communication (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). Reber and Berger (2005) looked at how an environmental activist group framed issues to influence news coverage. The above studies confirm that activist groups are themselves organizations that practice public relations, but the theoretical aspects of the findings are not activists-specific. The studies indicate that activist groups use media strategies in much the same way that all organizations use them, which does not expand theory about activists and activism.

Werder and Schuch (2008) used a communication-centric, rather than organization-centric approach to look at the effects of message strategy used for activism purposes. In their experiment, communication strategies served a problem recognition function. Studies that that identify the effects of activist strategies warrant further study and lead to theory building.

Communication Strategies of the Center for Media and Democracy

Effective activism includes influencing the agenda of policy makers and serving as an expert source of information. Smith (2005) notes that in the 1960s activist initiated reforms that were enacted into law or regulation by government agencies as the EPA. To examine the communication strategies used by the Center for Media and Democracy to attempt to change FCC policy, the study used a qualitative, historical research approach in order to understand the background and activities of the CMD and other organizations relevant to the central focus of the study. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) note the historical method is applicable to all fields of study when there is a need for historical knowledge. Because evidence should not be examined from a
singular point of view, primary and secondary resources were used. Primary documents included rules regarding sponsorship identification (FCC 73.1212) and Notices of Inquiry and Notices of Proposed Rule Making (FCC 05-84; 08-155) accessed from the FCC Web site, and the full text of the CDM study (Farsetta & Price, 2006). Additionally, press releases from the Web sites of the FCC, CMD, RTNDA, NABA, Free Press, and PRSA were examined. Finally, news articles from a Factiva search that appeared in Quill, Broadcasting & Cable, and The New York Times provided points of view for the study. It should be stressed that the study was not a content analysis that attempted to quantify any aspect of the issue, but rather used an historical methodology to gather as much relevant information about the problem as possible for the purpose of analysis.

The Center for Media and Democracy was founded in 1993 by John Stauber, author of Toxic Sludge is Good for You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry. One of its objectives is “countering propaganda by investigating and reporting on behind-the-scenes public relations campaigns by corporations, industries, governments and other powerful institutions” (www.prwatch.org). CMD is highly critical of public relations as an industry and as a profession. For more than a decade, it has been critical of the distribution and use of video news releases; it considers all VNRs to be fake news designed to dupe television journalists and viewers, and believes that use of VNRs without source identification constitutes plagiarism (Stauber quoted in Chepesiuk, 2006). It advocates for full source disclosure, which includes on-screen labeling whenever material from VNRs is used.

In 2005, the Center for Media and Democracy launched “Stop Fake News,” a letter-writing campaign on its Web site. The campaign was conducted jointly with Free Press, “a national, nonpartisan organization that seeks to increase informed public participation in media policy and to promote a more competitive and democratic media system” (www.freepress.net). The campaign urged people to, “Take action to stop fake news today - Demand that the Federal Communications Commission investigate, strengthen disclosure requirements and punish station owners that air fake news” (www.prwatch.org). Both organizations encouraged readers of their Web sites to complain that “corporate propaganda continues to infiltrate local TV newscasts with disguised product advertisements posing as genuine news reports…that represents a breach of the trust between broadcasters and their viewers,” and provided an easy-to-use dialog box where readers could edit or send the above statement verbatim to the FCC.

The campaign resulted in 40,000 “letters” to the FCC that prompted the FCC to issue a Reminder and Public Notice Seeking Comment (FCC 05-84) in April 2005 on the issue to disclose all entities involving VNRs. The FCC public notice began by stating that the Commission has recently received a large number of requests that it consider whether use of VNRs by broadcast licensees, cable operators, and other complies with the Commission’s sponsorship identification rules. It went on to say “the rules are grounded in the principle that listeners and viewers are entitled to know who seeks to persuade them…” (http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-05-84A1.pdf). The public notice reiterated the rules concerning sponsorship and political matter, but did not in any way interpret the rules differently nor add anything new (Calvert, 2008). In reaction to the FCC notice, a new organization, the National Association of Broadcast Communicators (NABC) was formed specifically to respond to the FCC on behalf of producers of VNRs.

On April 6, 2006, the Center for Media and Democracy released a study, Fake TV News, Widespread and Undisclosed, by Diane Farsetta and Daniel Price that identified television stations across the country that had aired VNRs without disclosure. In November 2006 a second
report, *Still Not the News: Stations Overwhelmingly Fail to Disclose VNRs*, was released. Together the reports identified 111 television stations that had aired 140 news segments from video news releases without disclosure to viewers. The reports alleged that the stations had violated FCC Rules that states sponsorship identification is required when a broadcast station transmits materials for which money, service or other valuable consideration is paid, promised or accepted…” (FCC, 47 CFR 73.1212 a). The CMD’s interpretation of the rules was that all VNRs must be identified all of the time, even though that is not stated in the FCC rules.

At the same time the first report was issued in April 2006, the Center for Media and Democracy and Free Press filed concurrent but separate complaints with the FCC. Subsequently, the FCC Enforcement Bureau launched an investigation and issued 42 Letters of Inquiry to the 77 broadcasters named in the first CMD report. In a Nov. 14, 2006 press release, Jonathan S. Adelstein, FCC chairman at the time, commended the CMD report and the Center for Media and Democracy by name, and said, “newsrooms are not allowed under the law to run commercials disguised as news without an honest and adequate disclosure (FCC Web site, hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs), which according to the FCC rules, simply was not true.

The CMD study prompted other interest groups to respond and become involved in the debate. The Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) issued a critique of the *Fake TV News*, through its lawyers, Wiley Rein & Fielding as well as responded through several press releases. The RTNDA response noted that the undisclosed corporate VNRs cited in the CMD report were not prohibited by FCC sponsorship rules. RTNDA called *Fake TV News* “a biased and inaccurate study” and noted that while the CMD report stated that “the only interests served are those of the broadcast PR firms clients” (Farsetta & Price p. 11), one of the VNRS called into question by the CMD was actually a case where “the station simply used of some of the footage as background for a short report criticizing the product the VNR as designed to promote” (italics in the original). It noted that a reasonable reading of the FCC’s rules suggests that the sponsorship identification rules do not apply if stations or their employees have not received consideration (defined in the FCC rules as payment) for including VNR material in a broadcast, unless the material concerned politics or a controversial issue of public importance. RTNDA contended that an FCC investigation was an unprecedented intrusion into newsrooms that would have chilling effect on the dissemination of newsworthy information to the public (RTNDA, 2006). Additionally, NABC and PRSA responded to the report, noting that forced disclosure outside of FCC regulation was a violation of the First Amendment and constituted “unprecedented intrusion of the government into the newsroom.” Like RTNDA, they advocated self-regulation as articulated in all of their organizations’ codes of ethics (NABC, 2006).

Despite rebuttals, the FCC investigation continued. In Oct. 2007, the FCC censured Comcast for showing segments from a VNR without disclosure on an affiliate station because the segment contained “too much focus on a product or brand name in the programming,” which is allowable as long as no payment was received for naming the brand. Comcast was fined, even though the FCC acknowledged there was no sponsorship involved (nor was there a political or controversial issue – the VNR was about a sleep aid). After further FCC investigations, Comcast was levied a total of $20,000 in fines. Comcast contested the fines, noting that no sponsorship identification was required since there was no consideration (payment) promised or received (Eggerton, 2007; Calvert, 2008). RTNDA weighed in, noting this was not how FCC rules had been applied previously (Eggerton, 2007). On Oct. 11, 2007, the CMD filed another formal complaint urging the FCC to expedite action on its investigation of the 110 other stations.
On Oct. 31, 2007, RTNDA responded again in a complaint to the FCC, noting that the identification of all material used from a video news release “already has begun to drastically chill speech in newsrooms across the country, inhibiting broadcasters and cablecasters from fully serving their viewers.” They reiterated that VNRs that come into newsrooms via digital, satellite or other video feeds are not, by definition, sponsored.

The actions of RTNDA, an organization that could also be considered an activist group, resulted in counter-pressure on the FCC that has stalled any policy changes as of early 2010. Meanwhile, the Center for Media and Democracy has moved its efforts from the issue of sponsorship (FCC 73.1212 section a) to section (d) of the FCC rules that addresses political and controversial issues, and also to the issue of payola that includes “embedded advertising” in product placement, both of which may have more legal traction. Even though, according to its Web site, the CMD continues to monitor the misuse of corporate VNRs, rather than continuing to pursue its original arguments, it had changed the focus of complaints to a different section of the FCC rules. Stay tuned.

Discussion

The study found that special interest groups working as activists for an issue and cause had a large role in the ethical debate about video news releases, at least for a period of time. The three central communication strategies employed by the Center for Media and Democracy were the letter-writing campaign to the FCC, the release of the research report, Fake TV News, about alleged violations of FCC rules by television stations, and the filing of formal complaints with the FCC. Media strategies, including publicity through press releases and online newsrooms, were secondary. While press releases were issued at each juncture and had an agenda-setting effect in the trade media in particular, the central communication strategies used a more direct approach that served a problem recognition function. The release of the CMD study, which resulted in a media flurry, followed by the formal complaint to the FCC served as the triggering events that resulted in an investigation into the use of VNRs, even though it did not result in policy change.

The failure of the CMD is affecting policy change was not due to its strategies, but rather due to the fact that it did not seem to fully understand the FCC rules about sponsorship and how they had been applied in the past. It used emotional arguments that centered on viewers being mislead, duped, and harmed while the federal agency with the power to protect them did not intervene, which may have resulted in loss of credibility. In an interesting turn of events, a second special interest group, the Radio-Television News Directors Association had the greatest effect on the FCC policy decision. RTNDA’s rebuttals had more legal teeth than did the arguments of CMD.

The effects of the communication strategies used by the activist organization in this study are congruent with the experimental finding of Werder and Schuch (2008) that help explain the communication effects of message strategies, particularly as they influence problem recognition and the issue of goal compatibility. In terms of persuasive messages, the rational strategies of

96 73.1212 (d) states “In the case of any political broadcast matter or any broadcast matter involving the discussion of a controversial issue of public importance for which any film, record, transcription, talent, script, or any material or service of any kind is furnished...an announcement shall be made both the beginning and conclusion of such broadcasts...”
the RTNDA trumped the emotional strategies of CMD, but the initial coercive message strategies of the CMD were effective.

**Advancing Theoretical Understanding of Activism**

Research about activist organizations in the public relations literature has moved from viewing them as a problem to viewing them as an opportunity, both of which are hegemonic, organization-centric approaches, and finally to viewing them as organizations in their own right. While activist-centric approaches are helpful and have confirmed that activist organizations use public relations tactics, they do not fully explain how activist approaches to communication are theoretically different from approaches used by all organizations. Two approaches for future research would help expand theory. The first is to continue research about activist strategies, rather than focusing on tactical issues such as communication channels. The second is to recognize the situational nature of activist organizations, both as publics and as organizations. Jiang and Ni (2007) note the dualist nature of the study of activist organizations; they can be public or can have their own publics, depending on the point of view. Furthermore, most organizations could assume activist roles for their special interests even when activism is not the central mission of the organization. Both the Center for Media and Democracy and the Radio-Television News Directors Association are activist organizations when viewed from the perspective of the public relations industry or the FCC in terms of VNR policy. However, both organizations have other missions and do not always operate in activist roles. Furthermore, corporations often take on an activist role when they have a special interest, often through lobbyists. Communication strategies of activism, rather than of activists, should be the unit of analysis.

**Resolving the Ethical Debate: All That Is Legal Is Not Ethical**

Since the purpose of the study was two-fold, a final look at the ethical debate about video news releases is in order. The basic argument in the debate comes down to whether identification of VNR material should be regulated by the government or self-regulated by journalists. At issue is the First Amendment and government intrusion in independent reporting, one of the points of the RTNDA rebuttal to the CMD study. Calvert (2008) contends the FCC is attempting to define news when it punishes journalists from using VNRs as source materials. While, current FCC rules do not require labeling for most VNRs, the Public Relations Service Council, The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the National Association of Broadcast Communicators, and the Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) advocate clear identification of the source of VNRs.

VNRs from traditional distributors like Medialink Worldwide, Inc. are clearly labeled as such on the satellite feed, and the source (organization that produced the VNR) is identified. Like print news releases, they contain verifiable information and contact information is provided in the satellite feed. Television news directors are not duped; they know the source of the feed and the origination point of the VNR. Since disclosure of source material that does not constitute sponsorship is voluntary, it comes down to the decisions of stations managers and television news directors. Part of the problem is there is no agreed-upon criterion for what constitutes VNR use. Many news directors believe labeling is not necessary when only a small, edited portion of a VNR is used in a story. However, journalists are violating their own code of ethics by not disclosing the source. Voluntary disclosure on the part of television news directors and journalists could end the debate.

**Post Script**
It is ironic that the name Center for Media and Democracy implies non-interference of the government with the gate-keeping decisions of the media. An objective of CMD was to instigate governmental regulation to require journalists to identify the source of third party materials. If the Center for Media and Democracy had succeeded in its call for identification of all source materials used in news stories, the result would been a step toward FCC intrusion and censorship that could have a chilling effect on journalists’ independence to use material from outside sources that might be of interest to their viewers. It would have allowed the government to interfere with the gate-keeping decisions of journalists, which is not in the best interest of media and democracy.
References


Federal Communications Commission. *Sponsorship identification; list retention; related requirements*. 47 CFR, 73.1212.


Theoretical Perspectives in Social Media: Excellence versus Simple Information Provision and Persuasion

Sean D. Williams
Owner, Communication AMMO, Inc. &
Adjunct Professor of Public Relations, Kent State University
Phone: (216) 333-1615
Sean@CommunicationAMMO.com
24202 Russell Road
Bay Village, Ohio 44140

Julie O’Neil, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Division Chair
Texas Christian University
Schieffer School of Journalism
Strategic Communication Division
TCU Box 298060
Fort Worth, TX 76129
Phone: (817) 257-6966
Fax: (817) 257-7322
j.oneil@tcu.edu

Abstract
The adherents of social media frequently cite the ability to use blogs, Twitter, discussion groups and other such tools as a means of “having a conversation with your customers.” The term “customer” implies a marketing-centric focus, rather than a strictly public relations one, but the Excellence project work suggests that two-way, symmetrical communications will bring about the best results. Is social media a manifestation of Excellence, or merely another channel for the distribution of messages? In particular, public relations outreach to bloggers (distinct from marketing outreach) is touted as an alternative to outreach to the mainstream media. This paper will explore current literature on social media use in public relations generally, and apply Excellence and other theories to attempt to explain social media’s potential impact on business communications through a content analysis. This is envisioned as a foundation for other research, informing the creation of a qualitative assessment to be conducted in 2010 and eventually, a quantitative survey. This research also could apply to internal communication use of social media, as data becomes available.
Summary

Perhaps every social media guru, whether self-described or otherwise, sees blogging, Twitter, Facebook, MySpace and such tools as the embodiment of the Cluetrain Manifesto. The Cluetrain’s first thesis is “Markets are conversations,” (Levine, et. al., 2000, p xxi) and social media would seem to be this article come true.

Social media is a means to allow conversation – real people having real dialogue. As marketers have begun using the tools, some organizations have thoroughly embraced this dictum; organizational Twitter accounts have names attached to them, rather than a faceless logo. Facebook pages are rife with dialogue from a real person monitoring and responding to friends’ postings. Corporate blogs have names and faces, just like the people who comment upon them.

In this paper, the authors examine what is in social media, rather than what should be. Specifically, we examine the Twitter and blogging activity of companies from a variety of sectors, with special attention to whether the content of tweets, blog postings and comments represent particular PR theories. Social media is being studied, and marketing theories may be revealing in that study as well, but this paper does not include either marketing theories or any emerging theories of social media itself.

The paper is intended as the first of three in a project to better understand social media from a public relations perspective and provide the outline of best practices from a theoretical foundation.

