



21ST INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS RESEARCH CONFERENCE

Theory and Research that Drives Forward
Management, Strategy, and Business Acumen
in Public Relations

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Sophia Alfieri and **Juliana Nikac**, Quinnipiac University

The first of its kind, this study assesses how National Hockey League teams create and strengthen relationships with strategic publics through social media engagement. With relationship management theory as the theoretical foundation, this study uses quantitative content analysis to examine how the NY Rangers forge relationships through social media engagement.

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Peter Debreceeny Corporate Communication Award

Nandini Bhalla, University of South Carolina

Multinational corporations are increasingly implementing green CSR locally and globally to gain public confidence and enhance their public image. This study uses a 2x2 experimental design to examine the impact of company location, issue proximity, culture, and environmental concern on public perceptions about the company and on purchasing intent.

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Boston University Award for the Top Paper about Public Relations and the Social and Emerging Media

Courtney D. Boman, University of Missouri, **Jason D. Ellis**, Kansas State University, and **Glen T. Cameron**, University of Missouri

Findings from this initial experimental design study show that SCCT does not predict postbrand reputation outcomes as it does when used with traditional media. Due to this theoretical gap, practitioners who are responsible for protecting an organization's reputation do not have a theory to predict and prepare social media responses.

In the Business of Better Health: An Equivalence Framing Analysis of Obesity Prevention Messages for Women **68**

Meta G. Carstarphen and **Nafida A. Banu**, University of Oklahoma

Studies show that many women, regardless of demographics, face increased health risks due to obesity. Analyzing the websites of two leading national non-profit health protection agencies, through the lens of equivalence framing shows implications for both corporate product and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) health messages to women.

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Brigham Young University Top Ethics Paper Award

Yi-Ru Regina Chen, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, **Shannon A. Bowen**, University of South Carolina, **Chun-Ju Flora Hung-Baesecke**, Massey University, New Zealand, **Ansgar Zerfass**, University of Leipzig, Germany, and **Ben Boyd**, Edelman

Utilizing semantic network analysis and factor analysis, this study surveyed 1,770 participants in three countries to identify the important CEO characteristics and competencies for developing creating shared values (CSV), the corporate initiative that makes profits while simultaneously solving economic or social needs of the community by innovating its business model.

The Outsiders: The University of Virginia Under a Microscope: An Analysis of Crisis Responses Surrounding the Charlottesville Protests **91**

Carl A. Ciccarelli and **Deborah Davis**, Ball State University

This study seeks to modernize the factors of analysis within crisis response strategy, specifically as it pertains to higher education. Statements from the University of Virginia were collected and analyzed to better understand the image restoration strategies applied in response to the protest marches held in Charlottesville on August 11th & 12th 2017.

From Hourglass to Spider Webs: Paradigm Shift in Media Effects and Implications for Public Relations **101**

David M. Dozier, San Diego State University

In order to remain effective and relevant, PR practitioners and academics must shift from an hourglass paradigm to a spider web paradigm regarding the structure of mediated communication and its effects. An *active audience-centric* model is proposed as a first step in such a paradigm shift.

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Institute for Public Relations' W. Ward White Awards for Top Three Papers of Practical Significance

LaShonda L. Eaddy, Southern Methodist University

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory identifies crisis history as an intensifier of responsibility attribution. This study offers a crisis history framework, salience scale and decision tree that can inform crisis strategies.

Exploring the Role of Social Media Usage in Creating an Engaged Workplace **127**

PRSA Employee Communication Research Award

Michele Ewing, Kent State University, **Linjuan Rita Men** University of Florida, and **Julie O'Neil, Ph.D., Professor**, Texas Christian University

Literature conveys the growing use of social media in organizations is leading to a reshaping of internal communication strategy. This study is designed to determine best practices for planning, implementing, and measuring social media strategies to improve employee communication and engagement.

Sustainability Alliance Networks on Facebook: A Big Data Network Analysis of S&P 500 Environmental Responsibility Initiatives on Facebook **140**

Arthur W. Page Center Benchmarking Award

Yi Grace Ji, Virginia Commonwealth University, and **Aimei Yang**, University of Southern California

To offer theoretical and practical insights on environmental sustainability CSR communication on social media, this study examines how S&P 500 companies form crosssectoral networks to engage stakeholders and communicate their cross-sectoral relationships. The study triangulates methods including data mining, text-mining, secondary data analysis of a financial database, and network analysis.

How Has Social Media Research in Public Relations Evolved?: An Analysis of Social Media Research in Public Relations **154**

Ensung Kim, Eastern Illinois University

This study reviews social media research in public relations in recent years and updates the findings of McCorkindale & DiStaso (2014). More specifically, this study, using a thematic meta-analysis, intends to determine how theory and research drive the field of public relations forward.

The Influences of Temporal Distance toward Organizational Threat on Publics' Responses in the Context of Health Crisis 163

International ABERJE Award

Sungsu Kim and **Yan Jin**, University of Georgia

This article examines the effects of an extended concept of organizational threat on publics' responses in the context of health crisis. To this end, the influences of perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat on publics' crisis responses (i.e., crisis responsibility, organizational reputation, crisis emotions, supportive behavioral intentions) and the role of perceived health threat are investigated.

Social Networking, Public Interaction, and Message Resonance: Lessons on Social Media-Facilitated Public Formation from the NFL Protests 176

Devin Knighton, **Justin Guild**, and **Brian Smith**, Purdue University

Despite social media's influence on public interaction and protest, few studies have examined the principles of public formation on social media. This study, a semantic network analysis, uses the backdrop of the NFL national anthem protests to understand how messaging and interaction creates and activates publics.

The Financial Impact of Fake News: A Case Study Analysis of Man-Made Crises 185

Cheryl Ann Lambert and **Michele Ewing**, Kent State University, and **Chas D. Withers**, Dix & Eaton

Preparing for fake news is increasingly a priority for public and private entities, due to the potential economic, financial, and brand equity impact. Case study analysis of PepsiCo, Kay Jewelers, and New Balance revealed financial impact of fake news stories. The theory of image restoration discourse provided framework for analysis.

Emotion-Carrying Messages and Stakeholder Engagement on Facebook: Behavioral Insights from Fortune 100 197

Prime Research Award

Zongchao Cathy Li, San Jose State University, **Yi Grace Ji**, Virginia Commonwealth University, **Weiting Tao**, University of Miami, and **Zifei Fay Chen**, University of San Francisco

This study investigated Fortune 100 companies' emotion-based content strategies on Facebook and stakeholders' engagement behaviors. Through regression modeling of over two million pieces of Facebook data, results confirmed that emotion-carrying posts and posts with strong emotions led to increased stakeholder engagement. An emotion contagion effect was verified.

**Connecting Organizational Identity and Image Research to Practice:
Using Social Media to Promote K-12 Education Programs** **210**

Jensen Moore, Jensen Armstrong, Wyatt Stanford, and Delaney Vaughn,
University of Oklahoma

Social media are a way K-12 schools have begun to recruit future students. This case study utilizes Excellence Theory to examine organizational identity and image. Interviews, focus groups, and a survey examined key publics' perceptions when a public-school district proposed creation and maintenance of social media pages.

**The Effects of Deny, Diminish, and Rebuild Crisis Communication Strategies on
Public Attitudes, Perceptions and Behaviors** **220**

Jensen Moore, J.D. Baker, Madison Huffling, and Calvin Washington, University
of Oklahoma

This within-subjects experiment tested 25 different crisis responses that fall into Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory strategies of deny, diminish, and rebuild. Results indicate rebuild strategies are best in terms of attitude toward the response, perception of the organization's recovery, and future behaviors toward the organization.

**Putting Policy into Work with PR: The Strategic Implementation of Kenya
Health Policy** **231**

Liza Ngenye, George Mason University

Kenya's Ministry of Health is challenged to implement a comprehensive health policy that affects all stakeholders in the Kenyan health system. This paper argues the importance of Relationship Management Theory as a practical public relations solution for compliancegaining to guide policy implementation and promote longevity of the health system.

**Astroturfing and Its Gain and Loss: Two Experimental Studies on the
Disclosure of Motives and Its Effect Boundaries for Ethical and
Effective Communication** **240**

Loarre Andrew Perez, Jeong-Nam Kim, and Bugil Chang, University of Oklahoma

Astroturfing is the practice of making messages appear to be supported by grassroots participants, when they are in fact originated by an organization. Our two experimental studies compare and delineate the gains and losses in credibility, brand, desired public intentions, and megaphoning from the use of astroturfing strategies.

Listening as the Driver of Excellent Public Relations Agency and Business Strategy 251

Institute for Public Relations' W. Ward White Awards for Top Three Papers of Practical Significance

Katie R. Place, Quinnipiac University

This study aimed to further develop the line of research regarding listening in public relations to describe how listening is utilized in a public relations context and how listening supports excellent strategic communication and business strategy.

Trust and Transparency: A Force Applied to Internal Strategic Communication in the Department of Defense 263

Koichi Yamamura International Strategic Communication Award

Mandy Seeley, Kenneth D. Plowman, and Zachary A. Miller, Brigham Young University

Recently, internal strategic communication was not improving at one office of the U.S. Department of Defense. Why were communication professionals in that office not successful? Earlier research showed that trust and transparency were connected to internal strategic communication—either positively or negatively. But one new theme arose from the current study: power.

New Contexts, New Narratives and New PRs 276

Emiliana Pomarico Ribeiro, Gustavo Carbonaro, and Paulo Roberto Nassar de Oliveira, University of São Paulo, Brazil

We live in the age of urgency and uncertainty, which leads us to the absence of narratives that bring meaning to our lives. Those new contexts require new PR professional profiles to create new narratives, with new technologies and new ways of feeling and being in the world. (*Note. This paper was presented in 2017*)

Narratives of Experience and Non-Violent Communication as a PR Strategy 287

Paulo Roberto Nassar de Oliveira, Emiliana Pomarico Ribeiro, and Gustavo Carbonaro, University of São Paulo, Brazil

This article is a theoretical reflection on Public Relations and the so-called narrative paradigm of communication. The idea is to emphasize the need new narratives that are in agreement with the new contexts, working with non-violent communication and affective narratives of communication, especially regarding internal communication.

Intermedia Agenda Setting and Perceived Message Credibility

298

Rochelle A. Rieger, Joe P. Keiley, Michael L. Hathaway, and Tiffani B. Walker,
San Diego State University

This experiment manipulated source attribution within an independent news story to gather measures of message credibility (N=676). Results indicated participants attributed significantly greater credibility to information subsidies linked to state-run propaganda sources, vice non-government sources. Results are vital for public relations professionals working with nations employing state-run media or propaganda practices.

Communicating Confidence in U.S.-Based Multinational Organizations: A Cross-Cultural Confidence Model

311

Katy L. Robinson, University of Florida

Guided by the theoretical framework of uncertainty reduction, a qualitative analysis that revealed how leadership communicators intend to communicate confidence U.S.-based multinational organizations. Interviews were conducted to better understand the experience, strategies and interpretations of leadership communicators. Results include a model, theoretical and practical implications.

Scale Development for Stakeholder Crisis Response Strategies: A Stakeholder-Oriented Approach

329

Hongmei Shen, San Diego State University, and **Yang Cheng,** North Carolina State University

Our study is among the first to propose a valid and reliable way to measure the crisis response strategies used by stakeholders, in the context of a most recent crisis of United Airlines in April 2017. Two online surveys (N=109 and 579) provided empirical support for the new scale.

Ending the Silence of Sexual Assault Victims: The #metoo Campaign on Twitter

343

Sara Sturgess and Kellie S. Burns, University of South Florida

A grassroots movement exploded on Twitter after actress Alyssa Milano invited users who had been sexually harassed or assaulted to tweet with the hashtag #metoo. This study will examine opinion leadership within the context of social network analysis and understand how users engaged with the campaign and others on Twitter.

The Influence of Organizational Environment on Corporate Messages of Japanese Companies 357

Hinako Suda, Hokkaido University, Japan

Drawing on organization theories, this study examines the relationship between organizational environment, organizational process, and corporate messages that PR practitioners compose, in the context of Japan. The findings indicate the possible influence of the organizational environment on corporate messages. The moderating effect of PR practitioners' involvement in the integration process will be discussed.

Dialogic Communication and Thought Leadership: Twitter Use by Public Relations Agencies in the United States 371

University of Miami School of Communication Top Student Paper Award

Patrick D. Thelen, Katy L. Robinson, and Cen April Yue, University of Florida

Guided by the theoretical framework of dialogic principles, a content analysis that compared how 117 Twitter profiles maintained by U.S. headquartered agencies are using this platform was conducted. Tweets were analyzed to better understand their content strategies and implemented dialogic principles. Additionally, this study placed a special emphasis on thought leadership.

Audiences and Publics: Building a More Definitive Understanding of Public Relations Outreach Terminology in the Era of Social Media 384

Institute for Public Relations' W. Ward White Awards for Top Three Papers of Practical Significance

Robert Wakefield, Brigham Young University, and **Devin Knighton**, Purdue University

Public relations is failing to distinguish between audiences and publics in today's megamarketing era while the business literature discusses "brand publics." This article presents a content analysis of the literature and introduces residual publics, which describes unintended recipients of messages that can be identified through social network analysis.

The Outsiders: Understanding How Activists Challenge and Change Corporate Behavior 396

Chelsea L. Woods, Virginia Tech

Although activists increasingly target corporations and these firms' reputations, public relations research on these critical publics lags behind practice. Drawing from interviews with activist practitioners, this study introduces the Corporate Campaign Model, which depicts and describes the various phase of activists' corporate campaigns, depending on the target firm.

What Happens When Organizations Lie: Deception, Reputation, and the “Lie Bias” Among Stakeholders 409

Benjamin Windholz and **Kathleen Ambrose**, University of Kentucky

Expanding situational crisis communication theory, this study examines the role of stakeholder perceptions in determining organizational falsehood through transparency, disclosure, and discourse. After analyzing case studies of three unique contemporary crises involving varying degrees of deception, a “lie bias” based in situational factors is proposed as a new construct.

The Use of the Saudi Electronic University for the New and Traditional Media in the Marketing of the International Conference on Integrated Education 2017: A Content Analysis Study of the Content of the Conference's Media Campaign

Ali D. Alanazi

King Saud University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

The problem of the study is to analyze and evaluate the contents of the media campaign accompanying messages and follow-up to the International Conference on Integrated Education—the path to knowledge economy held at the Saudi Electronic University during the period 3-5 /1439H corresponding to 21-23/11/2017.

Subject and importance of the study:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is witnessing a major developmental transformation targeting the various aspects of the economic, cultural and educational life of the society in an attempt to establish the Kingdom as a successful and pioneering model among the countries of the world. This transformation stems from the vision of the Kingdom of 2030, which senses the economic, societal, cultural and civilizational capabilities available to the Kingdom, At the international level.

The Saudi universities as one of the sectors of the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia in line with that vision and the preparation of strategies and operational programs to achieve the objectives of that vision, and the International Conference of Education merged - the road to the knowledge economy held at the University of Saudi Arabia during the period 3-5/1439 H corresponding to 21-23 / 11/2017, one of the forms of efforts and executive programs that seek to provide visions, recommendations and international experiences in the transformation of university education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia towards the economics of knowledge. The Saudi e-University has also prepared and implemented an information campaign to promote and participate in the conference at the local, regional and international levels. The current study is concerned with the monitoring and evaluation of the messages of the media campaign of the University for feedback on the importance of scientific research to realize the strengths And weaknesses in the procedures and future studies related to improving the mental image and institutional reputation of the University; in the framework of the relationship between the different media and community institutions, the need for each community institution to monitor the reactions on Ada Her and her career, based on the principle advantage of the views and perspectives on that performance in order to assess and stand on a solid ground of community consensus.

The subject of the current study is the importance of enabling the Department of Public Relations and Media of the University of the scientific foundations for the preparation of media content and advertising in the media campaigns as well as their relationship with the various media and directing the management towards its audience.

The problem of the study and its objectives:

The problem of the study is to evaluate the success of the Saudi e-University in the recruitment of traditional and new media in the marketing of its first international conference for integrated education by analyzing the contents of the media campaign accompanying messages and follow-up to the International Conference on Integrated Education - 5 / 1439H corresponding to 21-23 / 11/2017, and the study seeks through its descriptive approach to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the importance of the social media and the traditional and electronic media in the messages and contents of the media campaign for the integrated education conference 2017, held at the Saudi Electronic and Traditional University.
2. Monitoring the forms and arts of press materials for the information campaign of the 2017 integrated education conference in the social media and the electronic and traditional media.
3. Identifying the sources of press materials for the media campaign of the 2017 integrated education conference in the electronic and traditional press.
4. Identify prominent figures in the press material of the media campaign of the 2017 integrated education conference in the social media and the electronic and traditional media.

5. To stand on the role of the university's website in advertising and promoting the integrated education conference 2017 through:
 - a) The size of the publication of the University's data, announcements and press materials for the conference.
 - b) Monitoring the number of visitors to the University's data, announcements and press materials for the conference.
6. Demonstrate the role of university accounts on social media sites (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) in the media campaign of the 2017 integrated education conference in the Saudi electronic and traditional press through:
 - a) the size of the publication of the University's statements, declarations and press materials for the Conference.
 - b) The extent to which university accounts on social media sites are covered for the news coverage of the conference in the Saudi electronic and traditional press.
 - c) Monitor the size of the preference and admiration, comments, and public participation of the journalistic materials published on the university accounts and the extent of the interaction of those responsible for them through the responses and clarifications.

Study Questions:

1. What is the size of the interest of social media and the electronic and traditional media messages and contents of the media campaign for the integrated education conference 2017, held at the Saudi Electronic University.
2. What are the forms and arts of journalistic material for the media campaign of the 2017 integrated education conference in the social media and the electronic and traditional media?
3. What are the sources of press materials for the media campaign for the integrated education conference 2017 in the electronic and traditional press.
4. What is the role of the university's website in advertising and promoting the integrated education conference in terms of the size of publishing the conference's data and announcements, and the number of visitors to the site during the conference?
5. The role of the University accounts on social media sites (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) in the media campaign for the 2017 integrated education conference in the Saudi electronic and traditional press?

The theoretical framework of the study

This study relies on the role played by public relations in organizations in disseminating their news through the media, whether traditional or new media. In addition, public relations departments and their management of the organization's media campaigns need the media to reach out to the public and convey the message they wish to direct to the public.

So we see that the media are both traditional and new play an important and vital role for public relations, which necessitates public relations in organizations to follow the developments of the media, both technical and content. The use of public relations for the media has evolved, so that it is obliged to develop its content and the skills of its employees to cope with the developments of the new media, or what is now called social media.

Public relations play an important role in organizations of any kind or activity through their intelligent use of media to reach their various audiences. Public relations are a link between the institution and its various masses to create a kind of balance and harmony between the two sides. (Jamal and Ayeed, 2004) It is also marketed to the organization that with two-way symmetrical communication, it is very important for the public relation employees to

employ the social media as a tool to reach the audience.

“The biggest advantage of social media is that it allows you to have one-on-one, unfiltered conversations with potential customers. You are able to answer questions, respond to feedback, and address concerns or possible issues quickly, and in a very personal way”.

<https://www.webpagefx.com/internet-marketing/traditional-media-vs-new-media.html>

Several public relations researchers have pointed to the importance of employing the theory of excellence in public relations and the adoption of the two-way symmetric communication model of Gruneg and Hunt. This model demonstrates the positive role that this model plays in understanding and interacting with the institution’s audience continuously, The interests of the parties. (Rasem and Ayead, p. 67, 2013)

Literature Review:

The aim of the study was to study the solution of the eagles, Al-Manasra and Mohammed Al-Ziadat to determine the effect of marketing using social media on the intention to purchase in Jordan. They conducted a survey on a sample of companies and universities using the sample in order to reach people who use the media for marketing purposes. The effect of marketing on the use of social media on the intention to purchase, and the existence of a significant impact of the social content of the company in the means of social communication on the intention to purchase, as well as a significant impact of the statistical content of the user in social media on the intention to buy. (Solution of the eagles and Al-Nasmari and Al-Manasirah, 2016, p. 519)

In the study of the role of social media in contemporary marketing, Dr. Mohamed Falak, in which he used the analytical perspective, found that a marketing strategy through the social media of any organization would help her to compete better by managing her reputation electronically. Internet and social media on a daily basis. The more relevant and attractive the content of an organization, the more visitors and visitors can bring in this content and reflect positively on the Organization’s reputation. (Mohammad Falaq 2017, p. 16)

The study of Mohamed Abdel Samie explores the role of social media sites in marketing Egypt as an international tourist destination. 88% of respondents agreed to use social media sites to market Egypt as an international tourist destination. The remaining 12% Social is more useful in communicating with friends and colleagues by 88%.

The results of the study showed that 91% of the respondents agree that the Ministry of Tourism contribute to the task of marketing through social media sites. (Mohamed Abdel Samie, pp. 23-25, 2012)

In a field study on a sample of female students at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, entitled “The impact of the use of social media on social relations: Facebook and Twitter model,” researcher Hanan al-Shehri, found that one of the strongest reasons for girls to use social media Is the existence of an area of freedom to express their ideas and attitudes through these means, which cannot be provided in other ways. In addition, these studies help to create new friendships and cultural openness for their users. On the other hand, the study pointed to the existence of an inverse correlation between the variables of age and school level, the reasons for use and the nature of social relations, positive and negative. (Hanan al-Shihri, p. 78, 1434) A study finding by Timmins and Brown, shows that “overall assertion social media feedback from audience to journalist impacts the journalists and the decisions they make. The observations showed that most of the content producers spent a portion of their day checking social media. They used social media for slightly different purposes, but all of those able to be observed did use mainly smartphones for checking the apps”. (Timmins, Lydia. and Brown p

16, 2017)

In a study by Opgenhaffen and Claeys, proof “that social media in general have a fixed place in the business story of the organizations surveyed. In order to represent the company name or brand, a majority of the companies (namely, 14 of the 16) even chose to actively deploy various social media”. (Opgenhaffen and Claeys, p 6, 2015) They unanimously refer to the many benefits of interaction and conversation with the customers, although some companies also explicitly describe it as a necessary evil, because you can no longer avoid it. (Ibid, p 6)

“Rapid developments in new media and their various applications present novel challenges to communication researchers and theoreticians. Current theoretical understanding of the roles and impact of new and emerging media remains limited while application of traditional media theories becomes increasingly irrelevant. There remains a particular need for innovative conceptual frameworks from which to approach these new media and their social impacts. In pursuit of this objective”. (Shaheed, Avinash and Kanchan, p 1, 2010)

Methodology:

This study belongs to the descriptive studies, which are concerned with analyzing the current reality of the phenomenon (the subject of the study) to obtain accurate and complete information about them, classify them, interpret them, analyze them and draw conclusions.

The study was carried out using the “Media Survey Methodology” and through the “Content Analysis Tool”. It is one of the most accurate tools for collecting data as desired by the comprehensive inventory method, which is the most reliable method that can be used for judging and disseminating results.

The study has been divided into three phases correspond to the stages of the media campaign itself:

1. The first phase: from 15 September to 14 October 2017.
2. The second phase: from (15 October to 14 November 2017)
3. The third phase (November 15 to November 30, 2017)

It was agreed with the Rknan media company to follow up coverage and monitoring, as well as included the study follow up the university’s website and various accounts, and their impact on the campaign.

The units of analysis include:

A) Content Categories

- 1- University News
- 2- News of the International Conference on Integrated Education
- 3- Direct Articles
- 4- social media
- 5- Cartoons
- 6- Pictures
- 7- Infographic

B) Shape categories

- 1- Editorial forms
- 2- Image
- 3- Size of material
- 4- The direction of the material

Community of the study:

All paper and electronic newspapers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in addition to Twitter, YouTube and the University's website are the study community. The number of newspapers and websites covered by the study reached (28) paper and internet sites, including (15) paper and 12 Saudi websites, in addition to the website of the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) While the total number of press items monitored was (495).

Newspapers and News Sources under study:

Saudi Press Agency	Traditional Newspaper	E. Newspaper	Social Media
Saudi Press Agency (SPA)	AL Riyadh	Almandq	Twitter
		Sabq	YouTube
	Al Jazeera	Agel	
	Al Hiah	Alwaeam	
	Economic	Almwaten	
	Al Belad	Electronic Mal	
	Middle East Today	Arqam	
	Al Sharq	Aeen Alwom	
	Arab News	Anaween	
	Saudi Gazette	Twasel	
	Mecca Sports		
	Al Madina		
	Okaz		

Results:

Analysis of media coverage in electronic and traditional newspapers and social media during the period (15 September to 14 October 2017):

The Saudi e-University is one of the most important transformations witnessed by higher education institutions in the Kingdom since it was established by a decision by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in 2011, offering a new and different educational model that integrates with the other educational models Higher in the Kingdom. Therefore, the measurement of the university news in the local media and social media is essential because it depends on electronic communication and integrated education in all its forms.

The media coverage of the university and the conference in the social media and electronic and traditional journalism during the period (15 September to 14 October 2017).
Social media vs electronic and traditional journalism

The social media, as shown in Table (1), represented the largest percentage of media formats that were monitored in the media file during the period of analysis, with 89.42%, with 93 articles, (%), Equivalent to (10) news, and the articles ranked in the last one article only. A result consistent with the results of many previous studies that showed that there is a steady increase of institutions and public relations departments in the employment of social networks.

Table (1)
Distribution of materials for sample analysis on media

source	number	Percentage
Social Media	93	89.42
News in traditional and electronic newspapers	10	9.62
Articles in traditional and electronic newspapers	1	0.96
Sum	104	100

Categorizing of Saudi electronic and traditional press materials

The results of the monitoring showed that the electronic university activities materials and the materials of the International Conference on Integrated Education were ranked first with an average of (5) news each, and lastly one article about the Saudi Electronic University. This a proof that the university communication campaign succeeds to give an awareness to the public about the conference,

Table (2)
Kind of News

Kind	Number	Percentage
University News	5	45.45
Conference News	5	45.45
Article about University	1	9.09
sum	11	100

- The activities of the university were published in newspapers (Riyadh, Almaten, Ajel, Sabq, Saudi Press Agency "SPA").

The event items dealt with the university's announcement on how to register and study for the new academic year, in addition to the activities of the university celebration of the national day. The materials of the International Conference on Education were integrated into the papers of Al-Jazeera, Okaz, Makkah and Medina. The article, which was published in Al-Eqtisadiya newspaper by Dr. Abdulwahab bin Abdullah, called on the concerned authorities to share the expected revenues from universities with the data. The Saudi e-University does not have any property through which to generate future revenues.

Analysis of social media materials

The results of the monitoring showed that the electronic university activities materials ranked first with (82) articles, followed by the materials of the International Conference on Education (11) subjects.

Table (3)
Classification of social media

News	Number	Percentage
University News	82	88.17
Conference News	11	11.83
sum	93	100

The university's accounts in social media published the university's announcement about how to register and study for the new year, in addition to the activities of the university celebration of the national day and workshops. While the accounts of people registered in Twitter e-University through the system of study and to ask questions and inquiries about the university certificate granted by the university. The university's accounts were published on social media, in addition to the newspapers' accounts, in addition to the International Conference on Integrated Education, announcing the participation of 60 researchers. Measuring the impact and spread of the university's electronic materials in newspapers, both electronic and traditional, and social media during the first analysis period.

The results of the analysis revealed that the users 'views of the media campaign materials on Twitter ranked first with 42,123 views followed by the newspapers' websites with a rate of 21,596 views. Then the re-broadcast of the content as a form of interaction was 889 times, and finally the replay of the content on YouTube at 723 once. The final results indicate an increased level of audience interaction with campaign material posted on social networks (Twitter) compared to others.

Table (4)
Number of viewers to the university news in the media

media	number
Traditional and electronic newspaper views	21.596
Twitter Hits	42.123
Re-broadcast content (Twitter)	889
YouTube Hits	723

Categorize comments according to trend

The results of the analysis of viewers' comments on Saudi e-news links in the newspapers and users of the social media showed that the neutral attitudes during the analysis period ranked first with (103) comments by (59.88%) and second place positive comments by 26.74% 46) Comment.

Table (5)
Categorize comments according to attitudes

attitudes	number	Percentage
Neutral	103	59.88
Positive	46	26.74
Negative	23	13.37
Sum	172	100

Analysis of the media coverage of the University and the International Conference on social media and the electronic and traditional press during the period (15 October to 14 November 2017)

The Department of Public Relations and Information at the Saudi e-University formed an information committee which prepared a media center for the International Conference on Integrated Education. It also broadcast a number of press releases during the second phase of the analysis.

1- Media coverage in the social media and the electronic press during the period (15 October to 14 November 2017).

2-

Saudi Arabia's electronic and traditional press and social media

The social media as shown in Table (6) represented the largest percentage of the media formats that were monitored in the media file during the period of analysis, which amounted to (78.49%), by (135) articles, the news came in second place (20.35) (35%), and the articles ranked last in only two articles.

Table (6)
News Format

Format	Number	Percentage
Social Media	135	78.49
News in traditional and electronic press	35	20.35
Article in traditional and electronic press	2	1.16
Sum	172	100

Analysis of Saudi electronic and traditional press materials

The results of the monitoring showed that the subjects of the International Conference on Integrated Education ranked first with (67.57%) in the equivalent of (25) news, and in the second place were the electronic university activities items (10) news by (27.03%). Saudi Arabia.

Table (7)
Categorize comments according to Jurisdiction

Media Format	Number	Percentage
Conference News	25	67.57
University News	10	27.03
Article About University	2	5.41
Sum	37	100

The University's activities were published in Al-Jazira newspaper with (3) news, followed by Riyadh with two stories, and the rest of the newspapers came in equal numbers and numbers. The event also dealt with the announcement of the university's support for the royal decisions of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdul Aziz on the formation of an anti-corruption committee, in addition to the university's praise for the national projects launched by His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman. While the articles published during the period of analysis in the newspapers Okaz and today, and discussed the development of e-learning in the Kingdom.

A result that indicates in the latest analysis the increasing interest of print and electronic newspapers to cover the university news and campaign activities during the second phase and comparison in the first phase, indicating the magnitude of the effort made by the Department of Public Relations and the team responsible for the campaign in an attempt to market the conference and communication with the media.

Table (8)
Number of University News in the News paper

	Newspaper	Number	Percentage
1	Aljazeera	3	30.00
2	AL Riyadh	2	20.00
3	Saudi News Agency	1	10.00
4	Albelad	1	10.00
5	Electronic Ain Alarab	1	10.00
6	Alhayeh	1	10.00
7	Alwatan	1	10.00
	Sum	10	100.00

The results of the analysis showed that Al-Jazeera and Al-Jazeera were ranked first and second in the International Conference on Education (4) each with 16%, followed by Al-Ajal

Electronic (12%), Newspapers, and the University's announcement of the participation of 60 researchers in the conference from several countries

Table (9)
Number of the Conference News

	Newspaper or the Website	Number	Percentage
1	Al Riyadh	4	16.00
2	Al Jazeera	4	16.00
3	Electronic Ajel	3	12.00
4	Al Madina	2	8.00
5	Saudi News Agency	2	8.00
6	Okaz	2	8.00
7	Mecca	2	8.00
8	Electronic Mwatan	2	8.00
9	Alhayeh	1	4.00
10	Alwatan	1	4.00
11	Albelad	1	4.00
12	Sabq	1	4.00
	Sum	25	100.00

Where the results of the analysis and statistical data indicate that what was published about the conference is more than what was published about the university during the same period, a result of the recent analysis indicates the success of the campaign's media team and the management of public relations in the marketing of the conference.

Analysis of social media materials

The results of the monitoring showed that the electronic university activities materials ranked first with (91) articles, followed by the materials of the International Conference for Education (44) subjects.

Table (10)
Classification of social media materials according to Jurisdiction

specialized	Number	Percentage
University Materials	91	67.41

Conference Materials	44	32.59
Sum	135	100.00

The results of the qualitative analysis of the content of the published information materials indicated that the university has been interested in its calculation of the social networks, announcing how to register and study for the new year, in addition to supporting the royal decisions of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz, on the formation of an anti-corruption committee and the university's praise for the national projects launched by His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman. While the accounts of people registered in Twitter e-University through the system of study and to ask questions and inquiries about the university certificate granted by the university. While university accounts on social media, as well as newspaper accounts and other accounts were published on the International Conference on Integrated Education by announcing the participation of 60 researchers.

Although the material published on the conference came in second place, the indicators and statistical data confirm beyond a shadow of a doubt that they have a relatively good weight, especially if we realize that the topics related to the campaign and news conference represent only one of the activities and events that are university organized.

Measuring the impact and spread of university electronic materials in electronic and traditional newspapers and social media during the second analysis period
The results and data of the quantitative analysis show that the rates of interaction between the public and users with the campaign and with the information materials published about the university came at the highest level in the social network (Twitter) with a watch rate of 839.140 followed by the audience's views and interaction with the campaign materials on YouTube with a watch rate of 45.243, In the web sites at a rate of 182,643 views, and finally re-broadcast content on Twitter at a rate of 1,791 views.

Table (11)
Number of the viewers

media	Number
Newspapers	182.643
Twitter	839.140
Retweet	1.791
YouTube	45.243

Categorize comments according to trend

The results of the analysis of viewers' comments on SABB news links in newspapers and users of social media showed that the neutral trend during the period of analysis ranked first with (343) comments by (56.32%) and second place positive comments by 34.81% (212).

Table (12)
Categorize comments according to attitudes

attitudes	Number	Percentage
Neutral	343	56.32
Positive	212	34.81
Negative	54	8.87
Sum	609	100.00

Analysis of the media coverage of the university in the social media and electronic and traditional newspapers during the period from (15 to 30 November 2017)

The third phase of the analysis of the media coverage of the Saudi e-University in the social media and electronic and traditional newspapers during the periods before and after the official launch of the International Conference on Integrated Education.

1 - Media coverage of the Electronic University and the International Conference on social media and electronic and traditional newspapers during the period from (15 to 30 November 2017).

Distribution of the media content of the campaign in the Saudi electronic and traditional press and social networks according to the templates used.

The social media, as shown in Table (1), represented the largest percentage of the media formats that were monitored in the media file during the period of analysis, which reached (79.45%), by (174) articles, the news came in second place (20.09)), With the equivalent of (44) news, and the articles ranked in the last one article only.

Table (13)
News Media

Editing Format	Number	Percentage
Social Media	174	79.45
The News	44	20.09
Articles	1	0.46
Sum	219	100.00

A result that in its recent analysis indicates the increasing use of new media in marketing for the conference's media campaign and university news compared to traditional newspapers.

Analysis of Saudi electronic and traditional journalistic materials

The results of the monitoring showed that the subjects of the International Conference on Integrated Education ranked first with (81.40%), equivalent to (35) articles, and the second

item of the electronic university activities by (7) news (16.28%). About the Saudi Electronic University.

Table (14)
Kind of News

News	Number	Percentage
Conference News	35	81.40
University News	7	16.28
Articles about University	1	2.33
Sum	43	100.00

This is reflected in the increasing number of articles published in comparison to the published articles about the university in general.

The University's activities in the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) were published with two stories, and the rest of the newspapers came in equal numbers and numbers. The event items dealt with the University's announcement on university teaching methods and new educational services. - while the article observed during the period of analysis in Al-Watan newspaper the future of e-learning in the Kingdom.

Table (15)
The university News in Traditional and Electronic Media

	Newspapers and Websites	Number	Percentage
1	Saudi News Agency	2	28.57
2	Aljazeera	1	14.29
3	Okaz	1	14.29
4	Al Mwatn Electronic	1	14.29
5	Aweam Electronic	1	14.29
6	Ajel Electronic	1	14.29
	Sum	7	100.00

The results of the analysis showed that the news and events of the conference ranked first in terms of the interest rate of the listed newspapers. The newspapers of Riyadh, Madinah, Okaz, Makkah, Urgent and the Saudi News Agency each published 3 news, 8.57%. Other newspapers have a close numbers, and covered comprehensive coverage of the International Conference on Integrated Education.

Table (16)
The Conference News in the Traditional & Electronic Newspapers

	Newspaper & Website	Number	Number
1	Al Riyadh	3	8.57
2	Al Madina	3	8.57
3	Okaz	3	8.57
4	Mecca	3	8.57
5	Ajel Electronic	3	8.57
6	Saudi News Agency	3	8.57
7	Twasel Electronic	3	8.57
8	Sabq Electronic	2	5.71
9	Alwatan	2	5.71
10	Alyeem	2	5.71
11	Al Jazzera	2	5.71
12	Alhayea	1	2.86
13	Alqatesadeah	1	2.86
14	Albelad	1	2.86
15	Almdaen Electronic	1	2.86
16	Almnadq Electronic	1	2.86
17	Sda Electronic	1	2.86
	Sum	35	100.00

Where the results showed that there is a clear increase in the rates and volume of interest in the traditional and electronic newspapers news conference compared to the University's electronic news as shown in this table and the previous table.

Analysis of social media materials

The results of the monitoring showed that the subjects of the International Conference on Integrated Education ranked first with (167) articles, followed by the university activities materials with (8) materials. A result that in its latest analysis indicates the increasing interest of the social media networks in publishing the conference news and campaign activities because of its importance compared to the rest of the university's other activities. This result also points to the success of the media team responsible for planning the campaign and marketing the

conference and highlighting it on the level of media coverage, whether in social networks or in the traditional media.

Table (17)
Number of News

News	Number	Number
University News	8	4.57
Conference News	167	95.43
Sum	175	100.00

University accounts on social media, newspaper accounts and other accounts published comprehensive coverage of the International Conference on Integrated Education, while university accounts in social media announced the university's university teaching methods and new educational services. And the accounts of people registered in Twitter e-University through the system of study and provide questions and inquiries about the university certificate granted by the University.

Measuring the impact and spread of university electronic materials in electronic and traditional newspapers and social media during the third and final analysis period.

The data in table (18) shows that the interaction and the spread of campaign materials among users has taken different forms, topped by users' views of the campaign materials on Twitter by 682.336, and then see the materials of this campaign on the websites of the electronic newspapers by 193.982, watch, followed by Watch campaign materials on YouTube with 36,764 views.

Table (18)
Number of the News and Viewers

News	Number
Traditional and electronic newspapers viewres	193.982
Twitter viewers	682.336
Retweeted	2.493
YouTube	36.764

Categorize comments according to trend

The results of the analysis of the comments of the viewers of the SABB news links in the newspapers and users of the social media showed that the neutral trend during the period of analysis ranked first with (191) comments by (48.11%) and second place positive comments by (46.10% 183) Comment.

Table (19)
Categorize comments according to attitudes

Trend	Number	Percentage
neutral	191	48.11
Positive	183	46.10
Negative	23	5.79
Sum	397	100.00

Comment on results:

The results of the study showed that the role of social media has been instrumental in marketing the International Conference on integrated education - the way to the knowledge economy at the Saudi Electronic University, where the coverage of social media networks covered the traditional media and electronic journalism, in addition to the role played by the university's website and various accounts.

During the period specified for the campaign, the social media were advanced in covering the conference news. The news of the conference emerged on the university's news during the campaign, which indicates that the campaign succeeded in achieving its objectives. In terms of follow-up means, the results showed that Twitter is more watched by news watchers than any other medium.

The attitude of the news was among the results of the study, and it turned out that the university is mostly neutral, and the negative trend was the lowest, indicating that the university is moving in the right direction towards its internal and external audiences. In the second phase of the study and follow-up coverage, the results indicated that the campaign highlighted the university's news, and provided the conference news, which indicates the complementarity in the campaign between focusing on the university news and conference news. On the one hand, Twitter has continued as a first choice for the university and conference attendees. In the third stage, it was found that the social media are the first choice for those who follow the news of the university and the conference, indicating that these means have become a necessity for use by public relations.

Recommendations:

This study came out with a number of recommendations:

1. Public relations should activate their accounts on social networks to make them effective.
2. Public relations must develop the media content of the social media through courses and workshops for their employees.
3. Training the public relations employees and staff on the content industry for the means of media communication networks and how to use them as the main choice to deliver the message of public relations to different audiences.
4. The results of the study showed that social media became the number (1) option for followers, as well as for public relations in governmental and private institutions.
5. Develop the website of the institution in line with the technical developments, and developments in digital media.
6. Digital public relations have become a necessity in practice in all institutions.
7. Digital relations must be adopted by specialists and practitioners in public relations.