Brief Review of the Literature

Excellence Theory

In public relations theory literature, the Excellence Theory, offering a two-way, symmetrical model of interaction, seems a good fit for social media if we extrapolate Excellence’s largely internal focus to the publics accessing the organization via social media.

“The study showed that the value of public relations comes from the relationships that organizations develop and maintain with publics. It also showed that the quality of relationships results more from the behavior of the organization than from the messages that communicators disseminate.” (Grunig, Grunig, Dozier in Botan/Hazelton, 2006, p. 55)

The participative ideal of social media is made real by organizational behavior: involvement in social media activities. Therefore, relationship-building through social media should result in more favorable disposition for the organization in question.

“…communicators can develop relationship more effectively when they communicate with publics symmetrically rather than asymmetrically. Symmetrical communication is especially important inside the organization, where it helps to build a participative culture that, in turn, increases employee satisfaction with the organization.” (p. 55)

Adopting the view that social media is a tool for bringing external publics closer to the organization leads to declaring that creating a participative culture among those publics will have similar effects. Symmetrical communication with external publics should result in higher levels of satisfaction there.

Symmetrical communication implies a willingness on the part of the organization to change if their publics want them to change. This element is a sticking point for organizational adoption of Excellence, as conducting communication activities in pursuit of organizational goals is an article of communicator faith.

Social media adherents, however, will point out that gathering information from publics and adjusting plans accordingly is a traditional element in strategic communication planning anyway.
The remaining principles of Excellence do not apply as clearly, given their focus on structure, managerial capacity, diversity and integration under a single executive.

**Relationship Theory**

According to relationship theory, practitioners use relationship strategies to initiate and maintain long-term relationship outcomes with strategic publics (J. E. Grunig and Huang, 2000; Hon and J.E. Grunig, 1999). Four relationship outcomes include satisfaction, trust, commitment, and control mutuality (Hon and J.E. Grunig, 1999). These relationship outcomes help organizations be more effective in achieving such long-term organizational goals and objectives (Hon, 1997; Hon and J.E. Grunig, 1999).

Relationship maintenance strategies, also referred to as relationship cultivation strategies (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Ki and Hon, 2009), are those tactics used by practitioners to produce relationship outcomes (J. E. Grunig and Huang, 2000; Hon and J. E. Grunig, 1999). The social media tactics and messaging used by public relations professionals can be conceptualized as relationship maintenance strategies. From a theoretical perspective, provided there are actual two-way communication and an honest attempt on the part of the organizational communicator to reach out and engage publics, social media strategies should result in increased satisfaction, trust, commitment, and control mutuality.

**Theories regarding persuasion**

Pfau and Wan (in Botan/Hazleton 2006) argue that “persuasion continues to be an integral function of public relations.” (p. 112) They point out that “well-crafted messages force attention, affect beliefs, and ultimately, exert influence.” In this way of thinking, language matters quite a lot – information provision acting as the means to change thinking and behavior. Pfau and Wan might look at social media and see a message delivery vehicle augmented by a means for feedback, and ideally suited to persuade. The social media purist rebels at this thought, steeped in the idea of participation for its own sake, saying “it’s all about the conversation.” (as of 3 February 2010, there were 9.5 million incidences of that phrase resulting from a Google search.)

Krugman’s argument “that receiver involvement dictated how people process communication” (p. 113), and James Grunig’s observation that such involvement “determines whether people will seek out and actively process public relations messages...” (p. 113) links the demand for two-way communication to the concept of attaining PR objectives. The Society for New Communication Research found that the biggest barriers to making social media work was “not technology-related or getting funding, but getting people involved in the community (51%), finding enough time to manage the community (45%), and attracting people to the community (34%).” The interaction among community members contributed the most to community success. (SNCR 2008)

With most public relations messaging flowing forth without a means of publics involvement, preconceptions and learned decision rules (heuristics) will also influence understanding. If social media helps organizations create a more active and participative culture, messages should “stick” more effectively. (See discussions re: Chaiken on the Heuristic Systemic Model and Petty and Cacioppo on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, briefly noted in Botan/Hazleton 2006, pp. 113-114.)

Therefore, if involvement and participation are so critical, we would expect to find two-way communication regularly among social media activities.
**Medium Theory**, which holds that “independent of the particular content communicated, media forms manifest unique symbol systems that shape both what is communicated and how it is received...” (p. 117) gained attention for its application to television advertising, and it could be applied to social media as well.

Chaudhuri and Buck (1995, cited in Botan/Hazelton 2006) said that television’s ability to transmit emotion helps viewers “create an emotional bond with the brand.” In their research, they contrast television and print, seeing print as more content oriented and television more source oriented.

Which of these would apply to social media? It’s possible that the viewing of messages (albeit in word form) is more similar to television viewing than to print reading, and therefore better able to foster emotional connection and participation than more passive media.

Conversely, if content is more important than medium, **Rhetorical Theory** can apply. Heath says:

> Rhetoric at heart is the process of advocacy and counter advocacy. It is the rationale for suasive discourse. Rhetoric assumes that ideas appropriately framed and presented can affect strategic and ethical changes. It assumes that the symmetry of relationships is best defined by the ability of ideas to sustain themselves under the scrutiny of public discourse. (in Botan/Hazelton 2006)

The words and/or images delivered via social media exert influence and meaning through the act of discourse in the online space. Rhetorical Theory applies as long as participants are indeed engaged in conversation.

Much social media research is conducted by organizations with a vested interest in fostering the emerging primacy of social media at the expense of mainstream media. For example, the Altimeter Group and Wetpaint claimed that brands most engaged in more than 10 social media activities grew revenues on average 18 percent over the previous year, compared to the least engaged brands, which saw revenues fall 6 percent on average. They stated:

> Note that we are not claiming a causal relationship — but there is clearly a correlation and connection. For example, a company mindset that allows a company to be broadly engage with customers on the whole probably performs better because the company is more focused on companies than the competition. (Altimeter, 2009)

The press release announcing the results of this study, however, argues that: “‘The success stories we have uncovered provide a blueprint for companies making decisions about how to best apply their marketing and consumer relations resources.”

**Research Questions**

RQ1: Is the current content of organization-driven social media consistent with the idea of persuasion?

RQ2: Is the content consistent with the precepts of Excellence Theory?

H1: Organization-driven social media content is asymmetrical, and therefore focused on persuasion despite its two-way potential.

**Methodology**

The organizations in this study were chosen based on their use of Twitter and organizational blogs during the period October 1, 2009 to January 2010. This is not much different from The Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research Fortune 500 longitudinal study conducted in 2009 (Barnes & Mattison, 2009).
The authors wanted to choose organizations from outside the information technology sector, which has, unsurprisingly, been the one most embracing these social tools. TweetStats.com was used to capture Twitter statistics, blogsearch.google.com; Google in general; Technorati and Blogger were used to locate organizational blogs. The authors found that eight firms discontinued their corporate blogs following the subject period. Former blog addresses pointed to generic pages, with no mention or explanation. Two other firms were eliminated from the study as initial observations did not differ significantly from the 8 remaining firms. Other forms of social media activity (such as Facebook) may be mentioned, even though such activity is outside the scope of this very exploratory research. All of the data were gathered and analyzed during the period February 2010 to April 2010, pointing out the difficulty of studying a medium that literally is changing by the minute. Nearly all the research was conducted using the subject firms’ websites, blog sites, Twitter accounts and related material.

Terms
Twitter, a micro-blogging/mass instant messaging service, permits users to compose 140-character status updates, commonly referred to as Tweets. These Tweets are visible to anyone, technically, though mainly they’re intended to be seen by other Twitter users who “follow” people whom they want to stay in contact with. When another user forwards a Tweet to his/her own followers, that’s called Retweeting (RT). Tweets can be private communications, too, through Direct Messages (DM) that travel from originator to a single other Twitter user. Followers can create a conversation through Replies. Number of followers, number of users one follows, number of Tweets, Retweets and Replies are common statistics. A recent addition to Twitter are “lists,” user-controlled aggregation of followers by subject matter, location, etc. Blogs, short for Web Logs, are Internet sites. They provide a channel for the author to share information of any length. The sites are available to anyone, and it’s common for people to search for blogs on certain topics, using Blogsearch.Google.Com, Technorati, and other services. Most blogs have the ability to have readers comment, and it’s considered a best practice for an author to engage in conversation with his/her commenters. Web statistics are commonly used descriptively – visits, page views, time on page, downloads – as well as the number of comments and proportion of author replies to comments. Social bookmarking and rating services – Digg, De.li.ci.ous, and others offer further evaluation perspectives, but are outside the scope of this paper. Facebook has more than 400 million user accounts as of April 30, 2010, and many subject companies are using it as well. This, too, is outside our scope in this initial research, except as noted.

Results
If the point of organizational involvement in social media is similar to that of other types of communication, then sales-related messaging and broader, reputational messaging will rely on some type of suasive discourse. Therefore, organizations are trying to get people to think, feel or do something, and this is demonstrated in the evaluation of the subject firms.
Wells Fargo
Wells Fargo is one of the world’s largest financial services companies. It has four blogs and a Twitter account, and they use these tools differently from one another. The Twitter account (@Ask_Wells_Fargo) is a mechanism for uncovering customer service issues and moving them off the Twitter stream. They tweet during specified business hours, beginning with admonition to avoid tweeting personal or financial information. The typical conversation introduces the customer service tweeter, and instructs the customer to direct message Wells’ Twitter account to facilitate personal contact by either email or telephone. They seldom retweet, and replies make up 78 percent of their total tweet count, a very high proportion, though the replies are instructional as noted above, rather than adding new information or discussing matters with customers. During the study period, Ask_Wells_Fargo tweeted 1,044 times, 822 of which were @ replies and just 3 retweets.

The use of Twitter is asymmetrical and cannot rightly be called two-way despite the relatively high percentage of @ replies, which usually call upon the user to send a direct message (a private Twitter based communication) with offline contact information.

Wells’ blogs
Wells-Wachovia Blog, which is dedicated to the merger of the two companies, especially branch conversion information, dates, etc. For the last quarter of 2009 plus January, 19 posts generated 385 comments; Wells representatives replied to commenters 49 times, for a proportion of 12.7%. The post content is conversational in style, though the two-way replies to commenters are limited to apologies, answering occasional questions and providing additional information. Given the strong opinions and complaints voiced by many commenters, Wells could reply more frequently; there are many comments complaining that no one has replied. Guided by History is just what it sounds like – a series of posts recounting the company’s history, as well as posts that touch upon historical events. In the last quarter of 2009 plus January 2010, there were 22 posts that generated 87 comments (40 of which were on one post, a caption contest), nine of which were replies, for a proportion of 10%. All the replies save one were “thank you” comments of varying length, including thanks for correcting information. The Student LoanDown covers financing college education. In the last quarter of 2009 plus January 2010, there were 14 posts with 37 comments, 15 of which were replies for a proportion of 40%. All of the replies answered questions posed by the commenters (typically offering additional information) or, rarely, correcting misinformation. The posts are quite long and technical, covering documents and other lending materials and information. Stagecoach Island is an interactive game. Users participate in a virtual world, adopting personas – avatars – to represent them as they interact (similar to Second Life), transact business and take classes in Stagecoach Island University. The blog that supports the game had 26 posts with 127 comments, 34 of which were replies, a proportion of 26.7%. The replies both celebrated and encouraged commenters, gave instructions on how to solve technical issues and offered guided tours “in-world.”

Ford
Ford’s blog, TheFordStory.com, behaves more like a publication than a blog. It also serves as the center of Ford’s considerable social media activity, which includes Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr (the user-generated photo-sharing site).
The blog postings are articles of varying length about their products, technology and leaders. There are many comments. During the fourth quarter 2009 plus January 2010, TheFordStory had 61 blog posts generating 1,192 comments, only 49 of which were replies to other comments, a 4.1% ratio. Ford seldom engages with its commenters, and when it does it’s to correct misinformation, add information and say “thanks.”

On Twitter, however, Ford is much more interactive. During the same period, four Ford accounts tweeted 1,584 times, 927 of which were replies, for 58.5%. Retweets were minimal, at 162, mostly retweeting their company Twitter accounts.

The content of the tweets in the main is that of a conversation. Some material is promotional—pointing to blog posts, and other internal content, but the bulk of the tweets are not. They share media hits, chat, and generally participate in a flow of discussion. It does not appear, however, that the company is changing anything as a result of this dialogue.

Crate & Barrel; CB2
At the start of the research that led to this paper, Crate and Barrel had a corporate blog. It is now not available. C&B did Tweet from a corporate account 10 times during the period, but stopped January 11.

It appears that the company decided to concentrate on Facebook; the company page as of 31 March has more than 30,000 “fans” and a very active dialogue on its “wall.” {note for further research—if this is a trend, Facebook will require serious study.}

CB2, the company’s urban brand, does blog, with 54 posts during the study period and 63 comments, none of which were replies. One post was responsible for 34 of the comments – it’s fair to say that there is no dialogue between company and commenters here. Even the prospect to create a forum for commenters is not supported by the evidence. As with its parent, CB2 has apparently shifted its engagement to Facebook, where it has 4,457 fans.

CB2 uses Twitter (CB2Tweets) strictly as a means of notifying followers of new blog posts. It tweeted 44 times in fourth quarter 2009 plus January 2010, with just one retweet (of a Crate and Barrel tweet) and no @ replies.

A third C&B brand, The Land of Nod, targets accessories and décor for babies and children. It has no blog, but Tweets frequently. During the study period, it tweeted 156 times; more than 24 percent were replies and just under 14 percent retweets. The content of the tweets themselves is wide-ranging, though dialogic elements are rare. Most tweets are product promotions, contests, “knock-knock” jokes (apparently a part of the company’s Web site) and thank-yous.

Pottery Barn, PB Kids
Continuing a theme in the research, Pottery Barn (a Williams-Sonoma brand) seems to have begun its social media strategy with blogging and Twitter, only to abandon the blogging.

A search on Digg.com, a site where community members submit content to be “voted upon” by others, finds 70 “digs” regarding Pottery Barn – including 14 each in April and May 2009 and 12 in November 2009 – many of which emerged from what seem to be 11 Pottery Barn blog Web sites, but it appears unlikely that they are sponsored by the company.

Each of these sites contained one post dated Nov. 13 or Nov. 14, 2009. The site identifying information includes a copyright mark saying that it is owned by Pottery Barn Kids, but as the branding is completely different from other Williams-Sonoma owned brand sites, and as the content seems amateurish, it is more likely that an unaffiliated party is responsible.
Pottery Barn on Twitter had 30 tweets in the study period, with no retweets or @ replies. Pottery Barn Kids had 41 tweets, also with no retweets or @ replies. During the study period, however, Pottery Barn and Pottery Barn Kids launched Facebook pages. In December, the company reached out to 1,300 Facebook users in an existing “Pottery Barn Fanatics” group encouraging them to “fan” the company’s new page. As of March 31, 2010, Pottery Barn had more than 98,000 fans and Pottery Barn Kids more than 34,000.

**Home Depot**

Home Depot has an employee-generated blog coined “OrangeBlooded.” As described on its website, the blog celebrates the Home Depot’s culture. The stories are straight from the aisles and selected by Home Depot associates throughout the U.S., Canada, Mexico and China. A personal tone is reflected in the human interest stories posted to the blog. Blog titles such as “Associates Bring Cheer to our Communities,” “A Splash of Pink Pain for the Chicken Coop,” and “Wedding Bells at the Santa Fe Home Depot” reflect the local nature of the information posted by associates in this blog. However, despite its folksy and intimate feel, the content primary of this blog is promotional in nature. In essence, this blog serves as an outlet for public relations human interest stories. Very few comments from readers/viewers are posted.