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Strengthening National Hockey League Relations through Social Media

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Abstract

This research paper assesses how a National Hockey League team, the New York Rangers, creates and strengthens relationships with strategic publics through social media engagement. With relationship management theory as the main theoretical foundation, this study uses quantitative content analysis of 500 randomly generated tweets over a six-month period from the official New York Rangers account to examine how the team forges relationships through online involvement. Findings and implications suggest that the Rangers must better integrate relationship management and dialogic communication techniques on social media, especially conveying their “investment” in the fans and facilitating a dialogic loop. In order to strengthen our understanding of NHL efforts, future research must assess Twitter engagement of additional NHL teams.

Introduction

According to the National Hockey League, the hockey industry generates approximately \$4.1 billion dollars and receives more than 17,500 attendees at each NHL game (NHL.com) every year. As of 2018 there are 31 teams within the league, each with a different sized following throughout direct and surrounding towns, cities, and states. In this day and age of advanced technology, the teams use social media on a daily basis to stay connected to and keep mutually beneficial relationships with their fans and followers throughout the preseason, the regular season, the post season, and the off season. To successfully keep fans engaged and interested no matter the status of the team and its players, the hockey industry must constantly generate new, authentic, and creative ways to interact with their fan base and beyond.

Central to strategic communication and the engagement of publics are *relationships*. Relationships are described as “The state which exists between an organization and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural, or political wellbeing of the other” (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998b, p. 62). Scholars have suggested that relationships are the most important element that connects an organization and its publics. As Grunig and Hung (2002) stated, public relations professionals should focus on relationships as an indicator of both the value and the success of their work. The purpose of this study is to, through quantitative content analysis, analyze how National Hockey League teams, such as the New York Rangers, create and strengthen relationships with strategic publics (fans, media, local communities). Such a study is important in order to better understand how strategic communication efforts (such as social media engagement, events, and campaign tactics) can best engage fan bases and other important publics.

Literature Review

As this is the first study of its kind, there were no prior cases that we could review for assistance in our research. Instead, we started with a review of what content analysis is and how it can be used for a study such as this one. Quantitative content analysis is defined as “the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption,” (Riffe et al., 2005). Systematic means that specific terms, concepts and relationships must be made aware, while replicable means that the research conducted can be repeated in the future by other researchers. Symbols of communication can be visual or words and phrases. Content must be identified as present through a numerical number, must be descriptive, and should answer the posed research questions of the study (Riffe et al., 2005).

We also decided to first look at literature discussing the benefits of companies and organizations using social media. Having organizations on social media allows publics “to complain to, or compliment organizations, to follow their content, or criticize their policies. Simultaneously, social media has provided organizations with a new venue to spread content, provide services, co-create products or services, and more generally, to build relationships with the public,” (Dijkmans et al., 2015). It allows for exposure to brands and interactive conversations between organizations and publics. Dijkmans et al. highlights the importance of the use of a conversational human voice (CHV) to bring about a feeling of natural dialogue, which in turn can bring a sense of trust, security, and commitment.

The first theoretical base for this specific case study is the Dialogic Theory of Public Relations. In their classic study regarding dialogic theory of public relations and the World

Wide Web, Kent and Taylor (1998) explain that the theory refers to a communicative relationship where dialogue is cooperative, open, and respectful. Dialogue must also be accurate, empathetic, and understanding between all parties involved.

Dialogic theory and digital communications can facilitate and create mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and publics. Such relationships are achieved using five principles of online dialogic behavior: a dialogic loop, usefulness of information, generation of return visits, intuitiveness or ease of interface, and conservation of visitors (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Dialogic loop refers to letting publics communicate with organizations and in turn lets organizations respond to questions, comments, and concerns to create an open relationship. Usefulness of information means that the information being provided is of good use to publics of an organization. Generation of return visits refers to the success of bringing publics back to your social media and/or websites daily or weekly. Intuitiveness/ease of interface is the efficiency of finding information about an organization on their media outlets. Conservation of visitors means using links to avoid leading your publics to other organizations (Kent & Taylor, 1998). When these five principles are coupled with successful digital communications, organizations and their publics can experience and retain special connections that can bring advantages to both parties.

The second main theoretical basis for this specific case study is relationship management theory. According to Ledingham (2003), relationship management theory is “effectively managing organizational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time,” which “results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics” (p. 190). In his review of literature regarding the theory, Ledingham argues relationship management can be used as the general theory of public relations, stating how relationship management theory “balances the interests of organizations and publics through management of organizational-public relationships” (p. 181).

One of the goals of relationship management, especially in interpersonal communication, is to “establish and maintain successful relationships” (Toth, 2000). To do so, Ledingham and Bruning (1998b) concluded there are five dimensions to establishing an organizational-public relationship: trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. Trust is defined as the organization in the relationship doing what it says it’s going to do. Openness is operationalized as sharing the organization’s plans for the future with their publics. Involvement is seen as the organization getting involved with the community and paying attention to their well-being. Investment is described as the organization investing in the well-being of the community. Finally, commitment is an organization committing itself to the well-being of the community (p.62). These five definitions contribute to loyalty in organizational-public relationships, and consumers are more likely to use an organization’s services if given a competitive choice when they rank an organization highly with the five relationship dimensions taken into consideration (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998b).

Research regarding relationship management has been applied to other organizations, including religious organizations (Waters et al., 2011) and online campaign management (Levenshus, 2010). However, there has yet to be research conducted on relationship management theory applied to sports organizations. Therefore, based on literature regarding public relations, relationship management, and social media, the research question for this study is: *RQ: How do National Hockey League (NHL) organizations forge relationships with their target publics via social media (Twitter)?*

Methods

Sampling Procedure

In our research study, we used quantitative content analysis to analyze the use of relationship management on the official New York Rangers Twitter account, @NYRangers. We downloaded a file of 3200 tweets from @NYRangers during the January 29 to June 7 2017 time frame using ExportTweet.com. The file including original tweets, retweets and replies from the account. The selected time frame for the tweets was chosen because it represents the height of the hockey season and the time frame when the most engagement on Twitter was likely to occur.

In order to derive data from the tweets, we developed a codebook of 20 different variables to use when examining the tweets, 14 of which we pulled from the literature review and defined. The variables were derived from Dialogic Theory of Public Relations (Kent & Taylor, 1998) and Relationship Management Theory (Ledingham & Brunig, 1998).

We then created a universal code sheet (see Appendix) for each coder to record her application of the codebook to the sample of tweets. All of our variables in the codebook were non-complex; they were simply coded using a yes (2) or no (1) scale.

Using a random number generator, we selected the first 500 random numbers and applied them to the corresponding list of tweets. We then chose the first 50 tweets to perform content analysis and establish intercoder reliability using Krippendorff's Alpha via data analysis on Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Our results exhibited over 80% intercoder reliability on all variables, and 100% consistency on most variables.

After intercoder reliability was solidified, we then moved onto the random sample of 500 tweets. The tweets were then analyzed via SPSS for basic frequencies and descriptive analyses.

Findings

The first variable, investment, is defined as the use of the explicit word "investment" or "invest" and support of its publics by financial means, such as scholarship funds, drives and philanthropic support. None of the tweets we coded included the investment variable, as well as the trust variable, defined as use of the explicit word "trust" or "the feeling that those in the relationship can rely on each other," and the control mutuality variable, defined as any communication intended to convey a balance of control or power in the communications relationship.

Only 0.2% (n=1) of the tweets we coded included dialogic loop, or the opportunity for publics to query organizations or the opportunity to respond to questions, concerns or problems, and commitment, or use of the explicit word "commitment" or "committed" and the decision to continue a relationship. Only one of the tweets that had dialogic loop included an image and a link. The variables of conservation of return visits and humor were also relatively low, coming in at 0.4% and 0.8%, respectively. Conservation of return visits is defined as any communications intended to get the user to come back, such as referral services, links to information, forums, question-and-answer formats, experts, FAQs, downloadable information. Humor refers to "use of humor to engage target publics" or communications intended to increase the entertainment or happiness of target publics. Additionally, only one of the tweets that included conservation of return visits had an image and a link.

Involvement is defined as use of the explicit word "involvement" or "willingness to engage with target publics in a...". 7.2% of the tweets (n=36) included involvement. 24 tweets that coded for involvement included an image, while 8 contained a video and 15 had a link.

9.6% (n=48) met the variable of satisfaction, defined as communication intended to keep target publics satisfied or loyal to the cause.

Three of the most popular variables present within the tweets were networking (16.0%, n=80), positiveness (16.2%, n=81), and openness (22.4%, n=112). Networking refers to the willingness to further connections among the teams and target publics and other organizations. Positiveness is defined as communications of a positive tone or nature and does not contain damaging, upsetting, or negative tone or outlook. Openness is described as “willingness to share appropriate / necessary information with target publics.” These may include actions, such as holding press conferences, interviews with players, distributing updates such as injury reports, distributing press releases, and behind the scenes video or interviews.

The most frequent variable in the tweets was usefulness, coming in at 92.4% (n=462). We defined usefulness as “efforts to provide publics with information regarding the organization (contact information for example), or expert advice, tips, etc.” This was evident in the copy of the tweets, especially those that used images (n=113), videos (n=125), and links (n=37).

Overall, video was the media type used most commonly with tweets conveying relationship management techniques. The New York Rangers are still lacking in using many links, video, or images in their tweets. 75% of their tweets did not contain an image, 71.2% of tweets did not contain a video, and 92.2% of tweets did not contain a link. The Rangers used at least one hashtag in a tweet 76% of the time, but did not use a hashtag 23% of the time.

Overall Frequencies of Relationship Management Functions by NY Rangers on Twitter (N=500)

Variable	n	Percent
Usefulness	462	92.4%
Openness	112	22.4%
Positiveness	81	16.2%
Networking	80	16.0%
Satisfaction	48	9.6%
Involvement	36	7.2%
Humor	4	.8%
Conservation of Return Visits	2	.4%
Commitment	1	.2%
Dialogic Loop	1	.2%
Trust	0	0%
Investment	0	0%
Control Mutuality	0	0%

Relationship Management Techniques Explored by Media Type (Image, Video, or Link) (N=500)

Variable	Image	Video	Link
Investment	0	0	0
Trust	0	0	0
Openness	28	69	20
Involvement	24	8	15
Dialogic Loop	1	0	1
Usefulness	113	125	37
Conservation of Return Visits	1	0	1
Humor	2	2	0
<u>Positiveness</u>	29	35	6
Control Mutuality	0	0	0
Satisfaction	22	20	6
Networking	46	15	12

Implications

The New York Rangers have much work to do in order to better integrate relationship management techniques on social media. They appear to forge relationships with the fan base by providing useful and timely information. This relationship strategy is expected given their status as one of the Original Six teams built on reputation and tradition. They also use the technique of “openness,” “positiveness,” and “networking” to connect to its publics. The Rangers appear to be lacking in its demonstration of “trust” and “investment” in its publics, as well as lacking in the use of “humor” and “the dialogic loop.” Again, because the team must embody a sense of tradition among new and legacy fans, the Rangers may be working to stay “on message” while sacrificing some of the fun and games exhibited by other newly-created teams, such as the Las Vegas Golden Knights. Additionally, personal correspondence with the Rangers’ social media manager (Skollar, April 23, 2018) suggested that social media relationship management and dialogic strategic decisions depend upon a) where the social media team is housed in an organization and b) whether leaders in the organization prioritize social media communication. Specifically, the approaches to social media content production and relationship management techniques can vary if the social media team is housed under marketing, versus public relations, or as a stand-alone division. Giving the social media team optimal flexibility (as a stand-alone division in partnership with public relations) may best enable the social media team to create content and forge relationships with diverse publics in consideration of platform-specific and publics-specific needs.

In conclusion, this study can be used for professional sports organizations when attempting to analyze and develop social media strategies. It shows that trust and openness are essential for sports organizations to establish due to their connection with not only business professionals, but the fan bases as well.

To strengthen our case study of the New York Rangers, we would like to code a similar number of tweets for three recipients of the Dillman Award, given to the Eastern and Western Conference NHL teams for excellence in public relations. We would like to look at tweets for the 2017 recipients, the Minnesota Wild and the Toronto Maple Leafs, and the 2016 Western Conference recipient, the Calgary Flames. From this, we hope to unveil interesting findings and draw some unique comparisons of social media interaction among the four teams. It is also our hope to create a social media campaign proposal for NHL teams to keep up with the ever-changing nature of the Internet.

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**Appendix
Codebook**

Variable	Definition
Investment	Use of the explicit word “investment” or “invest” and support of its publics by financial means, aka scholarship funds, drives, philanthropic support
Commitment	“Commitment” or “Committed” “The decision to continue a relationship”
Trust	the explicit word “trust” or “The feeling that those in the relationship can rely on each other”
Openness	“willingness to share appropriate / necessary information with target publics” Actions, such holding press conferences, interviews with players, distributing updates such as injury reports, distributing press releases, behind the scenes video or interviews
Involvement	use of the explicit word “involvement” or “willingness to engage with target publics in a...”
Dialogic Loop	the opportunity for publics to query organizations or the opportunity to respond to questions, concerns or problems

Usefulness of Information	“efforts to provide publics with information regarding the organization (contact information for example), or expert advice, tips, etc.”
Conservation of Return Visits	any communications intended to get the user to come back, such as referral services, links to information, forums, question-and-answer formats, experts, FAQs, downloadable information
Intuitiveness / Ease of Interface	well formatted text that provides information in an easy to navigate manner; utilizing aesthetic considerations in communication
Humor / Entertainment	“use of humor to engage target publics” or communications intended to increase the entertainment or happiness of target publics
Positiveness	communications of a positive tone or nature Does not contain damaging, upsetting, or negative tone or outlook
Control Mutuality	any communication intended to convey a balance of control or power in the communications relationship; balance
Satisfaction	communication intended to keep target publics satisfied or loyal to the cause; willingness to address or improve target publics’ satisfaction
Networking	willingness to further connections among the teams and target publics and other organizations

Hashtag	Does the tweet include a hashtag? (1) no (2) yes If yes, record the hashtag(s)
Image / GIF	Does the tweet include an image/gif? (1) no (2) yes
Video	Does the tweet include a video? (1) no (2) yes
Link	Does the tweet include a link? (1) no (2) yes
Likes	Number of likes this tweet has received
Retweets	Number of retweets this tweet has received

**Green Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Communication and Culture:
A comparison between the U.S. and India**

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Abstract

Multinational corporations are increasingly implementing green CSR locally and globally to gain public confidence and enhance their public image. This study uses a 2x2 experimental design to examine the impact of company location, issue proximity, culture, and environmental concern on public perceptions about the company and on purchasing intent.

Companies and organizations across the globe have paid a lot of attention to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), especially in the last decade. Literature has emphasized the importance of effective communication of CSR activities by companies and organizations to the local and global audience (Bortree, 2014). Companies in developing countries have increasingly adopted CSR activities, largely due to the growth of western multinational companies (MNC) in last two decades. Implementation of green corporate social responsibility activities has a positive impact on the environment, communities, but how individuals evaluate green CSR activities of local and global companies are largely unknown. Thus, there is a need to investigate how citizens perceive local and global companies based on their environmentally friendly efforts.

India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world (Mourdukoutas, 2017) and has become a favored investment destination for foreign investors (1BEF, 2016). The purpose of this study is to examine how citizens of developed countries (in this case, the U.S.) evaluate local and MNCs based on their environment-friendly CSR initiatives in their country, and whether this evaluation differs from residents of developing countries (in this case, India). This study will investigate citizen's attitude towards a company based on the nationality of the company, and proximity of the green CSR initiatives. This study argues that 1) the type of company sponsoring green initiatives (national versus multinational), and 2) proximity of environmental cause (national versus international) impacts the public's perception towards the company and purchasing intent, and that culture and individuals' environmental consciousness play a key role in the evaluation of MNCs.

Literature Review

Green Corporate Social Responsibility

Public relations scholars have defined Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in multiple ways (Bowen 1953; Carroll, 1991; Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Literature suggests that Fortune Global 500 companies in the USA and UK invest \$15.2 billion a year on CSR activities (Smith, 2014). CSR plays a vital role in influencing the public's attitude towards an organization or its brands (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Some CSR initiatives that reflect ethical concerns toward the environment can develop a more positive brand image and thus, a higher purchasing intent (Planken, Nickerson, & Sahu, 2013; Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006). Sustainable development is related to initiatives taken by companies to conserve the environment and natural resources for coming generations (Kuhn & Deetz, 2008). Organizations are increasingly adopting sustainable development practices to ameliorate or reduce the negative impact of their operations on the environment (Williamson, Lynch-Wood, & Ramsay, 2006; Wahba, 2008). Environmental CSR has environmental, economic, and social implications (Bowen 2010; Shrivastava, 1995). It also helps in bringing a positive market attitude towards CSR (Bird et al., 2007; Wahba, 2008) through effective CSR communication, thereby improving the monetary performance of an organization (Klassen and McLaughlin, 1996).

Carroll (2016) argued that the pyramidal depiction of CSR is largely suitable for "American-type capitalistic societies" (p. 7). Visser (2011) suggested a new pyramid for developing countries and economic responsibility was the foundation of the pyramid, followed by philanthropy, legal and then ethical responsibilities; the conceptualization of CSR is not same in different organizations across the world, as every country, region, or community has the different sets of drivers for CSR. Crane, Matten, and Spence (2008) said that the growth of

western MNCs in developing countries is one of the reasons behind increasing CSR activities over the last two decades.

CSR Proximity

Literature has examined the cause proximity as a factor that can influence consumers' attitudes toward social engagement (Grau and Folse, 2007; Ross et al., 1992). Grau and Folse (2007) found that consumers evaluated local campaigns more favorably as it was more relevant to them and hence, elicit more attention. Thus, this study hypothesizes that proximity of CSR can impact consumers' evaluation of the company and purchase intent.

H1: The India based company (vs. the U.S. based company) practicing green CSR in India (vs. U.S.) will be evaluated more positively (H1a) and lead to higher purchase intention (H1b) by residents of India.

H2: The U.S. based company (vs. India based company) practicing green CSR in the U.S. (vs. India) will be evaluated more positively (H2a) and lead to higher purchase intention (H2b) by the U.S. residents.

CSR in Multinational Corporations

Multinational corporations are more likely to adopt CSR practices as compared to national companies, and their CSR profile is more likely to reflect the local culture (Chappel and Moon, 2005; Stohl, 2001). Data suggest the upward trajectory of the investment by developing Asian countries on the American soil. There has been a rising interest in India due to its sizeable skilled labor force, (Chambers et al., 2003) new tax systems (Shah, 2017), so Indian corporations are growing phenomenally around the globe (Arora and Puranik, 2004). Notably, India became the first country in the world to mandate CSR, in 2014, with legislation that requires companies to spend 2% of their net profit on social development (Prasad, 2014). For Indians, social responsibilities are an integral part of their religious duties and are considered as mandatory rather than optional (Mascolo, Misra, & Rapisardi, 2004), whereas, for Americans, social obligations may be a more personal choice (Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990).

Hofstede's Culture

Studies suggested that some Asian companies have successfully assimilated themselves into the host countries, while others did not (Cho and Kim, 2012). This can be explained by Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Hofstede (1984, 1998) laid out the five dimensions of culture: 1) power distance; 2) collectivism/ individualism; 3) masculinity/ femininity; 4) uncertainty avoidance; 5) long-term/short-term orientation (Confucian Dynamism).

Power Distance defines the extent to which an individual can accept and appreciate that the unequal distribution of the power within the organization and institution. Uncertainty avoidance defines the extent to which individuals feel threatened by an uncertain situation and act to remove uncertainty by creating beliefs and institutions. Individualism vs. collectivism defines the degree to which a culture values concern for self-versus peers in a group to which one belongs. Masculinity vs. femininity explains the extent to which a societal culture values work goals and assertiveness versus personal goals and nurturance. Long-term/short-term orientation (Confucian Dynamism) is related to the Confucian values. It explains the degree to which society values past traditions while dealing with future problems and challenges (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 1993).

Hofstede (1984) argued that cultural differences among different countries result in differences in the organizational environment. Many scholars have incorporated culture in their study related to business ethics and CSR (e.g., Christie et al. 2003; Jamali and Neville 2011; Sagar and Singla 2000). Christie et al. (2003) found that American scored higher on

individualism and Indians scored higher on power distance, and it plays a huge role in deciding respondents' ethical attitudes toward certain unethical practices. Maignan (2001) indicated that consumers in France and Germany more actively support socially responsible businesses than do US consumers. Based on these studies, this study hypothesizes:

H3: Culture will mediate the impact of company location and issue proximity on individual's evaluation about the company doing green CSR and the purchasing intent.

Environmental Consciousness

Individuals can be categorized based on their level of environmental consciousness, which is shown to be related to their purchasing behaviors (Roberts, 1996) and consumer behavior (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996). Dutta et al. (2008) revealed that American consumers' willingness to pay 10% or higher on menu prices for GP is associated with environmentally and socially responsible practices in the restaurants. In contrast, for Indians consumers, health and visibility were major drivers to pay 10% or higher on menu prices for GP. This study hypothesizes:

H4: Environmental concern will mediate the impact of company location and issue proximity on individual's perception about the company and the purchasing intent.

Method

Participants

An online experiment was conducted with 109 participants in India and 111 in the United States. The data for this study was collected in November 2017 using Amazon Mechanical Turk with an incentive of 50 cents, with a consent form as approved by the university IRB. The mode of the language of the questionnaire was English and two different Qualtrics' links were used to collect data separately from Indians and Americans.

Indian respondents: A total of 109 respondents from India participated in this experiment with 79 men (72.5%) and 30 women (27.5%). and a median age of 29 years was reported ($M = 31.05$, $SD = 7.63$). As India is a Hindu country, 91 respondents (83.5%) selected Hinduism as their religion, 10 were Christians (9.2%), 6 respondents (5.5%) were Muslim and 2 respondents chose "other" as their religion.

American respondents: A total of 111 participants from America were recruited, 47 males (42.3%) and 63 females (56.8%), with a median age of 36 years ($M = 38.43$, $SD = 10.36$). Among 111 participants, 83 (74.8%) were White, 11 (9.9%) were Asian, nine (8.1%) were Black, three were American Indian, two were Pacific Islander and three chose 'others' as their ethnicity.

Design

A 2 (Indian vs. U.S. company) X 2 (India vs. U.S.-based green CSR) between-subjects experimental design was used. Four randomly assigned groups were asked to read one of the following four companies' blog posts related to their green CSR: 1) Indian automobile company practicing green CSR in India 2) American automobile company practicing green CSR in India 3) Indian automobile company practicing green CSR in U.S. 4) American automobile company practicing green CSR in the U.S. An Indian and American MTurk sample is used for this study. Various green CSR initiatives for controlling air pollution were mentioned in blog posts.

Materials

The blog posts of fictitious American and Indian companies were created and message on the blog posts address companies' commitment to environmental efforts, especially in the area of controlling Co2 emissions at national and international level. This message was presented to respondents in four different formats.

Measures

A self-administered online questionnaire included eight measures and a total of 53 items. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale, 1 being strongly disagree to 7 being strongly agree unless specifically stated otherwise. In the hypothesized model, there are eight latent variables: a) environmental consciousness, b) collectivism, c) uncertainty avoidance, d) masculinity, e) power distance, f) Confucian, g) company evaluation, and h) purchasing intent. The environmental consciousness and five culture variables were considered as mediating variables. The dependent variables were the Indians' and Americans' attitudes towards the company and intention to purchase. The location of the company and its cause (CSR) were considered as independent variables. CFA for an exogenous and an endogenous model for both American and Indian data was conducted separately (see table 1 for fit indices).

Model evaluation criteria: To evaluate the CFA and SEM models, model-data fit indices, i.e., CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR were considered. Also, variation explained by the model in the dependent variable indicated by R^2 and parameters estimates in the model were observed. Local or modification indices were also examined. We only looked at modification index value that is big enough to cause a significant change in a model's chi-square (χ^2) fit index.

Culture

Culture was measured by using Hofstede's (1984) five dimensions. Collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and power distance scales were developed by Dorfman and Howell (1988); the Confucian Dynamism scale was developed by Robertson and Hoffman (1999). After conducting Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), some of the items with a low parameter value and a low percentage of variance accounted for (R^2) were deleted.

Collectivism: After CFA, the remaining three items had Cronbach's alpha score .80 for American sample and .703 (Hair et al., 2010) for Indian sample, the items were averaged to make a scale score. **Uncertainty avoidance:** After conducting Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the structure, the remaining four items had Cronbach's alpha score .838 for Americans and .783 for Indians. These items were averaged to make a scale. **Masculinity:** The original scale has five items but after conducting CFA, the remaining four items had Cronbach's alpha score .917 for Americans and .806 for Indians. These items were averaged to make a scale. **Power distance:** The original scale has six items but after conducting CFA, the remaining four items had high Cronbach's alpha scores for Americans (.798) and Indians (.895). These items were averaged to make a scale. **Confucian dynamism:** The original scale has eight items, but after conducting CFA, the remaining three items had low Cronbach's alpha scores .697 for Americans and .591 for Indians. These items were averaged to make two separate scales. Despite low reliability score, these items were included in final analysis.

Environmental Consciousness: The new environmental paradigm (NEP) scale (Dunlap et al., 2000) is used to measure respondents' environmental consciousness. To examine the reliability test of the scale, seven items were reversed. This scale included questions like "We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support." After conducting CFA, the remaining seven items had Cronbach's alpha scores 0.78 for Indians and 0.84 for Americans.

Attitude towards Company: Respondents' attitudes towards company was measured using three items, which were adapted from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989). Respondents were asked to indicate their overall impressions of the company based on what you read on its blogpost today using the 7-point semantic differential scale on three indicators: Bad/Good, Unpleasant/ Pleasant, and Unfavorable/ Favorable. CFA was conducted, Cronbach's alpha score

for the scale was high (0.887) for Indians and Americans (.935). These items were averaged to make a scale separately for Indians and Americans.

Purchasing Intention: Respondents' intention to purchase company's products were measured using five items on the 7-point semantic differential scale, which was adapted from Sen and Bhattacharya, (2001). Respondents were asked to indicate their overall intention to purchase company's products based on what you read on their blogpost today on five indicators: unlikely/likely, nonexistent/existent, improbable/probable, uncertain/certain, definitely would not/definitely would. After CFA was conducted, Cronbach's alpha score for the scale was high, 0.851 for Indians and .947 for Americans.

Manipulation Check Items: In order to check if the manipulation of nationality worked as intended, a single-item measure was used after the participants read the blog post in any of the four conditions: 'I just read a blog post about a company located in which country?' The question had three options: India, America and None of the Above. Similarly, to check the manipulation of the location of CSR activities, another single-item measure was used after the participants read the blog post in any of the four conditions: 'The company that I read about in the blog post discussed its commitment to decrease air pollution by installing windmill power plants in which country?' The question had three options: India, US and None of the Above.

Procedure

Each participant was randomly assigned to read one blogpost out of the four different versions. Culture variables and environmental concerns questions were asked pre-stimulus, demographics, and attitude towards the company, and purchasing intentions questions were asked post-stimulus; two manipulation check questions were asked to respondents just after they read the blog post. Pre-tests were conducted with 20 respondents each from the U.S. and India, as were manipulation checks about the perceptions of corporate locations and cause locations.

Data Analysis

Data was collected through Qualtrics and was transferred to SPSS (version 25) for analysis. Data cleaning and preliminary analyses, pre-test analysis, including the removal of ineligible study participants was conducted. For analyses, the location of the company and the green cause variables were converted; the U.S. was dummy coded as 0 and India as 1.

Results

To test the proposed hypotheses and model, data was transferred into R with the lavaan package used to execute the SEM. The proposed model for both the American and Indian data did not produce relatively satisfying global fit indices at the early stage of analysis. Therefore, modification process was performed by examining the local fit. As suggested by modification indices (MI), additional paths were included, and insignificant paths were removed. Since the Confucian dimension of culture variable showed no relationship with other latent variables and had comparatively higher MI value and lower r^2 values; it was dropped from both models, which significantly increased GFI and TLI values and helped in obtaining the fit models.

American model: The model displayed good global model-data fit ($\chi^2(314) = 430.27$, $p = 0.00$; CFI = 0.94; TLI = .93, RMSEA = 0.058 (90% CI: 0.044, 0.071); SRMR = 0.094).

Moreover, localized misfit was minimal (all correlation residuals were less than |8.0| with the majority at or less than |3.0|), indicating relationships between variables were adequately reproduced by the model. However, based on correlation residual and R^2 values, reverse coded R_E2, R_E4, R_E6, and R_E10 items were dropped. The adequate model-data fit of the fully-mediated model reflects that the model can reproduce observed relationships well (see Figure1).

H2 proposed that Americans will evaluate an American company doing green CSR in America more positively and will have a higher purchasing intent. H2 was supported as the results show that there was a direct positive relationship between an American company doing green CSR and purchasing intent ($b = 0.187$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = 0.040$) but cause proximity or location of the CSR has no relationship with purchasing intent. That is, Americans have higher purchasing intent for American companies doing green CSR irrespective of whether the company was doing green CSR in America or India. Also, the relationship between an American company doing green CSR is indirectly related to individuals' evaluation of that company. The relationship between American company doing green CSR and individuals' evaluation of that company is mediated by individuals' environmental consciousness. This also supports H4. There is a positive relationship between American company doing green CSR and individuals' environmental consciousness with a borderline significance ($b = 0.179$, $SE = 0.221$, $p = 0.082$). Literature has considered a relationship with p values ranging between 0.05 and 0.10 as borderline significant relationships (for example, Lee, & Tamborini, 2005; Kim, 2013). Also, there is a positive relationship between individuals' environmental consciousness and company's evaluation ($b = 0.296$, $SE = 0.111$, $p = 0.007$). This suggests that Americans with higher environmental consciousness will evaluate the American company doing green CSR more positively irrespective of the location of the CSR efforts as the location of CSR had no relationship with company's evaluation.

Indian model: The model displayed good global model-data fit ($\chi^2(240) = 355.39$, $p = 0.00$; CFI = 0.91; TLI = .90, RMSEA = 0.066 (90% CI: 0.051, 0.081); SRMR = 0.130). Moreover, localized misfit was minimal (all correlation residuals were less than $|9.0|$ with the majority at or less than $|3.0|$), indicating relationships between variables were adequately reproduced by the model. However, based on correlation residual and r^2 values, E11, and E15, items were dropped. The adequate model-data fit of the fully-mediated model reflects that the model can reproduce observed relationships well (see Figure2).

H1 proposed that Indians will evaluate an Indian company doing green CSR in India more positively and will have a higher purchasing intent. H1 was not supported as the results show that there was an indirect positive relationship between an American company doing green CSR and individuals' purchasing intent and evaluation of that company. The relationship between American company doing green CSR and individuals' evaluation of that company and purchasing intent is mediated by individuals' environmental consciousness. However, this supports H4. There is a positive relationship between American company doing green CSR and individuals' environmental consciousness ($b = 0.217$, $SE = 0.217$, $p = 0.041$). There is a positive relationship between individuals' environmental consciousness and purchasing intent ($b = 0.262$, $SE = 0.127$, $p = 0.019$) and individuals' environmental consciousness and company evaluation ($b = 0.307$, $SE = 0.128$, $p = 0.004$). This suggests that Indians with higher environmental consciousness will evaluate the American company doing green CSR more positively and will have higher purchasing intent for that company. Thus, the location of the company holds importance for Indians for evaluating and purchasing products of that company.

Also, the relationship between location (country) of green CSR of a company is indirectly related to individuals' purchasing intent. The relationship between a company doing green CSR in India and individuals' intention to purchase its products is mediated by cultural dimension, power distance. This also supports H3. There is a negative relationship between a company doing green CSR in America and power distance ($b = -0.191$, $SE = 0.140$, $p = 0.005$). There is a positive relationship between individuals' power distance and purchasing intent ($b =$

0.439, SE = 0.217, $p = 0.020$). This suggests that Indians with a higher appreciation for hierarchy and a top-down structure in society and organizations will have lower purchasing intent for companies doing green CSR in America and in other words, higher intention to purchase products or services from companies doing green CSR in India irrespective of the nationality of the company. Overall, the location of the company and green cause proximity hold importance for Indians.

Moreover, there is a positive relationship between collectivism and purchasing intent ($b = 0.472$, SE = 0.158, $p = 0.00$), suggesting that collectivist Indians, are more likely to purchase products/services of a company doing green CSR. Also, uncertainty avoidance has a positive relationship with company evaluation ($b = 0.511$, SE = 0.136, $p = 0.00$), indicating that Indians with higher a appreciation for rules and protocols to avoid future uncertainty have a positive evaluation for a company doing green CSR.

Discussion

This study is designed to test the effects of change in location of company and CSR in the public's evaluation of the company and purchasing intent. This study is novel in its approach to measuring the impact of cultural dimensions and environmental consciousness among residents of two countries, i.e., Indians and Americans.

Results indicated that the location of the company is important for both Americans and Indians, but the location of the CSR is vital only for Indians in the evaluation of the company and intention to purchase its products/service. Comparing American and Indian residents separately, American residents, in general, are more likely to buy the product from an American company doing green CSR irrespective of the location. Moreover, American society is comparatively higher on uncertainty avoidance, and would have higher purchasing intent for company doing green CSR, confirming previous studies that uncertainty avoidance individuals value responsiveness and reliability (Donthu and Yoo, 1998; Furrer et al., 2000), and a willingness to try something new or different (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Thus, Americans may feel that the company is more responsible and responsive towards a global environmental crisis as the company is engaged in various green CSR initiatives.

According to Hofstede measures, Indians score (77) much higher on power distance than Americans (40) (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 1993); they have higher purchasing intent for companies doing green CSR in India than in America. Consumers consider the impact of the green cause within a social space, and those located in the same social space, i.e., in India are perceived as more immediate and salient, and are thus more influential (Latané & Bourgeois 2001). For instance, issues such as air pollution occurring somewhere far away and any efforts to curb that issue appear rather abstract or unobservable to consumers, but any efforts to curb the same issue in local communities signals a greater or more tangible offer to consumers and hence, gain more support from consumers (Chang, 2012).

Results emphasized the role of culture in the difference of evaluation of the company doing green CSR and purchasing intent. Literature emphasized that culture guides and influences human behavior in particular situations (Feather, 1995; Rokeach, 1973). Also, culture is a strong determining force of our motivations, and product choices (Tse et al., 1989). As there is a significant difference in culture between India and the U.S., it may lead to a difference in evaluation of a company. Indian society is comparatively higher in collectivism, who believe in "we" and value group norms; have higher purchasing intent for companies doing green CSR. This could be explained that as collectivists care for their social group, they want a

clean and healthy environment for their loved ones, and thus, value any efforts by any company towards a clean environment.

Theoretical Implications

This study has multiple implications in the areas of corporate communication, CSR, and strategic communication research. By providing evidence of cultural difference on the evaluation of the company doing green CSR in two different countries, the study enhances the validity of the previous studies that have confirmed the impact of culture on CSR perceptions (Ott & Xiao, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2010). Moreover, this study also validates that the green CSR can positively impact the evaluation of the company and higher purchasing intent among consumers (Planken, Nickerson, & Sahu, 2013; Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006).

Practical Implications

This research advocates that multinational company, irrespective of its location, should often engage in environmentally friendly CSR to develop a more positive relationship with their global stakeholders. As uncertainty avoidance and environmentally conscious people residing in both countries have high purchasing intent for an American company doing green CSR, American companies should have a clear, direct and pragmatic approach to CSR communication. They should emphasize on the future benefits of the green CSR in their corporate communication (CC) plan. They should address their key glocal (global + local) partners and stakeholders in their CC plan and stress not only on the larger environmental welfare but also personal benefits.

Findings suggest that Indian residents, who appreciate hierarchy have higher purchasing intent for companies doing green CSR in India; American companies should convey green CSR purchase as classy than noble in their CC plan for the Indian audience. Their message can be interlaced with a subtle hint of societal class in an attempt to convey that caring for the environment and future generations are classy and set them apart. Also, MNCs, who are planning to establish themselves in India, their CC plan should emphasize on welfare to the Indian community, in general, and future generations through their green CSR.

This study is timely in view of increased global warming, and loss of lives due to its consequences in the form of hurricanes, drought, floods, and other natural disasters. It has become imperative for companies to develop new strategies and policies to implement and communicate green CSR initiatives for better global impact. This study has implications for multinational organizations operating in both countries to apply such knowledge to develop green programs and policies in a more strategic way, which will not only reflect societal benefits but also individuals' benefits for better receptivity and attitudinal change.

Conclusion

In sum, this study provides a novel examination of understanding the impact of the location of company and its CSR on corporate communication in a global context, as well as the factors that shape these evaluations. This study provides new understanding in terms of which cultural dimension(s) impact the green CSR communication in India and America. Glocal (global +local) Companies can utilize this information for careful planning the location of the green CSR and also strategize its communication to the target audiences.

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Figure2: Indian model. Ccomp= location of company, Ccsr = location of CSR, ENV = Environment consciousness, POW= Power distance, COL= Collectivism, UNC= Uncertainty avoidance, PI= Purchasing Intent, COEVAL = Evaluation of the company
#p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

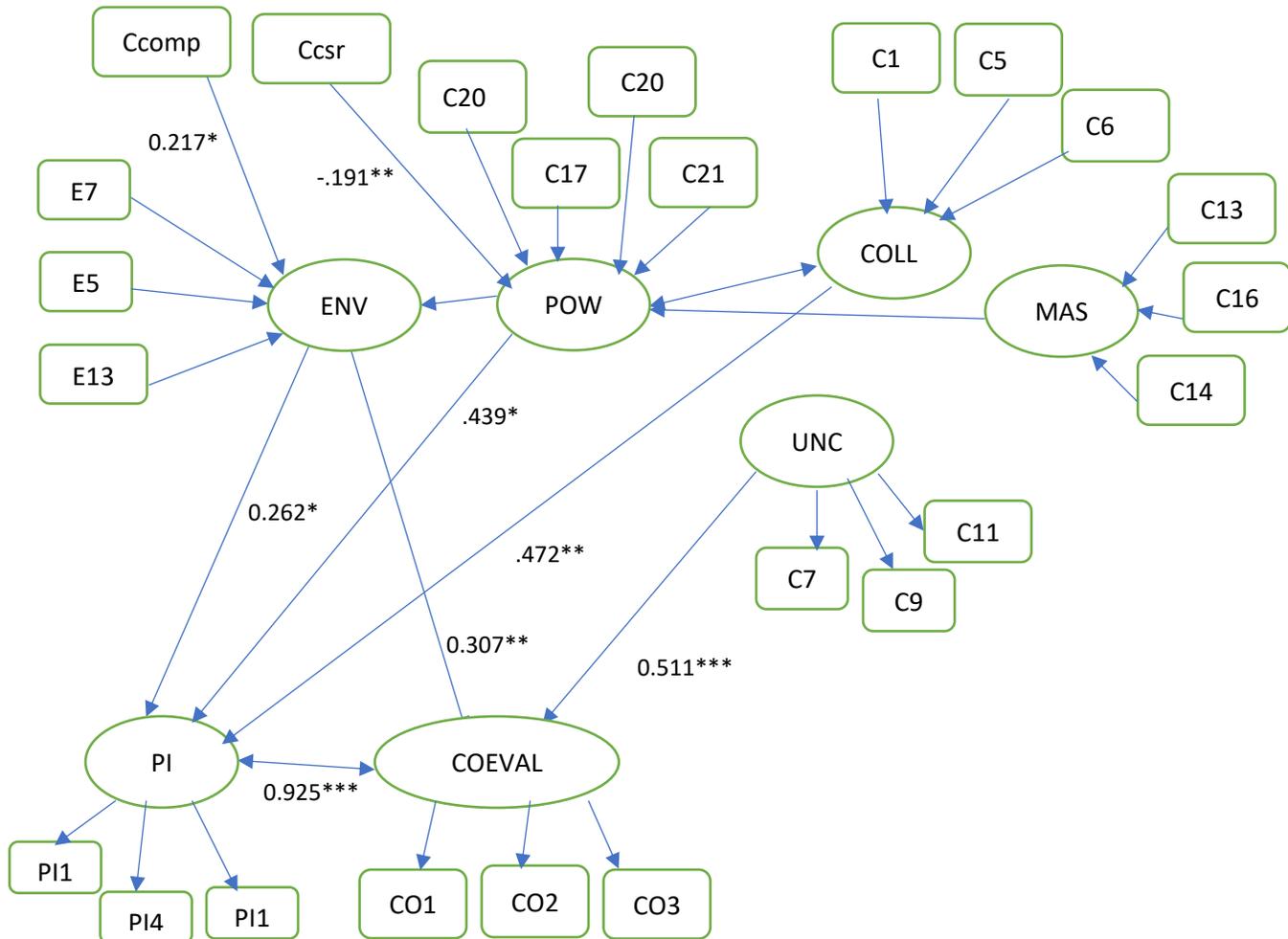


Table1: Goodness –of –Fit Indexes for the CFA for American and Indian model

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Preferred cut-off value	p>.05	>0.95	>0.95	0.05-0.08	<.09
Exo (Indian model)	1192.36 (210)***	.991	.905	0.064	.091
Exo (US model)	377.74 (267)***	.916	.906	.061	.088
Endo (Indian model)	18.79 (8)***	.975	.953	.11	.040
Endo (US model)	38.61 (19)***	.976	.965	.097	.045

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Do Message Characteristics of Social Media Hamper the Efficacy of Traditional Crisis Strategies? A First Test of Twitter-Based Message Effects on Reputation

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Abstract

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) has generated thousands of publication citations based on its ability to predict how crisis communication strategies used via traditional media effect brand reputation. However, a theoretical gap exists in how the strategy can be used in a limited character space on social media. Specifically, little empirical evidence exists about the most effective SCCT strategies for communicating via Twitter to moderate the damage a crisis can inflict on an organization. Controlled tests of message content via Twitter can provide communication professionals with insights about short messaging as a function of crisis type and response strategy. To that end, this experiment used a 2x2 design with two research conditions serving as independent variables: type of crisis: (1) preventable and (2) accidental; and response type: (1) rebuild and (2) diminish. The dependent variable was organizational brand reputation. The study focused on the university healthcare setting to get a very specific situation highly relevant to the 296 survey participants, who were millennials living in a Midwestern state recruited through a paid Qualtrics panel.