Home Depot has an active Twitter presence. As reflected by TweetStats (April 23, 2010), Home Depot averaged 213 tweets per month in the time period from October 1, 2009 to January 31, 2010 for a total of 852, more than 71 percent of which were replies and over 5 percent retweets. The Home Depot on Twitter site is transparent about the public relations function of its Twitter accounts. The site introduces its PR coordinator on its site: “I’m Sarah on our PR team, joined by Brandi and her team from Customer Care.”

Home Depot has multiple Twitter lists including: @HomeDepot/localnews, @HomeDepot/weather, @HomeDepot/brands-you-trust, @HomeDepot/homeimprovement, @HomeDepotdeals, @HomeDepotfdn, @HomeDepotracing. Its multiple lists reflect the fact that Home Depot is seeking to connect and provide useful and valuable information to rather specialized audiences. The bulk of the content includes promotional specials, customer service comments, and banter designed to spark discussion. For example, on Earth day, Home Depot tweeted, “Happy Earth Day! What are you going to recognize today?”

**John Deere MachineFinder**

MachineFinder’s blog showcases large photos of its tractors from around the United States accompanied by human interest stories. For example, blog post titles include “Nothing Pedals like a Deere,” “10 More Incredible John Deere HDR Images,” and “30 Examples of Tractor Art and Art From Tractors.” In addition to the colorful and interesting photos, video content is periodically posted. Few people comment on the blog posts. A MachineFinder tweet that seeks to drive people to the blog post typically represents one of the listed comments. MachineFinder’s twitter username, @machinefinder, has 1,433 followers. MachineFinder tweets appear to drive traffic to their website, to promote their blog entries, and to link their followers to important industry news. As reflected by TweetStats (April 23, 2010), MachineFinder disseminated 229 tweets in the time period spanning from October 1, 2009 to January 31, 2010, 30 of which were @ replies and 31 retweets.
Caterpillar, Inc.
Caterpillar, Inc. launched its first blog on July 8, 2009 for power generation users and professionals. According to a press released on Caterpillar’s website, this Power Generation Online Community “can be described as an interactive forum where consulting specifying engineers, operators and other power generation professionals can exchange ideas and best practices” (retrieved from the Caterpillar website, April 26, 2010). Caterpillar debuted a second blog in September of 2009. The purpose of this waste industry blog is to connect its waste industry group and waste industry professionals in order to share best practices (retrieved from the Caterpillar website, April 26, 2010).

Caterpillar Inc. employees take turns writing blog entries for both the power generation and waste industry blogs. The tone is conversational and personal. The two Caterpillar blogs seem to initiate legitimate conversation with community members. Less emphasis is placed on promoting Caterpillar. For example, in one of the waste industry blog entries, a veteran Caterpillar employee writes, “Over the last few blogs, we have touched on spacing equipment, product support measurements, and overall change in how we do business with the recent economic downturn. In this blog, we take a step back and do an overview of Life Cycle Management. In this new blog, Manage Your Fleet - - Taking a Life Cycle Management Perspective, Bill Debord focuses on other variables that drive cost over the life of your machine - - Selection, Operations and Project Management, Repair & Maintenance Management, Business Management, & Rebuild, Resale, Disposal” (April 26, 2010).

Also notable is the fact that the authors pose important questions to prospective viewers. For example, in the Power Generation Online Community, authors pose the following questions in their blog entries “How can I make money off of my standby genset during times when it’s doing just that… standing by?” and “Oil sample analysis provides important data on your engine. Who do you trust to give the best insight?” Given its emphasis on real questions and dialogue, it’s not surprising that the Caterpillar blogs generate a fair number of comments per post. Caterpillar’s Twitter username, @CaterpillarInc, has 3,577 followers. According to TweetStats (April 26, 2010), Caterpillar disseminated 121 tweets from October 1, 2009 through January 31, 2010. They averaged two tweets per day and 23 tweets per month, with no retweets and insignificant @ replies. Caterpillar’s tweets appear to fulfill many purposes: (1) to disseminate important company news, (2) to promote a blog entry by one of its employees, (3) to drive traffic to its website. Apparently, it does not use Twitter for discussion.
Sony
As you might expect, Sony uses many forms of social media. In its electronics business, the “Sony Electronics Community” includes a blog moderated by two staffers, photo and video content, material for downloading, separate communities for product ratings and reviews, a learning site “digital darkroom,” online course work at “Backstage 101,” and communities for Vaio (computers) and a site for Sony Reader users dedicated to “literary moments.” The Sony Electronics Community blog offers information about products and how they’re used. Photos, videos, podcasts – all kinds of content resides here. During the study period, the blog had 48 posts, 30 of which generated 124 comments. The moderators do interact in the comments, to thank commenters, offer additional information and make suggestions.

Other Sony businesses that use blogging include PlayStation, which has the most active blog of any company evaluated in this study. For one week at the end of January 2010, 14 posts generated 1,504 comments plus 116 replies. (For the study period, there are 342 posts.) On Twitter, Sony also has multiple accounts. The main @Sony has about 12,000 followers; @SonyElectronics has about 13,000. @SonyPictures boasts some 60,000 followers while @PlayStation (video games) has more than 250,000. The scale is daunting. During the study period, these four Twitter accounts had 2,985 tweets, 38% of which were @ replies and 14.5% of which were retweets. The content of the tweets is largely broadcasting, though there is some discussion. Most tweets are merely informational.

Conclusions
Except as noted in the detail above, corporate blogging is largely an exercise in one-way communication, if we define one-way as between company and others. The content is designed to position and persuade, sometimes merely to sell. The firms with the most blog comments (Ford, Wells Fargo) seem content to let those commenting discuss things among themselves rather than engage with them. The Caterpillar blogs that focused on customer-centric issues and problems represent an exception. Excellence theory is essentially about two-way communication and symmetry – the concept that organizations will change something of themselves as a consequence of that dialogue. There is little evidence that such symmetry is present in the blogs we evaluated.

Twitter would seem to be the natural space for two-way discussion, but the @ reply (the very essence of dialogue on Twitter) is underused, as is the retweet. There also is little evidence that the firms studied are operating symmetrically on Twitter. Will policies change, goals be adjusted, and/or mutually beneficial outcomes be realized? Unknown. Do Twitter followers think better of companies on Twitter?

Considering both blogging and Twitter, it’s often unclear whether the public relations arm of the firm or the Marketing one are handling social media. If marketing is in charge, the lack of symmetry isn’t remotely surprising. PR has, for the most part, a likelier tendency to look for reputational impact and opportunity for discussion than do marketers. The selling process, often referred to as “consultative” or “relationship” based, is still fundamentally about persuasion through skillful use of language. This suggests to us that neither Excellence, nor the Relationship Management Theory are very much in evidence among the companies we studied. Rhetorical Theory, on the other hand, with its focus on suasive language seems a better fit.

Facebook holds great potential because of scale. Gathering “fans” (or recently, “likes”) creates a focus group of people already interested in your organization. The temptation for firms is to market to this group, rather than establish a relationship with its members. This seems to us to be
a very risky notion, as tolerance for advertising increases with relevancy and decreases with the reverse. It’s a balancing act: you want to take advantage of the captive audience, but the focus on efficient maximization of impressions in traditional marketing reduces the relationship value. We could make a case that firms shouldn’t build their own presence in social media. Rather, they could participate as third parties in social networks. One business development strategy for solo PR practitioners is to visit blogs and sites and comment intelligently, building and enhancing reputation with little capital investment. Any of the firms in our study could opt to do the same – is it better for Pottery Barn to have 96,000 Fans, few of whom interact with the Pottery Barn people who run its Facebook page, or to have groups such as Pottery Barn Fanatics with just 1,300 members who ostensibly have a stronger affinity for that brand?

The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company relies on third-party sites for user product reviews – TireRack.com is one – and it’s not certain that bringing that capability onto Facebook or even its own website would improve reputational impact.

To revisit the research questions and hypothesis:

RQ1: Is the current content of organization-driven social media consistent with the idea of persuasion?

Yes. The bulk of blog postings, replies to comments and Twitter activity is consistent with persuasion.

RQ2: Is the content consistent with the precepts of Excellence Theory?

No. Even two-way discussion, hardly new to public relations during the Excellence Study, is erratic among the companies represented in this research. Neither did the researchers observe symmetrical behavior in subject blogs and Twitter activity.

H1: Organization-driven social media content is asymmetrical, and therefore focused on persuasion despite its two-way potential.

Hypothesis 1 is supported by the research.

Further research should use direct surveys among subject firms to connect their intended strategy with the observed behavior.
References


The Million Follower Fallacy: Audience Size Doesn’t Prove Influence on Twitter
Caterpillar - BLOG: Power Perspectives - Online Community
The Ford Story: Archive
http://www.sonyelectronicscommunity.com/sony/blog/
http://blog.us.playstation.com/ (Sony)
http://blog.machinefinder.com/ (John Deere)
http://orangeblooded.net/OB/ (Home Depot)
Wells Fargo Blogs: Join The Conversation
Word of Mouth, Insights, Customer Loyalty Biggest Benefits of Online Communities, Says New Study by Beeline Labs, Deloitte & Society for New Communications Research: Society for New Communications Research

TweetStats :: for Ask WellsFargo
TweetStats :: for CaterpillarInc
TweetStats :: for cb2com
TweetStats :: for CrateandBarrel
TweetStats :: for Ford
TweetStats :: for HomeDepot
TweetStats :: for machinefinder
TweetStats :: for PlayStation
TweetStats :: for potterybarn
TweetStats :: for PotteryBarnKids
TweetStats :: for Sony

TweetStats :: for SonyElectronics

TweetStats :: for SonyPictures
TweetStats :: for thelandofnod
Alienating Publics; Activating Publics: A Case Study of Whole Foods Market and CEO John Mackey’s Editorial about Healthcare Reform

John G. Wirtz
Austin Sims
College of Mass Communications
Texas Tech University
Box 43082
Lubbock, TX 79409
Email: john.wirtz@ttu.edu
Introduction

On August 11, 2009, The Wall Street Journal published an editorial written by John Mackey, CEO of Whole Foods Market, a retailer specializing in natural and organic foods and consumer products. In the editorial “The Whole Foods Alternative to Obamacare,” Mackey argued “…the last thing our country needs is a massive new health-care entitlement that will create hundreds of billions of dollars of new unfunded deficits and move us much closer to a government takeover of our health-care system.” Mackey then presented a series of reforms, many of which are often associated with libertarian or politically conservative positions. Examples of his suggested reforms included “less government control and more individual empowerment,” tort reform, health savings accounts, and high deductible health insurance plans. Mackey also credited the health savings accounts and high deductible plans offered by Whole Foods to its employees as producing substantial healthcare savings for the company.

Given that many Whole Foods customers consider themselves progressive or politically liberal (e.g., Mui, 2009, August 19), it is not surprising that Mackey’s editorial generated a negative reaction. For example, the website “The Huffington Post” featured a series of blog posts criticizing Mackey and his position on healthcare reform. Blogger Ben Wyskida (2009, August 14) wrote a post arguing that Mackey did not understand his own brand given that Mackey’s position on healthcare put him at odds with “about 80 percent of his customers, who may now feel betrayed and antagonized.” A group of self-proclaimed opponents to Mackey and his position on healthcare created a website calling for a boycott of the company (www.wholeboycott.com). Later, an anti-Whole Foods facebook page was created that grew to more than 30,000 members.

Interestingly, the publicity surrounding the Mackey editorial also resulted in a positive response toward the company from bloggers and commentators who identified themselves as “politically independent” or conservative. For example, a number of bloggers linked to the editorial and wrote pro-Whole Foods posts, and the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition (2009), a loose coalition of independent and conservative voters, created a pro-Whole Foods website (www.teacottwholefoods.com), where a series of “buycotts” to show economic and ideological support for Mackey and Whole Foods were organized.

The dynamic between the self-identified supporters of Whole Foods who stated their shock and anger at Mackey’s editorial and the individuals who had previously not supported Whole Foods because of their perception of the company but changed once the editorial was published is at the heart of the current paper. After providing a brief discussion of the history of the company, we then give a more-detailed discussion of the reaction from both sides to the editorial. We then present a descriptive analysis of comments and reaction to the controversy by self-identified existing and new customers of Whole Foods. Of particular interest are examples of comments or blog posts that reveal a perception that the company’s position on healthcare was at odds with those of the commenter. This analysis is informed by coorientation theory (McLeod & Chafee, 1973; Pearson, 1989), which suggests that an important part of successful communication involves the orienting process that two parties engage in within their shared communication environment. Important factors that influence communication effectiveness within that environment are agreement, accuracy, and congruency (see discussion below). The paper concludes with a discussion of public communication by a CEO in an increasingly polarized political environment that is also characterized by tools which facilitate organization and action by alienated or activated publics.
Brief History of Whole Foods

Whole Foods Markets is a 287-store retailer of natural and organic foods with approximately 50,000 employees and stores in 38 states, Washington D.C., as well as Canada and England. Whole Foods ranked No. 284 on the Fortune 500 list of largest U.S. companies for fiscal year 2009, with revenues of $8.0 billion and a profit of $146 million (“Fortune 500,” n.d.).

The company was founded in 1980 by John Mackey and his partners Rene Lawson Hardy, Craig Weller and Mark Skiles. Mackey wanted to create an organic food alternative to grocer giant Safeway, and the first store in Austin, Texas, was supposed to be the antithesis to the large corporate food markets that controlled the industry.

From its inception, the company set out to demonstrate that it was not only different in the products it offered but also in the core values that guided its business practices. The current version of the company’s values include (“Values Overview,” n.d.; emphasis ours):

- Selling the highest quality natural and organic products available
- Satisfying and delighting customers
- Supporting team member happiness and excellence
- Creating wealth through profits and growth
- Caring about communities and the environment
- Creating ongoing win-win partnerships with suppliers
- Promoting the health of company stakeholders through healthy eating education

The company also states that “[Our customers] are our most important stakeholders in our business and the lifeblood of our business. Only by satisfying our customers first do we have the opportunity to satisfy the needs of our other stakeholders” (“Values Overview,” n.d.).

Examples of company policies that demonstrate its commitment to its employees include the policy where no one at the company could have a salary more than nineteen times what the average employee makes. This has resulted in a salary of about $400,000 for company co-president and chief operating officer, one of the lowest annual salaries for a company president in the Fortune 500. As CEO, Mackey makes $1 per year, although that salary is supplemented by the stock in the company that he owns. Finally, the company provides health insurance and pays 100 percent of premiums for the 89 percent of Whole Foods employees who work 30 or more hours a week, a significant percentage higher than its competitors. In fact, it was in part because of the perceived success in providing healthcare benefits to Whole Foods employees that led Mackey to write an editorial about healthcare reform.

Whole Foods CEO writes an editorial

Mackey was contacted by the editorial page staff of The Wall Street Journal and asked to write about healthcare reform in the summer of 2009. At that time, there was considerable debate in the U.S. about plans for healthcare reform being considered by the Congress. While the title on the editorial submitted by Mackey was simply “Healthcare Reform,” copy editors at the Journal chose the more inflammatory headline of “The Whole Foods Alternative to Obamacare.” The editorial appeared on Aug. 11, and Mackey later expressed frustration at the headline in a post on his “CEO Blog” that links from the main corporate website (2009, 14 August). Mackey stated that he was answering the president’s invitation “…to all Americans to put forward constructive ideas for reforming our health care system.”

Nevertheless, Mackey began his editorial with a provocative quote by Margaret Thatcher, who beside President Ronald Reagan is probably the individual most closely associated with the
modern conservative movement. The quote—“The problem with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people’s money”—set the tone for the editorial, as well as the reaction by many of its readers.

After establishing the bleak financial future of the U.S. (e.g., large deficit, strain on Social Security and Medicare of retiring Baby Boomers), Mackey provided a series of eight suggestions for reducing healthcare costs. Each of the suggestions was oriented toward individual responsibility and market-based solutions to providing healthcare. The suggestions included changing tax law in order to reduce the disadvantage faced by individual purchasers of health insurance, allowing the purchase of health insurance across state lines, repeal health insurance mandates, tort reform, and high deductible health insurance policies.

One of Mackey’s final statements became a flashpoint for many who reacted negatively to the editorial. Mackey argued that access to healthcare was not an intrinsic right and that healthcare is “best provided through voluntary and mutually beneficial market exchanges rather than through government mandates” (Mackey, 2009, August 11). Mackey then noted that about 70% of healthcare dollars go to treat preventable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and obesity and concluded the editorial with a broad statement of individual responsibility, “We are all responsible for our own lives and our own health. We should take that responsibility very seriously and use our freedom to make wise lifestyle choices that will protect our health.”

Response from “most important stakeholders”

Reaction to Mackey’s editorial started slowly but built quickly over the days and weeks after the editorial appeared. The Huffington Post, a website that features primarily progressive and liberal bloggers, included a series of posts that attacked Mackey and the editorial for abandoning Whole Foods’ customer base and its core values. For example, blogger Ben Wyskida (2009, August 14) argued that Mackey obviously did not understand his own brand because Mackey’s position that there was no universal right to healthcare put him at odds with about “80 percent of his customers.” Wyskida said these customers probably felt betrayed and antagonized and concluded that he would no longer shop at Whole Foods, writing “To me, it’s pretty basic: Mackey is working to oppose things I believe in, so I should stop giving him money.”

Blogger Ethan Nichtern (2009, August 15), director of a Buddhist-inspired nonprofit organization, had a similar reaction to the editorial, which he characterized as “straight from Rush Limbaugh’s playbook” and displaying “selfish individualism, mistrust for the very notion of representative government itself, and continued support for a system of profit on anabolic steroids.” Nichtern noted that Whole Foods’ own mission statement is titled “Declaration of Interdependence,” which implies that everyone is connected and dependent on one another for the collective well-being. Nichtern called Mackey’s positions hypocritical and stated that he also would no longer shop at Whole Foods.

Media coverage of the negative reaction to the editorial

It didn’t take long for the mainstream media to report on the negative reaction to the editorial. One of The New York Times’ “opinionator bloggers” 97 Eric Etheridge (2009, August...
17) wrote a post about the controversy in which he discussed the response in the blogosphere and noted that at least some shoppers were planning to boycott the company. The Washington Post also ran a story (Mui, 2009, August 19) on the reaction to Mackey’s editorial, which the author described as a “liberal customer base go[ing] ballistic.” Mui quoted Thomas Goldstein, who supported a boycott of Whole Foods. “We want CEOs to understand that they benefit from progressive policies and fact costs when they take right-wing stands,” Goldstein said. Another Whole Foods customer quoted in the same article said, “A lot of people are sad to look at this corporation and see that it is just like any other, if not worse.”

The feelings of disillusionment with Mackey and Whole Foods coalesced into a more concerted effort to boycott Whole Foods. As noted, the website “wholeboycott.com” was established the week after the editorial appeared. It contained a series of articles and commentaries arguing against Mackey’s position on healthcare reform. The website also included information about boycotts and protests by Whole Foods customers and links to other websites that supported a boycott. One of those links was to a Facebook group “Whole Foods Boycott,” which gained more than 30,000 members within a month of the editorial appearing. The mission of the group stated,

“The Whole Foods brand was built with the dollars of deceived progressives. Let them know your money will no longer go to support Whole Foods to provide the platform for their anti-union CEO to influence healthcare policy and derail the debate with insurance industry, right wing propaganda” (Whole Foods Boycott, 2009).

Fans of the page were encouraged to post photos of cash register receipts from competitors of Whole Foods and to attend demonstrations in front of different stores throughout the country.

**Staging a “buycott”**

One of the most interesting responses to the Mackey editorial came from people who describe themselves as “politically independent” or conservative. A number used the opportunity provided by the discussion over the editorial to assert their support for Mackey and Whole Foods. For example, Radley Balko (2009), who writes for The Agitator, a conservative politics and culture blog, had this to say about Mackey’s piece, “I plan to do a lot more shopping at Whole Foods in the coming weeks…. Whole Foods is consistently ranked among the most employee-friendly places to work in the service industry. In fact, Whole Foods treats employees a hell of a lot better than most liberal activist groups do. The company has strict environmental and humane animal treatment standards about how its food is grown and raised…In short, Whole Foods is everything leftists talk about when they talk about ‘corporate responsibility.’”

The Times Online (Ayres, 2009, September 9) ran an article titled “Whole Foods boss John Mackey becomes unlikely hero of the U.S. Right.” In it the author said the average “gun-toting, churchgoing, flag-saluting American conservative would not be found dead walking the aisles of a Whole Foods supermarket,” but that that may have changed due to Mackey’s position on the Obama administration’s health care policy. The story quoted several self-identified conservatives who reported a sudden interest in shopping at Whole Foods. One stated that he had never been to a Whole Foods store before the editorial was published, but that he had traveled to the one near his house three times that week alone.

The Nationwide Tea Party Coalition, a broad coalition of independent and conservative voters, proposed a “buycott” of Whole Foods. The coalition established a pro-Whole Foods
website (teacottwholefoods.com), and the website included information about how to show economic and ideological support for Mackey and Whole Foods. St. Louis Tea Party leader Dana Loesch stated that, “Most tea party supporters are not regular customers of Whole Foods, and we want to show our support for Mr. Mackey’s championship of free market health care reforms.” Shortly after establishing the website, facebook groups started appearing with information about individual “buycotts,” and perhaps taking a page from the anti-Whole Foods website, a number of the “buycotters” posted pictures of the receipts from their purchases at Whole Foods.

**Whole Foods and Mackey respond to the crisis**

Almost as soon as the editorial appeared, the company Whole Foods attempted to put some distance between itself and the positions taken by Mackey in the editorial. On August 13 the company posted a response to the editorial on its website (“Our Leadership’s Response,” 2009, August 13). In it the company thanked its customers and shareholders for expressing their opinions about the position taken by Mackey. It also reiterated that the company provided health insurance for the 89 percent of Whole Foods employees who work 30 or more hours a week. The statement concluded by recognizing the many different opinions about healthcare reform shared by customers and employees alike.

The company also created a Healthcare Reform section in the forum section of its company website where individuals were allowed to post their thoughts about the editorial and other related topics. The company adhered to its policy of not censoring comments unless they included profanity or personal attacks. This resulted in numerous “Boycott Whole Foods” threads that were started and which appeared on the website. The next day Mackey posted his rationale for writing the editorial (2009, August 14), and the full unedited version of the editorial. He also allowed for readers to post comments in response to his editorial. Once again, all comments—positive and negative—were included as long as they did not include profanity or personal attacks.

After staying out of the media spotlight for a period, Mackey addressed the controversy, once again choosing the editorial section of *The Wall Street Journal* to discuss the reaction to the editorial and his views of capitalism. In an interview with Stephen Moore (2009, October 3), Mackey expressed surprise at the reaction to the editorial stating, “I think a lot of people who got angry haven’t read what I actually wrote.” He also suggested that at least some of the reaction was either caused by or supported by labor unions, which have tried repeatedly and unsuccessfully to unionize Whole Foods. In another interview with *Reason* magazine, a magazine of “free markets and free minds,” Mackey pointed out that the CEO of Safeway had written an editorial advocating market-based approaches to healthcare reform which had not resulted in any negative publicity. Mackey also described his political philosophy as one that believes in markets, individual empowerment, and individual choice.

Perhaps the coda to the controversy occurred in December when Mackey stepped down as chairman of the board of Whole Markets, while retaining the title of CEO. Mackey (2009, 24 December) announced his decision to step aside on his CEO blog, stating the Whole Foods “has been targeted by corporate governance activists for several years now seeking a separation of these roles. The members of the Board and E-Team tried to talk me out of giving up the title; however, I don’t believe it is in the best interest of our company or our stakeholders to devote any more time or resources to fight this misperception over a title any longer…”

Mackey had not commented again on the editorial publically until a recent profile appeared in the *New Yorker* (Paumgarten, 2010). In that article Mackey called the level of vitriol
aimed at him and his company “left-wing McCarthyism.” Mackey also stated that “people had an idea in their minds about the way Whole Foods was. So when I articulated a capitalistic interpretation of what needed to be done in health care, that was disappointing to some people” (p. 25).

**“But I thought you thought...”**

The quote in the *New Yorker* article goes to the heart of the situation surrounding Mackey’s editorial and how differently many people viewed Mackey and his company prior to the editorial and how drastically those views changed once the editorial was published. Coorientation theory can provide guidance here (McLeod & Chafee, 1973; Pearson, 1989). This theory suggests that an important part of communication involves the orienting process that two parties engage in within their shared communication environment. Agreement, accuracy, and congruency are important factors that influence communication effectiveness that environment.

Agreement is defined as a measure of similarity in attitudes toward an object or behavior. In this case, agreement would entail both parties (i.e., Mackey, Whole Foods customers) holding similar attitudes toward healthcare reform. Accuracy is a measure of how well one group can predict the attitudes and beliefs of another group. Here we might expect that Mackey would be able to accurately identify how his customers would feel about healthcare reform and likewise that Whole Foods customers would be able to accurately predict Mackey’s attitude toward healthcare reform. Finally, congruency is the degree to which one group’s attitudes predict the attitudes they perceive the other group holding. Here, we would expect the actual attitudes toward healthcare reform of the Whole Foods customers to predict the attitudes they perceived Mackey to hold and vice versa. And, of course, effective communication is more likely to occur when agreement, accuracy, and congruency are high between both parties.

One way to measure whether agreement, accuracy, and congruency between Mackey and the customer base of Whole Foods is to look at comments left by self-identified shoppers. Evidence of a low level of agreement would be seen in comments in which the commenter explicitly or implicitly rejects the healthcare reforms proposed by Mackey. Evidence of a low level of accuracy would be seen in comments where the individual expresses surprise, anger, or frustration at the position taken by Mackey. Evidence of a low level of congruency would be found in situations where the actual attitude toward healthcare reform by a customer was different than how he or she perceived Mackey’s position to be.

*Mackey’s position on markets and healthcare reform*

The first thing that is needed in any coorientation analysis is a description of Mackey’s position toward healthcare reform. In addition to the editorial itself (see Appendix for all eight proposals), there are a number of other cues to Mackey’s position on healthcare and markets available in public comments in which Mackey has openly referred to his appreciation of free market advocates, such as Ayn Rand, Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek, and Ludwig von Mises. For example, in Mackey’s (2009) audiobook about the power of conscious capitalism, he begins with a 10-minute discussion of how capitalism defeated socialism. In the *New Yorker* article, Mackey also stated, “Whole Foods itself is a market-based solution. We’re a corporation. We are in capitalism. We have to compete with Safeway and Wal-Mart and Kroger and Wegmans and Trader Joe’s. *What’s odd about it is that that’s what we’ve always been. We’re not a co-op*” (Paumgarten, 2010, January 4; emphasis ours). So, it is clear that Mackey’s position is one that places faith in capitalism and market-based solutions to problems, a position that was also clear in the editorial itself.
Commenters who did not like Mackey’s editorial

The blog post by Mackey that contained the original unedited editorial resulted in 4,547 comments. Similarly, many of the blog posts and news articles or commentaries about the editorial resulted in comments from readers.

It was very easy to identify posters who expressed surprise and astonishment that the company’s leader would not support universal healthcare. For example, a commenter named Cindy Lou Ferris wrote, “I have been a loyal Whole Foods shopper for more than 10 years. I read your article in the Wall Street Journal and can assure you Whole Foods will receive no further business from me or my family. I love your store but not more than I love my country. You are out of touch with the people who made your store popular and your article proves this point.” Similarly, a commenter named Bob Dobolina echoed the sense of anger and disillusionment at the positions held by Mackey, “Tort reform, interstate commerce so Big Insurance can nationalize their local monopolies. You may as well have thrown in ending the “death tax” as well. These are all standard Republican talking points. Your attitude–that the sick have no intrinsic right to health care–is both tight-fisted and self-serving. You’ve got yours so what do you care, right? If we’re arrested and we can’t afford an attorney, the state provides one. If we’re dying and we can’t afford doctor, as far as you’re concerned, tough luck. Nice try, but even with the new headline, it’s the same vile, soulless garbage. You’ve lost my business.” Finally, a commenter named Greg Sullivan stated, “Your op/ed piece restates the morally bankrupt stance of those who are most fortunate and don’t want their [sic] piece of the pie to be smaller. It is repugnant to me, and if you think the personal opinion of a CEO doesn’t reflect on the corporation then you are naive.”

These comments are representative of a large portion of the total left both in response to Mackey’s blog post and to other articles. Over and over commenters identified themselves as shoppers (or former shoppers) at Whole Foods Market, who disagreed with Mackey’s position in the editorial and who were upset that the CEO of a company they patronized would hold positions antithetical to their own.

Commenters who liked Mackey’s editorial

Conversely, a wide range of commenters noted that they agreed with Mackey’s position, and claimed they would shop more at the store. For example, a commenter named Geoffrey Douglas said, “I am a big new fan of Whole Foods. Thank you Mr. Mackey for standing up for what is right. I will shop there and recommend your stores to my friends as much as possible.” Another commenter stated “Good grief, a common sense approach to a problem and you are being vilified and boycotted. I don’t understand how anyone could find anything offensive in your Wall Street Journal op-ed. I intend to shop even more frequently at Whole Foods as a result of your op-ed piece.” Finally, commenter Edward Little said, “Your sound reasoning and clear commentary on health reform has won you a new customer for life—as long as you or a like-minded individual are CEO. While I note the distinction between personal views and corporate policy, I appreciate your courage in taking a stand on a controversial subject.” One comment (Geoffrey Douglas, 2009, August 14) stated the poster was a new fan of Whole Foods due to Mackey standing up for what he believed in and supporting an American cause. He stated his support would go beyond just himself but to his family and friends as well. Paul Gordon (2009, August 20) said he had never shopped at Whole Foods before hoped the boycotters would
continue on and be replaced by customers with common sense and honesty. Both of these posts represent people, who before the article were not aware of Whole Foods or John Mackey, but were attracted to the store because of a desire to support his ideals.

Surprisingly, a few of the comments based Whole Foods’ success purely on the ideology of Mackey and not his managerial skills or external factors. Robyn (2009, August 14) stated she had not heard of Mackey or Whole Foods before she opened the Wall Street Journal and read the op-ed piece, but attributed the success of Whole Foods to Mackey’s view. Others who were not aware of Mackey beforehand appreciated his candid message and willingness to stand up despite knowing how unpopular it might be with consumers. Edward Little (2009, August 14) never stated his intention to shop at or even visit a Whole Foods, but did indicate his impression of Mackey was favorable because of his stance on a controversial issue.

So, in the same way there were many people who became agitated and agonized at Mackey’s editorial, there were also many comments from people who claimed to become active in supporting Whole Foods based on the positions taken in the editorial. While the endpoint was completely opposite to those who did not like the editorial, the logic used was the same: the editorial gave a new light on what the company stood for because its CEO had published an editorial.

Conclusion

For those who did not like the editorial, the overall impression of the comments seems to be summed up by those who were angry at a man for stating his opinion and who felt genuinely betrayed by a store they held in high esteem and felt like incorporated their core values. For those who liked the editorial, they often seemed angry at a subset of the population who do not seem to share their own personal core values and a general distrust for the healthcare bill and government for proposing it. Some comments represented people who had never heard of John Mackey before the piece ran in the Wall Street Journal, but were able to form relatively positive opinions about both him and the store he helped to create.