Results highlight the importance of how messages are curated on social media to respond to a crisis and serves as a reference point for future studies looking to empirically test the effects of SCCT via social media. Findings from this initial study show that SCCT does not predict post-brand reputation outcomes as it does when used with traditional media. Due to this theoretical gap, practitioners who are responsible for protecting an organization's reputation do not have a theory to predict and prepare social media responses. If insignificant or inconclusive findings continue to occur in replicated studies, then SCCT as it currently stands does not translate to social-media outlets with limited character space and an extended theory is needed for the industry to use in formulating social-media responses.

Introduction

The sustainability and success of a company over a period of time is built by brand reputation. Reputation is produced from how employees, customers, investors, competitors, and the public view what a company does and what it stands for (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997). Having a positive reputation can reduce uncertainty about the organization's performance, motivate consumers to buy products, attract high-quality employees, encourage outside investors, and retain essential transaction partners such as suppliers and distributors (Fombrun, 2006). A threat to an organization's brand reputation can be considered a crisis. Crises can cause great harm to an organization's reputation by creating widespread, and often, disruption to a company's normal operations (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Crises are moments of moral imperative and the judgments, and evaluations made about crises often are grounded in larger ethical and value positions (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013).

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) views crisis communication as a way for organizations to maintain or re-establish a favorable reputation during and after a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). According to SCCT, there are four different responses, or what Coombs defines as postures, that can be used during a crisis situation to help control brand reputation loss. These postures include denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering (W. T. Coombs, 2015). The denial posture includes attacking the accuser, denial, and scapegoating as its strategies (W. T. Coombs, 2015). By using the denial strategy, the organization is claiming there was no crisis or it is blaming the crisis on a third party (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). The diminishment strategy attempts to reduce attributions of organizational control or the negative effects of the crisis. The diminishment posture contains two strategies, including excusing, which reinforces minimal responsibility for the crisis, and justification, which reinforces minimal damage from the crisis. Both strategies are recommended to be used with crises having a low level of crisis responsibility, such as accidents. The rebuilding posture is composed of two strategies that try to improve an organization's reputation and are used when the organization is taking responsibility or accepts the crisis. Compensation indicates that the organization is taking responsibility for the crisis and is suggested to be used when there are visible victims. The apology strategy, while valued, is considered the most complex to execute due to the difference in a full and partial apology (W. T. Coombs, 2015). The last posture is bolstering, which strives to build a positive connection between the organization and stakeholders with three strategies. The strategies include reminding, ingratiation, and victimage. Coombs (2015) suggests using bolstering strategies supplemental to other postures because they focus on the organization. The reminding and ingratiation strategies as positive information about the organization, while victimage builds sympathy for the organization.

Each posture aligns with a crisis type that includes victim cluster, accidental cluster, and preventable cluster. A victim cluster is defined as an event with very little attribution of responsibility to the organization, such as natural disasters, rumors, workplace violence, and malevolence (T. Coombs, 2015). The accidental cluster is comprised of technical-error accidents, technical-error product harm, and challenges. Crisis events that fall under accidental are considered by Coombs (1996) to be of low attribution of crisis responsibility and should use the diminishment posture if an organization has no crisis history. The preventable cluster is considered to have strong attributions of crisis responsibility for the organization. Preventable crises include human-error accidents, human-error product harm, and organizational misdeeds and should be responded to using the rebuild posture (T. Coombs, 2015).

The key to retaining a positive brand reputation is knowing which particular response

strategy to use for a specific crisis situation (T. Coombs, 2015). According to SCCT, matched and unmatched responses have differentiating effects on an organization's brand reputation. A matched response is preferred because it will ideally meet stakeholders' expectations of a response for the particular crisis situation. An unmatched response, depending on the situation, could cause stakeholders to see the organization as going above and beyond, or not doing enough.

With publics increasingly using social media during crises, crisis communication professionals need to understand how to not only match crisis types and responses, but also strategically optimize social-network tools (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2014). People are no longer seeking crisis-related information solely from official sources within traditional media, but are actively getting it publicly via information and communication technology (Heverin & Zach, 2010). With this shift to online and social-media channels by information consumers, organizations also must respond and engage with audiences through these channels during a crisis to correct inaccuracies and address concerns (Wollan, Smith, & Zhou, 2010). As a user-generated medium, social media gives organizations the ability to inform and to seek input from relevant publics (Hand & Ching, 2011) in real-time with their own words, which can be especially important during a crisis.

With more than 500 million tweets sent daily around the world, social media is an important tool for organizations to use in communication strategies to reach stakeholders (Salmon, 2017). Research suggests that social-media networks can be useful in times of crisis by quickly and effectively distributing information (Hand & Ching, 2011); (Harman, 2011); (Heverin & Zach, 2010); (Jin et al., 2014); (Procopio & Procopio, 2007); (Wollan et al., 2010). Educating the public regarding risks, encouraging visible support of an organization or cause, and establishing a venue for open dialogue online are all strategies for using social media during a crisis (Chan, 2014).

Crisis management is a well-established practice used in a wide variety of industries including healthcare, government, medicine, food, health, and non-profits to protect an organization and/or stakeholder during a threat (Chan, 2014). In this study, crisis management referred to the practice of protecting an organization and its stakeholders from threats and/or reduce the impact felt by threats (T. Coombs, 2015). Crises have the ability to do great harm, but an organization can create an opportunity for conversation and education with its publics when crises are managed effectively (Chan, 2014). However, once a crisis event occurs, socially mediated messages have the potential to add confusion, create anger, and hurt an organization's reputation (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Therefore, crisis managers should have a guideline of what communication strategies, based on theory, are best to use when designing a social-media crisis response strategy.

Past research focuses on distinguishing types of crises and what crisis communication strategies should be used within traditional media, yet failed to provide similar research for social-media outlets (N. A. Brown, 2014); (K. A. Brown, Dickhaus, & Long, 2012); (Freberg, Saling, Vidoloff, & Eosco, 2013); (Jin et al., 2014). Research on crisis communication via social media exists, but focuses on the information source rather than organization messaging or uses a case study approach (N. A. Brown, 2014); (Cooley & Cooley, 2011); (Franklin, 2014); (Ma & Zhan, 2016); (Porter, 2016); (Sisco, Collins, & Zoch, 2010); (Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013). These studies have indicated the importance of strategically matching crisis information form and source when organizations respond to crises, but do not focus on content of the message or are not experimental in nature (Jin et al., 2014). Experimental design is desirable due to its

ability to help researchers plan a study to meet specified objectives. This ensures that the right data, sufficient sample size, and power are available to answer the research questions of interest as clearly as possible. In addition, what has been developed in crisis communication has not been controllably tested in new media. Crisis communication is increasing in necessity as new media and the communication environment evolves. Focusing on the content of messages via Twitter provides communication professionals a better understanding of what should be said depending on different crisis levels.

Using Coombs' (1995) Situational Crisis Communication Theory, this research investigated how crisis communication strategies affect brand reputation, specifically when used on Twitter. The research objectives were:

- (1) To determine if matched response strategies used via Twitter will maintain pre-to post crisis reputation.
- (2) To understand the effects of an overcompensating (unmatched) accidental crisis response via Twitter on brand reputation.
- (3) To understand the effects of an undercompensating (unmatched) preventable crisis response via Twitter on brand reputation.

Methods

The experiment used a 2x2 design with two research conditions: type of crisis: (1) preventable and (2) accidental; and response type: (1) rebuild and (2) diminish. The two crises mirrored one another except for what caused the crisis. The crises involved a student data leak at a university health center. The accidental crisis was due to a healthcare computer database used to store students' personal information having glitches and redirecting all entries to an unsecured network location. Due to information being unsecured, third parties could access information such as student addresses, insurance information, and medical history. The preventable crisis occurred due to a doctor repeatedly accessing patient records and sending information such as medical records, prescription needs, and student addresses to a pharmaceutical company in exchange for money. This is known as a violation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 and against the health center's policies as stated in the background materials provided to participants.

The situation of a data breach and location of the healthcare center were chosen purposefully as something relatable to millennials. Even if the participants did not have a university background or familiarity, the healthcare center or data breach situation could be relatable. The crises were centered on a fictional university health center, Piedmont Health Center, located in Delaware. The health center was located in Delaware, so it was outside the geographic range of the sampling states, increasing the reality of the situation for the participants as they may be familiar with schools in their state and/or region.

Independent Variables

The independent variables in this crisis study were crisis type (accidental and preventable) and crisis response type (rebuild and diminish). The two crisis types provided dichotomized situations. The crisis scenario of the doctor accessing patient records and selling information to a third party violates HIPAA policies and makes it a preventable crisis. The accidental crisis was represented by a computer data breach (Coombs, 1996).

The second independent variable was the crisis response type released by the health center (Figure 1). Coombs (1996) states what organizations say to their various publics during a crisis should influence the extent of the reputational and financial damage a crisis can inflict on the organization. The crisis responses given by the health center included one matched response and

one unmatched response and were intended to influence perceptions of the organization, measured by brand reputation. The first matched response for the preventable crisis was a rebuild response. The unmatched response for the preventable crisis was a diminishing (underachieving) response. For the accidental crisis, the matched response was diminishing and the unmatched (overachieving) response was rebuilding. In addition, a true control was used to examine if participant's answers stayed consistent between the pre-brand and post-brand reputation test. If participants were part of the true control, then they received the pre-brand reputation survey, a video distractor, and the post-brand-reputation survey. A controlled response variable also was used to test the effect of crisis type on post-brand reputation.

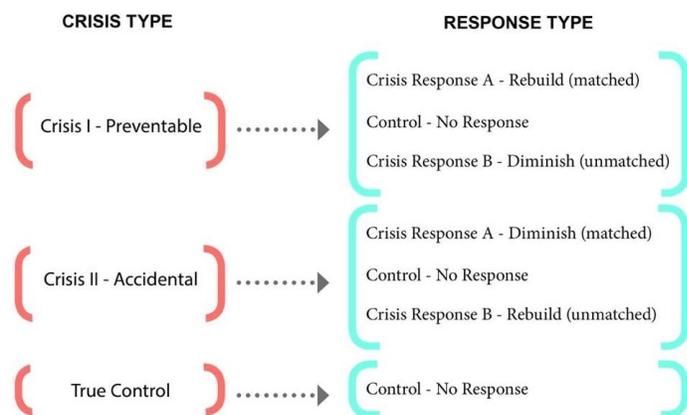


Figure 1. Independent variables

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study was the organizational reputation. The definition of corporate reputation from Fombrun and van Riel (1997) is “a collective representation of a firm’s past actions and results that describes the firm’s ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders” (p. 10). Having a positive reputation can reduce stakeholder uncertainty about organizational performance, motivate consumers to buy products, attract high-quality employees, encourage outside investors, and retain essential transaction partners such as suppliers and distributors (Fombrun, 2006). This study used the Consumer Reputation Index (CRI) to measure reputation with one main question regarding the respondent’s overall perception of the organization and seven questions that characterized the organization’s reputation issues such as: having good products and services; relationship with consumers; generates positive feelings; leadership and innovation; internal environment; ethical enterprise; and discretionary social responsibility practices (Feldman, Bahamonde, & Velasquez Bellido, 2014). Participants indicated their agreement with the statements using numeric values on a “1” to “6” scale anchored by bipolar statements. Ordinal scales measuring level of agreement with values “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” also were used.

Therefore, organizational reputation was analyzed using a t-test between the independent variables of preventable and accidental crisis. A series of t-tests were used to determine if there were any effects on the dependent measure (reputation). Descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable and Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = .84$) was used to assess the internal reliability for the brand reputation scale. This falls above the recommended .70 level of reliability requirement (Peterson, 1994). The Cronbach’s alpha in the original study conducted by Feldman, Bahamonde, and Bellido in 2014 was ($\alpha = .97$). Manipulations used within the study were

examined with a series of ANOVAs to test if there were significant differences between the means. To supplement the omnibus F-test for main effects used by ANOVA, Tukey's post hoc test was used to reveal differences between manipulations and to examine interaction effects.

Manipulation Checks

To test the validity of manipulating the two primary independent variables, checks were used to ensure the participants recalled the organization. Questions within the survey also were reverse coded to ensure participants were giving consistent answers. Another manipulation during the survey was the randomization that took place with each condition assignment. Random assignment occurred until an equal number of participants were in each treatment.

Procedure

The controlled experiment (Figure 2) collected data from a paid Qualtrics panel. The survey remained open until each condition had at least 40 participants. Nonresponses and incomplete surveys did not go towards the total amount collected and were not reflected in the data analysis. Data collection took three days to meet the conditions needed. Participants received a request for the online simulation and questionnaire that took less than 15 minutes to complete. In compliance with the Institutional Review Board protocol, an online briefing occurred before the experiment.

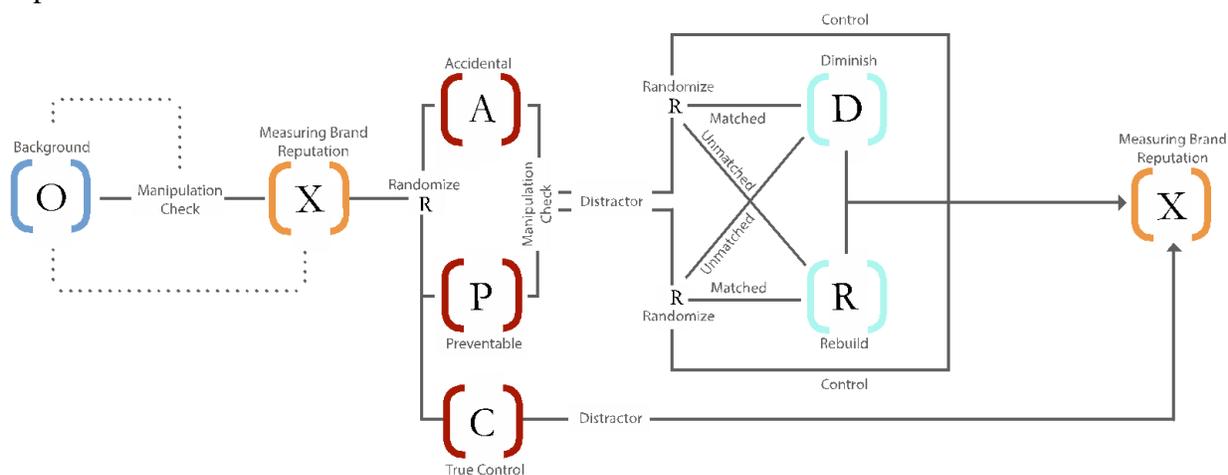


Figure 2. Flow of experimental design

Sample

The participants for this study were millennials who lived in Midwestern states and were recruited through a paid Qualtrics panel. The Midwestern condition was applied in order to create a geographical location that would have enough distance away from the fictitious organization in Delaware. Since there were seven separate conditions, a minimum of 294 participants were sought to ensure an adequate number of participants in each category. The Qualtrics survey remained open until all conditions were fully met, November 2, 2016 to November 4, 2016 and November 9, 2016. A total of 661 participants started the survey, out of which 230 were removed for not matching the requirements of being a millennial living in the Midwest. Another 131 participants did not fully complete the survey flow and were removed from the analysis.

Results

Research Objective 1: To determine if matched response strategies used via Twitter will maintain pre-to post-crisis reputation.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the matched accidental and preventable crisis response type on brand reputation (Table 1). There was a significant decrease in brand-reputation scores from the pre-brand-reputation test ($M = 4.76$, $SD = .87$) to post-brand-reputation test ($M = 4.23$, $SD = .92$), $t(82) = 4.62$, $p = .000$ (two-tailed) for all matched. The mean decrease in brand score was .53 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .30 to .75. The eta squared statistic (.28) indicated a small effect size.

Table 1

Paired-sample t-test for brand reputation by crisis response type

Response Condition	n	Pre-Brand^a	Post-Brand	Brand Change^b	Significance
Preventable Unmatched	43	4.81	3.85	-0.96	$p = .001$
Preventable Control	45	4.57	3.84	-0.72	$p = .001$
Preventable Matched	40	4.66	3.99	-0.67	$p = .003$
Accidental Unmatched	43	4.73	4.13	-0.59	$p = .001$
Accidental Matched	43	4.84	4.45	-0.39	$p = .001$
Accidental Control	39	4.44	4.25	-0.18	$p = .017$
True Control	43	4.57	4.57	0	$p = .001$

^a No significant difference among pre-brand scores

^b Post - Pre = Brand change

Research Objective 2: To understand the effects of an overcompensating (unmatched) accidental crisis response via Twitter on brand reputation.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the unmatched (diminish) response on brand reputation for the accidental crisis (Table 1). There was a significant decrease in brand-reputation scores from the pre-brand reputation test ($M = 4.81$, $SD = .74$) to post-brand-reputation test ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .99$), $t(42) = 5.25$, $p = .000$ (two-tailed). The mean decrease in brand score was .95 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .59 to 1.32. The eta squared statistic (.61) indicated a large effect size.

Research Objective 3: To understand the effects of an undercompensating (unmatched) preventable crisis response via Twitter on brand reputation.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the unmatched (rebuild) response on brand reputation for the preventable crisis (Table 1). There was a significant decrease in brand reputation scores from the pre-brand reputation test ($M = 4.73$, $SD = .95$) to post-brand reputation test ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.06$), $t(42) = 4.94$, $p = .000$ (two-tailed). The mean decrease in brand score was .59 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .35 to .84. The eta squared statistic (.63) indicated a large effect size.

Impact of crisis response strategy on brand reputation change score

In addition, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of crisis response type on brand reputation mean change score (Table 2). Participants were divided into seven groups per the crisis response type treatment (“1” = “Accidental Matched”, “2” = “Accidental Unmatched”, “3” = “Accidental Control”, “4” = “Preventable Matched”, “5” = “Preventable Unmatched”, “6” = “Preventable Control”, “7” = “True Control”).

The assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated in the Levene's test for homogeneity of variances, so the Robust Tests of Equality of Means was used. There was a significant difference in brand reputation change mean scores for the seven crisis type groups: $F(6, 289) = 5.39, p = .000$. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was determined to be a medium effect size of .10. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for accidental unmatched ($M = -.59, SD = .79$) was significantly different from the true control ($M = -.002, SD = .97$). The accidental control ($M = -.18, SD = .46$) was significantly different from preventable unmatched ($M = -.96, SD = 1.19$). Preventable matched ($M = -.67, SD = 1.35$), preventable unmatched, and preventable control ($M = -.72, SD = 1.17$) were all significantly different from the true control.

Table 2

One-Way ANOVA of crisis response treatment on brand change

Group	n	Brand Change*	SD
Preventable Control	45	-.72 ^{ab}	1.17
Preventable Unmatched	43	-.95 ^b	1.19
Accidental Unmatched	43	-.59 ^{ab}	0.79
Accidental Matched	43	-.39 ^{abc}	0.61
True Control	43	.00 ^c	0.42
Preventable Matched	40	-.67 ^{ab}	1.35
Accidental Control	39	-.18 ^{ac}	0.46

* Means with different superscripts are significantly different at $\alpha = .05$

Discussion and Implications

According to Coombs (2015), the accidental cluster contains low responsibility attribution crises and suggests providing information to victims by expressing concern or providing corrective action should suffice if an organization has no crisis history or has favorable prior reputation. In addition, if the organization has no crisis history or has a favorable reputation, then the diminishment strategy should be used for accidental crises.

Using Coombs' theory, the matched accidental crisis included four diminishing responses via Twitter that stated the issue, highlighted the importance of Piedmont's standards, and emphasized that its IT department was working to solve the issue. For the accidental crisis, unmatched response, Piedmont sent four rebuilding responses via Twitter that tried to improve the organization's reputation. Statements such as "your trust is our top priority" and "we will continue to work with our IT partners so this error does not occur again" were used. The matched condition, per SCCT, should have stabilized the brand's reputation or caused minimal damage and the mismatched should have increased the brand reputation due to overcompensation. However, a paired samples t-test found a significant decrease in brand mean change (Table 1). This finding goes against what was suggested in SCCT.

It is possible that the organization's responses did not come across as a denial or apologetic stance. This would have caused the matched and unmatched responses to be insignificant with the post-brand-reputation measurement. It also has been found by Brown,

Long, and Dickhaus (2012) that longer crisis response statements have been shown to improve one's reputation after a crisis. Since responses from Piedmont Health were limited to 140 characters, it could be that the persuasiveness of the message was not perceived.

SCCT defines a preventable crisis as an event that has strong attributions of crisis responsibility due to human-error accidents, human-error product harm, or organizational misdeeds (T. Coombs, 2015). The crisis situation presented in this study involved a doctor accessing student records and exchanging information for money with a pharmaceutical company. Since this falls under misdeed by an employee, the matched response for Piedmont was rebuilding and mismatched was diminishing. The rebuild response included statements such as the health center's standards, information on how to contact the center, and additional staff training to be implemented. The diminish response included information on the center policy for accessing data information, that it was a one-time occurrence, and it was only one doctor who accessed the information.

To explore research objective 3, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the preventable crisis type on brand reputation. There was significant decrease in brand reputation scores from the pre-brand-reputation test (Table 1). To confirm the effects of a preventable crisis on brand reputation, a one-way ANOVA found that the preventable matched, unmatched, and control were all significantly different from one another (Table 2). Like the findings for the preventable crisis t-tests, this signifies that a decrease in brand reputation could occur, regardless of response type when a preventable crisis occurs.

This finding aligns with the SCCT theory in that a preventable crisis will cause reputational damage. This also mirrors what Thiessen and Ingenhoff (2011) published, stating that preventable crises hold higher levels of responsibility. Due to the significance in the negative, brand-reputation change, researchers suggest that organizations complete a risk analysis to identify any potential crises that could arise. Conducting a thorough risk assessment could help decrease potential preventable crisis occurrences (Coombs, 2010).

SCCT and previous crisis communication research suggests an unmatched (underachieving) response for a preventable crisis would negatively impact the brand-reputation score. This was found to be true here as well; study participants who received the unmatched condition had a .96 decrease from the pre- to post-brand-reputation test. This signifies the need for an organization to understand the crisis type and ensure that the response aligns. This finding also suggests that an unmatched response could cause more damage than having no response at all. Having unmatched (underachieving) responses could create contradictions and cause statements to seem egotistical and lack control and compassion for victims (T. Coombs, 2015). This finding confirms that crisis communicators must be aware of crisis communication theories, such as the SCCT, that provide guidelines for what appropriate responses match within a crisis situation.

Implications for practice

This study is applicable for crisis managers who are responsible for protecting the reputation and reducing harm to an organization's brand (K. A. Brown et al., 2012); (T. Coombs, 2015); (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2010). Many organizations neglect to address social media as a multifaceted platform that may induce harm or good to its brand. Most organizations acknowledge that internal and external crises will and do occur; however, current thinking does not predict and prepare for unconventional crises outside of traditional media (T. Coombs, 2015).

The findings of the study confirm the need for practitioners to understand the crisis type prior to responding and understand the role of social media in communication. As shown in the

study, using an unmatched response could cause a decrease in brand reputation. This is especially true when using a low-attribution response for a high-attribution situation, as the response will fall short of what the crisis demands. Due to findings suggesting there is a correlation between use of Twitter and understanding an organization's response, it is especially important for communication professionals to be concise and use the right strategies to disseminate information.

The researchers suggest that organizations have a crisis communications plan and conduct crisis communication sessions prior to a crisis scenario to be fully prepared for an event to occur. By having training prior to a crisis event, organizations can minimize internal confusion about who the crisis communication team is and the communication strategy. Significant planning is suggested prior to a crisis event occurring since there can be a substantial impact if an organization does not align the response to the crisis occurring (Table 2).

It also would be of benefit for organizations to provide social-media training for employees, especially those charged with communications. Ideally, companies would provide social-media training for all employees to teach how to present themselves professionally. In addition, this training would cover what employees should or should not say on social-media during a crisis. At a minimum, organizations should provide social-media training for those charged with handling communications during a crisis. Trainings should ensure that the communicator is up-to-date on popular social-media platforms, what outlets the organization has accounts on, has literacy about outlets and that the person(s) understand(s) what role social media plays in the organization's response strategy.

The above recommendations require communication managers to have strong buy-in from the executive team of an organization, or what is called the dominant coalition (Ulmer et al., 2010)). The dominant collection is defined by Levitt and March (1988) as a group whose purpose is largely set by a negotiation process among members of dominant coalitions pursuing certain interests. It is important for crisis communication managers to build a reputation with the coalition prior to a crisis occurring. Most often crisis planning and training will need to be approved by an executive board since it will take time and money. Once a crisis does occur, a crisis manager might be charged with convincing the group that there is a problem that requires action to be taken. Crisis managers can appeal to a dominant coalition by using rational appeal and facts, or by using emotion. Having a strong reputation with the dominant coalition can provide less resistance to crisis planning and crisis resolution.

Implications for theory

This study provides new insight to the importance of how messages are curated on social media to respond to a crisis. Previously, Coombs (2014) stated that the Internet did not "revolutionize" crisis communication; rather it "merely hastened the evolution" of crisis communication (p. 19). There is a lack of empirical evidence about the most effective strategies for communicating and presenting crisis communication content via social media. However, there have been examinations of longer crisis response statements that have shown to improve one's reputation after a crisis (K. A. Brown et al., 2012). This finding from Brown, Long, and Dickhaus needs to be further examined to determine how it implicates social media use in SCCT. If 280 characters is not enough to persuade an audience, then crisis communicators might need to utilize images or other forms of media in social-media posts instead of just text.

This study contributed to the body of empirical knowledge of how social media with limited character space impacts how a message is received. Findings also indicate that some response strategies utilized on traditional media might not hold true for Twitter and that further

investigation is needed.

Additional Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Participants of this study were limited to millennials in the Midwest region. The millennial generation was chosen due to being consistently associated with higher digital and use of social media (“Millennials in Adulthood,” 2014); (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). The crisis scenario was created at a university health center so the millennial participants could relate to either the university or health center aspect. Future studies should expand to cover generations outside of millennials and make sure that the population chosen can relate to the organization in crisis.

In addition, at least 33% of participants had no college experience and another 50% only had an associate’s degree. It is possible that, due to participants not having a bachelor’s degree or higher, they were unable to relate to the organization. Researchers tried to overcome this obstacle by focusing on the healthcare aspect, but recommend future studies limit participants to those who have university campus experience or change the organization. A different approach would be to incorporate more identifiable brands in the experiment or provide more extensive information about the organization.

Summary

This study was initiated due to the lack of experimental research regarding crisis communications and social-media messaging outlets and serves as a reference point for future studies looking to test the effects of SCCT via social media on brand reputation. This study suggests that only parts of SCCT hold true on social media, including how a crisis is received and the impact of unmatched crisis communication strategies. Reputation protection is a valuable aspect of crisis communication and organizations invest a substantial amount of money and effort into building reputations and a sound theory is needed for social media use.

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In the Business of Better Health: An Equivalence Framing Analysis of Obesity Prevention Messages for Women

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Abstract

For public relations, the link between social recognition of health risk and disease and the business of health often rests upon the individual corporation's implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles. It is also through CSR efforts that organizations address their economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities to their stakeholders (Lee, 2011). Research studies have shown that public relations has defined and activated CSR in modern times, using communication tools to reflect corporate policies positively, while cultivating relationships with key stakeholders, including consumers. (Kim & Reber, 2008; Murphy & Schlegelmilch, 2013).

This paper, through an analysis based upon a themed content examination of two websites, will examine how leading health protection organizations--the nonprofit Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the for-profit Cleveland Clinic--have framed this health threat for women of diverse backgrounds. Such organizations play significant, but markedly distinct, roles in using web media to increase public's awareness of health issues, in general, (Park & Reber, 2010), and specifically, about weight and obesity.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, websites, frames, obesity, diversity, women's health

For public relations, the link between social recognition of health risk and disease and the business of health often rests upon the individual corporation's implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles. It is also through CSR efforts that organizations address their economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities to their stakeholders (Lee, 2011). Research studies have shown that public relations has defined and activated CSR in modern times, using communication tools to express corporate policies while communicating to key stakeholders (Kim & Reber, 2008; Murphy & Schlegelmilch, 2013).

This study, through an updated approach to framing analysis (equivalence framing), will examine how two leading non-profit health protection agencies, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Cleveland Clinic have framed this health threat for women of diverse backgrounds. Health agencies play a significant role in helping educate the media and increase public's awareness of health issues (Park & Reber, 2010). And, how the media frame a topic can influence audiences' interpretations and evaluations of a social reality (Tankard, 2001). Generally, previous studies have found that people interpret all health-related information either by benefit or by cost (Rothman & Salovey, 1997) and the way people interpret health information will affect their decision-making (Rothman & Salovey, 1997). People tend to avoid risks when they think about gains or benefits but prefer to take risks when they think about losses or costs (Rothman & Salovey, 1997). These preferences depend on whether the information is framed in terms of gains or losses (Rothman & Salovey, 1997).

We begin first with a review of relevant concepts such as obesity, corporate social responsibility and equivalence framing. Next, we will introduce our research questions, methodology and advance our hypotheses. Finally, we will discuss the findings from our content analyses.

While discussing equivalence framing of obesity, the study will consider how the health information/recommendation is framed in terms of benefits or costs.

Literature Review

Obesity

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the nation's self-described "health protection agency," people who are described as being overweight and obese carry weight ranges that are greater than the healthy weight of a given height (CDC, 2017). Overweight and obese bodies are generally determined by Body Mass Index (BMI), or by using weight and height to calculate a BMI number (CDC, 2017). For example, an adult with a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight and BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese (CDC, 2017).

In terms of the United States' rates of overweight sizes and obesity (including extreme obesity) among its populations, women rank higher than men. Women's obesity rates are 40% in comparison with men (35%) (NIH, 2017). The rates of extreme obesity are also higher in women (9.9%) than men (5.5%) (NIH, 2017). When considering race and ethnicity as factors among women, over 57% Black women are obese, followed by Hispanic women (46.9%), non-Hispanic White women (38.2%) and Asian women (12.4%) (NIH, 2017). The extreme obesity rates are also higher among Black women: (16.8%) followed by Hispanic women (8.7%) and non-Hispanic White women (9.7%) (NIH, 2017).

Overall, messages to counter obesity have highlighted the condition as an imbalance between caloric intake and energy outflows (Ogden, Flegal, Carroll & Johnson, 2002). The strategies to control obesity, therefore, have focused mostly on individual actions, such as, changing diet (i.e., types of food, portions,) and exercise patterns (Campo & Mastin, 2007). Another message strategies have highlighted the value of environmental assets, such as, school-

based health interventions and access to health-care providers (Jeffery, 1991; Wolfe, 2000). Despite their clear advantages of social and community supports, research shows that not all racial groups of women benefit comparably from these resources (Campo & Mastin, 2007). Finally, mediated messages have exacerbated the lack of serious attention to this issue in specific ways. One, media have either neglected this public health issue, or have appeared to sanction the overweight issue of the non-Hispanic Black population as “acceptable” by representing a preponderance of overweight African American actors (Tirdkar & Jain, 2003) and having few healthy food advertisements in the African American magazines. (Pratt & Pratt, 1996). By contrast, this early research showed that magazines targeted to Caucasian women (e.g. Ladies’ Home Journal) have greater proportions of ads on weight-control products (Pratt & Pratt, 1996). Within such mainstream publications, the obesity issues of Hispanic women and non-Hispanic Asian women were almost never addressed.

Corporate Social Responsibility

In public relations research, a scan of literature in leading journals reveal that, while Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a well-recognized concept, its application to the profession is varied (Lee, 2017). Broadly, CSR refers a corporation’s community-oriented responsibility to its stakeholders in the societies where they operate in addition to its clearer responsibilities to investors, shareholders and customers (Chandler, 2004). Additionally, this view admonishes corporations to identify all key stakeholders early and to incorporate their needs and values in organizational decision-making processes. This means that the CSR of an organization should relate to its moral codes, corporate philanthropy, community relations programs, law abiding actions, and issues management (Wood, 1991; Kim & Reber, 2008); Chandler, 2004). At the same time, public relations scholars have located CSR in different places within the field, including issues management (Heath & Coombs, 2006), Community relations (Swann, 2008) and branding (Chernev & Blair, 2015).

Companies characterized by CSR have been viewed as having a “higher purpose” and seen as willing to serve people through excellence of life and health (O’Toole & Vogel, 2011). At the same time, CSR can also create a “health halo”, where consumers evaluate the quality of a product based on the reputation of the company in the market (Peloza, Ye & Montford, 2015). Often, consumers make inferences about missing attributes by connecting available information more positively than they might ordinarily be inclined to do despite the missing information (Peloza et al, 2015). If this inference making can be reinforced through positively framed messages, along with relevant images, the CSR narrative in public relations messages becomes important in a different way. Instead of resting solely upon its long tradition of merely communicating the good deeds of a company or organization, a CSR narrative strategy can become a salient part of positive message framing of desired actions for targeted publics. Within this context, the following content analysis study examines how a specific health issue (obesity) for target publics (by gender and race) can be strategically managed by the health organizations.

Framing Messages—Gain, Loss and Equivalents

Framing, in its broadest sense, has been reflected in research as a popular strategy spanning many disciplines, including media, communication, psychology, political science and behavioral economics (Scheufele, 1999; Cacciatore et al, 2016). But with that breadth have come challenges as well, including definitional fluidity and operational uncertainty. Just short of calling for the “end of framing,” Cacciatore et al (2016) have suggested that these research

protocols can be enhanced by the use of more precise categories of framing, including the use of newer paradigms, including “equivalence framing” (p.20).

Equivalence framing examines the effects of communication messages when presented from two different, but logically connected positions, where one outcome is focused on positive, or gain terms, where the other is focused on negative, or loss terms (Donovan & Jalleh, 1999). In health communication messages, **gain frames** focus largely on positive outcomes, compared to **loss frames**, which focus largely on negative outcomes. Both frames can generate positive and negative behavioral outcomes, depending upon the audiences and contexts. For example, in terms of promoting a health behavior, such as exercise, gain frames were more effective when promoting increased self-esteem with more frequent exercise (Robberson & Rogers, 1988). However, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of a framed health message, researchers need to consider the contexts in which health decisions were made (Rothman & Salovey, 1997). To be specific, audiences will consider whether the recommended suggestions for an illness-detecting or health-affirming function and the possible risks are associated with it (Rothman & Salovey, 1997). Other message features, such as, the gender/ethnicity of the model in the stimuli, was also effective in promoting health testing (Kalichman & Coley, 1995). In a more recent analysis of the effects of negative or positive biases in framing messages, researchers discovered that customer satisfaction with hospital services rose higher when citizens were exposed to positively rated experiences before negatively rated ones (Olsen, 2015).

Method

The study conducted a limited website content analysis of two organizations – the CDC and the Cleveland Clinic. These health organizations were selected because both of them have a national presence but in two different spheres: for-profit and non-profit. The content analyses were conducted for seven days, starting from January 2nd, 2018 to January 9th, 2018. The seven days’ timeline were chosen to count new or updated articles. The keywords were “obesity”, “extreme obesity”, “weight loss”, “healthy food”, “healthy food environment” and “women obesity”. Stories that had headlines and texts with any of these keywords were considered as a unit of analysis. An exception was a group of messages targeting children, teen or adolescents’ obesity issues, since these age groups were not relevant with this study.

Codebook

The codebook created for this content analysis considered the **article title, topic focus, framing (gain/loss), sources used, no. of pictures used**. Articles that focused on positive/ gain terms were coded as gain frames (coded 1), while articles focused on negative/loss terms were considered as loss frame messages (coded 2). Articles that did not use gain and loss frame were considered as neutral frames (coded 3). To analyze gain or loss frame messages, only the headlines of the articles were considered. In terms of sources used, two key ones were identified – internal and external. Organization messages that used their past articles were considered to be internal sources (coded 1). An example is when CDC might use data from its own “Division of nutrition, physical activity, and obesity” and when the Cleveland Clinic quoted one of its own employees/experts. This type of reference was considered as an internal source. When these organizations used outside sources, they were coded as external source (coded 2). For example, CDC might use data from Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Cleveland Clinic might use data from the CDC. These types of references were considered as external sources. Finally, articles that used both internal and external sources were coded 3. If there was any story that did not use any reference, it was considered as other (coded 4).

In addition to the main codebook, we used two other codebooks: one, for picture analyses and another for framing analyses. Screenshots of all listed news stories were reviewed to see if any one story had any target group—such as for gender and race—that seemed overt in its messaging.

Results

This study compared top-level web pages for both the CDC and the Cleveland Clinic to compare framing about “obesity” and being “overweight.”

In terms of the total number of articles on the topic overweight and obesity, the CDC shared the highest number of articles.

Table 1: Comparison of articles between CDC and Cleveland on the topic overweight and obesity

Organization	Total articles	Food environment	Adult overweight and obesity data	Obesity prevention	Obesity effect
CDC	11	1	1	8	1
Cleveland	4	0	0	2	2

As the Table 1 suggests, out of a total of 15 articles, CDC had 11 articles on the topic obesity/overweight and Cleveland Clinic had 4 articles. From these 15 articles, four different types of news categories/ topic focus emerged – *food environment*, *adult overweight and obesity data*, *obesity prevention (strategies, exercise, meal plan, medicine, surgery, etc.)*, and *obesity effect (health effect, diseases)*. Of these four topics, the CDC published one article on food environment compared with none for the Cleveland Clinic. The same result emerged for adult overweight and obesity information. In terms of obesity prevention, CDC published most articles (8 articles) than Cleveland Clinic (2 articles). However, on the topic of “obesity effects” (health effect, diseases), the Cleveland Clinic published more articles (total 2 articles) than CDC (total 1 article). However, no organization published any articles focused only on women obesity.

Figure 1: Articles comparison between CDC and Cleveland on the topic overweight and obesity

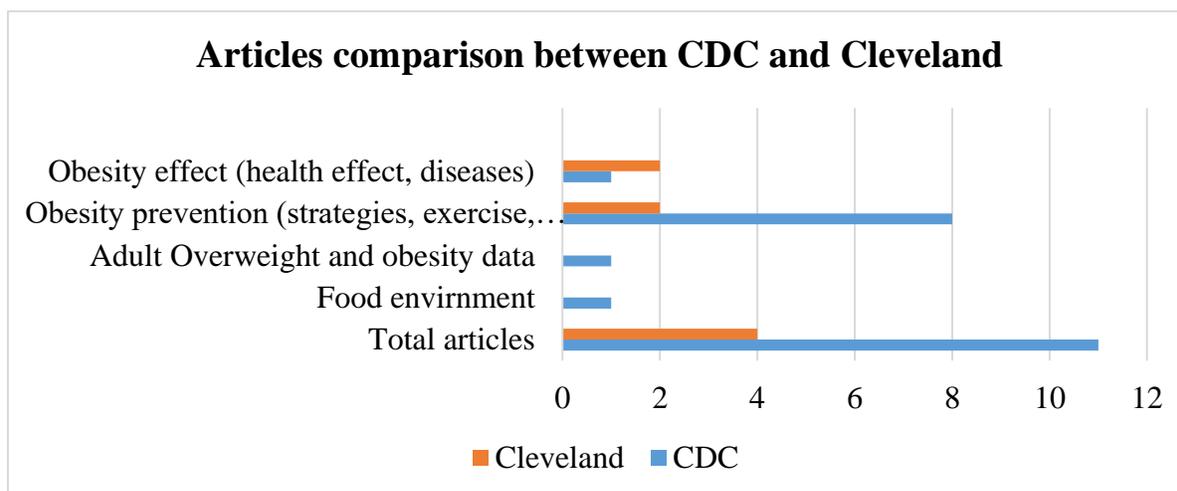


Figure 1 suggested that CDC published most articles on overweight and obesity issues.