One theme running throughout the comments was based upon Mackey’s First Amendment right and ability to engage the public. Some felt it was hypocritical to boycott Whole Foods based upon Mackey’s comments because the same values boycotters looked up to were being utilized in opposition to their views. However, many boycotters, perhaps subconsciously, acknowledged the alleged hypocrisy and articulated that just as it was Mackey’s right to express his opinions it was their right to shop at businesses that supported their own. Many of the same arguments were used by boycotters to justify why Whole Foods would be receiving their support, however there appeared to be little recognition that either side was using the same arguments.

Finally, whether or not any of commentators actually follow through on what they said or expressed may never be known. But as some people indicated, whether in the positive or negative, Mackey energized new and existing customers, angered old ones, and created dialogue among groups across the country. Mackey has a fiduciary duty to Whole Foods, its employees, and its customers, but he also felt a need to answer a call for debate over healthcare. His role as CEO and his role as a private citizen, engaged in civic participation, created a public relations crisis but ultimately he may have accomplished what he set out to achieve.
What should practitioners think?

There are several points worth highlighting here for PR practitioners. The first is the potential danger of the leader of a retailer or a publicly traded company expressing views that presumably run counter to a large portion of its customer base. Whole Foods is a brand that is associated with shoppers who are progressive or liberal, and by taking a position in favor of a market-based solution to rising healthcare costs, it was predictable that there would be a negative response. While Mackey has the right to his own views both on healthcare and free markets, it is odd and borderline irresponsible to make those views known in a venue such as *The Wall Street Journal*.

The second issue relates to the way that the controversy exploded and how much of the controversy was fueled by the Internet in general and by social media in particular. The wide availability of digital cameras and the ease of uploading photos to a website have reduced the barrier to entry for protesters. Similarly, the ease with which someone can log on and post a comment, join a Facebook group, or forward a message means that a small incident can grow quickly.

What is interesting to note is the decision by Whole Foods to allow for negative comments to appear attached to the CEO’s Blog, as well as in the online forum hosted on the company’s main website. The question is whether this is a net positive for the company. While there is something to be said for openness and discussion, it seems risky to allow any comment without profanity to exist on a company’s website, including comments with links to external websites.

Finally, the case raises the question of whether discourse today has become so polarized that positions on topics such as healthcare become proxies for other political fights. Politically conservative and politically liberal bloggers and commenters seemed to use the Mackey editorial as a way to repeat the same arguments in ways that seem to reinforce existing positions.
References


Mackey, J. (2009, August 11). The Whole Foods alternative to Obamacare: Eight things we can do to improve health care without adding to the deficit. The Wall Street Journal,
Appendix

Eight Proposals in Original Version of the Mackey Editorial

1. Remove the legal obstacles which slow the creation of high deductible health insurance plans and Health Savings Accounts.

2. Change the tax laws so that that employer-provided health insurance and individually owned health insurance have exactly the same tax benefits.

3. Repeal all state laws which prevent insurance companies from competing across state lines.

4. Repeal all government mandates regarding what insurance companies must cover.

5. Enact tort reform to end the ruinous lawsuits that force doctors into paying insurance costs of hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

6. Make health care costs transparent so that consumers will understand what health care treatments cost.

7. Enact Medicare reform: we need to face up to the actuarial fact that Medicare is heading towards bankruptcy and move towards greater patient empowerment and responsibility.

8. Permit individuals to make voluntary tax deductible donations on their IRS tax forms to help the millions of people who have no insurance and aren’t covered by Medicare, Medicaid, SCHIP or any other government program.

Source: (Mackey, 2009, August 14, Health care reform [Web log message]).
Building Ethical Customer Relations in Electronic Commerce Environment: Dialogic Communication and Making Customers’ Expectations Real

Ming-Yi Wu, Ph.D.
mingyiwu@att.net

Abstract

Due to the emergence of electronic commerce, customer relations in the electronic commerce environment has become a contemporary research issue. In order to explore consumers’ expected relationship building strategies from the on-line vendors, the researcher conducted 9 structured focus group interviews with 69 (31 male; 38 female) young consumers (mean age=20) in the United States in Spring 2009. The participants were asked to express their opinions about what on-line vendors can do to establish good and ethical relationships with customers. The combination of Kent and Taylor’s (2002) Dialogic Theory of Public Relations and Kazoleas and Teigen’s (2006) Technology-Image Expectancy Gap Theory of Public Relations helps to explain the findings of this study. Some participants mentioned that they expect dialogic communication with the on-line vendor through multiple channels. Some participants mentioned that making customers’ expectations about product quality and delivery time real is the key for establishing ethical relationships with customers. The results of this study extend the knowledge about customer relations in electronic commerce environment.

This project is sponsored by Wayne Thompson Fellowship, Western Illinois University.

The researcher thanks Meghan McLaughlin for her assistance of transcribing the focus group interviews.
**Introduction**

Due to the emergence of electronic commerce (EC), organizations can communicate with customers and sell products globally through internet channels. Thus, building customer relations in the electronic commerce environment has become a contemporary research issue. For example, Davis, Buchanan-Oliver, and Brodie (1999) conducted a focus group study to explore relationship marketing in electronic commerce environment. They proposed a trust-based approach which defines the good retailer-customer relationships in the e-commerce environment. Based on this approach, on-line retailers need to keep the promises of their customers. “This promise is defined by the virtual image of interorganizational service brand held in the customer’s mind and created by their interaction with that brand” (Davis et al., p. 328). The findings of their focus group interviews supported this research proposition. Davis et al. found that the relationship between on-line vendors and their customers can be defined by the disconfirmations of two types of cognitive images, the expected virtual experience and actual real/service-process created experience. Higher levels of consumer satisfactions result when the actual real service experience exceeds the expected virtual experience. The high level of satisfaction can lead to the development of trust and loyalty (customer retention) to the on-line shopping service.

Davis et al.’s (1999) research has served as an initial step to explore customer relations in e-commerce environment. However, their study was conducted about 12 years ago. The e-commerce market has rapidly grown and become more competitive since their study has been conducted. The present study aims to build on Davis et al.’s study and further explore good and ethical customer relationships in the electronic commerce environment based on a public relations perspective. The following section reviews literature about ethical public relationships in mediated environment.

**Literature Review**

*Ethical Public Relations in Mediated Environment*

In the last two decades, the impacts of technology on public relations have attracted much scholarly attention. Kent and Taylor (1998; 2002) proposed a Dialogic Theory of Public Relations to describe ethical public relations in mediated environment. Kent and Taylor (1998) argued that dialogic communication is like the product of two-way symmetrical communication. The nature of dialogic communication emphasizes on a process of negotiated communication between organizations and publics, and thus, it is considered as an especially ethical way of conducting public relations. Kent and Taylor proposed five principles for the successful integration of dialogic public relations and the World Wide Web. These dialogic principles include the dialogical loop, the usefulness of information, the generation of return visit (RV), the intuitiveness/ease of the interface, and the rule of conservation of visitors.

Kent and Taylor (2002) further emphasized that the practice of ethical public relations is to have two-way dialogic communication rather than one-way monological or manipulative communication and proposed five features of dialogic communication. These five features include

mutuality, or the recognition of organization-public relationships; propinquity, or the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics; empathy, or the supportiveness and confirmation of public goals and interests; risk, or the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own term; and finally, commitment, or the extent to which an organization gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in its interactions with publics (p. 25).
Kent and Taylor (2002) argued that organizations can build dialogic relationships with publics through interpersonal, mediated, and organizational channels. In terms of building mediated dialogical relationships, organizations should provide e-mail addresses, web addresses, and 1-800 telephone numbers to their publics in their corporate communication materials. Specifically, Kent and Taylor believe that the corporate Websites can function dialogically rather than monologically with publics by offering discussions, feedback loops, places to post comments, sources for organizational information, and postings of organizational members’ contact information.

According to McAllister-Spooner (2009), Kent and Taylor’s (1998; 2002) Dialogic Theory has served as a theoretical framework for many studies which investigate web-based public relationships in different types of organizations, such as nonprofit activist organizations, Fortune 500 companies, colleges and universities, congressional websites, and litigation public relations firms. For example, Park and Reber (2008) investigated how Fortune 500 corporations use their Web sites to build relationships with publics, such as media publics, consumers, investors, and internal audiences. They results of their content analysis study suggested that these organizations try to enhance trust, satisfaction, and openness in their public relationships by following dialogic principles, such as providing useful information on their Web sites. Park and Reber concluded that corporations need to utilize their Web sites effectively with an understanding of the dialogic capacity to promote dialogue in order to develop mutually beneficial relationships with multiple publics.

In addition to Kent and Taylor’s (1998; 2002) Dialogic Theory, Kazoleas and Teigen’s (2006) Technology-Image Expectancy Gap Theory also focuses on technology and public relations. This theory suggests that the marketing and media coverage of technological advances create unrealistic expectations about organizations’ abilities to meet their stakeholders’ needs. The unrealistic expectations can lead to crises or reputation damage if the organizations’ performance cannot meet the stakeholders’ expectations. Thus, organizations have to close the expectancy-reality gap by carefully monitoring their stakeholders’ expectations about their products and services and communicate with their target audience through modern technology without creating unrealistic expectations.

Kazoleas and Teigen (2006) also analyzed how internet changed the characteristics of communication when discussing the technology-image gap. They argued that technology has created four major changes in business communication. First, business communication moves from few-to-many communication to many-to-many communication. With the help of modern technology, smaller organizations can possibly present themselves as bigger organizations in the mediated environment. Second, there is a shift from producer-driven communication to receiver-driven communication. As a result, consumers become more demanding and more difficult to be satisfied. Third, communication becomes more access-driven because internet users can retrieve specific information from the Web quickly. Organizations must provide the information which their stakeholders want in order to satisfy their information needs. Fourth and finally, organizations are able to personalize the communication through Web-based communication. Because of these technological changes, a new term, net relations, emerges. According to Kazoleas and Teigen, “Net relations is the management of relationships between an organization and all its relevant publics through the use of the Internet and the Web technology” (p. 422). Net relations combines direct marketing and public relations to deliver messages to the target audience.
Both Kent and Taylor’s (1998; 2002) Dialogic Theory of Public Relations and Kazoleas and Teigen’s (2006) Technology-Image Expectancy Gap Theory focus on technological impacts on organization-public relationships. However, neither of them has been applied in previous studies which investigate customer relations in e-commerce environment. In order to close this gap, the present study aims to explore customer relations in e-commerce environment and examine the applicability of existing public relations theories (Dialogic Theory of Public Relations and Technology-Image Expectancy Gap Theory) in e-commerce environment.

Methods

The researcher conducted 9 structured focus group interviews (with IRB approval) with 69 (31 male; 38 female) young consumers (mean age=20) in the United States in Spring 2009. Participants were college students in a mid-west public university in the United States. The university is located in a college town. College students were chosen as participants because previous literature (e.g., Huang, Jung, & Salvendy, 2006; Lightner, Yenisey, Ozok, & Salvendy, 2002; Wu, 2010) suggested that college students are the most active internet users and on-line shoppers. Convenience-sampling methods were used to recruit participants. The researchers’ colleagues helped the researcher recruit participants by offering extra credits to their students. College students (young consumers) who are interested in on-line shopping signed up for participation. These 9 focus group interviews lasted approximately from 1 hour to 1 hour and half. The researcher and one of her graduate research assistant conducted these 9 focus group interviews. The group size ranges from 6 participants to 10 participants.

Structured interview questions were asked. The researcher arranged the focus group interview questions by using the funneling concept. According to Krueger and Casey (2009), the funneling concept is to move the discussion from broad to narrow or from general to specific. The participants were asked the following questions. First, the participants were asked to talk about why they choose the on-line channel to shop. Second, the participants were asked to explain why they choose to shop from a specific on-line vendor. Third, the participants were asked to express their views about what on-line vendors can do to establish good and ethical relationship with new customers. Fourth, the participants were asked to tell the research about what on-line vendors can do to maintain good and ethical relationship with existing customers. Finally, the participants were asked to tell the researcher how they determine whether they trust an on-line vendor or not. The focus group interview process stops until the point of saturation, which implies that participants in different groups express similar points of view and no new information can be gathered.

All of the focus group interviews were tape recorded with participants’ agreement. Then, the researcher and the researcher’s research assistant transcribed the results from the tape. Based on the interviewing results, a number of interesting results were found.

Findings and Discussion

Reasons for Shopping On-Line

The focus group interviews started from a more general question: “There are different channels for you to shop, such as internet (on-line channel), catalog shopping, and shopping at stores. Why do you choose to shop on-line?” Several participants mentioned that they choose to shop on-line because it is convenient. For example, a male participant mentioned, “It’s more convenient. You don’t have to leave your house. Sometimes, some stores are not in your area. You need to shop on-line to get what you want”. In another focus group session, a female participant said, “I am too lazy to go to the store. It’s easier for me to shop on-line”. Some other
participants mentioned that they shop on-line for economic reasons. For example, a female participant mentioned that “I want to save the gas. Gas price is very high right now”. A male participant said, “Sometimes, it is cheaper. There are on-line only deals”. A female participant echoed and said, “I agree. They give you on-line coupons all the time”. In addition to convenience and economic reasons, several participants mentioned that having more varieties of products is the reason for them to shop on-line. A female participant said, “I shop at Victoria’s Secret a lot. They only have under-wears and sleep-ware in their store. If you want to buy sweaters, dresses, or shoes from them, you need to shop on-line”. Another female participant agreed and said that “Yes. There are broader varieties. Even for panties, some of them are only available on-line. I did not see them at Victoria’s Secret’s stores”. Another reason for the participants to shop on-line is that on-line vendors can customize the products to meet each customer’s needs. A male participant said, “You can personalize things if you want. You can put your name on a T-shirt when you order it on-line. Just give them your name. They will do it for you”. This participant’s answer supports Kazoleas and Teigen’s (2006) argument that organizations are able to personalize the communication with publics through Web-based communication. On-line shoppers may also become more demanding and expects personalized communication and products.

**Reasons for Shopping from A Specific On-Line Vendor**

The researcher also asked the participants about the reasons why they choose to shop from a specific on-line vendor. The findings suggest that there are various reasons for consumers to choose to shop from a specific on-line vendor. Several male participants mentioned that they choose to shop from East Bay because they ask customers specific questions during the shopping process to make sure that customers order the right items. A male participant said, “I shop at East Bay a lot. They asked me a lot questions when I was shopping. They want to make sure that I bought the right item and do not have to ship it back. Like shoes, there are different widths. I was asked what’s the width I need”. Another male participant followed and said, “They try to help you make the right decision at the first time by asking specific questions. But, they also let you know how to ship it back if you don’t like it”. What the participants said seem to support Kent and Taylor’s (1998; 2002) dialogic principles of web design because these young consumers expect two-way communication when they are ordering products on-line. They prefer on-line vendors ask them questions about product details in order to make sure that they order the right items and would like to find useful information about how to return products if needed.

Some participants’ answers seem to support the assumption of the Technology-Image Expectancy Gap Theory that making customers’ expectation real is essential. Participants mentioned that they prefer to shop from a specific on-line vendor because the vendor makes their expectations real. For example, A male participant said:

They need to make my expectations real. It would be great that if they let me know if there is a delay of delivery. I ordered a pair of gloves from East Bay. Somebody called and told me that the product is a back order. If I pay now, I may need to wait one or two weeks. He asked me whether I want to wait or order something else. I told him I’ll wait. It’s good. Some companies just let you wait forever.

A number of participants mentioned that they choose to continuously shop from a specific on-line vendor because they can get something which exceeds their expectations. A female participant said that “I got something extra which exceeds my expectations from Victoria’s Secret. For example, I got panties as free gifts even I did not order them.” Another female
participant said, “I have good experiences, too. When I ordered something from Amazon, I got coupons for next purchase and free bookmarks. It’s always good to get something exceeding my expectation”. These participants’ answers support Davis et al.’ (1999) argument that higher levels of customer satisfaction result when on-line shoppers get services or products which exceed their expectations.

The combination of the Dialogic Theory and Technology-Image Expectancy Gap Theory explains parts of the reasons why the participants choose to shop from a specific on-line vendor. However, there are other reasons. First, getting a good price is important for young consumers. A male participant said, “I shop where they have sales”. A female participant echoed and said, “Yes. I like coupons and discounts”. Second, the vendor’s reputation helps consumers to make the decision. A female participant said, “They need to have a good reputation and treat their customers right”. A male participant said, “I think Best Buy has a very good reputation. I had good experiences shopping at their stores before. Since there is no Best Buy around, I shop at bestbuy.com”. Another male participant said, “I google when I need to but something on-line. I choose to shop at the first few sites which pop up. The first few pop-ups are usually well-known and have better reputations”. Third, peer influence is another reason for female participants to choose from a specific site. A female participant said, “I shop from the site my friends recommend”. Another female participant in that group agreed and said, “I do, too. I trust my friends’ recommendations”.

Customers’ Expected Relationship Building Strategies

After asking few general questions, the participants are very engaged with the discussions about on-line shopping. Then, the researcher asked the participants a more specific question: “From a customer’s point of view, what can an on-line vendor do to establish good and ethical relationships with new customers?” Interestingly, many participants mentioned that they expect the vendors give first time shoppers special discounts. A female participant said, “Bargains. Some sites give first time shoppers discounts. If there competitors do give me first time shopper’s discounts, I would expect them give it to me”. Another female participant echoed and said, “Yes. Both Amazon.com and Barnes Nobel sell books. I just buy from the cheaper one or the one gives me coupons or discounts”. These participant’s answer seems to extend the Technology-Image Expectation Gap Theory. Kazoleas and Teigen’s (2006) argued that corporations should carefully monitor their stakeholders’ expectations about their products and services. These expectations may be formed by the messages they presented from modern technology. The e-commerce environment is now very competitive. Customers can quickly gather product and price information on the web from different vendors. Therefore, on-line vendors may also need to know how their customers’ expectations are affected by their competitors’ special discounts and offers.

Several participants also mention that the vendor should make customers’ expectations about product quality real by providing useful information. A male participant provided an interesting example and said,

They need to meet my expectations. I used to buy a diamond pendent for my girlfriend on-line. It was a Valentine’s Day gift. The diamond looked big and glorious on the site. But, when I got it, it was tiny, little. Obviously, they enlarged it. I thought it’s unethical to give customers false expectations. It would be better if they told me that the picture is enlarged.

A female participant agreed and said, “Sometimes, pictures are misleading. They need to provide detailed product information, too. There are different materials for clothing, like cotton,
wool. They need to provide such information”. These participants’ answers support Kent and Taylor’s (1998) Dialogic Theory that Websites should provide useful information to publics. Specifically, on-line shoppers cannot personally see the products or physically touch the products when they shop on-line, they need accurate information and detailed descriptions about the products.

Some participants expect the on-line vendor to give them good first impression in the very beginning. A female participant said, “They need to send me the right product the first time. I don’t want to pay the postage and waste my time and energy to send the wrong product back”.

Then, the researcher asked the participants another question: “What can an on-line vendor do to maintain good and ethical relationships with existing customers?” Some participants’ answers were similar to the previous questions. For example, a female participant said, “The same. They need to meet my expectations. Give me a good price, a good product, and ship the item to me on time. It is not broken. It does not take too long”. Some participants stated the importance of confirmation from the vendor. A female participant said, “They need to send me confirmations through email after I place an order. I want a confirmation for each order I placed on-line. I want to know the order went through and I should be able to get the items soon. I can track the shipment after receiving the confirmation.

Some participants mentioned the importance of continued communication between vendors and customers. For example, a male participant said, “Continuously give me good deals. They can continuously send me product information and coupons through emails. We are cheap. We don’t want to pay extra”. Another male participant said, “They can keep sending me coupons from time to time, like birthday discounts”. Similarly, a female participant said, “Yes. They can email me the on-line coupons and sales information”. A male participant said, “I like product recommendations. Amazon recommends products to me all the time. They send me emails. If I like the recommendation, I’ll buy”.

Interestingly, some participants have opposite views about continued communication from on-line vendors. For example, a female participant said, “They should give me the choice to remove myself from their email list. I suffered from information overload every day. I already have too many emails”. Another female participant in that group agreed and said, “I hate junk mails. I got a bunch of junk mails every day. Once you buy something from a site, they continuously send you junk mails almost every day and saying so and so discount will end in the next 3 days or next 2 days. It’s annoying. My boyfriend has a separate account for on-line shopping. Anyway, I don’t want to be bothered, either. It seems that some participants would prefer continued communication. However, not everybody does. Therefore, on-line vendors should respect consumers’ choice to be communicated or not. This finding supports Kent and Taylor’s (2002) argument that the dialogic communication system should have rules governing the opportunity for beginning, maintaining, and ending interactions. If consumers expect and welcome continued communication, on-line vendors can continuously communicate with them. If consumers prefer NOT to be communicated after a purchase is done, on-line vendors should also respect their choice and end the continued communication.

Many participants also mentioned the importance of dialogic communication if there are problems of the product. A female participant said, “They need to make sure that clothes and shoes fit. If they don’t fit, they have to tell me how to return or exchange in a timely fashion. You cannot try the clothes on when you
shop on-line. If the size does not fit, I need to call 1-800 customer service number or email them. I have called a 1-800 number with nobody answering it. I will never shop at that site again.

Another female participant seemed to have a more positive experience and said, “They need to answer emails in a timely manner. Let me give you an example. I accidentally ordered a jacket twice. I don’t need two. I emailed the site. They replied my email and canceled the second order. I feel good about that site”. Another female participant’s answer also support the importance of dialogic communication:

I think the chat function helps. I want to chat with the customer service representative when I shop on-line. It’s like the on-line discussion when we take on-line courses. They reply your email immediately if you have questions. It’s easier than calling them. Some sites have the chat function. Some sites don’t. I prefer to shop at the site with the chat function.

A male participant said, “Send me emails if there is a delay of delivery. I don’t have much patience. If I expect to get something in the next 3 days, I don’t want to wait for 1 week for something I ordered”.

The findings suggest that the combination of Kazoleas and Teigen’s (2006) Technology-Image Expectancy Gap Theory and Kent and Taylor’s (1998; 2002) Dialogic Theory of Public Relations helps to explain young consumers’ expected relationship building/maintaining strategies in e-commerce environment. On-line vendors need to make consumers’ expectations about products and delivery time real and give consumers a very good first impression. On-line vendors also need to follow the Dialogic principles of Web site design and provide consumers two-way communication channels. If there are problems of the products, consumers know how to contact the vendor and solve the problem. On-line shopping is different from on-site shopping because consumers cannot physically touch the product or try the product on. It is possible that consumers will need to return or exchange the clothing type of products if the size does not fit. Therefore, on-line vendors should prove 1-800 customer service numbers or email address to their consumers and actually respond to their consumers in a timely manner.

Factors Affecting On-Line Trust

By the end of the focus group interview, the researcher asked the participants a question regarding on-line trust: “How do you determine whether you trust an on-line vendor or not? ” The most popular answer is of this question is related to the security issues. For example, a male participant said, “I’ll trust a site if they have a security lock that protects from identity theft. It’s a little icon at the bottom of the right hand corner”. A female participant agreed and said, “They have to make sure that the confidentiality with my account is closely guarded. Nobody wants their account information out there for any jerk to use”. Another female participant said, “Yes. They need to maintain their privacy policy. Confidentiality helps, especially with credit card information”. In addition to the security issue, some participants mentioned the importance of other people’s opinions. A male participant said, “I look at reviews and ratings”. A female participant agreed and said, “Yes. Other customers can rate the site and the product. I will take a look at their comments”. Another female participant said, “Sometimes, you listen to a friend who is familiar with a site”. Few participants mention the importance of quality of Web site design. For example, a female participant said,

The design of the Web site must be professional and organized. I will not shop from a poorly organized site because it looks untrustworthy. I feel I may not get the proper item I ordered. The shipment may be late or never come. I may even have problems returning
the product if I need to exchange size or color. Anyway, the site must be organized and provide me good information about the company and the products.

Another female participant agreed and said, “I think so, too. I want to find the items I want or something similar as soon as possible. I don’t want to shop from a disorganized site. I can’t find something I want if the site is disorganized”. These participant’s answers seem to support Kent and Taylor’s (1998) dialogic principles of Web site design, such as ease of interface and usefulness of information.

Conclusion

By conducting focus group interviews, this study has explored ethical customer relations in e-commerce environment and extend the knowledge about technology and public relations. The findings of this study suggested that Kent and Taylor’s (1998; 2001) Dialogic Theory of Public Relations and Kazoleas and Teigen’s (2006) Technology-Image Expectancy Gap Theory can be applied to explain ethical customer relations in e-commerce environment. The findings of this study support the applicability of existing public relations theories which focus on technology and public relations. In addition to the theoretical contributions, there are also practical implications from this study. The results of this study can help on-line vendors understand their customers’ expectations about their Website design, their products, and their services. For example, the researcher would suggest on-line vendors provide accurate and detailed product information on their Website in order to make customers’ expectations about product quality real. In addition, the on-line vendors should incorporate dialogic principles of Website design and allow customers to communicate with them through multiple channels if customers have questions.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Although there are a number of theoretical and practical contributions, this study has limitations. The combination of the Dialogic Theory and Technology-Image Expectancy Gap Theory help to explain customers’ expected relationship building strategies from on-line vendors. However, when participants were asked about on-line trust, many of them mentioned the privacy and security issues. The privacy and security issues have not been well addressed by these two existing public relations theories. Future studies may further investigate such issues which may greatly affect consumer trust in e-commerce environment. New theories may be developed to address the security and trust issues in mediated environment.

This exploratory study serves as the first step to understand customer relations in e-commerce environment based on young consumers’ perspective in the United States. However, consumers from other generations or different cultures may have different points of view. Future studies may interview consumers from different demographic groups in different cultures, and compare the findings with the present study. The electronic commerce market is rapidly growing in different parts of the world. Building ethical customer relations in e-commerce environment will continuously be an important research issue.
References


Assuring rationality and transparency in corporate communications: Theoretical foundations and empirical findings on communication controlling and communication performance management

Prof. Dr. Ansgar Zerfass
Institute of Communication and Media Science
Department Communication Management and Public Relations
University of Leipzig
Burgstr. 21, D-04109 Leipzig, Germany
Phone: +49-341-97-35040
zerfass@uni-leipzig.de

Abstract

In recent years, a lively debate on the concept of “communication controlling” has emerged in European public relations, especially in the German-speaking countries. Researchers, consultants and communication professionals have developed several frameworks which try to foster communication management by adding the function of communication controlling or – as it is sometimes named – communication performance management. A number of companies have already implemented such concepts, ranging from global corporations like Henkel and Deutsche Telekom to a group of national market-leaders organized within the so-called Corporate Communication Cluster Vienna in Austria.

Within this debate, the notion of “controlling” is a specific one. It must not be confused with the traditional concepts of measurement or evaluation as part of the PR management process, but it is closely linked to the concept of controlling and management accounting in management theory. According to this view, controlling is a complementary function to management. Its focus is on providing transparency by analyzing processes, identifying value links between goals and measures, defining key performance indicators and evaluation methods and providing up-to-date information which will allow management to achieve results.

Up to now, the basic concept of controlling has been transferred to many corporate functions like research and development, innovation and marketing. In most companies, corporate communication is not part of this game. This is one of the reasons why corporate communications cannot demonstrate its link to corporate strategies and why it is not possible to valuate investments and results in a proper way. This paper closes this gap by: a) developing a definition of communication controlling based on the management theory of controlling; b) explaining the interplay of communication management, communication controlling, corporate communications and business strategy in an overall framework; c) introducing the main areas of strategic and operational communication controlling and corresponding methods (scorecards, value links, multi-level framework of communication effects, measurement methods); d) discussing the status of communication controlling in Europe based on an empirical survey in 34 countries; e) reflecting on critical aspects of the concept and questions for future research.
Introduction

The complexity of communication management has increased noticeably in the past decade. Some of the most relevant drivers for this are the mediatization and fragmentation of society, the spread of interactive communication technologies, and the growing importance of immaterial values, such as brands, reputation, and employee commitment. Companies have to deal with numerous stakeholders (customers, politicians, employees, and local communities) as well as mediators (journalists, opinion leaders, Web influencers). They use a variety of communication channels (press and media relations, advertising, corporate media, events, and social networks) and pursue widely varying goals. These goals comprise, on the one hand, the implementation of business strategies by influencing knowledge, reality constructions, and attitudes of relevant stakeholders. On the other hand, communication management analyzes opinion building and the communicative environment of organizations, which may result in revisions of business strategies.

The great variety of goals and instruments makes it difficult to verify the contribution of corporate communications to value creation and to assess the success of particular communication activities. This is, however, absolutely essential if communication managers are striving to achieve sustained influence and to be part of the dominant coalition within their organization.

In order to counter this dilemma, researchers, professional associations, and PR practitioners in Europe have for some years now recommended the introduction of systematic communication controlling, in addition to strategic communication management. An initial project has been run by the Swedish Public Relations Association (1996). It became known in other countries much later and has not been continued. A systematic debate on the subject began in 2004 in Germany. A congress of the German Public Relations Association (DPRG) and of the German Association of Communication Consultancies (GPRA) brought together several hundred decision makers from the fields of communication, corporate management, and controlling. Since then, a small group of experts have been developing concepts and tools for communication controlling. Companies have started individual projects, consultants have been specializing in the subject, and task forces of the DPRG and the International Controller Association (ICV) have stimulated a lively exchange of ideas and experiences. Some companies have even started to hire communication controllers, a new role and job description within communication departments. Last but not least, academic research has been working intensely on these issues (Zerfass, 2005, 2008b, Röttger & Preusse, 2009). The results of the discussion up to this point, which extend from theoretical foundations, to different methods, to case studies, have been compiled in two edited books by Pfannenberg and Zerfass (2005, 2010). In addition, the bilingual platform communicationcontrolling.com (German/English) was established on the Internet to provide news and share knowledge on the subject.

Overall, the discussion not only carries on from PR theory and communication science, but also attempts to bridge the gap with management theory. In order to grasp the relevance of communication controlling, it is necessary to understand the significance of controlling in corporate management.
The Function and Role of Controlling in the Business Enterprise

Communication controlling is a typical example of decentralized controlling which, in contrast to controlling of the total enterprise, applies to individual business units or business functions (Weber & Schäffer, 2008, pp. 153-155). Similar concepts include R & D controlling and marketing controlling (Horváth, 2009, pp. 786-795, Köhler, 2006).

In theory and practice, corporate controlling is considered an integral part of corporate management. The focus and importance of controlling has nevertheless been controversial up to now. In order to avoid misconceptions, it must be stressed that within management theory:

- Controlling in the sense of management accounting should neither be confused with accounting or bookkeeping nor with monitoring or evaluation.
- Controlling as a function that is needed in (nearly) every corporate unit should be distinguished from the institution of the Controller or Controlling Department; the latter terms refer to specialized job holders or units.
- At its core, controlling should not be retrospective and judgmental, but forward-looking.

Theoretical conceptions of controlling

Beyond these basic assumptions, there are widely varying conceptions of controlling in business administration and management research (Weber & Schäffer, 2008, pp. 19-36):

- **Controlling as an information supply function.** This approach promotes an expanded view of accountancy and draws directly on the historical development of controlling: controllers or “comptrollers” started being hired in the United States roughly from the 1920s onward in order to extend “accountancy from a purely recording and monitoring tool to being an instrument for dealing with the future” (Weber & Schäffer, 2008, p. 5). In information-oriented conceptions of controlling, this perspective is to some extent expanded to encompass comprehensive responsibility for the collection and processing of all information deemed necessary for the management of an enterprise. However, this overlaps with the claims and practices of other business functions, in particular that of information management, and is therefore of little use.