This study next explored the framing strategies (gain vs. loss frame) used in these articles.

Table 2 suggested that among the total 11 articles of CDC, seven of them were gain framed, two of them were loss framed and two were neutral framed. Out of four articles from Cleveland Clinic, only one of them was gain framed, two were loss framed and one was neutral framed.

When they used references, CDC used their internal sources most (total seven articles) followed by external sources, and a combination of internal and external source (one article each). For instance, one article featured the stories of people who successfully lost their weight. That article considered as “other” because there were no internal or external sources used.

Table 2: Comparison between framing and sources (internal and external used)

Org.	No of articles	Gain framed	Loss framed	Neutral framed	Internal source	External source	Both internal and external source	Other
CDC	11	7	2	2	7	1	1	1
Cleveland	4	1	2	1	1	2	1	0

Figure 2: Comparison between CDC and the Cleveland Clinic (Framing and Sources used)

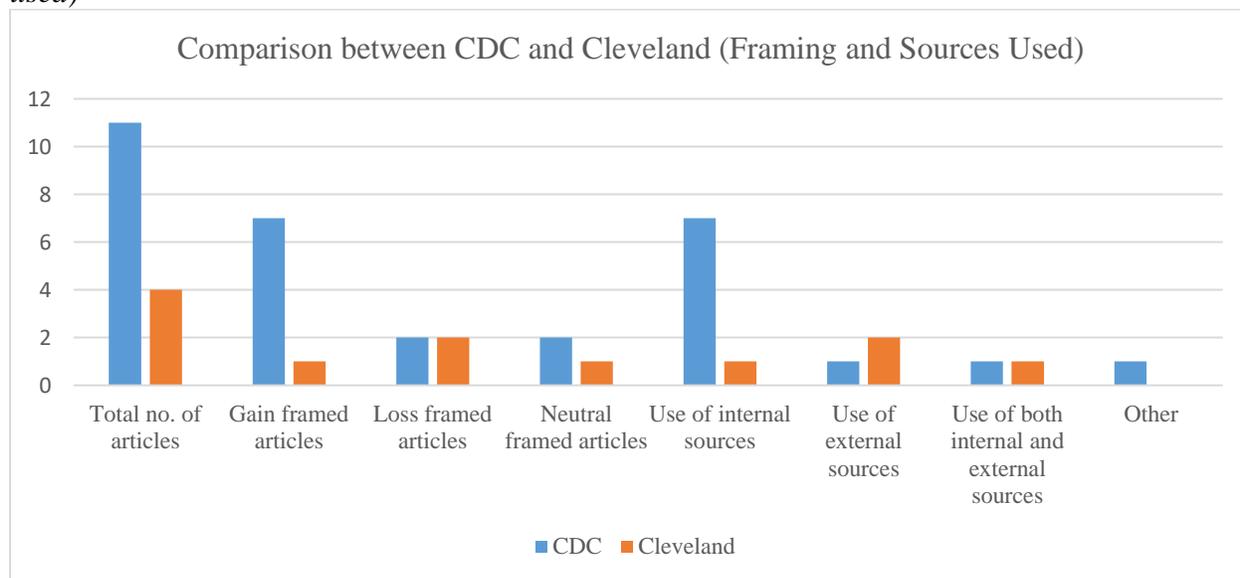


Figure 2 suggested that in comparison with Cleveland, CDC used gain-framed articles most. However, both organizations had equal number of loss-framed articles (2 articles each). In terms of using sources, CDC used internal sources most while Cleveland used external sources most.

Finally, this study wanted to examine pictures to see if they highlighted a focus on a particular public or groups of publics. Table 3 suggested that CDC used a total 28 pictures in

their 11 articles. There are pictures where both male and female were presented. Over, out of the total of 28 pictures, the numbers of females were 18 and numbers of males were 6. The ethnicities of the models were Caucasian (total: 7 people), African American (total: 5 people), Hispanic (total: 1 people), and non-Hispanic other (total: 1 people). There were no visibly Asian people represented in the pictures.

Surprisingly there were no pictures in any of the articles of Cleveland Clinic.

Table 3: Diversity Representation between CDC and CC [Cleveland Clinic]

Org	Total pic.	Total vid.	No. of females	No. of males	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic other	Asian	Unsure
CDC	28	0	18	6	7	5	1	1	0	0
CC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The study concludes that while framing the obesity issues, these two organizations resonated their organizational mission/goal in their practice. The study considered sources used in an article because it also described how an organization prefer to frame an issue. CDC used its own (internal sources) sources most. On the other hand, Cleveland Clinic used external sources most. Similar to the framing, the analysis of sources suggested that organizations preferred to follow their own organizational standpoint to address an issue.

Discussion: CSR Narratives, Branding and Public Relations

After categorizing articles into four groups (food environment, adult overweight and obesity data, obesity effect such as, health effect, diseases etc. and obesity prevention, such as, strategies, meal plan, medicine, surgery, etc.), the study found that the greatest focus was on obesity prevention (strategies, exercise, meal plan, medicine, surgery, etc.). CDC shared the most in this category in comparison with Cleveland Clinic. The result suggested that CDC followed its organizational mission/goal to focus “on policy and environmental strategies to make healthy eating and active living accessible and affordable for everyone” (CDC, 2017).

Similarly, Cleveland Clinic focused most on obesity effects (health effect, diseases), which suggested that Cleveland Clinic followed its own organizational mission/goal as a “nonprofit multispecialty academic hospital” to “focus was mostly on disease and surgical practices.”

Reflecting a recognition of how different contexts would influence information framing, most of the articles of the Cleveland Clinic focused mostly on **loss framed** messages. As stated earlier that the organizational goal of Cleveland Clinic was about disease and surgical practices. Therefore, not surprisingly, the articles we found focused mostly on obesity-related diseases and health effects. For this reason, these articles framed the negative outcome of the obesity/overweight. By contrast, most of the articles from the CDC site focused on **gain framed** messages. As CDC emphasized, this organization paid attention to strategies that would make healthy eating and living both accessible and affordable to broad publics. This organization’s articles focused on the accessible and affordable ways to prevent obesity and obesity related outcomes.

Finally, in light of the higher relevance of these issues for women of color, this research wanted to explore whether there would be overt evidence that these organizations were targeting

these specific populations. We found that neither the articles, nor the headlines specified a focus on women obesity issues. However, the picture analysis suggested that CDC included females (18 females total) most often in their pictures. By ethnic representation, Caucasians (total 7 people) and African Americans (total 5 people) were represented most frequently. These findings, although online, echo the magazine analyses of Pratt & Pratt, 1996 that showed that most weight loss coverage highlighted Caucasian customers most. However, the inclusion of African American representation suggested that the CDC may have considered the obesity effects on African Americans. The other two groups of color, Hispanic (1 person), Non-Hispanic other (1 person) were barely represented. But these results contrasted starkly with the Cleveland Clinic websites, which used no people pictures at all.

Limitations

This study used a short timeline (only seven days) and only two health organizations. The results based on these two health organizations are not adequate enough to draw a generalized conclusion about how all health organizations address the obesity issues of women. In addition, the content analysis techniques used cannot address how publics (especially women) perceive the role of health organizations in addressing obesity issues for a specific population. Future studies can include more health organizations to generate more data in order to test more strongly our observations about this issue. Finally, more direct analyses of audience perceptions could be tested.

Conclusion: CSR and Future Implications for Public Relations

What unites both of these organizations, though, is a consistent pattern of messaging that ties each one to messages of community concern about health. When it comes to obesity and weight management, we see that the CDC uses a predominance of gain-framed messages to inspire publics to use their own personal agency to create positive changes. The Cleveland Clinic sites, understandably, connects its messages of community concerns to specific medical treatments for obesity and weight management, which are consistent with its market and brand position. This prominence of messaging that seems to highlight communal good coincides with shifting trends in CSR and heightened use of online media. Studies showing “halo effect” of a public perception of corporate CSR on brands suggest that publics will be favorably influenced by their perceptions of an organization’s social goodwill (Chernev & Blair, 2015). Even as consumers respond in the marketplace to negative messages about the effects of certain foods on their health (Herrick, 2009; Young & Nestle, 2009), studies find that online messages compelling as they negotiate better strategies and trustworthy organizations to guide them through making decisions about their health (Lee et al, 2013; Waters & Feneley, 2013).

CSR has been seen as a key political strategy for companies and organizations who for a variety of reasons have wanted to ensure the goodwill of multiple, and sometimes competing, constituents (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Scherer, 2017). But CSR, almost since its inception, has been a fluid and changing concept, applicable to many areas of the practice. What remains under-explored is the role of public relations in sustaining a “halo effect” for companies and organizations with their publics through carefully framed messages and narratives that connect with the social good.

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Effective Leadership for Creating Shared Value: A Cross-National Study in the United States, Germany, and China

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Abstract

Porter and Kramer's creating shared value (CSV) has become a promising corporate social responsibility (CSR) approach since 2011, but has not been much examined in the public relations discipline. This study investigates whether stakeholders expect companies to practice CSV in comparison to intrinsic CSR, which is totally separate from profit-making. It also explores the role of leadership in implementing effective CSV as perceived by the stakeholder. A public preference for CSV over intrinsic CSR was found in a survey data of 1,784 participants in the US, Germany, and China. Effective CSV competencies were constructed as a unidimensional concept in the US, but German and Chinese viewed it as two-dimensional. Stakeholders perceived that leaders' moral characters play a more important and core role in effective CSV compared to their altruistic and behavioral attributes. Network analysis of the perceived effective CSV-characteristics provides further implications for CSV communication.

Keywords: CSR, CSV, leadership

Note: Due to the space limit, the tables and figures for this three-country study available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vsIYVYNPqSwUCVI_LYw17Tc01ybLiXCQ/view?usp=sharing

Introduction

In the recent decades, companies have placed increasing emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR) either because it is regulated by the market or because it drives positive reaction of various stakeholders (e.g., consumers, employees, community leaders, and government officials) (Dawkins & Lewis, 2003). However, stakeholders also see companies violating business expectations (e.g., poor labor treatment) or practicing short-term CSR as a “greenwash” marketing initiative. The conflicting reality reflects the challenge of CSR in practice from the economic view; that is, how to legitimize the practice of long-term CSR for significant social impacts among corporations.

To address this challenge, management scholars have called for a CSR paradigm shift to an approach of creating shared values (CSV) (e.g., Porter & Kramer, 2006, 2011; Spitzack & Chapman, 2012; Wójcik, 2016). CSV is defined by Porter & Kramer (2011) as “policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which they operate” (p. 66). Simply put, CSV theoretically conceptualizes a responsible corporate activity that embodies both economic *and* social values (Wójcik, 2016). It argues that responsible business activities should create both economic and social values by reconceiving products and markets, reconfiguring the value chain, or applying cluster development (e.g., joining resources and capabilities through collective/network business models (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Wójcik, 2016). Thus, as an alternative to CSR, CSV is internally driven (by corporate economic motives, along with ethics and social values) rather than externally driven (by stakeholder expectations), integral to corporate (core) business, and based on strategic analysis and outcome evaluation for a long-term perspective.

CSV has been welcomed by business, as widely discussed in the practitioner literature and business case studies. There is already a wide range of initiatives, such as the Shared Value Initiative or the Shared Value Leadership Summit that bring together renowned CEOs, associations, researchers and politicians to practice CSV. Leading companies, such as Nestlé and Adidas, have enthusiastically implemented CSV and actively promoted such initiatives and outcomes. CSV has also gained support from governments due to the increasing complexity of issues in societies. For example, the European Commission revised its CSR definition by making the creation of shared values an essential element of the concept in 2011. The Hong Kong government established the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund in 2013 to support social innovations that create shared value.

CSV has received some criticisms. The major criticism in respect of public relations lies in its similarity to strategic CSR. Despite its popularity among businesses, CSV might be viewed as serving corporate interests and thus as less desirable by stakeholders. To our best knowledge, there has no empirical research on public reaction to CSV.

This research attempts to extend public relations literature on CSR by examining the external stakeholder (e.g., current and potential customers and investors) reactions to CSV and exploring the stakeholder perceptions of effective CEO competencies and attributes in CSV. The study is significant for two reasons. First, CSV as an alternative to CSR is little known among public relations scholars and professionals. The research findings enable public relations professionals to consult the top management in organizational strategic planning that increases the organization’s economic and social capital by their improved understanding of CSV. Secondly, corporate engagement with stakeholders is key to successful CSV. The study provides practical implications for effective stakeholder engagement with CSV implementation by

managing the stakeholder perception of CEO quality via strategic communication.

Literature Review

Values, Ethics, and CSV from the Public Relations Perspective

Various scholars (Sims, 1994; Goodpaster, 2007; Seeger, 1997) have argued that an organization can have a conscience and even a moral intention that can be studied and modeled (Goodpaster 2007, p. 76, p. 83). Moral conscience is both an individual concept and one that can be applied collectively, as moral awareness and insight requiring “the coordination of self-interest alongside respect for others” (Goodpaster, 2007, p. 53). Individuals with strong moral values and an organizational culture that considers ethics (Sims, 1994; Bowen, 2004) both go into creating a corporate conscience and public relations acting as the corporate ethical conscience (Ryan & Martinson, 1983).

Corporate conscience (i.e., a predominant ethical framework constructed by mission, vision, and core values) leads to a corporation’s CSR or CSV attitude (Goodpaster, 2007; Sims, 1994). Further, some scholars (DeGeorge, 2010; French & Weis, 2000; Seeger, 1997) have argued that corporations must go beyond pure profit motives associated with individual ethical responsibility; they assert that the modern view holds organizations as collectives that are responsible for ethical behavior.

Refining the way we understand CSV as a function of ethics is particularly important because public relations professionals on the front lines of interaction with stakeholders and publics understand their values. Those values drive what stakeholders and publics want, and need, from organizations in terms of ethical decision making. This means that public relations can then engage in CSV initiatives that are of meaning to both the organization and the varied groups in the environment. Using ethics to understand the values of each stakeholder group and public in relation to the organizational value allows public relations to focus on the “shared” aspect of CSV. In addition, CSV enables public relations to advocate the business practice for social impacts with a long-term perspective (i.e., ethical decision-making) because CSV pursues profits by meeting the un-met needs in the markets and/or improves the internal operation or external environment of the business.

CSV and Public Perception

The concept of CSV has gained attention as it helps turn corporate citizens’ behavior into outcomes that benefit both corporations and society (Wójcik, 2016). CSV allows corporations to integrate societal issues and problems in their corporate business strategy planning (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Therefore, the major contribution CSV brings organization and society is that, by incorporating actions to resolve social and economic issues into their operations, the corporations can increase economic *and* social values, instead of solely redistributing “values already created by the firm” (Lee, et al., 2014, p. 1). CSV enables corporations to practice long-term CSR if they have a CSR awareness and a favorable attitude toward CSR.

However, the shared values of economic and social gains also reflect the paradox of CSR – a for-profit organization doing an activity that is considered as philanthropic and non-profit in nature to make a better society. The literature has documented this skepticism toward CSR motives, which leads to negative reaction to CSR (Forehand & Grier, 2003).

CSV research in public relations is at its early stage. Previous research has confirmed that stakeholders in general are not very familiar with CSV as a concept; however, CSV is viewed as a feasible approach by corporations. Such CSV orientation moderates the impact of CSR initiatives on public trust in business in specific countries and stakeholder corporate preference, purchase intention, and support for these corporations during crises (Hung-Baesেকে, et al.,

2016). With the above discussion on CSV, we proposed the first research question as follows:

RQ1: Does the public in the three countries prefer corporations to practice CSV over CSR that is separate from corporate profit-making?

Leadership and CSV

If CSV is a CSR approach well accepted by stakeholders, how can corporations effectively promote and implement it? Successful CSV asks the corporation to innovate its core business for the creation of profit-making and social benefits in a *local* context – a complex and dynamic process. Corporate CEOs must engage her stakeholders (employees, suppliers, investors, local community, NGOs, government) in shared value identification, CSV initiative planning, and implementation. In addition, CEOs are essential in bringing about organizational changes (e.g., transforming CSR to CSV) because of their power in decision-making and ability to influence followers (Quinn & Dalton, 2006; Scagnelli & Cisi, 2014).

To the best of our knowledge, no extant studies have examined the role of leadership in CSV. Due to the nature of CSV, we have applied literature on effective CSR-leadership types and leader CSR behaviors together with change leadership literature to identify possible CEO competencies and characteristics in effective CSV.

Leadership Types. No one specific type of leadership has been found to be the exclusively effective for CSR (Augus-Leppan et al., 2010; Egri & Herman, 2000). Among the effective CSR-leadership types, transformational, charismatic, and visionary leaderships are change-oriented (Groves & LaRocca, 2011); responsible/ethical leaders and authentic leaderships are closely associated with ethics and moral conduct. *Transformational leaders* can enthusiastically communicate their vision for change (i.e. CSV) and generate stakeholder commitment to change by stimulating innovative ways to get at the heart of complex problems and to revisit their own ideas from new approaches. These leaders also align the change with stakeholder needs or values from a long-term perspective by empowering them unlike *transactional leaders* who focus on remote goal achievement by provision of assistance and a system of incentives or rewards, setting up the rules of practice, monitoring for bad performance or mistakes, and taking corrective actions (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Similar to transformational leadership, *charismatic/visionary leaders* create shared values with vision, integrity, and determination and energize others to innovate and overcoming obstacles by generating respect and using leader charisma (Waldman et al, 2006). *Participative/shared leaders* make CSV a shared vision and collective effort of everyone by empowering those in the decision-making through active consultation and dynamic interactions with stakeholder groups (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000).

Responsible/ethical leaders are true to their values and have a deep sense of CSV. They set CSV examples, defines success by results and how they are obtained, and make fair and balanced decisions (Szekely & Knirsch, 2005; Wu et al., 2015). In addition, they act as role models and reinforce appropriate conduct through constructive two-way communication and ethical decision-making (Brown et al. 2005; Wu et al., 2015). *Authentic leaders* share some characteristics of ethical leaders (i.e., integrity, honesty, doing the right thing) but also demonstrate reliability, accuracy, and genuineness (Beckman et al., 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Effective CSV-competencies of CEOs. To effectively promote and conduct CSV initiatives, we conceptualize competencies by the leadership types and specific behaviors to three areas – (1) analytical competency, (2) management competency, and (3) communication competency. *CEO analytical competencies* give stakeholders involved in CSV confidence in the

corporation's ability to comprehend the complexity of community social needs and align such needs with its business for innovative solutions. Analytical competencies include CEO abilities to integrate, process, and comprehend information relevant to complex problems or difficult concepts through a holistic (interrelated) and diverse view.

A CEO's CSV *management competencies* refer to her abilities to implant CSV in the corporate DNA and manage CSV through the planning, implementation, adjustment, and evaluation stages. In addition, other competencies include: leaders' ability in achieving goals by dealing with conflicting priorities (Kakabadse, et al., 2009), appreciation of cultural diversity (Hind, et al., 2009), identifying a strategic focus (Sosik, 2005), overcoming obstacles (Mendonca, 2011), building stakeholder relationships (Hind, et al., 2009), reflexivity (Strand, 2011), and developing outcome measurement and evaluation (Brown, et al., 2005). CEO communication competencies contribute to idea exchange, constructive dialogue, mutual understanding, and symmetric interaction between the corporation and its stakeholders so as to facilitate decision-making, goal-alignment, collaboration-forming, and intellectual stimulation throughout the CSV stages (Invernizzi et al., 2016). The literature review on leader competency has led to the following research question:

RQ2: What are the important CEO competencies (in relation to analysis, management, and communication) for effective CSV perceived by stakeholders in the United States of America, Germany, and China?

Effective CSV-characteristics of CEOs. Effective CSV-leadership requires CEOs to have the vision, enthusiasm, and determination for change as displayed by transformational, charismatic, and visionary leaderships. These leadership types also call for CEOs to empower decision-making and act as a role model. Other attributes of transformational leaders include being trusted, having a strong ideology, and possessing a long-term perspective. Acting as a role model and charisma help CSV effectiveness, as well as integrity and genuineness – two core attributes of authentic leaders. Accountability and transparency are other effective-CSV characteristics suggested by responsible and ethical leaders (Wu et al., 2015). Caring for people, empathy, consistency and coherency were specific attributes of CSR-advocate leaders identified by the literature (Lisak & Roos, 2001; Strand, 2015). The discussions on the leadership characteristics lead to the final research question:

RQ3: What are the important CEO characteristics identified by the publics in the US, Germany, and China?

Methods

Participants

A total of 1,784 participants (US = 593, Germany = 592, and China = 599) were randomly recruited from the online research panels managed by an international research firm to complete an online survey administered between October 19 and 31, 2017. The three countries were chosen for this study because they represent the largest markets in North America, Europe, and Asia. Table 1 shows the participant demographics by country. Participants in the US and Germany were more equally distributed in gender while there were more males (52.3%) in China. In addition, the Chinese participants were much younger, more employed and with a higher educational level than their counterparts in the US and Germany.

Measures

CSV measures. CSV measure was developed by Porter and Kramer's (2011) definition. The measure stated that "a company should take specific actions that both increase profits and improve the economic and social conditions in the communities where it operates." A follow-up

question in relation to public attitude toward CSV asked if the participant agreed that “a company should be more profitable by finding ways to solve social and community problems.” This item was adopted from the 2014 Edelman’s Trust Barometer. Adapted from Elkington (2004), an intrinsic-CSR measure stated that “businesses should take initiatives to solve social and economic problems of the communities where they operate. However, such corporate initiatives should be separate from their own profit-making.” Participants were asked how much they agree with these statements using a seven-point Likert-type scale where 1 = extremely disagree and 7 = extremely agrees.

CEO competency for effective CSV instrument. As discussed in the literature review, leadership studies on CSR have identified a list of CEO competencies and characteristics that lead to effective CSV implementation. A total of 27 competency items of effective CEOs in CSR applicable to CSV were divided into three categories: (1) analytical competencies, (2) management competencies, and (3) communication competencies (see Figure 2). The participants were first read the definition of CSV and a CSV example and then rated the importance of each competency item for performing effective CSV using a seven-point Likert-type scale where 1 = not important at all and 7 = extremely important.

CEO characteristic measures for effective CSV. Eighteen characteristics of CSR CEOs relevant to CSV implementation were included in this study (see Table 3). After reading the CSV definition (same to the one introduced in the competency section), the participants were asked to choose 5 of the 18 as the most important CEO attributes that drive effective CSV performance.

Results

CSV Preference among the Publics

A paired t-test revealed that the participants across the three countries had a significantly higher expectation on companies to solve social problems and simultaneously make profits than to treat social responsibility and profit-making separately (US: $M_{CSV} = 5.74$, $SD = 1.337$, $M_{intrinsic-CSR} = 4.59$, $SD = 1.423$, $t = 16.79$, $p = .000$; GE: $M_{CSV} = 5.90$, $SD = 1.193$, $M_{intrinsic-CSR} = 4.78$, $SD = 1.259$, $t = 17.61$, $p = .000$; CH: $M_{CSV} = 6.23$, $SD = 1.038$, $M_{intrinsic-CSR} = 4.86$, $SD = 1.464$, $t = 20.22$, $p = .000$). Additionally, the participants in the three countries moderately agreed that CSV performance makes a company more profitable ($M_{US} = 5.10$, $SD = 1.415$; $M_{GE} = 5.36$, $SD = 1.359$; $M_{CH} = 5.96$, $SD = 1.038$). It is evident that current public expectation of CSR reflects a CSV orientation instead of the traditional intrinsic-CSR approach.

CEO Competencies for Effective CSV

Descriptive results. When asking the importance of CEO managerial competencies for creating effective CSV (see Table 2), the most important competency indicated by the US participants was teamwork at 5.99 ($SD = 1.175$) followed closely by overcoming obstacles at 5.96 ($SD = 1.124$). Among the German sample, the most important CEO competency was overcoming obstacles at 5.88 ($SD = 1.135$), followed by providing support and reward at 5.71 ($SD = 1.186$). Among the Chinese sample, the most important CEO competency was providing support and reward at 6.38 ($SD = .845$), followed by energizing innovation at 6.28 ($SD = .877$).

When asked to rate the CEO’s communication competencies important for effective CSV, smaller differences emerged. The highest rated measure appeared among the Chinese sample who rated facilitating constructive dialogue at 6.28 ($SD = .855$), followed by the American respondents rating active listening at 6.05 ($SD = 1.131$), and the German respondents rating of active listening as most important at 5.95 ($SD = 1.150$). The CEO analytical competencies for effective CSV showed less variance by country. Highest among the Chinese group was forming broader and more interdependent views of strategy and planning at 6.28 (SD

= .890), followed by the American sample rating understanding of difficult concepts as 5.90 (SD = 1.10), and the German sample also choosing understanding of difficult concepts as most important at 5.60 (SD = 1.277).

Principal component analysis results. A series of principal component analyses (PCA) using a rotated factor matrix with Varimax rotation were conducted to further explicate the dimensions of CEO competency for effective CSV as cognitively constructed by the participants in the three countries. Parallel analysis developed by O'Connor (2000) using SPSS was used to determine the number of extracting components because the other two general rules (eigenvalues-greater-than-one and the scree test) for component-number determination are much criticized and of low-reliability (Cliff, 1988; Streiner, 1998; Zwick & Velicer, 1986).

The results revealed that the CEO competencies for creating effective CSV were perceived as a unidimensional concept among the US participants (see Table 2). However, such competencies were grouped into a two-dimensional construct in the minds of the Germans and Chinese. In Germany, the CEO competencies for effective CSV were grouped as: (1) general CEO managerial competencies (over the stages of decision-making, implementation, and measurement and evaluation) and (2) effective persuasion (i.e., to persuade involved stakeholders by articulating complex concepts using business-case language and social media). In China, the two dimensions of the CEO competencies grouped as: (1) general CEO managerial competencies and (2) reflexivity and intellectual stimulation.

CEO Characteristics for Effective CSV

Descriptive results. Some differences emerged in the five most important CEO characteristics by country (see Table 3). The US participants rated integrity as the top characteristic of the CEO, with 64.9% agreement, followed by caring for people at 55.5%, accountability third at 48.7%, deep sense of purpose at 43.2%, and being trusted fifth at 41.4%. Among the German sample, being trusted was the top characteristic at 62.7%, with accountability second and 56.4%, determination third at 50.8%, caring for people fourth at 47.1%, followed by a long-term perspective as fifth most important with 42.4%. The Chinese rated accountability a strong number one CEO characteristic at 81.5%, followed by being trusted at 60.8%, integrity in third position at 56.6%, a long-term perspective at 40.6%, and in fifth position being true to his or her core values at 35.2%.

Accountability was rated highly across all three country samples, first in China, second in Germany, and third by US respondents. Being trusted was the only other top-five rated CEO characteristic across all three samples. Integrity was on the top five list of two countries. Among the top five characteristics, having a deep sense of purpose was unique in the US, while determination was unique to Germany and being true to his or her core values unique to China.

Network analysis results

A series of network analyses were conducted to better visualize the public's cognitive map of the 18 CEO characteristics in relation to effective CSV performance. Influential CEO characteristics were quantified by the two node-level metrics: *weighted degree centrality* and *betweenness centrality*. Weighted degree centrality refers to the total number of times a characteristic co-occurred with all other characteristics in the participant selections. Betweenness centrality refers to a characteristic's ability to act as a bridge between other characteristics and to connect otherwise-unconnected characteristics in the network. The networks of CEO characteristics for effective CSV are illustrated in Figures 1-3. The larger size of a node (i.e., a CEO characteristic), the higher weighted degree centrality of the node. The thicker an edge, the more times the two characteristics linked by the edge co-occurred in the participant selections.

Weighted degree centrality values (see Table 3) resulted in a consistent ranking across countries of the top five core CEO characteristics as suggested by the descriptive results. Betweenness centrality analysis (see Table 3) showed that charisma, coherency, and acting as a role model were the bridging characteristics identified by the US participants. The bridging characteristics in Germany were behavioral coherency, vision of legacy, and behavioral consistency; in China they were vision of legacy, empathy, acting as a role model, consistency, and charisma.

Discussion

This exploratory study is one of the first to investigate stakeholder attitude toward CSV as the company's role in society and their perceived CEO competencies and characteristics for creating effective CSV. It extends the body of knowledge in public relations by providing empirical evidence to advance the understanding of CSV from a stakeholder perspective, shedding light on effective CSV practice and CSV communication. The following findings are worth further discussion for theoretical and practical implications.

CSV Emerged as the Current CSR Expectation

The study reveals a preference for CSV over intrinsic-CSR (i.e., corporate action to solve social problems without making profits). The finding goes beyond the trend discovered by the Edelman's Trust Barometer study in 2014-2017: people in the US, Germany, and China agreed that companies *can* simultaneously improve social and community conditions and make profits. The finding suggests that public preference for CSV reflects a win-win and pragmatic view when considering how a company should act responsibly in society.

It is critical to note that this finding does not imply that stakeholders have less or no skepticism toward CSV. However, it suggests that the "profit-making" extrinsic motivation associated with CSV does not engender such skepticism. As the interviewees in another CSV study conducted by the research team (Authors, in press) explained, skepticism emerges when the CSV practice does not improve social or community conditions in "perception" or in reality. In a similar vein, Rim and Kim's (2016) study concluded that skepticism of CSR altruism motive and disbelief of CSR activities defined CSR skepticism. Effective measures of skepticism of CSR altruism were sincere motive (i.e., companies are honest about why they do CSR and their objectives; Vaidyanathan & Aggarwal, 2005) and intrinsic motive (i.e., companies do a cause because they genuinely care about it and/or it is a right thing to do), excluding extrinsic motive (i.e., companies do CSR to build corporate image and/or increase purchase intention). Effective measures of disbelief of CSR activities included CSR activities making a better society and CSR being used to cover mismanagement.

The perceived association between a company's "finding a way to solve social and community problems" and "being profitable" among stakeholders is also consistent with the previous findings that people, especially millennials, are likely to reward CSR-performing companies by product purchase, recommendations, and working or volunteering for them (Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2008; Cone Communication, 2015). Our other research (Authors, in press) provided another explanation to the finding: corporate innovation that creates the shared value (i.e., finding the solution for social problems that also increases profits) further cultivates corporate image, which in turn warrants supportive behavior among the public. Taking together the advantages of CSV argued by Porter and Kramer (2011) and Wójcik (2016) and its favorite attitude among the publics as suggested by our data, we contend that CSV is a promising paradigm that enables the corporation to act with a social purpose long term.

CEO CSV Competencies and Characteristics

Our data suggested that the perceived CEO CSV competencies differed in the three

countries. American participants conceptualized all the 27 competencies derived from the identified leadership styles in CSR as one overall component. Germans perceived a CEO who can effectively realize CSV as one equipped with general managerial ability and some particular communication skills to articulate complex concepts and deliver persuasion using business case language and social media. Chinese viewed a CEO in effective CSV as a responsible leader who has general managerial ability, engages in reflexivity, and intellectually stimulates the followers through effective communication.

One possible explanation for the German public's CEO perception is that Germans place great emphasis on deliberating which prolongs the decision-making. Thus, effectively persuading others after discussing about what the shared value is and could be achieved is crucial to effective CSV implementation that involves multiple stakeholders and calls upon a change of the *status quo*. The importance of CEO reflexivity, and their ability to intellectually stimulate the followers in effective CSV leadership, resonates with the fact that CSR (and CSV) is a relatively new concept in China. Thus, CEOs need to continuously engage in the reflexive process by intellectually stimulating themselves and others in order to explore the interconnectivities between business, environment, and society in contemporary China. By doing so, they can develop and refine their CSV initiatives for effective implementation. It should be noted that, the Chinese, influenced by Confucianism, usually think holistically, especially at the time of calling for a change (Liu, 1990).

The principal components factor analysis did not generate CEO competency components by leadership styles. Thus, we echo Strand's (2011) call and argue that future research should investigate how multiple leadership styles (e.g., the ones we applied to this research) can be simultaneously employed to effectively promote CSV in various markets.

Not surprisingly, moral characters (i.e., integrity, accountability, being trusted, and caring for people) played a more central role than other individual characters when perceiving an effective CSV CEO. Contrary to what Lisak and Roos (2001) found in CSR, fewer American and German participants selected coherency as an important CEO characteristic in the CSV context than vision of legacy. This suggests that CSV must embrace innovation or change to create both economic and social gains, rather than simply being socially responsible. It should be noted that charisma was a much more important CEO attribute in effective CSV in China than in the other two countries. The Chinese participants identified it as more significant in creating effective CSV than consistency, empathy, acting as the role model, and vision of legacy. Thus, CEO charisma, if applicable, should be a theme of CSV communication targeting Chinese stakeholders.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, these findings suggest that CSV is a promising research topic in the public relations literature on CSR. In addition, profit-making as an extrinsic motive may not be a salient factor in testing the impact of stakeholder perceived CSR motives on their reaction to CSR initiatives. The sincere-insincere motive dimension should be tested in addition to the extrinsic-intrinsic motive dimension. Practically, public relations professionals should internally advocate CSV if their companies have the expertise and resources to do it. Effective persuasion and reflexivity and intercultural stimulation through effective communication are the unique component of CEO CSV competencies in Germany and China, respectively. Communicating CEO moral characteristics sets the foundation for effectively promoting CSV among stakeholders. Also, public relations professionals can mention identified bridging characteristics when introducing their CEOs' attributes not directly connected to stakeholder current

perceptions of that CEO. For example, the Chinese indirectly link vision of legacy with acting as role model through charisma when thinking about a CEO in effective CSV. Thus, public relations professionals can introduce the CEO to Chinese stakeholders by the three attributes in an episode of CSV communication.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our findings lay the groundwork for future study. One limitation of this research is its sample (i.e., the random sample drawing from online research panels). Future research can further validate the findings using a random sample drawing from the entire population. Further analyses to identify CSV perceptions by public characteristics (e.g., relationship with the company and understanding of CSR/CSV) are valuable. This study explored the public “perception” of important CEO qualities in effective CSV. There might be a discrepancy between the perceived and the actual CEO quality in effective CSV. Thus, future research using quantitative or qualitative data gathered from CEOs, managers, public relations or CSR professionals, and stakeholder representatives (e.g., NGO leaders and union officers) should be conducted to reveal “actual” CEO quality. Also, the instruments for CEO competencies and characteristics for effective CSV might be further developed in a particular CSV context (e.g., by CSV initiative, by company, or by market). It is critical to further investigate stakeholder reactions to CSV-performing corporations (e.g., intention of purchase, recommendation, employment, and volunteering) and how CEO competencies and attributes for effective CSV can be enhanced.

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The Outsiders: The University of Virginia Under a Microscope: An Analysis of Crisis Responses Surrounding the Charlottesville Protests.

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Abstract

This study seeks to modernize the factors of analysis within crisis response strategy, specifically as it pertains to higher education. Statements from the University of Virginia were collected and analyzed to better understand the image restoration strategies applied in response to the protest marches held in Charlottesville on August 11th & 12th 2017.

This paper examined the image restoration strategies utilized by the University of Virginia in coping with the aftermath of the August 11, 2017 “unite the right” rally in Charlottesville. The scope of analysis within this study focused on internal statements disseminated by University of Virginia President, Teresa A. Sullivan and administrative representatives of the University of Virginia. The timeline for this analysis was August 4 – August 28, 2017.

This study provides further relevance to the theories and strategic models surrounding the process of responding to various crises within higher education. The content analysis included statements from the University of Virginia and coding to specifically determine their tone, and the implementation of a specific response strategy.

The primary theoretical framework utilized for analysis was Image-Restoration theory established by Benoit (1995). The analysis of post-crisis response strategies and their impact on organizational reputation was additionally structured around Coomb’s Situational Crisis Communication Theory (1998). Further analysis included the tone of response statements made by the University of Virginia, Fitzpatrick and Rubin’s (1995) model which focused on traditional public relations, traditional legal, mixed, and diversionary tones. The researchers looked to expand upon these models and assess their application and effectiveness within the specific context of crisis communication in higher education.

Jason Kessler, who is the president of a non-profit organization called “Unity & Security for America,” which he founded in support of “right ideals, organized the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Mr. Kessler noted that the rally intended to make a demonstration in support of the statue of confederate general Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, which local politicians have made a recent push to remove (Bertrand, 2017). The protest began on the night of August 11, when several protestors marched through the University of Virginia campus with torches and the rally became violent as counter-protestors assembled and the two-sides engaged in conflict, which forced law enforcement to intervene.

The following day Saturday August 12, which was the originally scheduled time of the rally included a larger crowd of both rally supports, counter-protestors, and law enforcement members. Prior to noon violence had broken out between the two groups and law enforcement members ruled that the rally constituted an unlawful assembly in Charlottesville’s Emancipation Park. Additional violence then prompted Virginia governor Terry McAuliffe to declare a state of emergency, in turn the University of Virginia responded to this declaration by issuing a statement to the campus community, which cancelled all campus activities, effective at noon.

The rally and protest march from Emancipation Park continued into the afternoon and would conclude with three deaths and numerous other individuals sustaining injuries. Two of the deaths were Virginia state troopers, their deaths in a helicopter accident, while monitoring the crowd violence. As a direct result of the protest, Heather Heyer died, and several others were injured when James Field Jr. deliberately drove his vehicle into the crowd of counter protestors. Meanwhile, other individuals were also injured during the march. However, this was not the first time that a demonstration regarding the Robert E. Lee statute had taken place in Charlottesville (Wilson, 2017). Emancipation Park in Charlottesville had previously been called Lee Park and community members had received prior backlash for changing the name. The first such event of this series of protests occurred on May 13, 2017. Shortly after the city’s plan to remove the statue of Robert E. Lee had been publicized, a white supremacist group leader Richard Spencer organized the “Take Back Lee Park” rally in Charlottesville (Spencer & Stolberg, 2017). The rally included protestors marching around the monument bearing torches and shouting threats but

was considerably small in scope when compared to the rallies in Charlottesville that would follow. On July 8, 2017 approximately fifty hooded Klu Klux Klan members proceeded to march down the streets of Charlottesville in the vicinity of Emancipation Park. However, on this occasion the protestors were met with strong opposition as nearly 1,000 protestors marched in opposition to the Klan members and the demonstration made headlines, but the rally did not gain much ground on this occasion. The rally on August 11 & 12 was the most violent and captured media attention.

Review of Literature

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT: Coombs, 1998) focuses on the inherently unpredictable nature of crises and seeks to attribute a source and type to the crisis, therefore allowing for specific crisis response strategy recommendations. (Coombs, 2012) Expanded the SCCT to provide that a crisis is “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes.” Coombs also goes on to describe crises and their manifestation as being “unexpected events, which are unique in nature” (Coombs, 2012, p. 4). This is a categorization, which this study seeks to employ regarding the University of Virginia’s responses to the “unite the right” protest rally. As an institution of higher education responsible for the welfare of their students, faculty, and extended campus community members the University of Virginia should be expected to have planning in place to respond to demonstrations of this size. However, the true nature, events, and results of this protest were indeed unexpected.

The scope of analysis within this study was twofold. The first focused on categorizing the types of image restoration strategies implemented by the University of Virginia and following the Charlottesville rally. The second primary area of analysis was the tone of the specific crisis response messages conveyed by the University of Virginia, in direct response to the Charlottesville rally. The analysis of image restoration strategies utilized within this case employed five relevant variations of image restoration strategies adapted from Benoit (1995). The typology of image restoration strategies included: 1) Denial, 2) Evasion of Responsibility, 3) Reduction of Offensiveness, 4) Corrective Action, and 5) Mortification.

Secondly, the four main tones of crisis response messages were employed within this study, which are 1) traditional public relations, 2) traditional legal, 3) mixed, and 4) diversionary. These were adapted from Fitzpatrick and Rubin (1995) and were utilized to help categorize the tone of response statements disseminated by the University of Virginia. A traditional public relations tone within a crisis response message can be defined as tactics, which embody an “open” policy or advocate for the equal omission of both good and bad news in an honest effort to inform news outlets and the public. They portrayed actions of a traditional public relations tone as including the following qualities: Investigating allegations and being candid about all discoveries; voluntarily admitting that a problem exists, if true announcing and implementing corrective measures as quickly as possible. Inversely a traditional legal tone found in crisis response messages will typically disagree with traditional public relations strategy, on its face and condemn a proactive release of any news associating blame with an organization. The legal counsel or constituents of an organization will typically advocate for the following types of actions within a crisis response message. 1) To say nothing or as little as possible; 2) be sure to cite privacy laws and other related company policies, whilst saying the minimum; And 3) deny guilt or act in a manner indignant to the notion that these allegations could have occurred or attempt to shift/share blame with the plaintiff.

The third tone defined by Fitzpatrick and Rubin (1995) is a “mixed strategy.” This strategy attempts to combine or utilize some mixture of both traditional public relations strategy and traditional legal strategy within the overall crisis response messaging tone. Organizations implementing a mixed strategic tone in their crisis responses may deny fault of an event or allegations, while also acknowledging that a problem has occurred and expressing remorse, through an adjusted public relations approach. The mixed strategy tone and tactics can have multiple applications in responses by both legal representatives and public relations practitioners. The fourth is diversionary, which aims to divert media and public attention away from the accusations. This tactic includes announcing to the media that the organization is bothered by the situation, while taking little or no action to improve it. Also, the organization may announce that the problem has been solved, or in the instance of an internal issue that the accused or alleged party is leaving the organization for “unrelated reasons,” hoping to put the issue to rest.

Additionally, the researchers identified the Charlottesville rally under the categorization of the thirteen recognized crisis types adapted from Coombs and Holladay (2002) and Coombs (1999b). Accurately identifying the crisis type can correlate directly with the level of organizational crisis responsibility. The analysis of the perceived crisis responsibility associated with the University of Virginia within the specific case is pertinent to this study. The level of crisis responsibility attributed to an institution can serve as a predictor for the effectiveness of one’s crisis response strategy, as other studies have shown, (Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 1995, 1999b; Benoit (1995), Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Various levels of attributions of organizational crisis responsibility may greatly shift the nature of the implemented response strategy and type.

Coombs & Holladay (2002) asserted the following about crises with high responsibility, “Crises with strong attributions of organizational crisis responsibility, such as organizational misdeeds, require strongly accommodative responses such as corrective action & full apology” (p. 172). In preparing to respond to and manage crises, specifically those, which are unprecedented. Mitroff (1996) presented the case for grouping know crises as a means of predicting and responding to crises at the organizational level. “Organizations can utilize crisis groupings to construct crisis portfolios, or a crisis management plan for each cluster, to which the organization is vulnerable. Rationale being that if an organization prepares a plan for one crisis in the cluster, it is reasonably well-prepared for other crises in the cluster” (p. 46-47).

Specific to the nature of this study and future crises in higher education crisis groupings ought to be implemented by universities as a proactive approach to cross-discipline crisis planning. The need for this approach can be seen through the Mitroff, Diamond, and Alphaslan’s 2006 study that defined the need of crisis cluster planning when the authors found that major crisis are not typically “a single isolated event,” but rather “involve a complex chain of crises” (p. 62). They further discussed “crisis mechanisms,” a term which is utilized to make commentary on crisis preparation trends, which literature has supported within organizational contexts and these researchers believe may be even more relevant to colleges and universities in approaching crises proactively. This notion asserts that all types of crises send out early warning signs before they occur, which at the organizational level allows crisis managers to anticipate these warning signs and often times prevent crises before they occur. The authors identified within their study 10 separate categories of what they labeled as “ticking time bombs” unique to major universities, which school officials should be on the lookout for, in order to prevent major crises in the future. Additionally, other major takeaways from this study, which are believed to be pertinent to the crisis management approach of most major American universities, and as such we must be mindful of, concerning the University of Virginia within this case are as follows. 1)

University key stakeholder groups can be seen to include “students, faculty, staff, parents, governing bodies, regulatory agencies, vendors, and athletic organizations, just to name a few” (p. 64). Secondly, a major finding of the study showed that “the surveyed colleges and universities were generally prepared only for those crises they had already experienced.” Which, allows us to spot a significant gap in crisis planning and the ability of universities to be able to handle and respond to future crises; especially given the state of unpredictability, within which crises typically appear and evolve. In sum, the authors provide evidence that few of the surveyed colleges and universities have implemented “broad-based crisis-management programs” (p. 66). A fundamental discovery among the surveyed institutions was that across the board crisis management was tied with institutional/departmental rankings for receiving the lowest level of financial, political, and institutional support from universities. We can now see that coupled with a lack of knowledge, poor crisis planning and management among higher educational institutions may also be attributed to improper prioritization. Along with an inaccurate assessment of needs, and either a lack of or inadequate distribution of resources not commiserate with the type of systematic crisis management process, which ought to be in place and practiced as an on-going effort within all major universities.

- RQ1:** *If Allegations or Blaming concerning how the Charlottesville riots were handled arise throughout the public and media coverage will the crisis response strategy of the University of Virginia be more accommodative and inclined to reduce those feelings?*
- RQ2:** *If the University perceives to have sustained more physical/financial damage, will it be more likely that their crisis response tone is more legal-based or representative of a mixed tone?*
- RQ3:** *If the crisis type for the University of Virginia crisis can be categorized amongst the thirteen types of organizational crises then will more knowledge will be gained that is beneficial to the formation of accurate crisis cluster planning within higher education?*

Methods

Within the scope of this study, the researchers used a content analysis to compare and contrast the crisis management and response strategies of the University of Virginia with previously pertinent literature and studies in related arenas. The definition for this form of analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). The methodology of this study was to identify and gather internal messages disseminated from the University of Virginia in the aftermath of and pertaining to the “unite the right” rally on the Charlottesville campus August 11-12, 2017.

The statements were labeled individually, without identifiable markings or names, and then coded to determine and isolate specific response variables. A systematic coding process was implemented to evaluate each of these statements. Content analysts describe coding as, “the process of observers or analysts interpreting what they see, read, or find and then formally stating their experiences as a proper analysis, and in a process according to observer-independent rules” (Krippendorff, 2004, p.126).

The rules (or codebook) governing the coder analysis within this study were primarily concerned with first identifying the situational crisis type; given an exhaustive and equivalent listed adapted from Coombs (1999b) and Coombs and Holladay (2002). The coding protocol then further examined the extent of usage of specific image restoration strategies (Benoit, 1995)

and strategic crisis response tones (Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 1995) within the provided statements. The codebook asked coders to evaluate, match, and record response strategies and tones equivalent with the university's post-crisis messaging efforts.

Coding Protocol

Two coders were briefed and trained on the research topic, definitions, and coding variables within the case. Ultimately, they worked independently to code. Krippendorff (2004) defines a coder as, "a person employed in the process of recording observations, perceptions, and readings of texts – coders may be readers, interpreters, transcribers, observers, or analysts" (p. 126). These individuals received coding sheets containing information about the case, detailed coding procedures, detailed definitions, and statements to be coded for distinct response variables. Following coder training the coders then individually analyzed the respective internal crisis response statements from the University of Virginia and recorded their answers on the coding sheet, in accordance with each specifically numbered response statement. The coder sheets were then compiled and the data was generated for analysis and assigned an inter-coder reliability score through the use of Krippendorff's alpha (α) coefficient. (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007).

Coding Items & Procedure

Image Restoration Strategy: One aspect of this analysis focused on the type of response strategy used in combatting the crisis. The five strategic options for crisis responses, which were analyzed within the context of this study were 1) Denial, 2) Evasion of Responsibility, 3) Reduction of Offensiveness, 4) Corrective Action, 5) Mortification. These five image restoration strategies were adapted variations from William L. Benoit's (1995) article, "*Sears' repair of its auto service image: image restoration discourse in the corporate sector.*" The primary theoretical framework utilized for analysis within this study was Image-Restoration Theory by Benoit (1995) and associated influences and discussion from the Situational Crisis Communication Theory model established by Coombs (1998).

Tone Analysis: Another aspect of the analysis within the scope of this study focused on the tone of response messages scripted by the university. The coding aspect of this study further analyzed the tone of response statements made by the University of Virginia in connection with pronounced image restoration strategies. This analysis was structured around the model put forth by Fitzpatrick and Rubin (1995) which, defined what constituted traditional public relations, traditional legal, mixed, and diversionary tones.

Results

This section will address the findings of the content analysis process within this sample, which explored the type of image restoration strategies and messaging tones implemented by the University of Virginia, as well as categorized the Charlottesville protest within a specific crisis type.

RQ1: Which of the five image restoration strategies identified in the sampling will be implemented the most in the University of Virginia's post-crises messaging and to what extent?

The coding of statements disseminated by the University of Virginia, in response to the Charlottesville riots revealed the usage of eighty-seven image restoration strategies within the university's post crisis messaging. The chart below displays the breakdown of to what extent each strategy was utilized by the University of Virginia.

CRISIS RESPONSE STRATGEY	TRACKED USAGE
Denial	0
Evasion of Responsibility	0
Reduction of Offensiveness	55
Corrective Action	20
Mortification	12

The crisis response strategies identified within the University of Virginia's overall messaging effort, and the extent of their usages were as follows; 1) Denial (0%), 2) Evasion of Responsibility (0%), 3) Reduction of Offensiveness (63%), 4) Corrective Action (23%), & 5) Mortification (14%). This indicates that across all of the coded statements by the University of Virginia, Reduction of Offensiveness was the image restoration strategy utilized most frequently.

RQ₂: What crisis response tone(s) will be primarily employed through the University of Virginia's post-crisis messaging and in what context?

CRISIS RESPONSE TONE	TRACKED USAGE
Traditional Public Relations	50
Traditional Legal	11
Mixed	25
Diversinary	8

The University of Virginia's post-crises statements in response to the Charlottesville riots were coded and found to contain the usage of 94 strategic crisis response tones. The tones employed in messaging were as follows, 1) Traditional Public Relations Tone (53.5%), 2) Traditional Legal Tone (12.5%) 3) Mixed Tone (27.5%), 4) Diversinary Tone (8.5%). These findings indicate that a traditional public relations tone was most often adopted by the University of Virginia in the response statements concerning the Charlottesville riots.

RQ₃: Which of the 13 crisis-type categorizations will most likely mirror the issues & challenges that the University of Virginia Faced in dealing with the Charlottesville riots?

The response statements from the University of Virginia were also coded for crisis type. The listing of the 13 crisis types and definitions were adapted from Coombs & Holladay (2002). Of the thirteen types coded for seventy-two categorizations of a specific type of crisis from the list were found in the University of Virginia's response statements. The predominant categorizations of crisis type were as follows, 5) Challenge (45.5%), 4) Workplace Violence (32.5%), and 3) Malevolence/ Product Tampering (12%). The crisis type most commonly identified to describe the Charlottesville riots within the University of Virginia's response messaging was Challenge.

Challenge, as a crisis type adapted from Coombs & Holladay (2002) is defined as, "[A] confrontation by disgruntled stakeholders claiming an organization is operating in an inappropriate manner" (p.170). They also defined Workplace Violence as, "An attack by an employee or former employee on current employees on the job" (p.170) and Malevolence/Product Tampering as, "Damage by an external agent against the organization" (p. 170).

Krippendorff's alpha (α) coefficient was used to quantifiably measure the inter-coder reliability amongst 3 coders for this research sample. This measurement method was useful in providing a reliability measurement by measuring the perceived level of expected disagreement versus the actual disagreement amongst the two coders. The goal in implementing

Krippendorff's alpha (a) as a reliability coefficient is ideally to achieve a reliability score above .8. However, unique to the context of analysis within this sample it was expected that a Kalpha score of .8 would be difficult to achieve due to an array of factors.

Inter-coder Reliability Measurements

Cohen's Kappa – Inter Rater Reliability	Krippendorff's Alpha (a) coefficient
Score = .541	Score = .763

Additionally, several factors are worth mentioning as they pertain to the coding results of this study and the perceived reliability. The in-depth definitions of crisis types, strategies, & tones were provided within the coding handbook. However, the writing style of the analyzed statements, disseminated by the University of Virginia allowed for interpretation by the individual, presenting a basis of dispersion among coder agreement. Whereas, some coding of content can simply ask individuals to mark what could be considered widely agreeable responses, this study gave the individuals opportunities to interpret and observe information in styles unique to their selves. Lastly, 13 possible options were adapted for the categorization of a crisis type, five possible image restoration strategy choices, and four possible answers for the response tones of coded passages.

Discussion

The discovery of Reduction of Offensiveness as the primary image restoration strategy evidenced throughout the University of Virginia post-crisis messaging is significant for several reasons. Firstly, as a method of commentary on the University of Virginia's level of perceived crisis responsibility when the response statements were being issued. The absence of the image restoration strategies of Denial and Evasion of Responsibility in the coding analysis of these university response statements showed that the University of Virginia did not perceive a high level of crisis responsibility.

Furthermore, the University of Virginia did not engage in a process of blaming or denial either. Rather, the employment of Reduction of Offensiveness and Corrective Action as the primary image restoration strategies displayed the university's willingness to engage with its stakeholders, meet their situational needs, and take measures to encourage key audiences to revisit perspectives of the university, similar to those previously held, prior to the Charlottesville riots. This is further supported by the large-scale usage of a Traditional Public Relations tone by the University of Virginia, within their post-crisis messaging efforts. The open policy, truthful, informative and accommodative nature of a Traditional Public relations tone coincides, with a goal of wanting to inform and engage with key institutional stakeholders; similar to the aim of the university's proposed image restoration strategies.

Concerning the coding procedures and reliability testing it is my assertion that these broad ranges of answer possibilities may have had an inherently adverse effect on the lowering of perceived inter-coder reliability within this study. In the future, it will be beneficial to narrow the model into a more fixated approach, choosing to focus on a more specifically tailored area of crisis. However, within the aim of this study all of these possibilities were broadly explored purposefully in this context, to avoid bias and not attempt to sway the coders into viewing/interpreting this crisis within such a subjective light.

Recommendations/Limitations

A limitation for this research involved the sample selection process. Two graduate students in public relations were utilized to code the selected passages for analysis within this research sample. This choice to implement coding as the primary data collection tool within this

study initially stemmed from perceived participant accessibility issues. The usage of graduate students was relative to these individuals belonging to a highly accessible population with specific knowledge, necessary to the understanding of public relations strategies and variations of crises.

In future research designs surveying would be highly encouraged as an ideal collection method. It is anticipated that the use of this quantitative data collection method would produce sampling results more representative of the population. However, a major concern would be the general public's lack of specific knowledge pertaining to the management of and response to organizational crises, as a potential factor detrimental to quality results. Also, another potential deterrent to the wide-scale application of surveying as an advancement of this study would be the tedious nature. As in-depth definitions must be distributed and comprehended by all participants prior to their analysis and categorizations of the overall image restoration strategies implemented by the University of Virginia, consistent with the present model. For the aforementioned reasoning a content analysis with a convenience sample was chosen for this present study.

Similarly, to the established need for crisis clusters discussed in Mitroff, Diamond, and Alpaslan (2006) and various other crisis management studies, as a crucial aspect of the preparation and pre-crisis phase. This study recommends across the board, the construction of modern crisis cluster profiles, which are mutually exclusive to higher education institutes. The sampling and analysis of a substantial number of major crises at the university level, such as the University of Virginia crisis in this case, ought to be conducted as part of a larger comprehensive research effort. It is then our hope that such a comprehensive approach of analysis; specifically, at the university level would yield meaningful contributions in the further manifestation of proper resources, increased knowledge of effective and contextually appropriate crisis management responses, and a more accurate prioritization of crisis preparation/prevention efforts by institutes of higher education.

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**From Hourglass to Spider Webs:
Paradigm Shift in Media Effects and Implications for Public Relations**

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Abstract

In this essay, we argue that — in order to understand the effects of social media — we must shift from an hourglass model to a spider webs model. Assumptions of limited channel capacity, one-way flow of information, and uniform media content are obsolete. Many theories of media effects that make such assumptions are also of limited utility. Social media allows audiences to actively consume and generate media content. Social media users act as secondary gatekeepers by reposting some messages and not others. The concept of active audience must be liberated from the uses and gratifications perspective and its erroneous assumption that media use is goal-directed, purposive, and motivated. Rather, we argue that the concepts of play and flow better theorize how people use (play with) media. We argue for an active audience-centric model of publics. We suggest that psychophysiology, ethnography, and network interventions offer promising frameworks for the advancement of public relations scholarship and practice.

Introduction

In public relations, a key *raison d'être* is to facilitate communication between the organizations that employ practitioners and the publics on whom the survival and growth of the organization depends (Broom & Sha, 2013). Of course, the public relations function is much more complex than the “journalist-in-residence” model (e.g., to communicate) would suggest. Nevertheless, communicating with publics remains a core function of public relations. This essay steps back from the current normal science (Kuhn, 1970) that predominates current public relations scholarship. We suggest a paradigm shift. Note that this shift does not require abandonment of the strategic management approach to public relations (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Rather, it actually compels the practice of public relations to evolve from a one-way flow of communication (organization to publics) to a two-way flow (organization to publics and publics to organization). Ultimately, the paradigm shift moves from a two-way flow of communication to n-way flow. That is, the number of participants (nodes) in a communication network — or members of a virtual community — and the links connecting them are near infinite.

Public relations practitioners — like journalists and scholars of mediated communication — are primarily interested in the *effects* of mediated communication. Broom and Dozier (1990), for example, argued that *any* public relations program worthy of the label seeks to change or maintain the knowledge, attitudes, and/or behaviors of publics and senior managements (dominant coalitions) of organizations. That is, practitioners and educators of public relations see communication as *a means to an end*. Because the early practice of public relations was dominated by press agency, publicity, and public information models of the practice (see Grunig & Hunt, 1984), 20th century advances in the theory and practice of public relations struggled to redefine the practice and the discipline away from simply disseminating messages. The goal of the two-way models was to provide a feedback loop; public relations should be the eyes and ears of the organization, as well as its mouthpiece.

Early research into the organizational roles of practitioners provided evidence that the *technician* role was empirically and theoretically distinct from the roles of communication *liaison*, *expert prescriber*, and problem-solving *process facilitator* (Broom, 1982; Broom & Dozier, 1986; Broom & Smith, 1979). The original typology was reduced to two theoretically and empirically distinct organizational roles: *manager* and *technician* (Dozier & Broom, 2006). Performance of the manager role is linked to influencing organizational behavior; execution of the technician role is not. In summary, the concern of the strategic management model of public relations is building relationships between organizations and publics. Mediated and interpersonal communications are important tools for building those relationships, but communication is simply a means to an end.

One sometimes wonders why seemingly intelligent people can make such spectacular blunders (e.g., the Vietnam war, U.S. foreign policy in the 21st century). Part of the answer lies in the paradigms used to filter information and make sense out of what we see, hear, feel, taste, and measure. As Babbie (2001) argued, paradigms are hard to see because they are “so implicit, assumed, taken for granted” (p. 42). Because paradigms are, as Babbie said, “taken for granted,” they create blind spots. The observer often misses what’s obvious because it’s inconsistent with the paradigm. We will return to paradigms and blind spots as we explore new ways to conceptualize communication with publics.

The Old Paradigm: The Hourglass Model

As displayed in Figure 1, the old paradigm of media effects assumed limited channel capacity. Only a few elites owned and controlled the channels of mass communication (TV, newspapers, radio, magazines, etc.). Some mass communication channels sought audiences with distinct demographic and psychographic characteristics (e.g., *Sports Illustrated*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, etc.). Most, however, sought mass audiences to maximize advertising revenues. This led to relatively uniform media content. Elite gatekeepers at monolithic media outlets controlled access to mass audiences. Gatekeepers filtered millions of events, issues, and trends in society to select a small subset as “news.” (Similar processes were involved in selection of so-called entertainment content.)

Under the hourglass model, public relations practitioners sought to build relationships with journalists and gatekeepers. The goal of these relationships was to slide information through media gates to mass audiences. To ensure that such information was favorable to the organizations they represented, practitioners used *information subsidies* (Gandy, 1982). Information subsidies include news releases, VNRs, news conferences, media tours, and other methods to help journalists produce news commodities. Thus, journalists find it easier to cover favorable aspects of organizations, as well as favorable coverage of issues important to those organizations. By virtue of the immutable laws of cost-benefit analysis and reduction of uncertainty, journalists tended to use subsidized information, typically at the expense of enterprise/investigative reporting (Gandy, 1982).

Obviously, public relations practitioners do not help journalists produce news commodities out of the goodness of their hearts. Rather, the goal of such information subsidies is to change or maintain what publics know, feel, and how they behave toward organizations. That is, practitioners subsidize (favorable) information because they believe such mediated communication exerts *effects* on publics. This is not a parochial concern of public relations. Rather, marketers and advertisers are equally concerned with media effects. Under the old paradigm, various theories were proffered to explain and predict media effects. These include agenda building, agenda setting, framing, cultivation, and desensitization. All of these models and theories assumed limited channels of communication and more-or-less uniform media content.

These models and theories also assumed a relatively passive audience. The only exception to this generalization is the uses and gratifications perspective. This perspective is one (but not the only one) that embraced the concept of active audience. From the uses and gratifications perspective (Rubin, 2009), audience members “are variably active participants who initiate the selection and use of communication vehicles” (p. 167). The active audience paradigm starts with the individual member of an audience (public) and asks: What does the individual do with media? This reverses the direction of Lasswell’s (1948) classic model of media effects: Who (source) says what (media content) through what channel to whom (audience) with what effect? The new chain of inquiry goes something like this: What does the individual do with interpersonal and mediated communication and with what effect?

On the surface, the uses and gratifications perspective would seem like a useful approach to studying active audiences. As demonstrated below, however, the uses and gratifications perspective is, in fact, an *intellectual cul-de-sac* (Kaplan, 1964) that has generated an athoretical potpourri of “gratifications sought,” blinded to the obvious by its own paradigmatic axioms. Nevertheless, the active audience perspective is key to understanding the effects of mediated communication in the spider webs of social media.

The New Paradigm: The Spider Webs Model

As displayed in Figure 2, social media have turned the study of media effects upside down and inside out. Key underlying assumptions of the models and theories of old media effects no longer apply. First, the channels of mediated communication are essentially unlimited. Anyone with Internet access can post text messages, photos, music, and video content for anyone else to read, see, hear, and share (repost). Individual members of publics can select media content from a wide range of sources. This means that elite gatekeepers cannot monopolize the information available via the Internet.

In the Excellence Study (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002), the importance of two-way communication was demonstrated. Since then, the social media revolution has occurred. Now, communication between organizations and publics can follow complex, multi-channel pathways. In social network analysis, these pathways are called links. Individuals and organizations linked by these pathways are called nodes. In Figure 2, a message from Node A (a media outlet or a website operated by the practitioner's organization) requires 25 links to reach Node B. In the two-step flow of communication (Katz, 1957), Node N_1 might be regarded as an opinion leader, transferring information from the media (or practitioner organization) to others. In network analysis, communication can flow along many diverse links. The link between N_1 and N_2 is important because it bridges the clique that Node A belongs to the clique that N_2 belongs to.

As messages pass through the spider webs of social networks, messages are often compressed or shortened. In addition, messages are distorted from their original meaning and intent, in a manner consistent with values and beliefs of the node transmitting the message. Message credibility was always a concern of media effects scholars and practitioners. But as messages pass through the spider webs of social networks, each node operates as a secondary gatekeeper. Each node can elect to repost messages or not. Messages can be reposted with commentary that can reframe the message as something very divergent from the meaning and intentions of the original source. For marketers and advertisers, the pot of gold in social media is for a marketing/advertising message to "go viral." In public relations, messages about organizational misdeeds — as perceived by publics — can go viral as well. This is known to cause migraine headaches and peptic ulcers among public relations practitioners, which adds a new nuance to "going viral" on social media. Because social media use is so ubiquitous on smartphones, tablets, and laptops, some scholars are studying social media usage as an addition.

The spider webs model of media effects suggests that public relations practitioners and scholars embrace the concept of active audience. With the embrace of an active audience, one might be tempted to likewise embrace the uses and gratifications perspective. This would be a big, big mistake.

A Critique of the Uses and Gratifications Perspective

In his able summary of the uses and gratifications perspective, Rubin (2009) stated five paradigmatic assumptions of the uses and gratifications (U&G) perspective. First among these is the assertion that "communication behavior, including the selection and use of the media, is goal-directed, purposive, and motivated" (p. 167).

This paradigmatic blind spot is the Achilles Heel of the U&G perspective. Why? Because — for most people consuming media most of the time — this assumption is simply not true. In fact, if one reviews nearly 50 years of uses-and-gratifications research, this obvious fallacy is blindingly obvious. The truth can be seen in the data, but one must look at it through a different paradigmatic prism.

Figure 3 displays graphically the methodological approach of the uses and gratifications perspective. Early research by McQuail, Blumler, and Brown (1972) suggested a theoretical typology of gratifications sought. These included diversion (passing time, entertainment), social interaction (something to talk about with others), environmental surveillance (what's going on that affects me), and social identity (personal reference). Many subsequent studies in this research stream have used modified versions of this typology.

Most (but not all) uses-and-gratifications research employs survey methodology. Respondents are typically asked closed-ended questions about goals external to the media use itself, called *gratifications sought*. Often factor analysis is used to reduce data by clustering similar gratifications sought into groupings. As items (gratifications sought) are added to and subtracted from the U&G item set, the factor structure shifts to accommodate the shifting inter-correlations of the items.

The result is a potpourri of ephemeral “factors” that fluctuate from one study to the next. Table 1 summarizes the meta-analysis of 14 studies of uses-and-gratification measures as applied to Facebook usage (Ryan, Chester, Reece, & Xenos, 2014). Using the McQuail et al. (1972) typology, we classified the subcategories identified in Ryan et al. meta-analysis into groups. (See Subcategories of types at bottom of Table 1.) Regarding *diversion* as the gratification sought, percent of explained variance ranged from 0% to 46%. Regarding *social interaction* as the gratification sought, percent of explained variance ranged from 3% to 38%. Regarding *surveillance* as the gratification sought, percent of explained variance ranged from 0% to 14%. Regarding *identity* as the gratification sought, percent of explained variance ranged from 0% to 15%. In summary, U&G scholarship assumes that media usage is goal-directed, purposive, and motivated. Researchers decided *a priori* what those goals might be, designed closed-ended questions to measure which goals audience members were pursuing, and then factor analyzed the data to cluster goals together. While it is true that some media usage is goal directed, U&G research misses the larger picture.

An Alternative Model of the Active Audience

Public relations practitioners, journalists, advertisers, and scholars of media effects *work* with mediated communication. The practitioner works to write a news release. A journalist works with the news release to write a story. Perhaps that explains why people in these occupations are unable to see the obvious: For audiences, using media is frequently not a means to an end; using media is an end in itself. Normal people aren't working to pursue external goals when they use the media. Normal people play with media, as an interlude in the day and as relief from work-like, goal-directed activities (Stephenson, 1967; Dozier & Rice, 1984).

Indeed, culture may play a role. As Dozier (2013, August) argued, “Americans often work hard at play, forgetting—for example—that playing golf is more important than winning at golf. Perhaps it is no coincidence that an Englishman (Stephenson) and a Hungarian (Csikszentmihalyi) were able to see play and hobbies as worthy of serious scholarly study” (p. 10). In a stream of research spearheaded by Valerie Barker at San Diego State University, we have combined Stephenson's play theory of communication with Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow to explain the use of social media (Barker, 2012, 2015, 2017; Barker, Dozier, Schmitz Weiss, & Borden, 2013, 2014). Play and flow are interrelated concepts that seek to understand what's happening in the minds of people who engage in activities with no external goal or reward. The rewards (optimal flow in Csikszentmihalyi's theory and communication pleasure in Stephenson's theory) are *intrinsic to the activity itself*.

An Active Audience-Centric Model of Publics

To truly study how to communicate with publics, scholars of mediated communication effects need to start with the human brain (see Figure 4). Learn how the brain plays with mediated communication. An emerging sub-discipline that holds great promise is *psychophysiology*. A comprehensive explanation is beyond the scope of this paper (see Lang, Potter, & Bolls, 2009, for a more complete review). Thinking, consciousness, awareness, and feelings are functions of the mind. But these “software” activities occur in the hardware of the brain, what psychophysiology calls the *embodied brain*. We cannot directly study what the mind is doing when media users play with media. But like bubble chambers in subatomic physics, activities of the mind leave physical tracers that we can measure.

Psychophysiology is intrinsically tied to the concept of an active audience. Avoiding the premature closure of the uses and gratification perspective and its false paradigm (communication is goal-driven) will facilitate this stream of research. Although it may seem like heresy to quantitative scholars, we recommend that we scrap survey research with closed-ended items for the time being. Rather, we should use ethnographic methods to build an understanding of media usage inductively. We can’t enter the minds of users as they play with media. But like psychophysiology, ethnography keeps us close to the phenomena of interest.

Social network analysis offers a new way to think about mediated communication. As Millennials turn to social media for news, information, and entertainment, we need to understand how these embodied brains behave as nodes in social networks — and with what effects. Our interest in social network analysis goes beyond understanding the structure of social networks. Rather, our interest is in network interventions. Valente (2012) defined *network interventions* as the “process of using social network data to accelerate behavioral change or improve organizational performance” (p. 49). To reframe Valente’s definition slightly for our purposes, public relations practitioners do network interventions as processes whereby social network data is used to change or maintain what publics know, how they feel, and the way they behave toward practitioners’ organizations. At the same time, practitioners are nodes in the social networks they seek to influence. Thus, according to the principles of symmetry and ethical practices in public relations, other nodes in the network affect what practitioners know, how they feel, and the way they behave. As informal members of dominant coalitions, practitioners use this understanding of publics to influence organizational decision-making. In the spider webs of social media, organizations and practitioners cannot *control* or *manage* the narrative about organizations and issues important to them. However, they can *participate*.

The final step in developing a useful model of audiences and publics is to realize that public relations practitioners and educators look at media use in fundamentally different ways than do publics. This is a paradigm shift. Most of the time, publics *do not care* about your organization or messages from your organization. However, they do play with communication from and about your organization. Thus, good communication strategies (in non-crisis situations) consist of developing narratives that publics can play with. In other words, what can practitioners tell about their organizations that will engage publics that essentially don’t care?

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Table 1

Incoherency of a Standard Uses and Gratification Typology as Applied to Social Media (Facebook)

Study	Sample Characteristics	Diversion	Social Interact	Surveillance	Identity
Foregger, 2008	UG/USA/Comm	33%	11%	0%	3%
Sheldon, 2008	UG/USA/Comm	16%	35%	0%	5%
Sheldon, 2009	UG/USA/Comm	13%	31%	0%	4%
Hart, 2011	HS Students/USA	37%	10%	5%	0%
Hart, 2011	UG/USA	17%	38%	5%	0%
Papacharissi et al., 2011	UG/USA	29%	7%	7%	0%
Alhabash et al, 2012	FB users/Taiwan	0%	6%	0%	5%
Tosun, 2012	UG/Turkey	12%	33%	0%	0%
Valentine, 2012	Internet users/USA	41%	10%	6%	0%
Balakrishnan et al., 2013	UG/Malaysia	8%	35%	0%	5%
Giannakos et al., 2013	FB users/USA	46%	15%	0%	0%
Aladwani, 2014	FB users/Kuwait	6%	34%	14%	0%
Hollenbaugh et al., 2014	FB users/USA	7%	32%	0%	15%
Shoenberger et al., 2014	UG/USA	18%	3%	0%	11%
	AVERAGES	20%	21%	3%	3%
	MINIMUM	0%	3%	0%	0%
	MAXIMUM	46%	38%	14%	15%
Subcategories of Types	pass time entertainment relaxing escape surfing habitual entert wasting time excitement	soc connection maintain ties companionship expressive info share romance est. new relations networking sharing sociability	info seeking prof advance monitoring	soc comparison virtual comm soc presence status updates shared identity self present exhibitionism self expression	

The Hourglass Model of Media Effects

(assumptions: limited channels & 1-way flow)

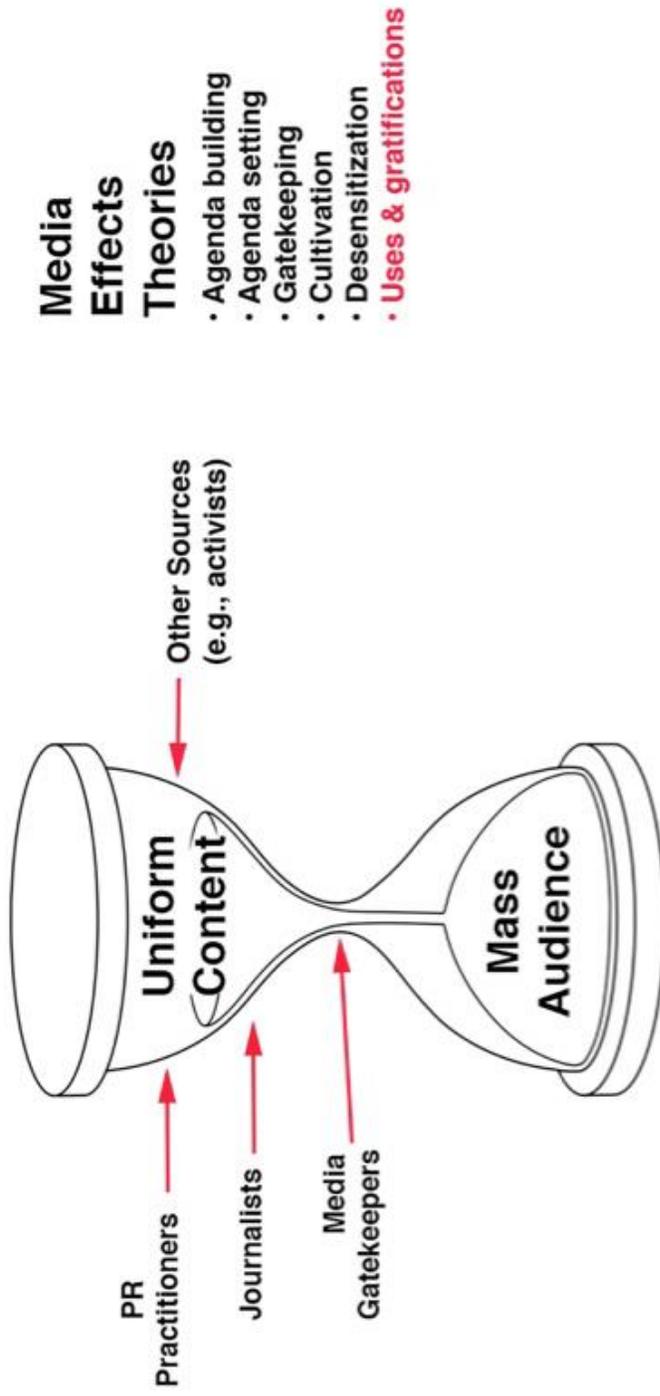
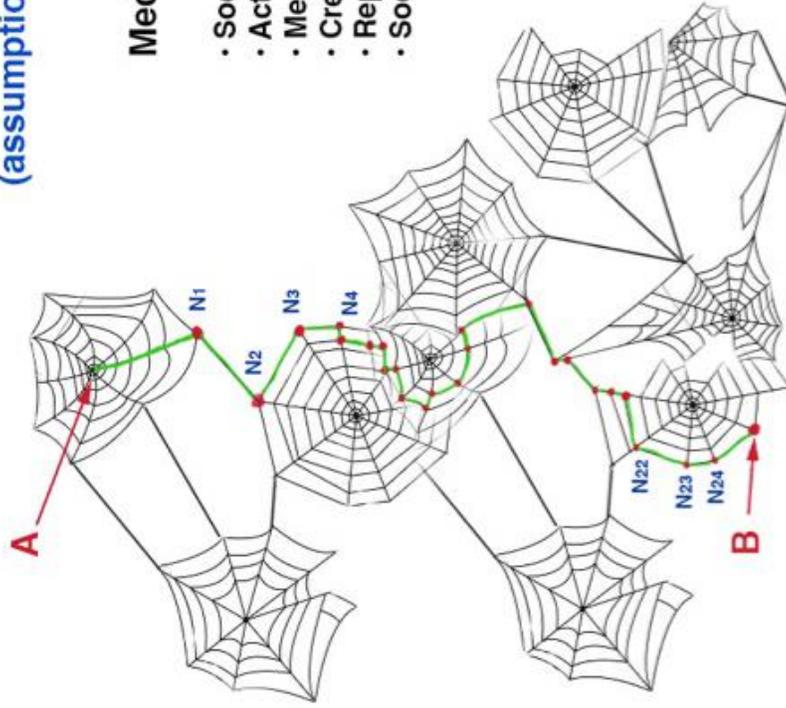


Figure 1. The hourglass model of media effects, assuming limited channel capacity and one-way flow of communication.

The Spider Web Model of Media Effects

(assumptions: unlimited channels & n-way flow)



Media Effects Theories

- Social network analysis
- Active audience
- Message compression & distortion
- Credibility & secondary gatekeepers
- Reposting & “going viral”
- Social media “addiction”

Legend

- A** — Media outlet
- N1** — “Opinion leader”
- N1-N2** — Bridging link
- N2-N3** — Dyad
- B** — Member of target public
(25 links from original source)

Figure 2. The spider web model of media effects, assuming unlimited channel capacity and n-way flow of communication.

The Potpourri of the U&G Perspective

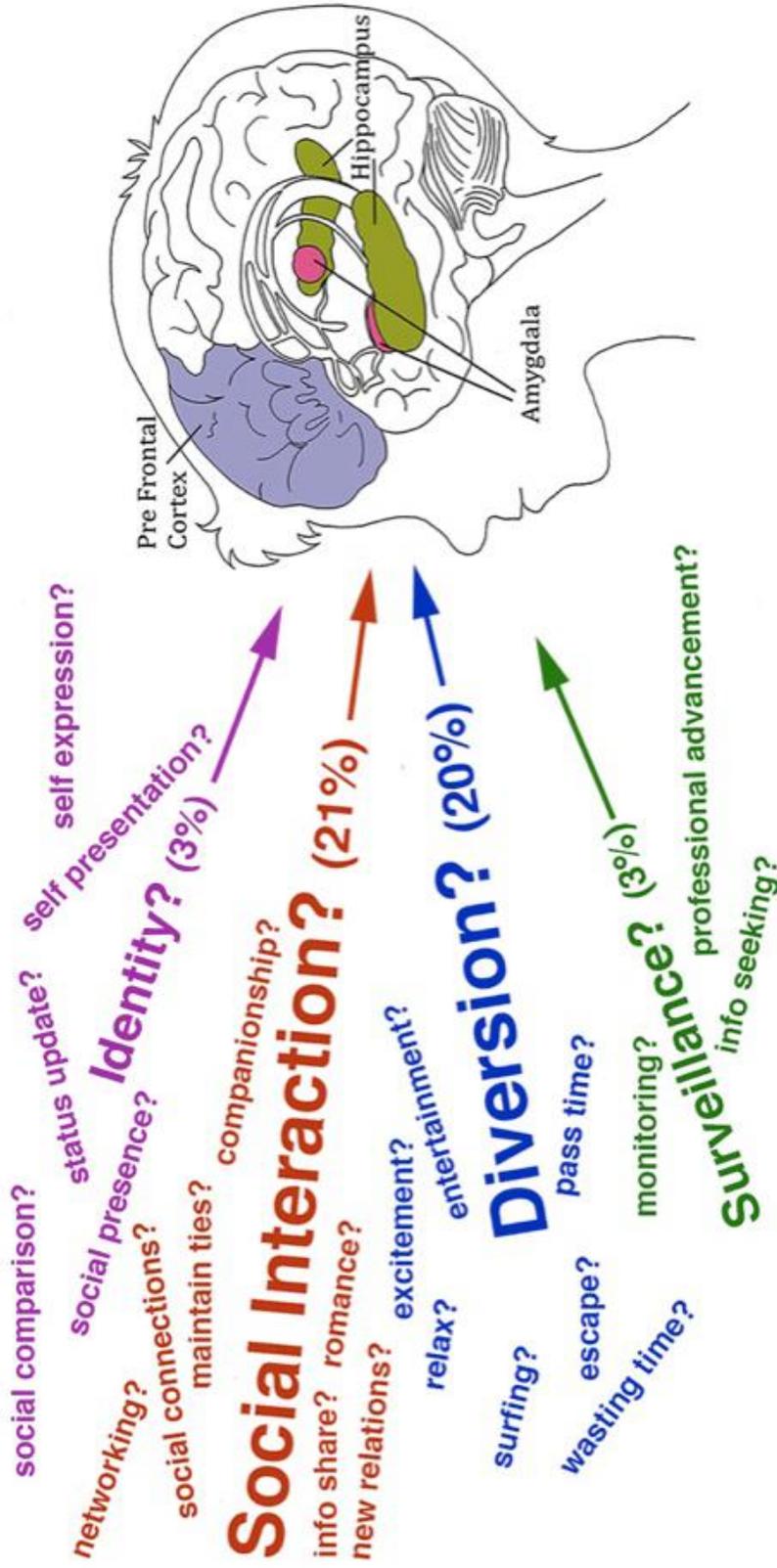


Figure 3. The potpourri of the uses and gratifications perspective.