- **Controlling as a coordination function.** This view, which has dominated German-language research on the topic up to the present, was formulated by Horváth at the end of the 1970s. He defines controlling as a “performance target-oriented coordination of planning and monitoring as well as information supply” (Horváth, 2009, p. 123). At the basis of this is the assumption that the management system is divided into a planning and monitoring system, on the one hand, and into an information supply system, on the other, and that both of these must be coordinated by a specific third operation: controlling. Horváth restricts the duties of controlling to this interface, and, by doing so, positions it as a complementary function of the comprehensive steering responsibility of management. Other authors such as Küpper (2008) take the matter further by assigning controlling the total coordination of all management functions – from planning and monitoring to organization and human resources. Equating controlling and management in this way does not make good sense; in practice it contradicts the empirically identifiable tasks of controlling and, moreover, blurs the specific features of both areas. But today, even the classical perspective of Horváth is challenged by researchers and practitioners. Critics point out that the underlying distinction between the systems is not convincing and that it clashes with the concept of strategic management, as well as with several segments of corporate management (Weber & Schäffer, 2008, p. 27).
• **Controlling as a corrective for problems of delegation.** Anglo-American notions of management accounting are for the most part based on institutional economics and principal-agent theory (Lambert, 2007, Weber & Schäffer, 2008, pp. 29-31). Their idea of man is – unlike behavioral science and management research – that of a profit-maximizing “*homo oeconomicus*.” In expanding neo-classical theory, these concepts take into account socially produced rules of the game (markets, laws, property rights) and turn their attention to how these rules can be designed in order to shape the relationships between principals and opportunistic agents in a rational manner. Controlling comes into play in order to counteract occurrences of information asymmetry. To give an example: managers specialized in marketing and communications always have a degree of freedom in their area of responsibility. Thus, top management must be concerned with preventing the assertion of vested interests through shaping appropriate incentive systems and reporting structures for those specialists. In this way, controlling becomes a corrective for the division of labor. This leads to different hiring profiles for managers (flexible, creative, aggressive, ready to take risks, emotional) and controllers (rigid, governing, pedantic, risk-averse, analytically sober), which can be shown empirically (Weber & Schäffer, 2008, pp. 41-43).

• **Controlling as assuring the rationality of management.** The prolonged discussion about the lack of selectivity in the approaches outlined up to now has meant that, since the end of the 1990s, noted controlling researchers have supported a new and promising conception of controlling. Weber and Schäffer (2008) proceed from the assumption that, first of all, controlling should ensure management’s rationality and thus remedy the systematic and empirical deficits of corporate management. They point to the fact that management “is performed by economic actors (especially managers) who strive to achieve individual goals and who are endowed with cognitive abilities. These are subject to individual limitations. Deficits of rationality may result from a manager’s limited abilities (‘skill’) and motivation (‘will’)” (Weber & Schäffer, 2008, p. 28). Rationality assurance through controlling should increase the probability that the anticipated relation between means and ends may still be realized. Accordingly, the core task of controlling consists of “providing an ‘alternative’ view on previously discovered solutions and avoiding mistakes and other rationality deficits before they become effective” (Weber & Schäffer, 2008, p. 38).

• **Controlling as a process steering function.** In mainstream management research, controlling in the sense outlined here – as well as communication management – is seldom explored in detail (i.e., Weihrich & Koontz, 2004, Steinmann & Schreyögg, 2005, Müller-Stewens & Lechner, 2005). In most textbooks only the evaluation and revision of management decisions themselves are discussed and are partially designated as “controlling” (Robbins & Coulter, 2009, pp. 395-419). However, a sound explanation of the interplay between management and controlling may be found in Steinmann and Scherer (1996). They view controlling, in agreement with the previously outlined concepts of rationality assurance, coordination, and information supply, as a process steering function on a meta-level, that is, as a task that supports management processes run by different people. The management processes themselves are comprised of planning, organization, staffing, leadership, and monitoring functions, and serve to steer purchasing, production/provision of services, distribution, and servicing (Steinmann & Schreyögg, 2005). The need to tackle the issue of coordinating management processes themselves once again in the framework of the controlling function arises from the increasing complexity of enterprises. Leaving apart smaller organizations, a single manager would simply be overtaxed by the demands of the pending tasks. In this understanding
of the concept, controlling represents an important function which facilitates excellent management based on the division of labor. Yet it claims no role for itself in the management or in the provision of services (Steinmann & Scherer, 1996, p. 143). Controlling is relevant for every department within the business enterprise and part of each manager’s job. Of course, some of the duties may be bundled in the institution of the controller, or of a controlling department, if efficiency can be raised by standardization and an increased availability of know-how and methods.

Controlling defined by practitioners in the field

The academic definition of controlling as a process steering function that involves the responsibility for transparency (as a complement to profit-responsible management) corresponds to the way in which controlling practice views itself. The International Group of Controlling (IGC) describes the duties as follows: “Controllers design and accompany the management process of defining goals, planning and controlling and thus have a joint responsibility with the management to reach the objectives. This means: controllers ensure the transparency of business results, finance, processes and strategy and thus contribute to higher economic effectiveness. Controllers coordinate sub-targets and the related plans in a holistic way and organize a reporting system which is future-oriented and covers the enterprise as a whole. Controllers moderate and design the controlling process of defining goals, planning and management control so that every decision maker can act in accordance with agreed objectives. Controllers provide managers with all relevant controlling information. Controllers develop and maintain controlling systems.” (www.igc-controlling.org, January 2010)

Communication Controlling: Rationale and Definition

The interplay of management and controlling outlined above can be transferred seamlessly to various areas of corporate management. For example, marketing controlling is a support function of marketing, and its tasks may be deduced directly from the various subsections of marketing management (Köhler, 2006, pp. 42-47). Accordingly, communication controlling must be located in the context of communication management (Zerfass, 2005, p. 200). For the purpose of classification, unfolding the connections with corporate management, as well as corporate communications, is indispensable (see Figure 1).

Strategic management, corporate communications and communication management

Within any company, strategic management bears total responsibility for the business strategy (product-market concepts and key parameters of performance), which are key for making profit and increasing corporate value. In order to reach these goals, it is necessary to manage stakeholder relations within and outside the organization by coordinating multiple actions and conflicting interests (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, pp. 13-37, Heath, 1994, pp. 3-6). This occurs against the backdrop of varying socially rooted forms of integration (markets, hierarchies, value systems and prestige orders, legal systems; see Zerfass, 2008a, pp. 72-79). Communication contributes to relationship management in quite different ways, depending on the various forms of integration. Communication, for example, helps to motivate employees, to
attract potential customers for new products, to gain the support of politicians, or to urge stockholders and unions to support restructuring programs. In any case, communication processes are social interactions which comprise symbolic acts of notifying, as well as acts of understanding, and serve the purpose of promoting understanding and reality construction, and hence persuasion (Heath, 1994, pp. 32-59, Zerfass, 2010, pp. 144-233).

Figure 1: Communication Controlling as a Support Function.

Obviously not all strategically relevant tasks can be influenced through communication and not all communication processes within an enterprise are associated with business strategy. Consequently, corporate communication is defined as the totality of communication processes which contribute to the definition and realization of tasks within profit-oriented organizations by enabling the internal and external coordination of actions and the clarification of interests, and which, by doing so, contribute to managing social and economic relations between companies and their specific stakeholders (see also Zerfass, 2008a, 2010). Communication in this sense is consciously shaped and partially delegable, e.g. to communication departments or agencies. Based on the different modes of integration within typical stakeholder relationships, several subsections of corporate communication can be identified:

- **Internal communication** among owners, executives and employees within the organization for the common purpose of providing goods and services,
- **Market communication** with customers, partners and competitors with the aim of opening up or preventing economic contracts and transactions,
• **Public relations** communication with stakeholders in the social and political sphere for legitimization and assuring room for maneuver,

• **Financial communication** (investor relations) with stockholders and in the capital market, which, strictly speaking, may indeed be assigned to the two areas mentioned first, but which is often considered independently on the basis of very strongly regulated relationships.

From this perspective, **communication management** has a double task. On the one hand, it concerns the management of corporate communications, that is, essentially the question of initiating communication processes with the aim of conveying the company’s point of view and influencing stakeholders (“outbound”). As a result, concrete objectives of value creation should be supported, such as an increase in sales figures or, alternatively, cost cutting efforts. But the feeding of external opinions and interests into the organizational decision-making process (“inbound”) (Röttger & Preusse, 2009, pp. 175-177) is just as important. Communication management monitors relevant stakeholders and communication processes within the organization (through audits, for example; see Hargie & Tourish, 2009) and in the organizational environment (for example, through issues monitoring and issues management; see Heath & Palenchar, 2009). This is not necessarily bound to the implementation of communication campaigns. A contribution to value creation may also be made when these findings (e.g. customer opinions in online communities or views of the guiding intellectual forces in science) stimulate new ideas and improve business strategies.

Communication management bears responsibility for the results and, like every other management process, may be subdivided into several idealized phases: an analysis of stakeholder relations, themes/issues, images/opinions, and the company’s own capabilities is followed by the planning and implementation of communication strategies, programs, campaigns, and individual measures, and, finally, by monitoring the results (Broom, 2008, pp. 267-376, Smith, 2005). In addition, it is necessary to monitor the implementation process by tracking critical milestones and to catch unforeseen changes (Zerfass, 2008a, p. 90). By doing so, communication management tries to support value creation on the one hand, and connect corporate communication with the lifeworld of relevant stakeholders on the other hand. This is necessary because communication processes are social interactions and, consequently, can only succeed when both the organization and its stakeholders get involved and contribute.

**Communication controlling as a support function focusing on transparency**

Communication controlling can be conceptualized as a support function that guarantees the transparency of strategies, processes, performance, and finances for communication management based on the division of labor, while at the same time making available appropriate methods, structures, and indicators needed for the planning, implementation, and monitoring of corporate communications (Zerfass, 2005, 2008b). The functions of communication controlling or “communication performance management,” as it is sometimes called in practice, include: analyzing the management processes of corporate communications; monitoring the knowledge and attitudes of stakeholders; mapping the cause and effect relationships between business strategy and corporate communications; defining indicators and documenting them in indicator profiles; selecting and/or developing methods of evaluation; managing evaluation companies as well as processing the results, which culminates in the visualization of dashboards or measurement cockpits. Because of the latter functions, communication controlling is closely
linked to measurement and evaluation as a part of communication management (Watson & Noble, 2007).

Following this definition, controlling only creates the basis on which planning, implementing and monitoring occur, and which still remains the responsibility of communication managers. However, due to a lack of knowledge among many marketing and PR professionals, specialists for communication controlling are often the only ones who are able to deal with advanced methods of deducing objectives and developing measurement programs. From an organizational standpoint, most companies in Germany who have implemented communication controlling systems have integrated the relevant tasks within the communication department. This might be a staff function reporting to the chief communication officer as well as a subtask of a team member holding a line function. Initiatives to implement such systems have nearly always been started by communication departments themselves. However, controlling departments and controllers are taking an interest in the topic and have started developing their own ideas (Schmidt & Biel, 2009). For example, the International Controller Association will approve normative guidelines for communication controlling in 2010. Nonetheless, involvement of the communication and controlling specialists themselves is hardly sufficient. To remain successful on a sustained basis, support and legitimization by top management is required. Along with the increasing importance of communication management and of growing budgets for the corresponding departments, one can expect that dominant coalitions will become active in many companies. From their point of view, it makes sense to establish a communication controlling system focusing on rationality assurance within the process of communication management.

**Main Objectives: Assuring Rationality and Providing Information**

Following the example of the corporate controlling function (see above), the tasks of communication controlling may be defined as follows.

Communication controlling serves to *assure the rationality of communication management*, where rationality is understood to mean “the dominant view of experts concerning a specific means-end relation” (Weber & Schäffer, 2008, p. 52). By establishing a communication controlling system, communication management is meant to be organized in such a way that it achieves the objectives of value creation. At the same time, it shall be ensured that corporate communications are implemented in accordance with the state of the art. We may distinguish three levels of rationality in this context (Weber & Schäffer, 2008, pp. 53-54): *results-based rationality* (Are the correct communication objectives or monitoring objectives being aimed at and achieved?); *procedural rationality* (Are appropriate working models and concepts being used and implemented?); and *input-based rationality* (Are communication professionals and others involved equipped with the requisite know-how and will? Are the appropriate resources available?). Accordingly, we may distinguish different fields of action (see also Figure 1): analyzing the interplay between corporate goals and communication objectives, for example, through applications of the balanced scorecard and value links (Pfannenberg, 2010, Zerfass, 2008c), as well as analyzing different phases of corporate communications, from the point of initiation to the economic results, using a multi-level framework of communication effects (Rolke & Zerfass, 2010; see below).

In addition, communication controlling assumes the *information supply of communication management and of corporate management*, if communication managers are not
able to observe, monitor, and analyze on their own due to a lack of capacity or competencies. The delegation of data collection and reporting has several advantages (Hargie & Tourish 2009, p. 29). First, the monitoring and steering capability of communication management is increased when information is accumulated in one place and when common indicators, methods of data collection, and comprehensive analyses are employed (diagnostic function). Second, a systematic analysis of value chains and communication processes enables corporations to improve organizational structures, procedures, and instruments for communication management (innovation function). Finally, the conceptual and, increasingly, institutional differentiation of communication controlling also facilitates the comparison of communication practices with legal and ethical standards or norms, for example, with professional codes of ethics for advertising and public relations (compliance function).

**Criteria and Levels: Strategic and Operational Communication Controlling**

Communication controlling as a support function is just as multi-layered as communication management itself. It involves a multitude of areas which occur, moreover, in different ways and are specific to the situation of the focal organization. Consequently, there can never be a “single best way” of handling communication controlling. Rather, what is needed is a portfolio of methods and indicators which can deal with particular problems (Zerfass, 2008b, pp. 443-446).

*Strategic communication controlling*

The task of strategic communication controlling is to create and maintain communication management’s potential for success. Its main focus is the effectiveness of the overall communication policy and its infrastructure (“Are we doing the right things?”). First, this involves rationality assurance for the steering and monitoring of the communication strategy. This is about the interlocking of business strategy and communication strategy and of value creation through communication – something that is frequently discussed, but seldom realized consistently in practice: in other words, the contribution that communication makes to achieving the strategic aims of the total organization. The focus here is on methods (e.g. communication scorecards) with which the importance of communication as a value driver of corporate success can be proved. Additionally, standardized methods for the assessment of immaterial values driven by communication, such as brands or reputation capital, are relevant here. Such methods are targeted in corporate practice and research, but so far have yet to be standardized (Zerfass, 2009).

Secondly, strategic communication controlling includes rationality assurance for the structures and processes of communication management. Through process analyses, organizational structures and staffing of communication departments, as well as internal workflows and interfaces to agencies and service providers, can be evaluated and optimized. In this way, top management and leaders of communication departments can ensure that the potential necessary for a communication strategy aimed at value creation exists.

In recent years, strategic communication controlling has been further developed significantly through the elaboration of generic value driver models with key performance indicators for the main areas of corporate communication (Pfannenberg, 2010).
Operational communication controlling

Operational communication controlling is concerned with the provision of methods and information which facilitate an optimal exploitation of the potentials for success that are created by communication management and communication strategy. Its main focus is the efficiency of the communication policy (“Are we doing things right?”). Above all, this concerns the *rationality assurance of communication programs/campaigns and evaluation routines*. In the case of PR programs and campaigns, one must ensure, for example, that they have been set up stringently and consistently and that the financial resources have been allocated optimally. With the aid of program analyses and concept evaluations, it is possible to steer and monitor the performance of individual programs. In the same way, complex procedures like issues management and other forms of environmental scanning should be examined for consistency.