An Active Audience-Centric Model of Publics

- To study media effects, start with the brain (psycho-physiology)
- Active audience ≠ U&G
- Comm/mass comm is mostly about play, flow
- Do qualitative research (ethnography) & avoid premature closure
- Use network analysis data for network interventions
- Realize that publics *do not* care about your org. (unless you piss them off!)

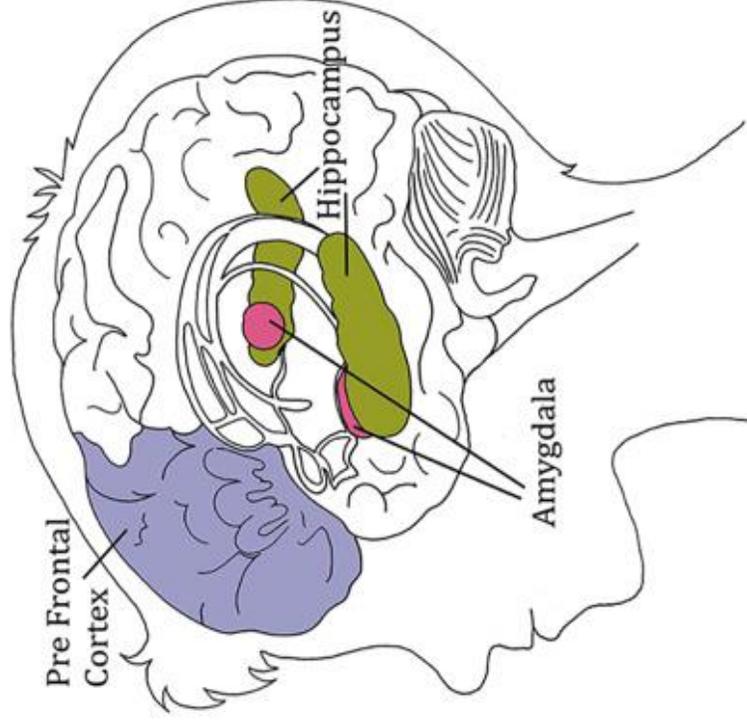


Figure 4. An active audience-centric model of publics with suggestions for methodology and theory construction.

**Unearthing the Facets of Crisis History in Crisis Communication:
A Conceptual Framework and Introduction of the Crisis History Salience Scale**

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Abstract

According to research conducted by McKinsey & Company, headlines including the word “crisis” and the top 100 companies from Forbes 2015 Global 2000 list appeared 80 percent more often in the past decade than previous decades. This is just one indication of the pervasiveness of crisis reports in the world today. In this new media age, publics have unprecedented access to information. Therefore, when organizations experience crises it is more visible than ever before.

Stakeholders and key publics can seek crisis information in a variety of ways, one of which is via online media. This information seeking method allows stakeholders to access centuries-old information about the organizations with just a few keystrokes. Therefore, organizations that have experienced crises in the past must plan their strategy accordingly. There are several factors that impact how much stakeholders consider previous crises when making current evaluations of organizations that are experiencing crises.

Coombs’s (2004) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) identifies performance history as an intensifier of attribution of responsibility during crises. Performance history includes relationship history and crisis history. Relationship history refers to the rapport an organization has with key publics prior to a crisis, while crisis history is whether or not an organization has experienced a previous crisis. Extant crisis communication literature has mostly examined crisis history as a one-dimensional variable. The present study examines crisis history as a multi-faceted variable and proposes a crisis history framework.

The proposed framework examines crisis history and its possible roles among various stakeholder groups. The study also offers a crisis history salience scale, developed based on a thorough literature review as well as in-depth interviews with public relations practitioners, public relations scholars, journalists, and the general public.

The crisis history salience scale can help crisis managers consider the multiple facets of crisis history during their crisis communication planning and implementation. The study also offers a decision tree to assist crisis managers in the planning stage by informing their strategy with crisis history considerations.

Keywords: Crisis history, salience, reputation, emotion, crisis responsibility, SCCT, decision tree

Introduction

According to research conducted by McKinsey & Company, headlines including the word “crisis” and the top 100 companies from Forbes 2015 Global 2000 list appeared 80 percent more often in the past decade than previous decades. This is just one indication of the pervasiveness of crisis reports in the world today. In this new media age, publics have unprecedented access to information. Stakeholders and key publics can seek crisis information in a variety of ways, one of which is via online media. This information seeking method allows stakeholders to access centuries-old information about the organizations with just a few keystrokes. Therefore, organizations that have experienced crises in the past must plan their strategy accordingly.

Crises are unpredictable events that can interrupt organizations’ operations and cause potential reputational harm (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). In some cases, organizations’ current crises can meet their old ones and wreak havoc (Czarnecki, 2017). Furthermore, crisis history and prior reputation are integral because they impact stakeholders’ acceptance of messages (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2015). Organizations stand to lose their reputations when crises arise; either due to the actions that led to the crisis or due to poor crisis management. Additionally, crises have the potential to have negative outcomes. Therefore, sound strategy is integral to weathering a crisis storm. Both internal and external stakeholders face tremendous threats when crises arise, thus requiring communicators to ensure that stakeholders’ concerns are addressed. Consequently, it is important for crisis communication scholarship to examine this phenomenon and look closer at the idea of crisis history and its impacts. Although the crisis history term is addressed in foundational crisis communication theory and scholarship, the term has not gained traction in theory or in practice.

The present study makes significant contributions to the crisis communication literature by exploring crisis history more thoroughly. Currently, crisis history has been operationalized as when an organization has experienced a similar past crisis (Coombs, 1995, 2004). The few studies that have examined this variable have simply explored the impact of a negative or positive crisis history as well as no crisis history being indicated (Eaddy, Brummette, & Jin, 2017; Eaddy & Jin, 2016). However, an explication of the term reveals that the variable is more dynamic than crisis history valence. Therefore, the researcher developed a crisis history salience measure to help crisis managers consider the multiple facets of crisis history during their crisis communication planning and implementation. The study also offers a decision tree to assist crisis managers in the planning stage by informing their strategy with crisis history considerations.

Literature Review

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

SCCT prescribed crisis response strategies for organizations to use post crisis based on the type of crisis that occurs (Coombs, 2004). Coombs and Holladay (2002) identified three crisis clusters/types: victim, accident and preventable. Crisis type refers to the frame surrounding the nature and cause of the crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). Each crisis cluster is characterized by the amount of control that the organization had over the crisis, which is also referred to as initial crisis responsibility. The victim crisis cluster includes crises in which the organization had no control, the accident crisis cluster refers to incidents such as technical malfunction, and the preventable cluster refers to crises that were intentional and within the organization’s control. SCCT suggests that crisis responsibility is intensified by previous relational reputation and crisis history. Prior relational reputation refers to the relationships and

rapport that an organization has or is perceived to have with its stakeholders. Crisis history refers to whether the organization has experienced similar crises in the past (Coombs, 1995, 2004).

SCCT is grounded in attribution theory which suggests that people look for reasons that events occur so that they can maintain control of their lives (Coombs, 1995, 2004; Dean, 2004). Attribution theory examined perceived causality and suggested that there are three dimensions that impact attribution of responsibility: locus of causality, control and stability (Weiner, 1976). Specifically regarding crises, attribution theory suggested that if an organization has a history of crises then those problems need to be addressed (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Kelley's co-variation principle offered the concepts of distinctiveness, consensus, and consistency. Relationship history is the operationalization of distinctiveness and consensus, and crisis history is the operationalization of consistency.

Coombs's 2004 study showed that crisis history had an indirect and direct effect on publics' perceptions of organizational reputation. Therefore, crises considered mild reputational threats become moderate threats, and crises considered moderate threats become severe reputational threats when there is crisis history, thus intensifying the overall threat. Crisis history valence has been examined and found to have significant impacts. Only a few studies have examined the possible impact of crisis history empirically (Coombs, 2004; Eaddy et al., 2017; Eaddy & Jin, 2016; Seo, Jang, Miao, Almanza, & Behnke, 2013). Crisis communication scholarship could benefit from additional examination of crisis history. Firstly, crisis communication scholarship needs further explication of the crisis history concept. Secondly, the literature requires more empirical testing of the concept.

Building an Integrated Crisis History Framework

Conceptualizing Crisis History

The aforementioned studies that examined crisis history's impact, defined crisis history as an organization experiencing a similar previous crisis. It is crucial to examine crisis history through a multi-disciplinary lens to ensure that the framework is more encompassing and useful to scholars in multiple disciplines. Reviewing similar concepts from corporate communications, organizational science, business, finance, and risk/disaster will ensure that crisis history is conceptualized more fully.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) literature suggests that the CSR history of an organization can impact organizational reputation management during crises (Klein & Dawar, 2004; Vanhamme & Grobbsen, 2009). Organizational science literature has examined the impact that behavior history can have on personal reputation (Anderson & Shirako, 2008; Ferris et al., 2003; Zinko, Ferris, Humphrey, Meyer, & Aime, 2012). In product-harm crises, business literature emphasizes the significance of a strong brand and reputation and the importance of sound crisis communication to maintain brand equity (Grundy & Moxon, 2013; Standop & Grunwald, 2009; Zou, Zeng, Zeng, & Shi, 2015). Business and management literature has also examined how history impacts industries.

According to Barnett and Hoffman (2008), a firm's reputation and performance is impacted not only by its own actions, but also by other industry firm's actions. This phenomenon is referred to as industry spillover and can be positive or negative (Goins & Gruca, 2008). Finance scholarship investigates the impact of sustained crises within market sectors versus a single organization. According to Baxter and Feldberg (2000), such instances are referred to as sectoral crises. The authors also suggest a need to identify crisis triggers so that plans can include strategies to avoid events that will trigger a crisis. Crisis triggers appear to be the equivalent to multiple or sustained crisis, contributing to crisis history.

Disaster and risk scholarship focuses on people's behavior in response to a possible or pending risk or disaster and showed that people are more likely to follow disaster/risk messages if they have previously experienced similar events or there is a history of similar events occurring (Rød, Botan, & Holen, 2012).

This review of crisis history conceptualizations has highlighted the concept across disciplines, all of which offer valuable insights into the term. With these considerations, it is important to consider the commonalities to formulate a more encompassing crisis history framework.

Proposing a Crisis History Framework

The review of crisis history conceptualizations illuminated five main concepts regarding an organization's previous similar crises: time, stability, valence, crisis type, and prominence/visibility.

Time

Crisis history would not exist without a temporal component. In general, there must be a previous crisis for crisis history to be considered. Although this component is straightforward, there are several dimensions due to temporal distance. Firstly, temporal distance can impact knowledge of previous crises because the public and stakeholders may not remember or be aware of crises that occurred in the distant past. Contrarily, crises that have occurred in the recent past may have more salience. Secondly, if a crisis occurred in the distant past perceptions regarding that crisis could have changed negatively or positively over time, impacting present assessments.

Stability

Stability refers to the expectancy of the crisis repeating or changing. If publics and stakeholders have an inclination of stability, then they will attribute more responsibility as organizations are viewed as repeat offenders. Contrarily, if the crisis is perceived as unstable, then publics and stakeholders are more likely to give the organization the benefit of the doubt and not expect something similar to happen again.

Valence

The valence of crisis history is a double-edged sword. If an organization has a positive crisis history, then they can benefit from a halo effect in current crises (Coombs & Holladay, 2002, 2006). However, it is also possible that a positive crisis history can cause reputational damage when a current crisis is handled poorly. Conversely, if there is a negative crisis history then the organization may experience the velcro effect during a current crisis and incur additional reputational damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

Crisis type

SCCT originally identified ten crisis categorizations: natural disaster, rumors, workplace violence, product tampering/malevolence, challenges, technical error accidents, technical error recalls, human error accidents, human error recalls, and organizational misdeeds (Coombs, 1995). The ten categories were eventually reduced to include three categories: victim, accidental, and preventable crises. Victim crises occur when organizations and stakeholders are victims and are not responsible for the crisis. Accident crises occur when organizations experience unintentional crises due to mechanical failure, technical breakdown or faulty products. Preventable crises occur when human error has caused a crisis because the prevailing assumption is that the organization could have prevented the crisis if the employee had the appropriate training. Organizational misdeeds are also considered as preventable crises because organizations intentionally put stakeholders at risk. The categories differ based on how much perceived control

the organizations have over the crisis. Attribution of responsibility increases progressively from victim, accidental, to preventable (Coombs & Holladay, 1996).

Visibility

The visibility of previous crises can impact crisis history. If an organization has experienced a crisis previously unbeknownst to the general public, then the crisis history may not impact current crisis perceptions. Additionally, crisis history can be impacted by the visibility of the previous crisis. There are several aspects of visibility that can impact crisis history such as geographical visibility (proximity), industry/sectorial visibility (similar crisis occurred in industry), personal visibility (salience to the public or stakeholder), and media visibility (media outlet(s) that cover the crisis). Although these are key factors of crisis history, there are many other influential factors that could shape the impact of crisis history.

Influential Perspectives and Factors

The previous section identified the key factors in the crisis history framework. However, it is also crucial to consider influential perspectives of crisis history. Firstly, the organizational perspective is important because the organization must consider previous crises, internal factors such as organizational climate and leadership as well as personnel and their knowledge of the previous crisis, and external factors such as media coverage of the previous crisis. Service-oriented organizations should also consider customers' knowledge of the previous crisis.

Secondly, stakeholders' crisis history considerations may differ based on the various types of stakeholders. Faussin (2010) suggested that there are three different types of stakeholders: real stakeholders, stakewatchers and stakekeepers and they differ based on their ties to the organization. Each group's view of past crises would probably differ based on their relationship with the organization and whether they were connected to the organization when the previous crisis occurred. More recently, the term stakeseekers has been used to better characterize the social environments of organizations that sometimes are disrupted by those seeking to put new issues on the corporate agenda (Holzer, 2007).

Thirdly, crises and controversies are often tried in the court of public opinion. Therefore, the public perspective should also be considered. When the public is considering the impact of crisis history, people are first relying on their own memory to recall previous crises or influential community leaders can remind them of what happened previously. It is also possible that a minority could impact the majority by spreading ideas regarding the crisis history.

Fourthly, organizations must consider the perspectives of their sectors or industry. Barnett (2007) suggested that rival firms are interdependent and trade associations or industry self-regulation may benefit participating and non-participating firms. Similarly, organizations can have reputational interdependence that leaves them susceptible to crises that occur to other organizations within their industry. When organizations of a particular sector or industry consider crisis history they should be looking at previous crises that have directly impacted competitors or other industry organizations.

Fifthly, information content can have a profound impact on all of the aforementioned factors in a variety of ways. Most of the perspectives mentioned would likely seek additional information regarding crisis history from a media source or encounter the information with the pervasiveness of new media. According to Loader (2008), "the pervasiveness of these new networked media in the home, work, and public spaces provides the opportunity for 24-hour access to news and information almost anywhere in the world" (p. 1923). With this consideration, one should note that new media can single-handedly impact each of the aforementioned perspectives. New media can transcend temporal, geographic, organizational,

and sectorial boundaries by providing limitless information at the grasp of majority of people. New media allows people to learn historical information easily and quickly. Therefore, peoples' media consumption could impact their perceptions regarding crisis history among many other factors.

Lastly, the information source and form can impact crisis history by the changes that various sources and media can cause in publics' perceptions. In the current information age, oftentimes new media provide an opportunity for the public to receive information from various sources. Several studies suggest that new media and traditional media are used for different purposes and that the medium might matter even more than the message (Austin, Fisher Liu, & Jin, 2012; Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011).

Each of the aforementioned perspectives can also be shaped by emotions. Therefore, the framework must also address crisis emotions of the public. The emotions that publics experience during previous crises can impact their memories of the crisis as well as their perceptions of the organization that experienced the crisis. Emotions can also impact how publics consume crisis information and what medium they choose to consume for crisis information. The framework is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Crisis History Framework

Scale Development for Measuring Publics' Crisis History Salience

Upon explication of crisis history, the present researcher determined that the construct is multi-dimensional and might be best examined and measured through a scale. The researcher explored the construct by conducting interviews with four public relations scholars, three public relations practitioners, four journalism scholars/former journalists and two members of the general public to see if the crisis history dimensions identified through the literature review and concept explanation were thorough and encompassing. The interview data was used to identify areas that the concept explication and literature review did not address. The initial item pool was developed based on the dimensions that were identified. The initial item pool included items designed to measure valence, stability, crisis emotions and impact/proximity dimensions. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) with the items considering an organization that is currently experiencing a crisis.

The present study analyzed data collected using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is a service that provides “requesters” opportunities to pay “workers” to complete tasks (Amazon, 2017). There has been contention among scholars regarding the effectiveness of using the cheaper MTurk workers as survey respondents. However, several studies have shown that MTurk workers are more attentive than college students, their responses are equivalent to in-lab participants, and more diverse than in-lab participants (Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013; Hauser & Schwarz, 2016). There were 513 study respondents who were compensated \$.50 for completing the online survey. The data were collected on February 18, 2017. Demographic information for the sample is included in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Sample Statistics for Scale Development

Total n	513
Age	
18 - 24	11.5
25 - 34	42.7
35 - 44	25.3
45 - 54	9.6
55 - 64	7.8
65 - 74	2.7
75 - 84	0.2
Sex	
Male	56.1%
Female	43.10%
Race/ethnicity	
White	64.50%
African American/Black	6.00%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%
Asian	23.8%
Other	4.1%
Geographic Region	
Northern US	5.8%
Southern US	30.8%
Eastern US	3.9%
Western US	17.3%
Northeastern US	15.6%
Southeastern US	10.3%
Midwestern US	13.5%
Other	2.3%

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on half of the sample. The following analyses were performed to determine the factors to retain. The eigenvalues computed in the EFA suggested that there were six components in the crisis history salience construct. A parallel analysis was conducted to ensure the eigenvalues were statistically significant. Both the principal components parallel analysis and raw data permutation indicated that there were four eigenvalues that were greater than 1.

Conceptually speaking, the proposed crisis history framework suggests that the components work independently, which was confirmed due to lower component correlations. Therefore, a Varimax rotation was used to determine the factors for each of the four components of the construct (See Table 2). The resulting scale had 21 items with a Cronbach's alpha of .849.

Table 2
Initial Scale Items

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
I consider how effectively the organization responded to previous crises	0.750			
I recall how well the organization handled a similar previous crisis	0.741			
I consider how long ago the organization's previous crises happened	0.710			
I recall the organization's previous crises	0.693			
I look for information about how the organization handled previous crises	0.648			
I consider previous crises that happened more than 10 years ago	0.640			
I consider previous crises that happened more than 5 years ago	0.617			
I recall when the organization has had repeated crises	0.460			
I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis if it happened close to where I lived		0.817		
I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it happened close in a place I've visited		0.772		
I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it impacted me personally		0.734		
I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it impacted professionally		0.712		
I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it impacted vulnerable people.		0.664		
I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it impacted marginalized people		0.518		
I consider previous crises that happened in the past month			0.864	
I consider previous crises that happened in the past six months			0.849	
I consider previous crises that happened in the past year			0.837	
I am more angry when the organization had a similar previous crisis				0.826
I am more sad when organization had a similar previous crisis				0.745
I am more scared when the organization had a similar previous crisis				0.71
I am more worried when the organization had a similar previous crisis				0.638

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using the other half of the sample. The path analysis indicated which factors should be retained for the final scale. The factors loadings are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3
Crisis History Salience Scale

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
I consider how effectively the organization responded to previous crises	0.855			
I consider how long ago the organization's previous crises happened	0.806			
I recall the organization's previous crises	0.768			
I look for information about how the organization handled previous crises	0.785			
I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis if it happened close to where I lived		0.852		
I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it happened close in a place I've visited		0.779		
I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it impacted me personally		0.885		
I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it impacted professionally		0.799		
I consider previous crises that happened in the past month			0.917	
I consider previous crises that happened in the past six months			0.953	
I consider previous crises that happened in the past year			0.924	
I am more angry when the organization had a similar previous crisis				0.806
I am more sad when organization had a similar previous crisis				0.793
I am more scared when the organization had a similar previous crisis				0.861
I am more worried when the organization had a similar previous crisis				0.85

Component Identification

The researcher examined each component for commonalities and named them accordingly. The final component correlations are shown below in Table 4.

Table 4

		Alpha
Evaluation	I consider how effectively the organization responded to previous crises	0.816
	I consider how long ago the organization's previous crises happened	
	I recall the organization's previous crises	
	I look for information about how the organization handled previous crises	
	I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis if it happened close to where I lived	

Impact	I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it happened close in a place I've visited	0.848
	I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it impacted me personally	
	I'm more likely to consider a previous crisis when it impacted professionally	
Recency	I consider previous crises that happened in the past month	0.927
	I consider previous crises that happened in the past six months	
	I consider previous crises that happened in the past year	
Emotion	I am more angry when the organization had a similar previous crisis	0.849
	I am more sad when organization had a similar previous crisis	
	I am more scared when the organization had a similar previous crisis	
	I am more worried when the organization had a similar previous crisis	

Final Component Correlations

Discussion

The present study has offered a deeper look into the crisis history concept by exploring various crisis history facets that individuals may consider. The newly developed scale is promising for future empirical study, but does not offer an immediate resource for crisis communicators. Therefore, the researcher has developed a decision tree to help crisis communicators consider the various dimensions of crisis history salience when developing crisis communication strategy and crisis management plans. The Crisis History Salience Decision Tree is intended to inform crisis planning by helping crisis communicators consider how crisis history may impact their stakeholders and publics. Ideally, the decision tree should be included into the crisis management plan to ensure that crisis history is of utmost importance to crisis planning. The decision tree is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2

Crisis History Salience Decision Tree

Has your organization experienced a previous crisis?

“NO” Considerations:

- Has a competitor or other industry organization experienced a similar crisis previously?
- Have you researched to ensure there are no similar previous crises? If no, be sure to do so.

“YES” Considerations:

- How recent was the previous crisis?
- How were organizational stakeholders impacted?
- Were stakeholders angry, sad, scared or worried??
- What was the impact of the previous crisis to various stakeholder groups?
**(consider geography, personal and professional impacts etc.)
- How effective was the crisis response? As portrayed/reported by the media and stakeholders.

Note to the practitioner:

As you draft key messaging, consider your key stakeholders' emotions and perspectives regarding the previous crisis. Also use the answers to the previous questions to inform your strategy and anticipate how stakeholders and media may react and respond in a crisis situation based on your previous crisis.

Limitations, Implications, and Future Directions*Limitations*

While the crisis history salience scale can make significant contributions to empirical research, it is not easily transferrable to the practice. However, as empirical research is conducted, the tree can become even more informative by offering suggestions for possible sentiment or other outcomes if questions are answered in a specific way.

Implications

The major implication of this study is that a new framework has been proposed. Crisis managers will benefit from the proposed framework because it can inform their crisis communication strategy and allow them to anticipate how certain crisis history dimensions might impact publics' perceptions of crisis responsibility, crisis control, and crisis emotions. There is a gap in the crisis communication literature regarding the impact of crisis history as well as the impact of various considerations that individuals may have regarding crisis history. The crisis history salience scale developed in this study is one way to begin to understand the underlying mechanisms of crisis history. Furthermore, the availability of crisis information and the rapidity that publics can obtain it will require crisis communicators to understand how their target publics process the information regardless of whether they have direct experience with the previous or current crisis.

Future Directions

Crisis history salience is an important construct to be studied to help crisis communicators understand how to develop sound strategy when they have experienced similar previous crises, but also to help them understand the best ways to help their publics when crises arise. This study has only scratched the surface of the impacts that crisis history salience can have on publics' perceptions of a current crisis. Future studies should use crisis history salience as an independent variable to see if it impacts publics' perceptions of organizations in crisis. Furthermore, future research should examine whether or not the crisis history construct operates the same in different types of crises.

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Exploring the Role of Social Media in Creating an Engaged Workplace

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Abstract

Literature conveys the growing use of social media in organizations is leading to a reshaping of internal communication strategy. This study is designed to determine best practices for planning, implementing, and measuring social media strategies to improve employee communication and engagement.

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Introduction

According to a 2017 Gallup poll (Boyle, 2017), only 33% of U.S. employees and 15% of global employees are engaged at work. Employee engagement remains a top three priority for public relations practitioners working in corporations (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2015). While public relations practitioners use a myriad of channels to foster engagement (Mishra et al.), they are increasingly using social media as part of their internal communication programming (Haddud, Dugger, & Gill, 2016). Gartner (2013) predicted that 50 percent of large organizations would have internal social networks by the year 2016. The growing incorporation of social media in organizations is leading to a reshaping of internal communication strategy, as organizations seek to improve corporate reputations and foster employee engagement (Huang, Baptista, & Galliers, 2013; Madsen, 2017; Men & Bowen, 2017; Neill, 2015; Skrzypinski, 2013; Towers Watson, 2013). However, research on how internal social media can contribute to employee engagement is sparse (Haddud et al., 2016). This study addresses this gap and presents best practices for managing social media to engender engagement.

Literature Review

With the day-to-day advancement of new technology and the flourishing of social media tools, the internal communication landscape and practices have been transformed (Men & Bowen, 2017). Buettner (2015) defined internal social media as a social networking site that is operated by a company with restricted access to employees, creating opportunity for connecting employees. Wang and Kobsa (2009) explained two types of social media networks used in the workplace: social networking sites open to the public for registration (e.g., Facebook and LinkedIn) and enterprise social networking sites that are internal to a specific company and its employees (e.g., Yammer, Jive, Facebook for Work, SocialChorus).

According to a 2013 Towers Watson Change and Communication ROI Survey, 56% of the employers surveyed use social media tools as part of their internal communication initiatives to build community. The most popular tools include instant messaging (73%), streaming audio or video (61%), human resources blogs (55%), online employee profiles (54%), and social networks (53%) (Towers Watson, 2013).

Most of existing research on internal social media has focused on how companies can benefit by using social media. Social media can facilitate conversations across corporate departments, regions, and hierarchical levels (Huang, Baptista & Galliers, 2013) and among geographic and cultural boundaries (Kane, 2015). Social media can increase collaboration, employee advocacy, sharing of knowledge, employee retention, productivity, and community building (Lipiainen, Karjaluoto & Nevalainen, 2014; Madsen, 2016; Neill, 2015; Opgenhafen and Claeys, 2017). Social media can also help with company branding, as companies leverage employee messaging to build corporate reputation and to assist with recruitment (Neill), and can make CEOs seem more personal and affable (Men, 2015).

While traditional communication channels are still used more frequently for internal communication, Gen X and Gen Y employees are likely to prioritize social networking tools for communication in the future (Cardon & Marshall, 2014). Millennials expect more collaboration from internal communication, which can be facilitated by social media (Neill, 2015). Companies must train and educate employees about using social media in the workplace (Haddud, Dugger, & Gill, 2016). Li and Terpening (2013) found that 43 percent of companies identified internal social media education as a top priority. To encourage social media usage and minimize risks, companies should use social media policies and guidelines (Cario, 2014; Parker, Harvey & Bosco, 2014).

Despite the growing use of social media among large companies and the recognized internal communication benefits derived from social media, less is known about how social media can be used to engender employee engagement. One exception is a 2016 study by Haddud, Dugger & Gill that used a case study approach to examine one multinational company's social media tools and employees' level of engagement. Their research found that higher levels of self-reported usage of internal social media by employees were associated with higher self-reported employee engagement. While this finding is important, the research was limited in that it focused on only one company, and the researchers concluded with a need to further explore internal social media and employee engagement. Mark (2014) also noted a lack of research focused on how data from social media platforms can be used to understand organizational behavior.

Scholarly understanding of employee engagement continues to evolve, as researchers examine the many dimensions of employee engagement, and the role that related phenomena, such as stress and organizational involvement, might play in engagement (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Engagement was initially defined as how "people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Schaufeli et al. (2002) proposed another influential definition and regarded engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). Macey and Schneider (2008) highlighted the three levels of engagement to include trait engagement (i.e., disposition and cognition), psychological state engagement (i.e., affection and emotions), and behavioral engagement (i.e., behaviors). Other scholars such as Kang (2014) and Men (2015) identified empowerment as an important aspect of employee engagement from a public relations perspective.

Internal communication practitioners agree that employee engagement is an important communication goal (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). As Mishra et al. review in their (2014) study, many scholars have examined how organizations can increase engagement through internal communication. Saks (2006) noted the importance of clear and consistent messaging and support from direct supervisors. Welch and Jackson (2007) emphasized the importance of open communication and helping employees to understand the goals of the company. In Mishra et al.'s study, public relations executives noted the importance of multiple channels in building engagement, particularly face-to-face approaches, to foster greater employee trust and commitment.

Purpose and RQs

Internal communication practitioners recognize the value of using social media; however, there is minimal research on *how to* harness employees' social media use to improve communication strategy and employee engagement, the latter of which remains a challenge and a top public relations priority. The literature conveys many suggestions on how organizations should manage the risks and benefits of their employees' participation in social media in order to protect their reputation, but these recommendations often focus on tactical measures, rather than on strategic management (Dreher, 2014). The objective of this study was to determine best practices with planning, implementing, and measuring social media strategies to improve employee communication and engagement by examining the following research questions:

- RQ1: How is employee engagement defined and measured?
- RQ2: What communication channels and social media tools are used to engage employees?
- RQ3: What are some best practices for planning and implementing social media strategies to improve employee communication and engagement?

RQ4: What is the evolution of internal communication around social media?

Method

Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 20 internal communication practitioners; 15 interviews were from October 2017 through early January 2018; and five pilot interviews were conducted prior to test the interview guide. Researchers used a purposive snowball sampling approach to identify and invite participants with at least five years of internal communication experience and who work at companies known for workplace satisfaction, the latter criterion based upon third-party evaluations (e.g., *Fortune*, Workplace Dynamics and Glassdoor listings) of top workplaces in the United States. Practitioners who participated in the interviews work for large, global companies representing energy, education, fashion, finance/insurance, healthcare, manufacturing, services/consulting, transportation, and other industries.¹ On average, the participants, which included 11 males and 9 females, worked 17 years in the communications field.

Researchers used a semi-structured interview guide for all the interviews, which were conducted by phone and/or Skype. After the interviews were transcribed, researchers read and analyzed interview transcripts. Researchers used open and axial coding processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to analyze interview transcripts and notes. Open coding assisted with identifying dominant themes, whereas axial coding helped identify specific examples representative of each dominant theme. Finally, emerging themes from the field notes and interview transcripts and notes were cross-analyzed and compared as a collective whole.

Results and Discussion

RQ 1: How Employee Engagement Is Defined and Measured

The interviewees in general held a consistent and accurate understanding of employee engagement, which encompasses the cognitive, affective, and behavioral involvement with an organization. Specifically, the interviewees identified the following defining attributes:

Purposes and meaning

The majority of the interviewees perceived engagement as a deeper level of employee connections with an organization's mission, purposes, and values. Engaged employees find meaning and purposes in their job. They work not just to get financial returns but to fulfill a mission and purpose. Interviewee 15 suggested that engagement is "employees know why they're showing up to work and what their role is in the purpose of the company...And...that they connected to the purpose and the brand of the company in a meaningful way that allows them to do their jobs well." Interviewee 5 stated, "when an employee is connected to the values of the company, mission and plans, they bring a certain level of energy and passion to the job based on that connection."

Absorption, attentiveness, and discretionary efforts

The interviewees recognized that engaged employees are attentive in their work and going-ons in the organization and feel absorbed and dedicated to their roles. Interviewee 9 stated, "engaged employees have a better understanding of the things that we are working on, the solutions that we have, the capabilities that we have." Given the absorption in their job, when employees are engaged, they are willing to give discretionary efforts. As interviewee 4 explained, "We really think about things like discretionary effort; we know that when people feel connected to the organization and are proud to work here, and they believe in the mission, they're going to give their all and so that's what we're trying to drive toward."

¹Table with interviewee background is available upon request. (Omitted because of space limitation.)

Positive affectivity

Aligned with the literature, engagement was also defined by the majority of the interviewees to entail excitement, passion, and pride. As interviewee 14 shared, “An engaged employee is someone who is passionate, or proud to work for the company, and is not afraid to share that passion.” Interviewee 12 stated that engagement creates “a culture in which people feel comfortable and proud to be a part of our community.”

Empowerment

Another important attribute of employee engagement as identified by the interviewees was empowerment. As interviewee 6 elaborated, when the workforce is engaged, “There is employee voice throughout the organizations, for reinforcing and challenging views, between functions and externally, employees are seen as central to the solution. “Interviewee 1 concurred that engaging employees is “...letting people know that they have a voice, letting people know that voice heard and we actually do things about it. Feedback loop.”

Participation and involvement

Finally, over half of the interviewees recognized the behavioral aspect of employee engagement, suggesting that engagement is about employee participation and involvement in organizational activities. Interviewee 7 stated that engaged employees are “asking more questions, being more curious, and participating in different types of activities and so on within an organization.”

Overall, interviewees’ understanding of employee engagement is aligned with how the term is defined in the literature. Interviewees touched upon the cognitive, affective, and behavioral involvement with an organization, reinforcing the definitions postulated by Kahn (1990), Schaufeli et al., (2002), Macey and Schneider (2008), Kang (2014), and Men (2015).

Measurement of employee engagement

In terms of measurement of employee engagement, interviewees identified both outcomes and outcome level measures. At the outcome level, engagement is often measured by examining employee reaction to communication messages, such as “clicks on platform, shares of content, impressions per platform” (interviewee 9) and “measure of likes and- comments, views” on social media (interviewee 11). As for outcome level measures, in addition to the attributes specified in the definitions, interviewees identified *business objectives* as another critical measure. Interviewee 7 explained,

“We measure recruitment, retention, and productivity in some cases. We look at the business... We look at how quick companies get ideas into the marketplace. What is the velocity of innovation? That is the signal that you’ve got an engaged workforce. If you can get out products quicker that is a competitive advantage to you.”

Interviewee 11 concurred, and said when employees are engaged, “it’s hitting all the business objectives really, you’re gonna sell more, you’re gonna do better, you’re going to have more productivity.”

With regard to measurement methods, surveys are used most often, according to interviewees, followed by focus groups, and observations. Digital analytics are more increasingly used in measuring employee engagement with social media used to facilitate internal communications.

RQ 2: Communication Channels and Social Media Tools Used in Engaging Employees

Among the various communication channels discussed by interviewees, *Intranet* and *email* appeared as most commonly used by the participant companies, followed by *face-to-face venues* such as townhalls, employee meetings, informal gatherings, and management by walking

around. Interviewee 5 gave examples of different forms of face-to-face communications with employees. She explained,

“We do face-to-face meetings on all of our campuses with our staff. ... We also do a bunch of small gatherings. You can't get 60,000 people in a room. Our leaders have a schedule and will visit different departments each year. We also host the Plummer dialogues. Dr. Plummer is a historical figure at XX. And there's a room; that's a beautiful library and every month we invite about 20 different physicians that come and have a conversation with our CEO in kind of a small intimate gathering.”

Electronic and digital media such as teleconferences, videos, webcasts, digital signage, e-newsletters, etc. were also reported being commonly used by many interviewees. Expectedly, the use of traditional print media declined in internal communications, with only one interviewee mentioning print newsletters.

The interviewees in general acknowledged the trend of using *social media* in internal communications. Such tools included blogs and *general social networking sites* such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Snapchat, Google Plus, and Flickr. *Specialized internal social media* tools provided by vendors such as Yammer, Chatter, Slack, Facebook at Work, Social Chorus (<https://www.socialchorus.com/>), and Dynamic Signal (<https://dynamicsignal.com/>) were used by some companies. For instance, Interviewee 8 introduced how Social Chorus works,

“The Social Chorus app is the mechanism for employee communication to connect with employees. The app is on the home screen and these giant brands connect with employees. Log in and the employees get instant content. It reaches employees via other platforms like Yammer and Slack.”

Some organizations developed their own *enterprise social media* to engage employees. A collaborative content creation approach was often advocated in such cases. For instance, interviewee 7 shared that they created an information hub called Voice and explained how it is used:

“We encourage our employees to write commentary and to post information on a variety of things. And then, we search out things in business and society and politics and whatever that we think our important, and we put it on this site. And then employees have access to this site and basically can share all that content with all their networks. So, we give them content to do that.”

Overall, while a variety of interpersonal, electronic, and social media channels are being used by organizations in connecting with and engaging employees and each serves different functions, social channels are apparently on the rise. Many organizations interviewed embraced the social trend and started to try out new tools. Among the new social media platforms, *mobile apps* appeared to take the lead and favored by many organizations mainly due to the convenience, personalization, the greater penetration of smartphones, and the increasingly mobile workforce.

RQ3: Best Practices in Managing Social Media for Employee Engagement

A central focus of the study was to examine the best practices of internal use of social media to engage employees. To that end, interviewees were asked to share their success and failure stories related to internal social media. Overall, the best practices entailed general communication management strategies and specific content strategies, which are detailed below. Social media training and education

The interviewees overall suggested that social media training is not only basic but also critical for effectively using social media to engage employees. It is necessary to provide clear policies for employees to follow when it comes to social media posting, such as what is or is not appropriate to share and what is expected. Adoption of social media is a learning curve for some employees; thus, it is beneficial for organizations to provide training on how to use certain social media tools, their benefits for employees and the organization, as well as how to share internal social content externally.

For example, interviewee 11 stated, “I think you do need social media guidelines more so than a policy that you can teach people. Once people feel confident and comfortable posting, they will.” Interviewee 16 also shared, “We recently revamped our social media guidelines just to make them much simpler and more straightforward, because I think a lot of times like what gets in the way is people just not knowing. Are they allowed to share? Will they get in trouble?” Empowering employees and identifying employee social advocates

Essentially, internal social media are developed *for* employees and used *by* employees (Men & Bowen, 2017). However, an obstacle is that employees tend to engage in self-censorship when it comes to social posting inside organization (Madsen & Verhoeven, 2016) for fear of posting low-quality comments or judgement from peers or supervisors. Many of interviewees in this study recognized, it is thus critical to empower, encourage, involve employees to use the social tools, such as identifying employee social media advocates, who are tech-savvy and innovative to be the leading social voices. For instance, interviewee 5 shared,

“... We did a fairly extensive social listing exercise, which helped us identify people at xx who were already volunteering their own time. People... who are already technical experts in one manner or another, like they’re our innovative people. And those categories of people who also had a social presence.”

Leadership involvement and endorsement

Relatedly, it is critical to involve leaders and gain leadership support and endorsement for internal social media efforts, as recognized by many interviewees. On the one hand, leadership social engagement sets role models and the tone for the organization’s social media culture. On the other, leadership presence on social media grants employees an opportunity to connect with top leaders directly and voice their opinions, which blurred the communication hierarchies (Men & Bowen, 2017). Further, top leaders can utilize social media to establish and enhance thought leadership. Interviewee 7 shared how their CEO engaged in internal social media:

“Our CEO blogs almost every week. So, he is very consistent and disciplined. His blogs are thought provoking, informative and they are basically meant to do two things – help the business learn and help employees understand how the business thinks. He does a phenomenal job. All the kinds of clients we work with, we push that type of thinking onto our clients. And if your CEO is not really communicating on a regular basis via blog or commentary or something then basically people do not understand who you are.”

Monitoring and listening

Many interviewees suggested that to mitigate the risks for employee posting, it is important to monitor internal social media, an expanded environmental scanning effort. This is aligned with what previous scholars have suggested (Opgenhafen & Claeys, 2017). Indeed, social media monitoring is not only about identifying issues or problematic posts, as some interviewees suggested. More importantly, it is about listening to employee voices and concerns and then to address them timely and properly. As interviewee 15 stated, “There is a risk that you are not going to like a comment, or there’s a comment you need to address... I think it’s really

important to foster those relationships internally. It's important to empower people managers or line leaders to be able to address these concerns in the moment when they're happening." Thus, monitoring and listening via social media also helps fosters conversations internally, builds relationships, and enhances employee engagement. In addition to internal social media administrative strategies, interviewees also shared effective content strategies in engaging employees.

Creating sharable, relevant, and practical content

Many interviewees suggested that organizations should actively create social media content for employees to share. To that end, it is critical that the content is relevant, practical, and of interest to employees. Some companies recognized employees' accomplishments on social media. Others posted newsworthy events. For instance, interviewee 3 shared, during their global leadership forum, the inaugural gigantic meeting of world leaders convening to coincide annually with the UN General Assembly, the communication team put up a summary article on social media with details on what happened that day with the photography, and gained significant success with employee social sharing. "People want to hear about people," interviewee 14 commented. Interviewee 16 shared that they worked closely with the tone acquisition team to determine what kind of content candidates are looking for in terms of doing research about the company before they join. He further notes, then "we think about how we can leverage our...existing employee activity to kind of show what our culture looks like and help people sort of see themselves here.... we always provide people with the opportunity, like a reminder that they can share that content whether that's on Facebook or LinkedIn or Twitter, however they want to do it."

Authenticity and consistency

Interviewees also emphasized the importance of being authentic and consistent when it comes to using social media to engage employees. For instance, interviewee 11 noted, "Importantly you want to remain very true to the brand, so you don't want to start posting things that feels like you're snatching from other brands or you start." He also highlighted how consistency matters for employer credibility, "You have to establish consistency on these channels so that employees begin to expect things, and then if you stop then you just sort of lose your credibility." Such remarks are in line with what previous scholars have suggested that truthful, genuine, authentic and consistent communication is essential in building employee-organization relationships (Shen & Kim, 2011; Men & Stacks, 2014).

RQ 4: Evolvement of Internal Communication Around Social Media

The interviewees discussed the following trends as they see internal communications continuing evolving around social media in the next decade.

More conversational, interactive, dialogical, and humanized

Aligned with the unique features of social media, with the adoption of the social tools internally, internal communication will likely become more centered around interactions, conversations and dialogues, and be more social, personalized and humanized, according to the interviewees. As interviewee 11 noted, "I think predominantly we're moving towards a social dialogue, and it's a public dialogue now." Interviewee 2 said, "Social will be a much more important part of social engagement strategies going forward, particularly with remote workers." Similarly, interviewee 12 stated, "People are more inclined to engage in media if it's a two-way conversation. We really need to get our portal to be more interactive...People want to hear human stories."

Employees as content collaborators and social ambassadors

Given the collaborative nature of social media, employees will be more involved in internal communications as content creators, story-tellers, and ambassadors as opposed to mere information recipients, as noted by Men and Bowen (2017). The interviewees of the study shared the same insights. According to interviewee 4,

“The traditional way of thinking about internal communications, which is a person or department in communications produced everything is slowly going away. What’s happening is social media is providing the content for internal communications and internal communications people are basically curators... We used to say the communicators need to understand what is relevant for employees and what social media is saying is employees know what is relevant for employees all we need to do is listen to that.”

Interviewee 8 also stated, “Leading brands continue to roll out social media programs company-wide in an effort to transform employees into brand advocates in social channels, recognizing the value in powering their employees to organically spread the brand’s message.”

Multimedia and mobilization

As a multimedia platform, social media tools allow communicators to post message in all kinds of forms, such as pictures, videos, audios, emojis and so on, which are more personalized and social. Several interviewees shared that they started to post more “videos” and “infographics.” Visual storytelling is taking off in internal communications. Further, as mobile technology such as social messengers becoming the new wave of social media, internal communications are likely to be more mobile-based, according to interviewees. As interviewee 4 noted, “Employees are already using phones to access and share information... We need to reach employees where they are.”

Overall, the contribution of internal social media in engaging today’s digital-savvy workforce was warranted. A trend of internal communication involvement toward being more social, personal, participative, mobile, and behavior-driven was observed.

Behavior and data-driven

As the public relations profession continues to emphasize behavior change and engagement (Men & Bowen, 2017), internal communications are likely to evolve toward the same direction, as acknowledged by some interviewees. For instance, interviewee 3 remarked, “I think it’s gonna be less about the delivery of message than the activation of human behaviors. It could be if you’re a CEO, and you’re trying to figure out what to do about employees and social media, your orientation is going to be probably around driving strategic alignment.” With the assistance of social analytical tools that come with social technology, insights can be offered to drive behavior change. As interviewee 14 noted, “We have to show data. Explaining to senior leadership social media is being used by business owners to tap into what people are saying about the brand to improve and evolve business.”

The blurred line between internal and external communication

With the increasing role of employees as storytellers and ambassadors, the line between internal and external communications is blurred as noted by several interviewees. This is in line with Men and Bowen’s (2017) observation that “anything internal can transcend boundaries and travel to external stakeholders in real time in this transparent and connected digital age” (p. 175). Interviewee 16 remarked, “there’s not a lot that is internal that isn’t external. To some extent, we expect that when we put something out, like a statement on our values, we expect to some extent that anything we put out internally could go externally.” Likewise, interviewee 14 stated, “Any brand that wants to continue to be relevant with new audiences will have to really blur those

lines between what we're sharing internally versus externally. They have to align.”

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to explore the best practices of planning and implementing social media internally to engage employees. Through 20 in-depth interviews with thought leaders and experienced professionals in internal communication in the United States, the study specifically explored how employee engagement is understood, and more importantly, how social media contributes to building an engaged workforce in the digital era. Insights on how internal communications will evolve around social media were also examined.

Overall, the findings confirmed the roles of social media in engaging employees in today's increasingly digitalized organizational settings. The concept of employee engagement was understood thoroughly by internal communication managers and thought leaders; that is, a psychologically motivated state characterized by vigor, absorption, dedication, sense of meaning and purposes, empowerment, positive affectivity, and behavioral involvement and participation. To drive employee engagement, a variety of channels were used by organizations including intranet, emails, face-to-face meetings, teleconferences, webcasts, e-newsletters, and the booming social media tools. Organizations had adopted various social media platforms to connect and engage with internal audiences, such as blogs, general social networking sites (SNSs, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, etc.), specialized SNSs for employee communications and engagement (e.g., Yammer, Chatter, Slack, Facebook at Work, etc.), and organizational SNSs developed and used exclusively by the company. Many organizations have achieved successes in using social media for employee engagement.

Best practices included administrative strategies such as providing clear social media policies, guidelines, and employee training, identifying, promoting, and empowering employee social advocates, leadership involvement and endorsement, and social media monitoring and listening, as well as content strategies such as providing sharable, relevant, and practical content, and being authentic and consistent. Social media grants employees the opportunities to connect with one another, share their insights and expertise, voice their opinions and concerns, and engage in conversations with management directly (Men & Bowen, 2017). Such process empowers employees and instills a sense of community and builds deeper bond and attachment with the organization, which, in turn, could contribute to employee engagement.

Moving forward, the technology will continue to transform the internal communication and employee engagement practices. In particular, according to the interviewees, with more and more organizations getting “social” and “digital,” internal communications are likely to become more conversational, interactive, dialogical, and humanized. Employees are becoming content producers for the organization, empowered social advocates, messengers, and ambassadors; consequentially, the line between internal and external communication is increasingly blurred. With the new wave of social messengers and mobile technology coming up, internal communications are expected to be more mobile and flexible, reaching employees anywhere any time. Moreover, the big data that come with social media conversations and analytics allow organizations to understand employees better and make data-informed decisions to change employee behaviors. These new trends cast both opportunities and challenges for today's internal communication professionals.

The current study addresses a critical and timely issue in internal communications and contributes significantly to the growing body of literature in social media management and employee engagement. Despite the important theoretical and practical insights offered, the study encountered several limitations that can be addressed in future search. First, all interviews were

conducted with practitioners living and working in the United States; future research should expand to include an international sample. Second, although in-depth views and rich examples are shared by interviewees on the best practices of using internal social media to build an engaged workforce, the qualitative approach is limited in testifying the linkage between the use of social media and employee engagement. Future researchers can utilize a quantitative approach such as surveys to verify to what extent internal social media can drive employee engagement. Important topics such as how social media works in engaging employees, what the mechanics are underlying this process, and how to measure internal social media engagement are all worthy of further investigation.

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**Sustainability Alliance Networks on Facebook: A Big Data Network Analysis of S&P 500
Environmental Responsibility Initiatives on Facebook**

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Abstract

To offer theoretical and practical insights on environmental sustainability CSR communication on social media, this study examines how S&P 500 companies form crosssectoral networks to engage stakeholders and communicate their cross-sectoral relationships. The study triangulates methods including data mining, text-mining, secondary data analysis of a financial database, and network analysis.

Introduction

The widespread adoption of social media presents unprecedented opportunities for companies to influence public awareness about their CSR initiatives and manage relationships with stakeholders (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kim et al., 2014; Kim & Rader, 2010; McCorkindale, 2010). The interactive nature of social media expands companies' communication networks and engage stakeholders in many ways (Freeman & Moutchnik, 2013; Ji, Chen, Li, & Stacks, 2017). Research found that environmental sustainability was one of the most prominent themes among Fortune 500 companies' Facebook-based CSR communication (Fraustino & Connolly-Ahern, 2015). Similarly, according to Giving USA, in 2016 donations to environment and animal organizations have experienced a 7.2 percent increase, marking the highest growth among all receipts (Giving USA, 2017).

Additionally, previous research found that corporations often collaborate with nonprofit organizations and nongovernment organizations (NPOs) in CSR endeavors such as environmental initiatives (Yang & Liu, 2016). Such cross-sectoral alliance provide critical and valuable opportunities for corporations and NPOs to pool their resources and expertise together and address some of society's most challenging problems.

To offer theoretical and practical insights on environmental sustainability CSR communication in the social media context, this study examines how S&P 500 companies form cross-sectoral network to engage stakeholders and communicate their cross-sectoral relationships. By examining nine years of 472,832 posts and a network involving 3071 organizations, this study looks into how corporations establish workforces with other organizations that share common interests on sustainability, which may produce different stakeholder engagement outcomes. Theoretically grounded in *structural stakeholder influence theory* (Frooman, 1999; Frooman & Murrell, 2005; Rowley, 1997) from management and stakeholder engagement theory from public relations, this study yields an interdisciplinary perspective to explore an underresearched context and predict stakeholder engagement on social media. Methodologically, the big data network analysis approach addresses the major methodological limitation in previous studies with limited scale of actual communication activities (e.g., Curtis et al., 2010; Kang & Norton, 2004). Results provide significant implications for companies to effectively develop CSR network and nurture relationships with key stakeholders via social media.

Literature Review

Structural Stakeholder Influence Theory

A stakeholder is "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p. 25). According to Freeman, the performance of a corporation largely depends on its capacity to negotiate, balance, and satisfy the demands and interests of various internal and external stakeholders. Based on Freeman's seminal work, a number of stakeholder theories have explored the structure and dimensions of corporations' societal relationships (for an extensive review, see Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The dominant approach to understand stakeholder influence is the demographic approach focusing on key stakeholder attributes (Frooman, 1999; Frooman and Murrell, 2005).

This demographic approach of stakeholder influence theory conceptualized stakeholders as isolated entities each making unrelated claims to corporations. This approach has also minimized the influence that the social environment plays in shaping organizational decisions. Social environments are dynamic and ever changing as one change in a firm, sector or economy has rippling effects across the system. One change in organization's relationships begets another

change in the network, and networks are often conducive to the dissemination of influence and change (Carrington, Scott, & Wasserman, 2005). Additionally, the traditional, corporate-centric view of stakeholder management has been criticized for its dyadic approach and inability to explain corporations' response in social networks. As noted by Roloff (2008): "Stakeholder theory does not sufficiently reflect what happens in multi-stakeholder networks" (p. 234).

An alternative approach to understanding stakeholder influence is the structural approach (Frooman, 1999; Frooman and Murrell, 2005; Rowley, 1997). The structural approach focuses on the relational setting in which organizations operate. The structural approach argues that organizations' social relationships such as the level of resource dependence between a stakeholder and a corporation (Frooman, 1999) and the centrality of a corporation within a network of stakeholders (Rowley, 1997) may determine stakeholder influence.

Rowley's (1997) network stakeholder management theory introduces the social network paradigm to accommodate multiple, interdependent stakeholder interests and predicts organizations' reactions. An important development in the network theory of stakeholder influence is the assumption that corporations do not respond to one stakeholder group at a time (Vandekerckhove & Dentchev, 2005). Rather, corporations are subject to stakeholder influence within the networks comprised of corporations and their stakeholders. The interactions and structure of relationships among corporations and their stakeholders exert considerable influence over management decisions, such as their alliance building strategies, corporate social responsibility reporting and so forth (Habisch, Patelli, Pedrini, & Schwartz, 2011). According to this network model, the corporations are not always the nexus of interactions. Rather, both internal and external social connections may affect corporate behaviors.

A network paradigm moves beyond dyadic relationships between a stakeholder and a focal organization to a macro-level perspective that accounts for the interactions among all stakeholders. This is a relatively new area of research that has the potential to reshape how we conceptualize, measure and engage in interorganizational relationships (Monge & Contractor, 2003). A network paradigm challenges the notion that stakeholders are solely determined by corporations; instead it claims stakeholder relationship management is a process involving multiple social actors and the relationships among them.

Rowley (1997) applied two network concepts—density and centrality—to predict stakeholders' strategies. Rowley asserted that in dense networks (i.e. members are well-connected to each other), stakeholders' communication efficiency increases because the dense networks help to magnify stakeholders' influence and put a considerable pressure on corporations. Centrality, generally speaking, is the frequency of relationships an organization has in a network. When an organization connects with a large number of others, it is positioned centrally in the network and is seen as having a relatively high status (Knoke & Yang, 2008). Rowley argued that the greater an organization's centrality, the more likely the organization can resist stakeholder pressures because a well-connected organization tends to have greater access to resources (Gulati, 1998). Overall, Rowley (1997) contended, "the density of the stakeholder network surrounding an organization and the organization's centrality in the network influences its degree of resistance to stakeholder demands" (p. 888). This resistance will influence relationship building and engaging with publics.

Rowley's (1997) stakeholder network theory makes an important transition from an organizational-centric approach to understanding stakeholder influence to a network paradigm. The conceptualization of stakeholder networks moves the focus of stakeholder management away from focal organizations, and instead leads us to a more communicative focus (Cooper &

Shumate, 2012). Through the lens of communication management, we can see the relationships between organizations and their stakeholders, as well as the relationships among stakeholders.

Based on Rowley's theory, it is important to ask what the overall structure of an environmental sustainability CSR network is.

RQ1: What is the overall structure of the CSR network?

In addition, given the importance of the concept of centrality, we need to understand what organizations are most central in a CSR community.

RQ2: Who are the most central corporations in this CSR network and who are the most central NPOs in this CSR network?

Finally, since organizations' embeddedness in different clusters of stakeholders may affect organizations' assessment of stakeholder influence, the next research question directs our attention to communities within this CSR network.

RQ3: Are there communities within this CSR network.

Social-Mediated Stakeholder Engagement

While public or stakeholder engagement seems to have become a buzzword in recent public relations research, the development of which has more than 20 years of history in various contexts (Johnston, 2014). Consensus has been reached that stakeholder engagement occurs as interaction between an organization and individuals and groups that are impacted or influenced by it (Bruce & Shelly, 2010). In this interactive communication process, both organization and its stakeholders jointly co-manage relationships and constructing meanings to reach mutually beneficial agreements and goals (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Heath, 2014; Johnston, 2014).

More recently, critical linkages are discovered between social media based stakeholder engagement behaviors and organizational outcomes, including three dimensions: perception, relationship, and behavior (Men & Tsai, 2016). It is demonstrated that stakeholders who experienced high level of interactions with an organization on social media tend to evaluate their relationships with the organization more positive (Men & Tsai, 2014; Bortree, 2011) and perceive the organization more authentic and transparent (Men & Tsai, 2014). Companies that receive more positive feedbacks from their stakeholders on social media also are found to be overall more reputable (Ji et al., 2017). In addition, stakeholders' social-mediated communication activities with and about an organization are antecedents of their supportive behaviors toward the organization, such as purchasing (Naylor, Lambertson, & West, 2012; Stephen & Galak, 2012), donating (Ji, 2017), and voting (DiGrazia et al., 2013).

The significant influence of social media engagement has led to a growing number of studies examining the antecedents of stakeholder engagement and how to increase stakeholders' level of participation in organization's social media communication. Two streams have emerged from precursory factors. The first is grounded in classic public relations theories, such as two-way symmetric communication and dialogic communication. The other is closely associated with interactivity, a theoretical construct that stems from computer-mediated communication (CMC). Public relations scholars argued that when posting on online organizational communication with a focus on dialogue-creation and dialogic invitation components can attract stakeholders to be part of interactive conversations and further strengthen relationships between an organization and its stakeholders (Kent et al., 2003; Saxton and Waters, 2014). From CMC perspective, it is deemed that the variety of technology-based interactivity features carried by websites and level of effectiveness of how organizations use those functions are important predictors of organization-stakeholder online interactions (Kelleher, 2009; Lee & Park, 2013; Li & Li, 2014; Sung & Kim, 2014).

However, there is little if any research has investigated whether from a network perspective the connections created by organizations on social media would impact on their stakeholder engagement behaviors. To illuminate the importance of stakeholder influence structure for social media based organizational communication, we explored whether and how companies' social network features can have impacts on stakeholder engagement. Therefore, the following research question is proposed.

RQ4: Do corporations' network positions (brokerage, centrality, structural holes constraint, structural holes effective size) predict their stakeholder engagement (number of likes, shares, and comments) on Facebook?

Specifically, *brokerage* indicates the position of an organization when acting as a broker developing a relationship between two unconnected organizations (Gould & Fernandez, 1989). *Centrality* measures the frequency of a focal corporation's relationships and the centrality and frequency of relationships other connected organizations have (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005; Rowley, 1997). *Structural hole constraint* measures the number of structural holes surrounding a focal corporate and its level of dependency on other organizations in the network. Lastly, *structural hole effective size* is to assesses the strength of a company's connection with others (Burt, 1992).

Method

A big data approach is adopted and the study triangulates methods including data mining, text-mining, secondary data analysis of a financial database, and network analysis. The sample companies used in this research were the Standard & Poor's 500 (the S&P 500). The list of these companies was obtained from a financial database, Compustat. These 500 companies were chosen for examination because they are considered as main pillars of U.S. economy. A test of how they practice public relations on social media in the area of sustainability bears many practical implications for other corporations and businesses. Given these companies represent a wide range of industries, adopting their natural-occurring longitudinal data to test public relations theories should provide robust results.

Data Mining

The Standard & Poor's 500 (S&P 500) companies were selected as the sample. Their Facebook data were retrieved via a *data mining* procedure using Facebook² Graph API³. A pretest revealed that a total of 340 companies were present on Facebook. Those companies' posting history on Facebook and its stakeholders digital engagement actions were retrieved from the first day of January 2007 to the last day of December 2015. Python programming was utilized for code scripting and data mining. A total of 472,832 posts from 340 S&P companies were collected.

² Facebook was selected for hypotheses testing in this research due three reasons. First Facebook has a longer history than other competitors and it is widely believed to be the most representative and influential social media (Pew Research Center, 2016). Second, a Tweet on Twitter has a length limit (i.e., 140 characters) but a post on a Facebook post does not have a length limit; thus it is more flexible in formats and potentially more informative. Third, Facebook API does not have a limit rate in accessing data. Therefore, researchers are able to obtain a more complete trajectory of company and publics activities on Facebook.

³ Facebook Graph API is the primary way for researchers and practitioners to mine data from Facebook platform. It presents and organizes interactions generated by organization, groups, and individual as nodes and connections between nodes, which are accessible and analyzable (Facebook, 2016; Russell, 2013).

Text Mining

To select company posts with a focus on environmental sustainability, a *text mining* process was conducted with keyword search in R. Keywords included both vocables and roots depicting different aspects of environmental sustainability, which were created on the basis of the existing literature. Sample keywords included but not limited to: “climate change”, “conservation”, “global warming”, and “sustain”. After this process, 29,871 posts from 337 companies related with environmental sustainability were obtained. Stakeholder real-time engagement behaviors were also summarized, which included total number of likes, shares, and comments each companies received via posts on environmental sustainability issues. Posts interactivity features were also retrieved, such as number of photos, videos, and hyperlinks.

To identify the active social network and key stakeholders that companies created and interacted with during their social media communication practices, we adopted the *mention* function embedded in the the Facebook API. The final sample consisted of 3,017 active stakeholders that were involved in the environmental sustainability CSR communication within S&P 500’s network on Facebook.

Network Analysis

In this study, the connections between organizations are established based on their mentioning relationship. When one organization *mentions* another organization in its posts, the two organizations are considered as having a relationship. A relationship is conceptualized as an indicator of acknowledgement. This is a directional network and organization may either initiate or receive mentions. The mentioning network was analyzed with a network analysis software program: UCINET 6 (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002). UCINET 6 was used to compute the centrality measures, fit discrete core–periphery models, and test network regression models (Borgatti & Everett, 1999).

Social network analysis and Exponential Random Graph Model (ERGM) were performed to answer the research questions. Social network analysis is the method that examines the patterns of relations among actors, monitors flow of resources (e.g., information, investments, etc.), and reveals how structural factors constrain or foster the activities of networked actors (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Network statistic measures can be used to assess the global structure of networks, the local positions of individual organizations, and flow of resources among organizations. ERGM is a class of network analysis statistics that can “assess the statistical likelihood of specific network configurations” and examine “the prevalence of the network structures above what would occur by chance alone” (Shumate & Palazzolo, 2010, p. 347). Traditional network analysis statistics are unable to analyze multiple relationships and attributes in a single statistical model (Robins, Pattison, Kalish, & Lusher, 2007; Robins, Snijders, Wang, Handcock, & Pattison, 2007).

Results

To answer RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, social network analysis was performed.

RQ1: *What is the overall structure of the CSR network?*

On Facebook, the sustainability network contains a total of 3071 unique organizations. These organizations are connected via 3502 links, with an average density of .000371. Overall, this is a sparsely connected network. The social fragmentation index of this network is .143, suggesting there is only a small percentage of nodes that are disconnected with other nodes in this network. The average communication speed is .467, which refers to the average steps any two reachable nodes can interact. This small number suggests that it is relatively easy for any two organizations to interact in this network.

Moreover, there does seem to be a core-periphery structure exists in this network. A core-network analysis identified a core network (the core network is the densest part of the non-trivial components). Out of the 3071 nodes, 413 organizations belonged to the core network. The core has a density of .005, much higher than the average density of this overall network. Table 1 lists the organizations that are part of the core-network and have a centrality measure that are one standard division above normal. There are a total of 67 organizations qualified for this criterion. A close examination suggests that except for a few NPOs and government agencies, most centrality/influential organizations are corporations.

RQ2: *Who are the most central corporations in this CSR network and who are the most central non-corporations in this CSR network?*

In terms of in-degree centrality, the most central organizations are Waste Management, Animal Planet, DTE Energy Music Theatre, Energy Star, U.S. Department of Energy, Detroit Lions, Kinder Morgan, The Nature Conservancy, Chevrolet, and WM Phoenix Open. These are organizations that are most likely to be mentioned by other organizations. See Figure 1 for a visual depiction of major organizations and their relationships.

In terms of out-degree centrality, the most central organizations are DTE Energy, Waste Management, Discovery Communications, SCANA Energy, Eaton, Xcel Energy Minnesota, Time Warner Cable, General Motors, NRG Energy, and Center Point Energy. These are organizations that are most likely to mention other organizations in their posts.

When compare the in/out-degree centrality lists, it seems that except for Waste Management, organizations with high in-degree are not the same as organizations with high out-degree. While NPOs and government agencies tend to be most mentioned in the network, many companies went out of their way to mention NPOs and government sectors in their posts. Moreover, it seems energy companies are eager to mention other organizations and foster dialogues on sustainability issue.

RQ3: *Are there communities within this CSR network?*

Overall, there are 27 cliques in this network. In addition, to identify sub-groups in this network, we used the Newman Clustering Algorithm to identify groups. The Newman Modularity for the analysis is .863. Since higher value indicates a better clustering, this network has a strong clustered structure. Using this method, the analysis identified 98 sub-groups. Among these groups, there are eight groups have over 100 nodes. The basic statistics for each of these groups can be found in Table 1. A negative E/I index suggests that members of a group are more likely to communicate with other members than with nonmembers. Overall, the analysis suggests that there are indeed clusters within this network. Moreover, within different clusters, members are far more likely to communicate with each other than with external others.

RQ4: *Do corporations' network positions (brokerage, centrality, structural holes constraint, structural holes effective size) predict their stakeholder engagement (number of likes, shares, and comments) on Facebook?*

To answer RQ4, three negative binomial regression models were constructed with number of likes, shares, and comments as univariate dependent variables. These numbers were measured as the summations of total stakeholder engagement reactions (like, share, and comment) to each environmental CSR post made by a given company. Independent variables captured each company's network features, including brokerage, centrality, structural holes constraint, and structural holes effective size. To control for other factors that may impact the outcomes, a series of control variables were also included in the regression models (total page likes, number of hyperlinks used, photos posted, videos posted, and posts).

$$\log(\text{like}/\text{share}/\text{comment}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{brokerage} + \beta_2 \text{centrality} + \beta_3 \text{constraint} + \beta_4 \text{effective_size} + \beta_5 \log \text{page_like} + \beta_6 \log \text{link} + \beta_7 \log \text{photo} + \beta_8 \log \text{video} + \beta_9 \log \text{posts} + r$$

Results revealed that only *structural holes effective size* was a significant predictor of for $\log(\text{like})$ ($b = -.012$, $\exp(b) = .99$, $SE = .004$, $p < .001$). The regression coefficient was exponentiated for interpretation. The results showed that for each one-unit increase in *structural holes effective size*, there would be 1% fewer likes, after holding all other covariates constant.

Discussion

The findings provide evidence about the structure of the environmental sustainability CSR network on Facebook and its impacts. First, in the current CSR network, common features are detected among environmental responsibility initiatives across corporate, nonprofit, and government sectors. Second, the analysis also revealed a strong initiative taken by energy companies to shape the sustainability conversation. Finally, companies' positions in the network have limited influence on their stakeholder engagement reactions. These findings, and the implications are discussed below.

Drawing from the structural stakeholder influence theory literature, this study examines the network structure of the environmental sustainability CSR cross-sectoral alliance network among S&P 500 companies and their stakeholders. Although results revealed a sparse network among overall connections, an emerging trend of collaboration was discovered across sectors involving businesses, nonprofit sectors, and government organizations on environmental and sustainability issues. This network involved key players with a variety of backgrounds. It is likely that S&P 500 companies and their stakeholders from diverse industries and sectors have recognized and acknowledged the value of cross-sectional cooperation and have been making efforts to expand their networks and establish relationships. Such an effort may continue to promote more cooperation involving organizations with diverse backgrounds. These connections may facilitate the exchange of ideas and practices and sharing of resources, which may eventually disseminate across industries to influence environmental sustainability CSR communication and practice.

It is interesting to note that the cross industrial penetration of sustainability environmental CSR does not suggest that individual organizations from different sectors play similar roles in the CSR network. Quite to the contrary, findings of this study suggested that organizational characteristics critically affect CSR network building. Both table 1 and Figure 1 revealed that in the CSR network, corporations are the central forces initiating connections. They frequently initiate or are involved in sustainability related social media conversations. A closer examination further pinpoint among corporations, energy companies are found to have high out-degree centrality. It means energy corporations are eager to reach out through mentioning target organizational stakeholders (oftentimes NPOs and government agencies) in their Facebook posts to raise awareness and establish relationships.

In terms of the impact of corporations' network positions on stakeholder engagement, *structural holes effective size* was found to have a significant association with stakeholders' liking behavior on Facebook. Since large effective size suggests organizations bridging a diverse group of organizations, the negative association can be interpreted when companies are connecting with similar others their Facebook posts are more likely to be liked. This may due to the fact that similar organizations may share each other's perspectives and form a coherent conversation. Being well-embedded in such a network gives corporations the advantage of appearing as popular and more likely to reach like-minded audiences.

This study established a benchmark for tracing trends in cross- sectoral sustainability alliances that take place on social media. Future studies should continue to examine the developments and the changes of environmental sustainability networks. In addition, although this study adopted stakeholder structure theory and detected subgroups in the current network, no typology was adopted to explain the formation of those sub-communities and the associations among them. Future studies may closely examine these communities and develop a classification method to organize different categories of communities. Finally, this study focused mainly on U.S. based S&P 500 companies and associated sectors. We recognize the relationships among international companies and NPOs and regulatory agencies may vary from current findings. Therefore, future studies can explore cross-national cooperation on sustainability issues.

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Appendix

Table 1.

1	DTE Energy	35	American Express
2	Waste Management	36	Ball Corporation
3	Discovery Communications	37	Ecolab
4	SCANA Energy	38	Whole Foods Market
5	Eaton	38	Ryder System, Inc.
6	Xcel Energy Minnesota	39	The Nature Conservancy
7	Time Warner Cable	40	UPS
8	General Motors	41	Applied Materials
9	NRG Energy	42	Ingersoll Rand plc
10	CenterPoint Energy	43	Avery Dennison
11	Range Resources Corporation	44	PSEG
12	Yahoo	45	FedEx
13	Animal Planet	46	Chevrolet
14	Mondel??z International	47	The Mosaic Company
15	CSX	48	WM Phoenix Open
16	Tractor Supply Co.	49	Northrop Grumman Corporation
17	Southern Company	50	UnitedHealth Group Careers
18	PepsiCo	51	Spectra Energy
19	ConocoPhillips	52	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
20	Kinder Morgan	53	American Red Cross
21	Henry Schein, Inc.	54	Amazon.com
22	Blizzard	55	Autodesk
23	Emerson	56	Legg Mason
24	DTE Energy Music Theatre	57	Norfolk Southern Corp
25	Chesapeake Energy Corporation	58	U.S. Energy Information Administration

26	American Electric Power - AEP	59	Scripps Networks Interactive
26	The Dow Chemical Company	60	Williams
27	ENERGY STAR	61	Anadarko Petroleum Corporation
28	Eastman	62	Dr Pepper Snapple Group
28	FirstEnergy Careers	63	DuPont
29	Wyndham Worldwide	64	Henry Schein Animal Health
30	U.S. Department of Energy	65	Intuit
31	Raytheon	66	Lockheed Martin
32	Alcoa	67	TSYS
32	Chevron		
33	Detroit Lions		
34	Nasdaq		

Table 2.

Group	size	Density	Internal links	External links	E/I index
1	281	0.004	283	52	-0.690
2	202	0.005	216	46	-0.649
3	199	0.005	207	87	-0.408
4	185	0.006	188	53	-0.560
5	169	0.006	182	98	-0.300
6	134	0.008	140	42	-0.538
7	124	0.009	138	45	-0.508
8	107	0.010	108	22	-0.662

Figure 1. Indegree centrality.

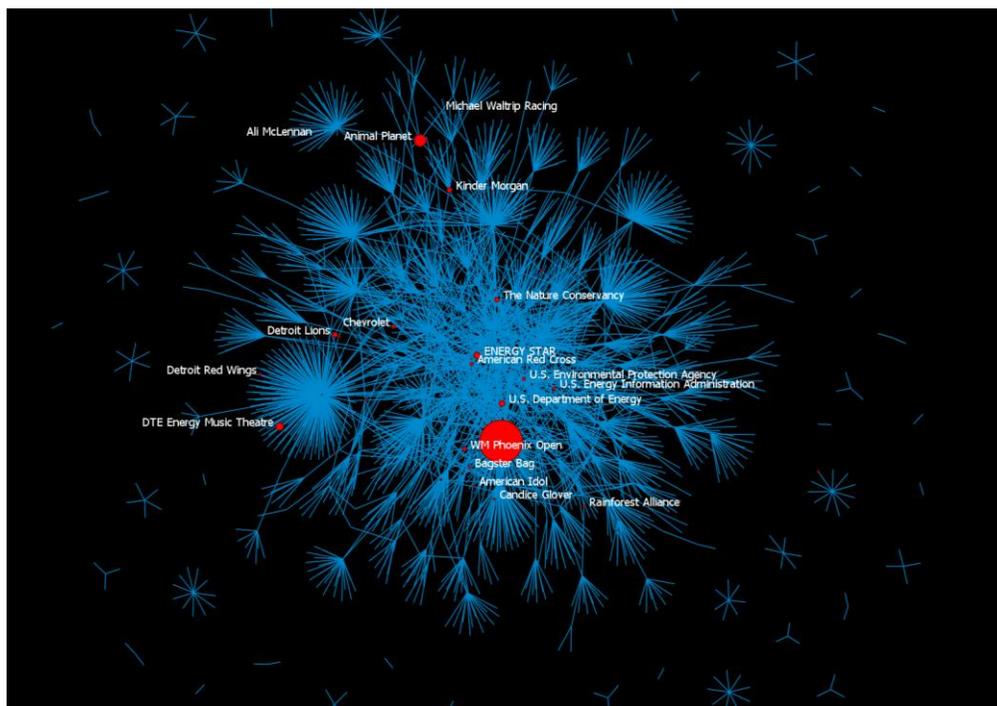
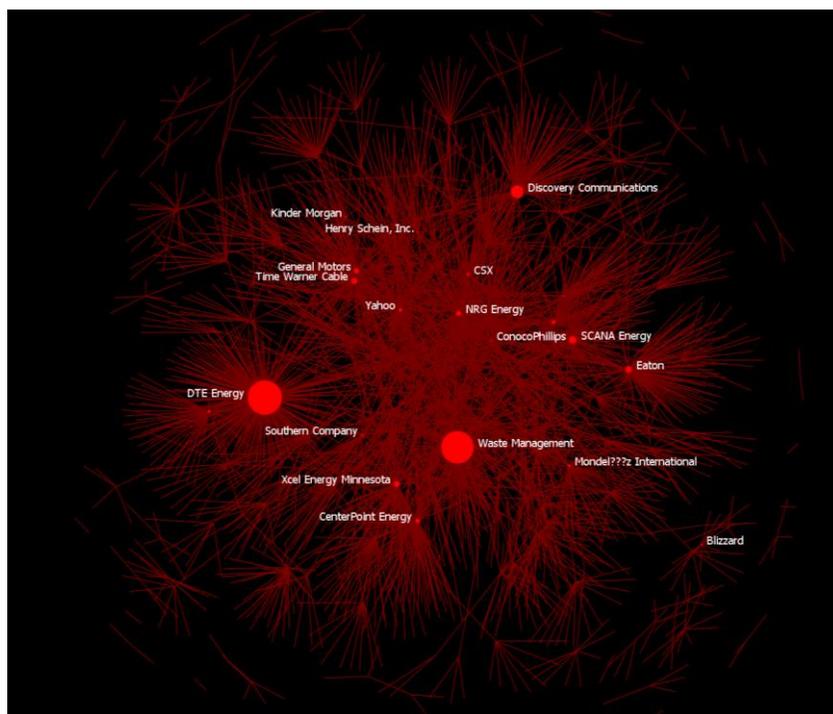


Figure 2. Outdegree centrality.



**How Has Social Media Research in Public Relations Evolved?:
An Update of Social-Media-Related Studies from 2014 to 2018**

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Abstract

There have been an increasing number of studies examining the social media in public relations in the past 15 years. As the social media has become one of the most important areas of research, efforts to regularly update the state of research are needed. The current study reviews 102 research studies examining various aspects of social media published in three major peer-reviewed journals in public relations between 2014 and 2018. The findings indicate that researchers investigating the social media in public relations today expand and diversify the topics of study, frequently incorporate theories in answering research questions and testing hypotheses, and attempt to adopt balanced research methods to arrive at the more complete understanding.

Keywords: social media, public relations, public relations research

Introduction

Since the inceptions of early social networking sites such as SixDegrees.com and Friendster in late 1990s and early 2000s, the social media has grown exponentially, and its impacts on domestic and global societies has become enormous (Shah, 2016). The development of the social media has intensified with the popularity of Facebook and Twitter, and today, it is hard for anyone to imagine interactions among any communication entities without including the social media.

Social media landscape in early 2018 shows that social media platforms popular among Americans are expanding. Smith and Anderson (2018) reports that while Facebook is still the primary platform for most Americans with 68 percent of Americans using the platform, Youtube, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram are also widely used. Especially in younger generations such as 18-24-year-olds, Youtube, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter are preferred to Facebook.

The popularity of social media is not just observed in the United States. Social media users throughout the globe reached 2.8 billion in 2017, or 37 percent of the world, and 91 percent of social media users access platforms via mobile devices (Kemp, 2017). The same trend-tracking group reported that the social media use expanded even as people raise concerns over privacy issues (Kemp, 2018).

Public relations practitioners and scholars have quickly adopted the social media as a vehicle for strategic communication and as a platform to conduct public relations campaigns (Wang, 2015). Wright and Hinson (2017) chronicled the use of social media in public relations practices since 2006 and reported that social and other digital media use among public relations practitioners has increased each year. Communication scholars touted the nature of the social media that inherently promotes interaction among users. Men and Tsai (2014) noted the nature of the social media as a medium that promotes “interactive, participatory, collaborative, personal, and communal” communication. They extended their evaluations of the social media to include that the social media has potential to engage publics in two-way conversations, support certain behaviors, and/or build meaningful relationships. In anticipation of future trend, Wright (2018) stated that digital storytelling and dialogue, ephemeral content, artificial intelligence, and augmented reality would be increasingly used in public relations in near future.

As public relations practitioners adopt and use social media technologies in their practices, scholars have studied various facets of the social media. Khang, Ki, and Ye (2012) reported that 34 studies were published in *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations Research* between 1997 and 2010, and in those 34 studies, use of, perception of, and attitude towards social media were most frequently explored topics (28 studies or 82.4%). Other studies explored social and political issues (6 or 17.6%), social media communication issues (5 or 14.7%), social media in comparison with other media (2 or 5.9%), and cultural issues (1 or 2.9%) (Khang, Ki & Ye, 2012). In their study of the state of social media research in public relations, McCorkindale and DiStaso (2014) argued that “the most important areas of social media research in public relations include theories, ethics, measurement, standards, and benchmarking.” Similarly, Wang (2015) reported that social media usage and attitudes towards social media, the role of social media, the effects of social media on public relations, and social media as communication tools were the important research topics in the existing studies.

The current study grew out of the need for a regular update on the topic that is fast evolving. As McCorkindale and DiStaso (2014) acknowledged, the social media is one of the fastest growing areas in the history of public relations, and public relations research about social media has grown equally fast in the past 10 years. Several scholars have made regular efforts to

review available literature on social media and public relations (Kennedy & Sommerfeldt, 2015; Khang et al., 2012; McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014; Neil & Lee, 2016), and it is my hope to join in their efforts. This study examines the studies published in three highly influential peer-reviewed journals in public relations from 2014 to 2018 in an effort to update our knowledge of the trends existing in current literature on the topic of social media and public relations. The current version of the study includes review of three journals, as it is still in the process of expanding and refining.

Previous Studies

Several scholars have made efforts to provide a report on the state of social media research in public relations by reviewing research studies published in prominent journals within the communication and public relations disciplines. This study heavily relies on five studies that are similar in nature in order to review what previous studies have examined. They are: Khang et al. (2012) which examined the trend in social media research in advertising, communication, marketing, and public relations from 1997 to 2010; McCorkindale and DiStaso (2014) which provided the state of social media research; Wang (2015) which offered a synthesis of social media-related public relations research; Neil and Lee (2016) which examined how roles in social media are evolving in the practice of public relations; and Kennedy and Sommerfeldt (2015) which proposed a postmodern approach for social media theory and research in public relations.

Khang et al. (2012) explored patterns and trends of social media research in advertising, communication, marketing, and public relations over 14 years. To examine how social media research has developed, the authors recorded social media types, research topics, theoretical framework, research method, data collection, unit of analysis, and developmental states of research. While Khang, Ki, and Ye examined 17 academic journals in four disciplines, two of the 17 were included as representative journals of public relations discipline: *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations Research*. The authors reported that 34 studies were published in the two journals between 1997 and 2010, and in those 34 studies, use of, perception of, and attitude towards social media were most frequently explored topics (28 studies or 82.4%). Other studies explored social and political issues (6 or 17.6%), social media communication issues (5 or 14.7%), social media in comparison with other media (2 or 5.9%), and cultural issues (1 or 2.9%) (Khang, Ki & Ye, 2012). Social media types studied in published articles included: blogs (17 studies or 50.0%), social media in general (9 or 26.5%), social network sites (6 or 17.6%), forum and bulletin board (4 or 11.8%), online community (1 or 2.9%), and electronic word of mouth (1 or 2.9%). Uses and users of social media (28 studies or 82.4%) was the most common phases of social media related studies in their study. Effects of social media (4 or 11.8%) and improvements of social media (2 or 5.9%) were also studied.