Another important field of action is operational communication controlling at the level of communication instruments. This is about the *rationality assurance of communication activities*, thus, for example, methods for managing and controlling media relations, corporate media (employee and customer magazines), and events or online communication. This is the classic domain of empirical research methods in communication planning and evaluation (Stacks, 2002, Broom & Dozier, 1990, Smith, 2005). Here, the question to be asked concerns the instrumental effects of communication activities and the (potential) effects on relevant stakeholders. In order to measure the benefits – something that is always done retrospectively – a multitude of proven methods is available, from opinion polls to media analyses to reputation measurement (Watson & Noble, 2007, Paine, 2007, Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, pp. 207-259, Macnamara, 2005, pp. 243-312, Broom, 2009, pp. 349-376, Pfannenberg & Zerfass, 2010). As a whole, operational communication controlling aims at improving cost efficiency, quality, the production of messages, and the performance of instruments.

**Methods: Integrating Management and Measurement Systems**

The concept of communication controlling outlined here is not a theoretical vision, but instead already a reality in some progressive companies (Pfannenberg & Zerfass, 2010, Chapter 3). This is possible because management practice need not begin “from the ground up” but can instead fall back on experiences and concepts from other domains.

Communication science and marketing/PR practice already have a differentiated repertoire of tools for performing communication audits in order to analyze (internal) communication processes and communication structures of corporations and for performing media analyses and audience research. At the same time, management research and managerial practice provide general methods for controlling, as do modern management systems such as the balanced scorecard, benchmarking, and business process management.

These methods need to be brought together in comprehensive systems of communication controlling and then developed further. Such efforts frequently fail, however, because of the different concepts and paradigms of the individual disciplines. For this reason, the German Public Relations Society (DPRG) and the International Controller Association (ICV) have developed a common framework that standardizes the dimensions of communication effects (see Figure 2). The framework classifies the most important levels of steering and evaluation and
The DPRG/ICV framework distinguishes several starting points of controlling:

• **Input (What expenditures are being made for communication?).** The resources employed include staff employment and the financial costs of communication. Both of these can be measured using cost categories. In this regard, controlling can build on established methods of accountancy, but it must adapt them to the requirements of corporate communication. For example, a levy of costs drawn on specific stakeholders, communications channels, and corporate messages is desirable.

• **Internal output (What is being achieved by the company itself?).** This comprises process efficiency, which can be recorded using budget adherence, operating times and error rates, and the quality of activities provided by communication departments and agencies. In this context, the satisfaction of (internal) clients is an important measure. However, the focus still remains on the organization itself and the initiation of communication processes. To gain insights on this level, controlling must once again fall back on accountancy but it must also employ its own empirical data.

• **External output (What means of contact are being developed?).** This step refers to the range and contents of messages that are available to stakeholders or recipients. Indicators such as the number of clippings or favorable media coverage, visits to corporate websites or “share of voice” on social media platforms, and characteristics of the media or communication channels may be collected. These are necessary conditions for the success of communication processes with stakeholders. But they do not prove who has read an article or used a website, so relationships cannot be measured on this level. Nevertheless, the task of communication controlling is to provide methods of empirical social research such as content analyses and online analyses for communicative output.

• **Direct outcome (To what extent are perception and knowledge being increased?).** As far as perception, utilization, and knowledge are concerned, the changes affecting the stakeholders themselves are involved. Awareness, online session length, number of readers per issue, recall, and recognition are typical parameters through which the success of communication and the generation of information in communicative interactions can be shown. Here, just as at the next level, opinion polls and observations are used.

• **Indirect outcome (How strongly are opinions and intentions being influenced?).** This phase relates to the exerting of influence as the actual goal of all communication activities. Information on opinions, attitudes, and emotions, as well as the behavioral disposition and behavior or actions of stakeholders can be depicted with several indicators. Some of the most popular ones are brand image, changes in reputation, employee commitment, and willingness to buy.

• **Outflow (Which business goals can be achieved as a result?).** As a consequence of communication processes, strategic and/or financial objectives of corporate performance and/or intangible resources in capital formation can be influenced. This may be tracked by such indicators as turnover, project closings, cost reduction, or reputation and brand values. However, the link between communication strategies and corporate goals can only be represented by value links which have been developed in a corporate-specific manner. For this purpose,
communication controlling has to employ appropriate management systems such as the balanced scorecard (Zerfass, 2008c) or valuation processes for intangible assets (Zerfass, 2009).

Figure 2: The DPRG/ICV-Framework for Communication Controlling (Rolke & Zerfass, 2010).
Implementation: Top-down and Bottom-up Approaches

Communication controlling systems can be developed and implemented in quite different ways (Zerfass 2008b, pp. 449-452). The particular conditions of each corporation are most important in this context. Previous experiences with evaluation methods play just as great a role as the organizational culture and the rootedness of modern management methods in the organization. Worldwide communication controlling for a major industrial group must necessarily be different from controlling for a medium-sized company or a public institution.

In principle, a top-down method for introducing communication controlling is advisable. In this case, strategic communication controlling is first implemented by deducing communication objectives from corporate goals. This permits the development of complete value links, from the corporate goals to the communication instruments, including the definition of suitable indicators and key performance indicators.

A bottom-up approach, on the other hand, is to be recommended when operating deficits in corporate communications are evident and when the up-to-date improvement of processes and instruments has the highest priority. This approach is also suitable when the systematic deduction of communication goals is not possible, due to unspecific corporate strategies or resistance to corresponding management methods within a company. In this case, one can start with setting generic objectives for the communication department or for individual stakeholder groups and then optimize the operational communication processes. While doing so, the refinement of the goals and the ties to business strategy should not be lost sight of and must be made up for over time.

Empirical Findings on Communication Controlling

The practice of communication controlling has remained underdeveloped up to now. This is shown by empirical studies conducted by the University of Leipzig and its partners in Germany, Europe, and at the international level.

A study of the leading German corporations (listed in the Dax-30, MDax, TecDax share indexes) has shown that communication controlling is practiced mainly in the context of steering operational activities (Sommer, 2007). The strategic dimension was barely considered by those communication, marketing, and finance directors (n=88) who were interviewed. At the same time, the communication scorecard concepts that already existed at the time were little known. Noteworthy is the fact that, among those respondents who already used communication controlling, the alignment of communication against corporate goals and the creation of transparency in corporate communications were cited as the most important motives for doing so. This underlines the practical relevance of the conceptualization which is being developed here.

The need for connecting corporate goals and communication objectives is confirmed by the largest European study on communication management to date. The European Communication Monitor 2009 (Zerfass, Moreno, Tench, Verčič, & Verhoeven, 2009) is based on a questionnaire answered by 1,863 communication managers from 34 countries. Eighty-four percent of the respondents were communication directors, unit heads, or agency CEOs. Because of their professional experience (in the majority of cases more than 10 years) and their age (42 years on average), the respondents can be seen as opinion leaders in this occupational field.
Forty-seven percent of those interviewed characterized the connection between business strategy and communication as the principal challenge facing communication management today. This topic has been the most pressing issue facing the practice in the three years following the study. By comparison, only 19 percent agreed that new methods for evaluating communication need to be established. In previous years this figure was higher. It appears that European professionals have realized that the call for new procedures and formulas is misguided. On the contrary, there is, instead, the need for a systematic application and linking of well-known management concepts and evaluation methods. At present, there are clear deficits in cost accounting and impact measurement. These were tracked empirically in accordance with the DPRG/ICV framework described above. Europe-wide, only 47 percent of communication managers measure financial input and only 30 percent measure personnel costs at the project level (input). When evaluating communication, attention is first focused on media exposure or on the reach of company-owned communication platforms, such as corporate websites or the intranet (output). Three out of four of those questioned are attempting to create more transparency in this area. Fifty-four percent, according to their own indications, focus their attention on the success of communication with communication partners (direct outcome). Indicators for exerting influence as the actual goal of any communication (indirect outcome) play a role for a clearly lower number (39 percent) of communication managers. However, the fact that the implications for corporate goals, including the creation of intangible assets (outflow), are only tracked by around one-third of the respondents is decisive and alarming (Zerfass et al. 2009, pp. 69-75). The study shows that value-based communication is still not feasible due to a lack of controlling concepts and transparency in most European companies.

The Global Survey of Communications Measurement 2009 (Wright, Gaunt, Leggetter, & Zerfass, 2009) shows that at the international level there is an even greater need for development. Participating in this nonrepresentative trend study were 520 communication managers, with a particular emphasis on the U.S., the U.K./Ireland, Germany, India and Canada. Evaluation practice at present is characterized worldwide by media-related approaches (clippings, Advertising Value Equivalence, etc.). At the same time, a clear majority of respondents support the view that it is possible to calculate the financial return on investment (ROI) of communication activities. An obvious interest in having a tool for measuring ROI goes hand in hand with an increasing awareness of the importance of evaluation and value creation. These results show that the foundations of controlling in general and communication controlling in particular have hardly been understood in the occupational field until now. Simple computation models and ROI formulas, as they are favored here, cannot cope with the complexity of corporate communications and communication management. Consequently, they are not a meaningful way of looking at strategic communication controlling.
Restrictions and Perspectives of the Concept

In-depth study of the foundations of controlling, management systems, and evaluation methods have led to greater interest in communication controlling. However, as the previously cited surveys show, many communication professionals still hope for quick and easy, ready-made solutions, such as ROI measurement tools. What is overlooked here is the fact that controlling systems always need to be implemented in a corporate-specific way (Horváth, 2009, pp. 805-811). For this purpose, clear goals, strong leadership, as well as sufficient human and financial resources, are necessary. Communication controlling can only contribute to competitive advantage and value creation when – as is also the case with business strategy and communication strategy – it is developed on a company’s own authority. But one must not overlook the fact that the introduction of controlling systems may also have negative consequences. These also need to be thought through at an early stage.

Misunderstandings and challenges

Zerfass (2005, pp. 218-219, 2008c, pp. 150-151) as well as Röttger and Preusse (2009) have pointed out the limits of communication controlling and the blind spots in the discussion up to this point. The traps may be indicated and, accordingly, avoided as follows:

- **Faulty applications of management methods and evaluation instruments.** The first problem area, which can be traced back to the lack of experience in dealing with the respective systems, is the improper design of scorecards and indicator systems. This risk is familiar from strategic management and marketing controlling. Some concepts proposed in the early discussion on scorecards in Public Relations were limited to the operational level (i.e., Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1987, Vos & Schoemaker, 2004), or they were conceptually contradictory, so that attempts to implement them also reached their limits quickly (for more details, see Zerfass, 2005). Another typical application error is that communication controlling is only set up for specific communication channels, areas of corporate communications, departments or business units, without having established a clear connection with overall corporate goals either in advance or at least subsequently. Without continuous value chains, many well-intentioned approaches for evaluation and optimization degenerate into “rituals of verification” (Power, 1997). At this point, the exchange of experiences with fellow users of communication controlling in corporations, as well as with consultants and researchers, plays an important role. Learning the “best practices” helps in avoiding typical application errors and in employing meaningful value chains or indicators.

- **The illusion of objectivity and the reduction of complexity in communication management.** Another challenge is the seeming objectivity of indicator systems, measurement results, and numbers. Power (1997, pp. 142-143) points out that these elements are not at all as effective and neutral as is generally assumed. The context of justification involving methods and indicators is rarely questioned, however. Numbers appear to be objective. Therefore, communication instruments that are already well-established and can be easily measured are often favored. Corporate communication threatens to become even more strongly “output”-oriented because of the evaluation methods that are available in that case (Zerfass, 2005, p. 218, Röttger & Preusse, 2009, p. 173). Creative and new communication instruments, which are the most important source of sustained competitive advantages, take a back seat in the same way as the “inbound” tasks of communication management, particularly the contributions to a revision
of corporate strategies by monitoring issues and stakeholders (Röttger & Preusse, 2009, pp. 175-177).

- **One-dimensional concepts of stakeholder relations and communication effects.** The discussion of communication controlling is frequently based on two misleading assumptions: first of all, the idea that stakeholders can be influenced unidirectionally; second, the belief in the controllability of communication processes by organizations. Both assumptions are not adequate to the findings of modern organizational sociology and communication science (Röttger & Preusse, 2009, pp. 170-174). In particular, as outlined above, it is often overlooked that the activities of corporate communications (stimuli) do not inevitably lead to changes in the attitudes and behavior (responses) of the recipients, since the success and the result of social interactions are always influenced by the interests and strategies of all participants. To this extent, illustrations of communication effects like the DPRG/ICV concept should not be misunderstood as mechanistic, empirically demonstrable and calculable models. Rather, these are frameworks which are meant to depict patterns of causality (Rolke & Zerfass, 2010) and to serve as methods for discussion and argumentation in the same way as other management methods. Above all, they enable communication professionals to start discursive planning and to reflect on their courses of action.

- **The selectivity of controlling and strategic blindness.** Communication controlling inevitably includes a systematic depiction of stakeholder relations, value chains and communication processes, based on monitoring and evaluation. This can lead to a situation where changes in the organization and in the corporate environment fail to be perceived in time. As an interface to political, social, and economic interests, communication management needs to react very flexibly and to adjust its structures, processes, and measures promptly (Röttger & Preusse, 2009, pp. 174-175). This flexibility – and, as a result, a critical criterion of success in corporate communication – is at risk when controlling systems prevent, for example, a reallocation of budgets. This might be the case if new communication tools such as web videos still lack standardized indicators and evaluation methods. At this point it becomes clear that communication controlling, as is the case with overall corporate controlling, must continually be supplemented by undirected strategic scanning (Steinmann & Schreyögg, 1987, Zerfass, 2010, pp. 245-248, 322-323). It is and remains the task of strategic management to question critically (on an ongoing basis) and to develop further the tools of performance monitoring, such as scorecards and quality management systems (Müller-Stewens & Lechner, 1995, pp. 693-705). The responsibility that communication controlling has for maintaining transparency does not free communication management of its responsibility for ensuring results.

**Future developments in theory and practice**

The challenges mentioned above do not call into question the meaningfulness of communication controlling. Rather, they underline the fact that a thorough grappling with the theoretical foundations is necessary in order to avoid wrong interpretations. Communication science may be an important contributor of ideas (Röttger & Preusse, 2009). Moreover, an accurate understanding of management methods, such as value links and scorecards, appears necessary. In light of existing research and practical experience in corporate controlling, it is not a matter of developing new foundations. What is demanded, rather, is a systematic integration of different perspectives within a common paradigm of social interactions (Zerfass, 2008a).
If and how rapidly communication controlling as a complementary function of communication management will be institutionalized in corporate practice cannot be determined. In the German-speaking countries, well-known businesses have begun to set up corresponding structures. The spectrum extends from global companies such as Siemens, Audi, Henkel and Deutsche Telekom, to “hidden champions” such as Hoerbiger and Cognis, to public enterprises such as the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) (for case studies, see Pfannenberg & Zerfass, 2010, Chapter 3). In addition, there are initiatives in which companies collaborate and set up common indicator systems at the regional level (like the Corporate Communication Cluster Vienna, Austria) or focused on specific channels (e. g. WebXF, the Web Excellence Forum for digital corporate communication). Joint initiatives of the ICV and the DPRG are advancing the standardization of concepts and indicators. The institutionalization of communication controlling has begun and today it stands where corporate controlling as a whole stood at the end of the 1960s. At the time, controlling structures were set up within a few years in nearly all major corporations, and corresponding positions were filled (Weber & Schäffer, 2008, pp. 3-10). Parallel to this, the research field has also evolved worldwide.

As a result, broad fields of action are being opened up for the theory and practice of corporate communications. International comparative research projects appear just as promising as transferring the concepts and experiences outlined here to other countries.
References


Creation through Communication] (pp. 50–60). Frankfurt am Main: Frankfurter Allgemeine Buch.