In terms of theoretical framework, Khang et al. (2012) found that public relations research most often applied relationship management theory, agenda setting or framing theory. The authors, however, noted that the majority of articles either utilized or replicated existing theoretical frameworks rather than suggesting new concepts or frameworks. They also reported that 70.6 percent of social media articles in public relations tested research questions and/or hypotheses, and over 80 percent of studies used quantitative rather than qualitative research methods. Based on their findings, the authors suggested that future scholars develop new concepts and theories, utilize a balance of methodological approaches, and incorporate probability sampling.

In an effort to draw a picture of the evolution of social media in public relations, McCorkindale and DiStaso (2014) identified and explored various components of social media

research. They defined the most important areas of social media research in public relations to be theories, ethics, measurement, standards, and benchmarking. The authors reported that public relations scholars examined the following: theoretical concepts such as engagement and dialogue, transparency, influence, and authenticity; ethical guidelines to effectively navigate social media; social media measurement standards; social media benchmarking (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014, pp. 8-10).

Wang (2015) also provided a synthesis of social-media-related research in public relations that is similar to Khang et al.'s study. Wang reported that the topic or subject of studies covered a wide range from social media usage to attitudes towards social media to role of social media in public relations. In terms of theoretical frameworks, the author observed limited use of theories and concepts. In conclusion, Wang suggested that future scholars integrate various perspectives, theories and approaches.

Two remaining synthesis-oriented studies offered different insight. Neil and Lee (2016) explored how the social media roles assumed by public relations practitioners have evolved over time, and Kennedy and Sommerfeldt (2015) proposed an alternative approach to public relations scholarship. Using two online surveys, Neil and Lee identified seven distinct social media roles assumed by public relations practitioners: social media technician, social listening and analytics, online media relations, policy maker, employee recruiter, internal social media manager, and policing. These social media roles interacted with traditional media roles, offered opportunities for more power and influence for public relations practitioners, and resulted in gender differences in some of the roles.

Kennedy and Sommerfeldt (2015) evaluated existing study from the perspective of postmodernism and argued that rational models of social engagement have been privileged by social media scholars. In order to advance social media theory and practice in public relations, the authors argued that scholars and practitioners should approach the social media through "a postmodern lens."

Research Questions

The overarching research question of the current study is as follows:

- RQ1.** How has social-media-related research in public relations evolved in the past four years between 2014 and 2018? What is the latest information on:
- a. topics
 - b. theoretical frameworks
 - c. research methods

Method

Peer-reviewed journals such as *Public Relations Review*, *Public Relations Journal*, and *Journal of Public Relations Research* began publishing the topic of social media and public relations in 2008. Although research publications in public relations published few social-media-related research between 2008 and 2010, this trend quickly changed after 2010. Increasing number of research studies on the topic of social media and public relations started to appear in various journals since then.

To answer the question, "how has social-media-related research in public relations evolved between 2014 and 2018?," the current study examined research articles on the topic of social media and public relations published in three major journals in the public relations discipline: *Public Relations Review*, *Public Relations Journal*, and *Journal of Public Relations Research*. As I expand and refine the study, other research journals might be added.

Each journal's website was accessed to examine the journal's each volume and issue. As I examine each issue of each journal, I harvested all articles related to "social media," "digital (media)," "social network(ing)," "Facebook," and "Twitter."

A total of 102 articles were collected and the researcher reviewed and recorded the topic, theoretical framework, and research method(s) of each study.

Findings

As table 1 shows, a total of 102 social-media-related research studies were published in three journals between 2014 and June 2018. Seventy-two social-media-related studies were published in *Public Relation Review*, 20 studies were published in *Public Relations Journal*, and 10 studies were published in *Journal of Public Relations Research*. The total number of social-media-related articles published in each journal varied, as the number of articles each publication include in each issue per volume per year is typically different.

Table 1. Number of social-media-related articles published in three journals by year

	PR Review	PR Journal	Journal of PRR
2014	24	4	4
2015	17	6	3
2016	12	5	1
2017	16	5	1
2018 (Jan.-June)	3	0	1
Total	72	20	10

Topics (Subjects) of Studies

When topics of 102 studies were examined, four main topics or subjects emerged: social media itself (platform itself); social media use (users, perceptions, attitudes, practices, and strategies); social media effects (impacts, relationships, factors or predictors of social media use); social media's role in public relations concepts and theories. Seven (6.9%) studies examined social media itself, 61 studies (59.9%) examined social media use, 14 studies (13.7%) investigated social media's effects, and 16 studies (15.7%) examined social media's role in public relations concepts and theories.

Theories or Theoretical Frameworks

Researchers who published in the three journals between 2014 and 2018 actively pursued theoretical frameworks to guide their studies. Eighty-four studies (82.4%) explicitly incorporated theories or theoretical concepts in their studies, and 18 studies (17.6%) did not explicitly included theoretical frameworks. Some of the frequently adopted theories include dialogic communication principle, Situational Crisis Communication Theory, and the concepts such as role, power, credibility, and engagement.

Research Methods

Researchers preferred quantitative research methods. Sixty-one studies (59.8%) used quantitative analyses. Of them, content analysis (27, 26.5%), survey (26, 25.5%), and experiment (7, 7.8%) were the representative quantitative methods used in the studies. Qualitative research methods were also used quite frequently. More than a quarter of 102 studies (27, 26.5%) took qualitative research methods such as case studies (13, 12.7%) and in-depth interviews (7, 6.9%). Many researchers adopted a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods as well. More

than 10 percent of all studies used research methods that combine quantitative and qualitative approaches (11, 10.8%).

Table 2. Research methods used in studies

Method	Frequency	Percentage
Content analysis	27	26.5
Survey	26	25.7
Experiment	8	7.8
Case study	13	12.7
Interview	7	6.9
Review of existing studies	5	4.9
Combination of methods	11	10.8
Other	3	2.9
N/A	2	2.0
Total	102	100.2

Discussions and Conclusion

As the social media has become increasingly important in public relations practice and research, regular update on published works is important. The current study intended to meet that need by examining social-media-related studies in three major public relations research journals published in from 2014 and 2018.

The findings of this study are compared here to those of previous research whose main focus was the review of existing literature:

First, current study findings indicate that the topics of social-media-related research are expanding. Khang et al. (2012) reported that about 83 percent of social-media-related studies published between 1997 and 2010 examined uses of, perception of, and attitude towards social media. In this study, I found that about 60 percent of research studies investigated the similar topics between 2014 and 2018. In addition to the use of, perception of, and attitude towards social media, this study found that researchers investigated social media effects such as impact of social media in the organization-public relations and social media's role in public relations concepts and theories.

Second, the findings of this study indicate that researchers are actively incorporating theoretical frameworks in their works. About 82 percent of studies published in between 2014 and 2018 explicitly incorporated theoretical framework, an 11-percent increase from 70.6 percent in Khang et al.'s report (2012). This finding is also different from what Wang (2015) found. Wang observed limited use of theories and concepts and asked researchers for integrate various perspectives, theories and approaches. Some of the theories and theoretical concepts frequently explored included dialogical communication theory (e.g., Galvez-Rodriguez, 2018; Kent & Taylor, 2015; Watkins, 2017), situational crisis communication theory (e.g., Graham et al., 2015; Ott & Theunissen, 2015; Xu & Wu, 2016; Zoonen & Meer, 2015), engagement (e.g., Allagui & Breslow, 2016; Men & Tsai, 2015), roles and power (e.g., Neill & Lee, 2016; Sweetser & Sha, 2015), and credibility (e.g., Kim & Brown, 2015; Kim & Hammick, 2017).

Third, similar to previous review studies, this study too found that researchers relied on quantitative research methods more than they did on qualitative research methods. Although this study found the reliance on quantitative research methods is less severe (59.8%) than what

previous scholars found (over 80%, Khang et al., 2012), quantitative research methods were clear majority methods adopted in the works examined in this study. What needs to be noted here, however, is that an increasing number of researchers chose to use more than research methods in order to seek more complete answers to their questions. More than 10 percent of all studies used research methods that combine quantitative and qualitative approaches (11, 10.8%).

Overall, the current study tells us an optimistic story about the current state of social-media-related research. Researchers investigating the social media in public relations practice and research today expand and diversify the topics of study, frequently incorporate theories in answering research questions and testing hypotheses, and adopt balanced research methods to arrive at the more complete understanding. All in all, a good news!

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**The Influences of Temporal Distance toward Organizational Threat
on Publics' Responses in the Context of Health Crisis**

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Abstract

The current study explores the influences of perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat on crisis outcomes (i.e., crisis responsibility, organizational reputation, crisis emotions, and supportive behavioral intentions) and the role of perceived health threat in the context of health crisis. The findings of an experimental study ($N = 239$) indicate that perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat is negatively associated with crisis responsibility, crisis emotions, and is positively related to supportive behavioral intentions. In addition, mediation analysis reveals that there are indirect effects of perceived temporal distance on supportive behavioral intentions via crisis responsibility and crisis emotions. The indirect effect through crisis responsibility and the direct effect of temporal distance on supportive behavioral intentions are also contingent on the perceived health threat level. The theoretical and practical implications for the role of perceived temporal distance of organizational threat and perceived health threat are discussed.

Introduction

Threat has been regarded as a key factor in discerning organizational crisis. Threat, which is defined as a “potentially negative situation involving publics,” describes potential damages inflicted by the crisis (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999, p. 184), which is a crucial factor to understanding crisis situations and publics’ reactions to them. Threat was conceptualized in the contingency theory of strategic conflict management as one of the 86 contingency factors that decide the levels of advocacy and accommodation (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997). Facets of threats have been explicated from the perspective of an organization by threat appraisal model (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2005). The model proposed to develop three dimensions of threat (i.e., threat level, duration, and type), providing a framework to discern the nature of threat, but it focuses on treating threat from the perspective of an organization (e.g., public relations practitioners). In this spirit, how publics perceive threat that may damages an organization will be an interesting venue to look at. Indeed, there have been few studies in the area of crisis communication to explore organizational threat from publics’ viewpoint. Considering publics’ evaluation of threat likely affects diverse crisis outcomes (e.g., organizational reputation, crisis responsibility, and crisis emotions), this study aims to dig into publics’ appraisal of threat and how it affects various outcomes in the context of health crisis.

The idea of temporal distance helps to extend the concept of threat in this direction. According to construal level theory, individuals have distinct psychological associations with events based on their perceived temporal distance (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Studies have found that people tend to have a more positive view of a particular event when it will occur in the distant future than when it will occur in the near future (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). The present study examines how perceived temporal distance works in understanding organizational threat and its effects on crisis outcomes. In addition, to take risk communication perspective into crisis context, the role of perceived health threat is explored in terms of its interaction effect with perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat.

Threat Dimensions

The threat appraisal model proposed a 3-tier dimensionality to grasp aspects of threat: threat type (internal vs. external), threat duration (short-term vs. long-term), and threat level (high vs. low) (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2012). The threat dimensions were operationalized based on previous research about perception of threat. For example, scholars from the area of marketing presented that there can be three types of threats: physical/social, second/third party, and immediate/delayed threats (Strong, Anderson, & Dubas, 1993). The 3-tier dimensionality focuses on how social threat is evaluated when public relations practitioners communicate with publics (Jin et al., 2012). The type of second/third party is related to threat type and immediate/delayed threat gives a foundation for threat duration and threat level (Jin et al., 2012).

The studies concerning threat dimensions in the context of crisis management have focused on organizational perspective. As an example, an experimental study showed that threat type (internal vs. external) and duration (short-term vs. long-term) significantly influenced cognitive threat appraisal (situational demands and resources), emotional arousal, and the degree of accommodation among public relations practitioners (Jin & Cameron, 2007). More specifically, public relations managers in the condition of external and long-term threats reported more perceived situational demands and resources for the organization, most intensive negativity, and selection of more accommodative stances.

Consideration of how publics perceive threat is an essential step for a more complete picture of the effects of crisis occurrence. Given that threat is both the cause and effect of crisis

and is associated with crisis response (Jin et al., 2012; Rosenthal & Kouzmin, 1997), threat also needs to be further conceptualized from publics' perspective. For this purpose, time needs to be addressed in threat dimensionality as an additional factor (Kim, 2017). This is plausible given the connection between threat and an actual occurrence of crisis. Threat serves as a cause of crisis, but not all threatening cases are treated as actual crisis (Jin et al., 2012). It is argued that crisis happening requires a certain level of threat (Jin & Cameron, 2007). Hence, the process where threat becomes crisis is tapped into threat dimensions. To wit, Kim (2017) proposed that temporal distance between the current time and future points of threat realization will extend the threat dimensionality to demonstrate a holistic view to the threat appraisal and provide the framework of how publics' perception of threat affects the cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to crisis situations.

Temporal Distance of Threat

Application of temporal distance in threat dimensions is supported by construal level theory (Liberman & Trope, 1998). The theory constructed the notion of psychological distance, which is "a subjective experience that something is close or far away from the self, here, and now" based on the abstract mental construal of events or objects (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). To wit, how an object is located from the reference point (i.e., self, here, and now) addressed four kinds of dimensions (i.e., temporal, spatial, social, and hypothetical distance) proposed by the theory. The perception of distance is addressed by construal, which refers to "the processes that give rise to the representation of the event itself" (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 443). In terms of construal levels used for evaluating different psychological associations, distant objects are regarded as abstract, structured, and high-level, and proximal objects are construed as concrete, unstructured, and low-level (Trope et al., 2007).

Psychological associations tightly related to time dimension is perceived temporal distance (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Temporal distance which influences individuals' reaction to future events systematically changes individuals' construal evaluation of the objects. The construal level is applied to perception of temporal distance; a temporally distant event is construed as more abstract, simple, and high-level than a temporally proximal event (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Most notably, temporal construal of future events determines individuals' judgment, attitudes, and behaviors (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008). Individuals focus on essential and abstract features of distant-future events and incidental and concrete features of proximal-future events (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003). This aspect of construal makes individuals' reactions to vary by temporal distance.

Kim (2017) suggested to apply the concept of temporal distance into threat in the context of crisis communication. This novel approach helps to predict crisis-related outcomes from the perspective of publics. Especially, it should be noted that threat, by nature, is a future-oriented concept. Thus, threat is perceived based on temporal construal of future events. Temporal distance from the current and future time point (proximal future vs. distal future) when a threat becomes an actual crisis and/or when a threat begins to impose negative impacts on objects (e.g., an organization, publics, society) is a factor to determine crisis outcomes (Kim, 2017). One notable idea about the application of temporal distance in crisis contexts is that this type of distance determines perception of relevance (Chandran & Menon, 2004). For instance, people think proximal-future risk events as more relevant than distal-future ones (Zwickle & Wilson, 2013). In a similar way, another study demonstrated that U.K. survey participants reported more concerns on climate change because it is perceived as a temporally proximal issue (Spence, Poortinga, & Pidgeon, 2012). These studies corroborate the idea that temporal distance toward

threat is a significant factor in predicting crisis outcomes (Kim, 2017). Indeed, involvement was found associated with publics' crisis responses (e.g., crisis emotions, crisis responsibility) (Choi & Lin, 2009) and the levels of involvement likely depend on perception of temporal distance.

Temporal distance of threat also predicts valence of crisis outcomes. According to construal level theory, individuals are likely to have more positivity toward a high-level construal object than a low-level one (Trope et al., 2007). Due to future optimism, people are likely to predict distant future events more positively than proximal future events (Trope & Liberman, 2003). For instance, perceived risk was found higher when a risk is presented in a day frame (vs. in a year frame) (Chandran & Menon, 2004). When the value associated with high-level construal is more positive than the one of low-level construal, an object is perceived more attractive as temporal distance becomes longer (Trope & Liberman, 2003). More specifically, distant future events (high-level construal) are perceived as more positive than proximal-future ones (low-level construal); thus, related outcomes likely are perceived more favourable as temporal distance increases. This is similarly applied to understanding how future threat is appraised by publics and their crisis outcomes are formed. It is predicted that greater their perceived temporal distance is, more positive their crisis outcomes are. Formally put:

H1: Greater perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat will be associated with (a) less crisis responsibility, (b) more positive organizational reputation, (c) less negative crisis emotions, and (d) more supportive behavioral intentions.

Previous research findings also confirmed the mediating role of those factors in crisis communication context. A prior study demonstrated that crisis responsibility mediated the effects of causal attribution, crisis seriousness, the organization's crisis response on impression and trust toward organization, and purchase intention (Lee, 2005). A study examining cognitive processing model of crisis communication found that organizational reputation served as a mediator on the effects of crisis response, crisis responsibility, and emotional response on supportive intention (e.g., word-of-mouth and purchase intentions) (Kim & Yang, 2009). In terms of the mediating role of crisis emotions, another study showed that feeling of anger mediated the relationship between crisis responsibility and negative word-of-mouth (WOM) intention, and between crisis responsibility and purchase intention (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). These studies suggested that crisis responsibility and negative crisis emotions would negatively relate to, and organizational reputation would positively relate to supportive behavioral intentions. It is predicted that perceived temporal distance will be negatively associated with crisis responsibility and crisis emotions, which are, in turn, negatively related to supportive intentions. Perceived temporal distance will be positively related to organizational reputation, which is ultimately associated with lower levels of supportive intentions. Formally put:

H2: (a) Crisis responsibility, (b) organizational reputation, and (c) crisis emotions will mediate the relationship between perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat and supportive behavioral intentions.

Perceived Health Threat

This study attempts to explore how perspective of risk communication fits into crisis communication context in the health-related context. Close association between crisis and risk has led to a reciprocal relationship between crisis management and risk management (Coombs, 2010). As a part of crisis preparation, risk communication helps stakeholders who might incur risk understand potential consequences (Coombs, 2010). Given the close relationship between crisis and risk management, this study aims to extend the scope of crisis communication research by considering risk perception (i.e. perceived health threat) elicited by the crisis situation.

In the field of risk communication, the key constructs tapping individual's perceived health threat are perceived severity (individuals' beliefs of how serious a health threat condition and its consequence are) and perceived susceptibility (beliefs of how vulnerable individuals feel toward a health threat condition) (Austin, Ahmad, McNally, & Stewart, 2002). Health communication theories (e.g., health belief model) have assumed that these variables are to predict individuals' health behaviors in the context of risk (Rosenstock, Strecher, & Becker, 1988). It was argued that people accept the advised health behaviors to prevent contracting disease when they believe themselves susceptible to the disease and its consequence would be severe on themselves. However, to the best of our knowledge, perceived health threat has not been used to predict crisis outcomes. Hence, the present study attempts to explore how perceived health threat affects publics' crisis responses in a health crisis situation. Due to limited empirical evidence, our approach to include a risk factor into crisis communication is addressed the following research questions:

- RQ1:** Will perceived health threat moderate the effects of perceived temporal distance on (a) crisis responsibility, (b) organizational reputation, (c) crisis emotions, and (d) supportive behavioral intentions?
- RQ2:** Will perceived health threat moderate the indirect effect of perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat on supportive behavioral intentions via (a) crisis responsibility, (b) organizational reputation, and (c) crisis emotions?
- RQ3:** Will perceived health threat moderate the direct effect of perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat on supportive behavioral intentions?

Method

Sample and Procedure

A total of 239 respondents were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). A total of 239 participants (121 in proximal future threat message and 118 in distant future threat message conditions) completed the online study via MTurk participation pool system. The subjects were given 1 dollar for completion of the questionnaire. Eligible participants were required to be 18 years old or older and reside in the United States. The mean age of the participants was 36.78 ($SD = 11.35$). 49.0% were female and the majority race/ethnicity were White (77.0%).

To investigate the influences of the key construct, perceived temporal distance toward an organizational threat, this study employed a one factor, two conditions design where participants were exposed to a message with a proximal future threat vs. a message with a distant future threat. After an online consent form was completed, respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two message conditions. In both conditions, they read the message before completing a questionnaire that included perceived temporal distance, crisis responsibility, organizational reputation, crisis emotions, supportive behavioral intentions, issue involvement, and a battery of demographic questions. The whole experimental procedure was conducted via Qualtrics.

Message Stimuli

The message stimuli for the participants to have different levels of temporal distance toward organizational threat are based on a fictitious health crisis case in which people are dead from an unknown disease after receiving the flu vaccine produced by a fake company (i.e., *SanVaxzer*). Given that crisis happens only when a certain level of threat is observed (Jin & Cameron, 2007), the future threat manipulation focuses on when the threat actually becomes a crisis. Threat was manipulated by emphasizing that the incidence and death rates are expected to

rise up in the next 2 weeks (in proximal future threat message) vs. the next 2 years (in distant future threat message)

Measures

Perceived temporal distance

Two items were used, asking when respondents perceive the major problem affecting public health inflicted by the crisis situation will occur. Responses for each item were recorded on a 7-point scale of *in the near future* (1) to *in the distant future* (7), and a 7-point scale ranging from *very soon* (1) to *sometime much later* (7) respectively. The responses from the two items were averaged with a higher score indicating greater perceived temporal distance ($r = .88, p < .001; M = 2.90, SD = 1.66$).

Crisis responsibility

Crisis responsibility attributed to the organization was captured by using seven items (*strongly disagree* = 1, *strongly agree* = 7) (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). The responses were averaged, with a higher score indicating greater responsibility attributed to the organization (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86, M = 5.17, SD = 1.09$).

Organizational reputation

To measure organizational reputation, five statements were used (*strongly disagree* = 1, *strongly agree* = 7) (Coombs & Holladay, 1996). Responses were averaged together to create a measure of organizational reputation. A higher score indicates more positive organizational reputation ($\alpha = .83, M = 3.91, SD = 1.28$).

Crisis emotions

The likelihood what happened in the crisis situation would make them feel the following four emotions was asked (Jin, Liu, Anagondahalli, & Austin, 2014): (a) "Angry, irritated, annoyed," (b) "Sad, downhearted, unhappy," (c) "Scared, fearful, afraid, and (d) "Nervous, anxious, worried" (*very unlikely* = 1, *very likely* = 7). Scores were averaged, with higher score indicating greater negative crisis emotions ($\alpha = .84, M = 4.96, SD = 1.39$).

Supportive behavioral intentions

Supportive behavioral intentions were assessed with five statements adapted from previous studies (*strongly disagree* = 1, *strongly agree* = 7) (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010; Newburry, 2010). Responses were averaged together, with a higher score indicating greater intentions of supportive behaviors ($\alpha = .96, M = 2.57, SD = 1.58$).

Perceived health threat

Perceived health threat was captured by using 6 items adapted from existing measures (Brabin, Roberts, Farzaneh, & Kitchener, 2006; Witte, Meyer, & Martell, 2001). All responses were averaged together to make an index of perceived health threat, with a higher score indicating greater perceived health threat ($\alpha = .87, M = 5.22, SD = 1.19$).

Covariates

This study controlled for age, gender, race/ethnicity, and issue involvement. To measure issue involvement, three statements asking whether participants think the threat was important, personally relevant, and involving to themselves were used on a 7-point scale of *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7) (Leippe & Elkin, 1987). The responses were averaged and higher scores indicated greater issue involvement ($\alpha = .93, M = 4.80, SD = 1.58$).

Results

Manipulation Check

To confirm that participants perceived different levels of temporal distance toward the organizational threat according to their assigned message condition (a proximal future threat vs.

a distal future threat), an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Results indicated that perceived temporal distance was greater in distant future threat message condition ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.59$) compared to the proximal future threat message condition ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.66$), $F(1, 237) = 11.648$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .047$. Thus, the effect of message exposure on perceived temporal distance toward threat was confirmed.

Effects of Perceived Temporal Distance on Supportive Behavioral Intentions

For testing H1, multiple ordinal least squares regression (OLS) analyses were conducted. The results indicated that perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat was a significant, negative predictor of crisis responsibility ($b = -.294$, $SE = .039$, $p < .001$), supporting H1a. On the other hand, perceived temporal distance did not significantly predict organizational reputation ($b = .045$, $SE = .052$, $p = ns$), leaving H1b unsupported. Results confirmed the significant, negative relationship between perceived temporal distance and crisis emotions ($b = -.148$, $SE = .053$, $p < .05$), supporting H1c. Greater temporal distance was also associated with greater supportive behavioral intentions ($b = .414$, $SE = .053$, $p < .001$), confirming H1d.

Indirect Effects of Perceived Temporal Distance

To test H2, mediation analyses using model 4 of PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) was conducted. Research showed that a significant, positive indirect effect of perceived temporal distance on supportive behavioral intentions via crisis responsibility was found (point estimate = .123, $SE = .030$, 95% CI = [.068, .187]) as the bootstrapping CI did not straddle zero, supporting H2a. Organizational reputation did not serve as a significant mediator (point estimate = .011, $SE = .013$, 95% CI = [-.015, .036]), leaving H2b unsupported. Crisis emotions was a significant mediator (point estimate = .022, $SE = .013$, 95% CI = [.002, .051]). Thus, H2c was supported (see Figure 1).

Conditional Indirect and Direct Effects of Perceived Health Threat

For addressing RQ1 through RQ3, the moderated mediation analysis by using model 8 of PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) was conducted. Findings revealed that the interaction of perceived temporal distance and perceived health threat was a significant predictor of crisis responsibility ($b = .077$, $SE = .030$, $p < .05$), indicating the direct effect of perceived temporal distance on the crisis responsibility was moderated by health threat. As threat level is greater, the direct effect becomes less (see Figure 2). In addition, probing the indirect effect through crisis responsibility revealed significant indirect effects for respondents with all levels of individual threat (i.e., 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles) as bootstrapping CI did not include zero (See Table 1).

However, the interaction of temporal distance and perceived health threat did not significantly predict organizational reputation ($b = -.056$, $SE = .040$, $p = ns$). The interaction on crisis emotions was also not significant ($b = .066$, $SE = .041$, $p = ns$). The interaction on supportive behavioral intentions was significant ($b = .141$, $SE = .036$, $p < .001$), which means the direct effect of perceived temporal distance on the behavioral intentions was moderated by health threat. As threat level is greater, the direct effect becomes stronger (see Figure 3). Probing and conditional direct effect analysis showed the effects were significant only at 50th and 84th percentiles of perceived health threat (see Table 2).

Discussion

As the first empirical test of the extended threat appraisal model from the public's perspective, this study provides findings that contribute to public relations theory advancement and evidence-based crisis communication research, shedding light on the new focus of crisis communication practice – how organizations can capitalize on the strategic role of perceived temporal distance toward threat.

The Role of Perceived Temporal Distance in Crisis Communication Process

Perceived temporal distance, as the new dimension added to the threat appraisal model, seems to exert both direct and indirect effects on publics' cognitive (i.e. crisis responsibility attribution), affective (i.e. crisis emotions including anger, sadness, fright and anxiety), and behavioural (i.e. supportive behaviours toward the organization affected by crisis) responses in a crisis situation.

In terms of direct effects of perceived temporal distance, publics' perceived temporal distance predicts their attribution of crisis responsibility, crisis emotions felt, and likelihood to support the crisis-affected organization. The further away of the perceived crisis impact, relative to individuals themselves, the less likely publics are to attribute the crisis responsibility to the organization and less crisis emotions they are to feel in response to the crisis situation. However, they are likely to offer greater support toward the organization, when the impact of the threat is likely to occur in a more distanced future. This finding suggests that if publics believe that a given crisis situation is likely to impact the organization in a more long-distanced future, they intend to react less emotionally, assign more crisis attribution to circumstance rather than the organization, they are more willing to support the organizations in and after the crisis. In other words, when publics perceive a crisis situation has affected the organization but not the individuals themselves yet, they tend to take more actions, including supporting the organization, in order to prepare themselves and the organization for the raining days in the future.

Mediation analyses and moderated mediation analyses further provide detailed pictures of how the above cognitive, affect and behavioural variables in crisis communication process are associated with each other. First, crisis responsibility and crisis emotions each serve as significant mediators: The less organization is held for the crisis situation and less negative emotions felt toward the crisis as a result of longer threat distance appraised by publics, the more likely they are to support the organization. Second, conditional indirect and direct effects of perceived health threat are evident: The mediation effects of crisis responsibility and crisis emotions, respectively, exerted between perceived temporal distance of threat and supportive behaviours, are further found to be moderated by perceived health threat: This finding suggests that the indirect effects via crisis responsibility and direct effects between temporal distance and supportive behavioral intentions are conditional based on the levels of perceived health threat.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributing to public relations theory building by expending the existing threat appraisal model in organization crisis situation context, focusing on the publics' perspective and how they appraise an organizational crisis that have direct impact on their own welling. It is one of the first studies that take publics' perceived threat temporal distance as a central piece in cognitive appraisal approach to crisis communication.

This study takes both crisis communication and risk communication perspectives, in the context of a health-related crisis, which involve a flu vaccine manufacturer and consumers of its product. This study includes measures of not only how organizations are affected by the crisis but also how much individuals themselves are likely to be impacted by such an organizational crisis. Therefore, research insights from this study can be applied to health crisis situations, where organizations and publics are both affected but the perceived temporal distance in relation to the organization and publics themselves are likely to differ. The predictive power of temporal distance, contributes to understanding publics' responses in crisis and explaining why and how such responses occur pending on their threat and risk perception triggered by the crisis situation.

The findings of this study offer practical implications for public relations professionals and crisis communication managers. An organization's crisis response strategies need to be aligned with the expectations and coping needs of the publics. The temporal framing of an organization's crisis response should match with the perceived temporal distance of threat in relation to the publics affected by the crisis situation. As the perceived temporal distance may vary from immediate future to distanced future, the actions to be taken by the organization need to be communicated and implemented according, including either short-term actions only or both short-term and long-term actions. It is critical for organizations to keep in mind that, in times of crisis, publics not only passively receive and respond to organization's crisis response actions, they plan and will take actions about the situation, including support the organizations. Crisis managers, therefore, should help organizations assess publics' threat appraisals, including perceived threat temporal distance, in order to recommend the most effective organizational actions that will gain the most support from the publics.

Future Directions and Limitations

This study proposed and tested an additional dimension of threat, temporal distance, which extends the threat appraisal model in crisis communication. Future research needs to further assess the relationship between temporal distance dimension and other dimensions (i.e. threat type, threat duration, and threat level) as perceived by both organizations and publics. In addition, how an organizational crisis is perceived as a future risk by publics who are not immediately affected by the crisis, needs to be further evaluated. This direction calls for extending primary publics to not only victims and families, but also broader range of publics whose wellbeing might be at increasingly high stake as time goes on. Effective and strategic crisis communication needs to include not only how an organization responds to crisis now but also how it plans to take action to the near or further distanced future, anticipating and getting prepared for percussions of current crisis and building allies with publics who might be willing to provide greater support to the organization when future crisis occur.

Last but not least, one of the surprising findings indicate that organization reputation does not appear to be predicted by perceived threat temporal distance or function as a mediator between perceived temporal distance and support intentions. Whether reputation is not directly related to perceived temporal distance of the threat caused by a crisis situation needs further empirical verification. Other factors, in conjunction to perceived temporal distance, might need to be considered. Thus, the role of reputation in threat appraisal model, either as an outcome of threat appraisal or a mediator of threat appraisal effect on behavioral outcomes, needs to be further assessed as the threat appraisal model is further refined as a crisis and risk communication framework in public relations research and practice.

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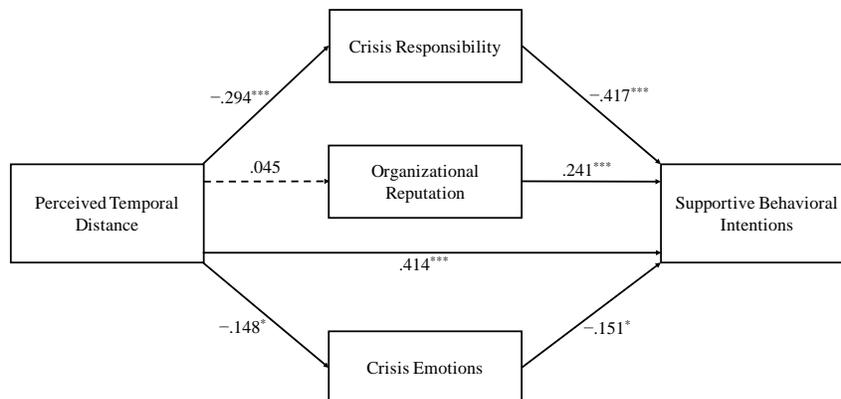


Figure 1. Model depicting the mediating role of crisis responsibility, organizational reputation, crisis emotions on the relationship between perceived temporal distance and supportive behavioral intentions. Coefficients are unstandardized regression coefficients. Dotted line denotes not significant relationship.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

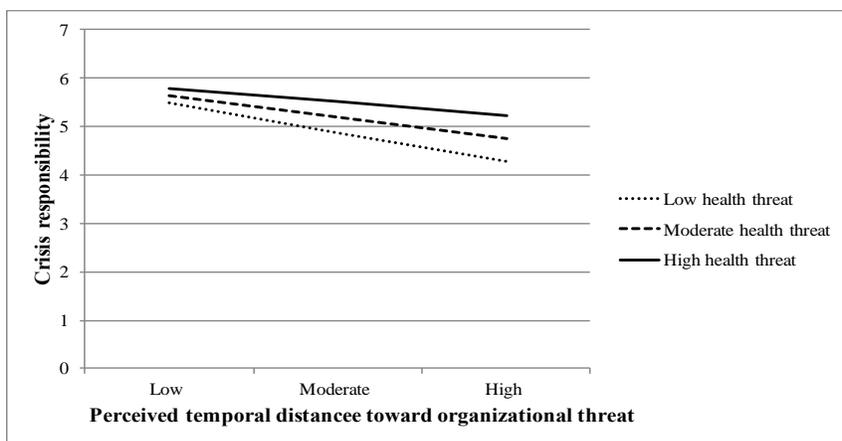


Figure 2. The moderating effect of perceived health threat on the relationship between perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat and crisis responsibility.

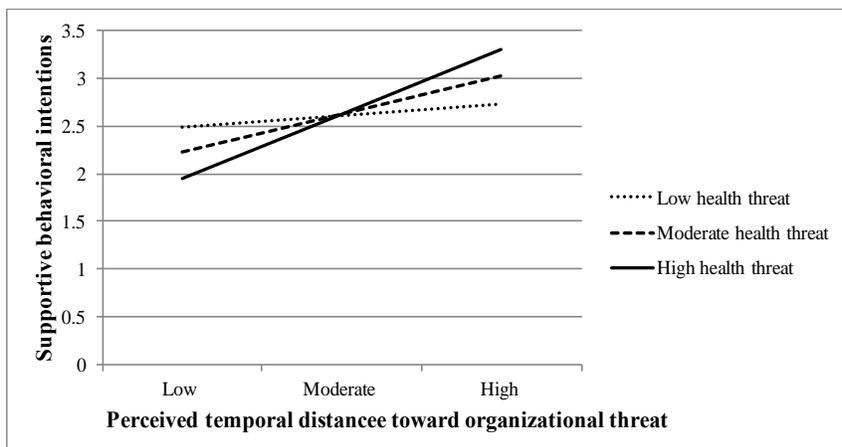


Figure 3. The moderating effect of perceived health threat on the relationship between perceived temporal distance toward organizational threat and supportive behavioral intentions

Table 1

Indirect Effect of Crisis Responsibility on Supportive Behavioral Intentions at Different Levels of Perceived Health Threat

Level of Moderating Variable	Point Estimate for Indirect Effect		95% Bias-Corrected Bootstrap CI for Indirect Effect	
	Point Estimate	Bootstrap SE	Lower	Upper
Threat at 16 th percentile (4.037)	.161*	.042	.086	.253
Threat at 50 th percentile (5.223)	.120*	.029	.069	.184
Threat at 84 th percentile (6.410)	.078*	.029	.030	.142

Note. Bootstrap resampling = 5,000. SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.

* indicates the point estimate is statistically significant based on the upper and lower boundaries of confidence intervals that did not straddle zero.

Table 2

Direct Effect of Perceived Temporal Distance toward Organizational Threat on Supportive Behavioral Intentions at Different Levels of Perceived Health Threat

Level of Moderating Variable	Point Estimate for Direct Effect		95% Bias-Corrected Bootstrap CI for Indirect Effect	
	Point Estimate	Bootstrap SE	Lower	Upper
Threat at 16 th percentile (4.037)	.073	.069	-.063	.210
Threat at 50 th percentile (5.223)	.240*	.051	.141	.339
Threat at 84 th percentile (6.410)	.407*	.064	.281	.532

Note. Bootstrap resampling = 5,000. SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.

* indicates the point estimate is statistically significant based on the upper and lower boundaries of confidence intervals that did not straddle zero.

**Social networking, public interaction, and message resonance:
Lessons on social media-facilitated public formation from the NFL protests**

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Abstract

Despite social media's influence on public interaction and protest, few studies have examined the principles of public formation on social media. This study, a semantic network analysis, uses the backdrop of the NFL national anthem protests to understand how messaging and interaction creates and activates publics.

The National Football League (NFL) experienced its lowest ratings in seven years at the start of the 2016 season after the San Francisco 49ers Quarterback Colin Kaepernick took a knee in protest during the United States National Anthem (Katz, 2016). By the next season in the fall of 2017, the number of NFL television viewers dropped by another 5 percent as more players and coaches became involved in the protests (McCarthy, 2017). In that season, President Donald Trump inserted himself into the discourse by posting to Twitter; and in response, more than 2.5 million tweets were posted. Most of the tweets about the National Anthem protests in the 2016 and 2017 season included the hashtag, #takeaknee.

The hashtag #takeaknee was a mechanism used by individuals to congregate online around the issue of the National Anthem protests. The purpose of this paper is to use the #takeaknee hashtag and those involved with it to examine the formation of a public as a network. Our goals are to expand theoretical understandings about how a network can become a public. Social media has the potential to provide the needed context to study the processes by which inactive publics become active. It has increasingly become a platform for protest, where publics congregate to debate issues, make meaning of events, and take action. Although public relations scholarship has investigated many cases of organizational response on social media, few studies have examined the principles and practices of public formation on social media.

Literature Review

Social theorists have studied the notion of a public for over a century (per Ni & Kim, 2009). In recent decades, the definition of a public, its communication behaviors, and its implications for the strategic management of public relations practice have been a focus of public relations scholars (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1997; Kim & Grunig, 2011). In particular, researchers have looked at how individuals recognize problems and then form distinct groups to communicate and solve those problems. As a result, public relations research has recommended segmenting communication to each distinct public. It is consistent with the definition of public relations as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.6). However, public relations research has done little to examine how publics communicate with each other. Our theories do not explain how publics interact with each other while simultaneously interacting with the organization. Instead, it mainly addresses a process by which a single public forms. We propose that a network approach offers a valuable paradigm through which we can investigate this gap in public relations research and provide an expanded perspective on the formations and evolutions of multiple publics

Price (1992) identified the term public as originating with the Latin phrase *poplicus* or *populus* meaning “the people.” There are several perspectives for theory and research on a public. One perspective undertaken by many public relations scholars is the situational theories of publics (Kim & J.E. Grunig, 2011). The situational perspective views a public as a single collection of individuals that emerges in response to some problematic situation. Park (1972) first explained a public as an emerging social entity characterized by opposition and rational discourse, an organization in response to an issue, and the ability to think and reason with others. According to Dewey (1927), a public is a group of people who face a similar problem, recognizes the problem, and organizes to do something about the problem. Blumer (1946) refined the term public to “refer to a group of people who are confronted by an issue, are divided in their ideas how to meet the issue, and engage in discussion over the issue” (p. 189). Monberg (1998) shared this perspective: “Publics are created when citizens come together to form a community, deliberating about common aims and values” (p. 430). Thus, a public is a “social concept” and “requires social spaces where dialogues may be enacted” (Monberg, 1998, p. 430).

According to Grunig and Repper (1992), public relations is strategically managed when it is designed to build and maintain relationships with publics who are most crucial to the success of the organization. The key to effective public relations is systematically identifying key publics and prioritizing these publics according to a situation (Grunig & Repper, 1992). Grunig and Repper defined three stages in the strategic management of public relations: the stakeholder stage, the public stage, and the issue stage. In the stakeholder stage, a stakeholder is defined as “people who are linked to an organization because they and the organization have consequences on each other” (Grunig & Hunt, 1992, p. 125). Grunig & Hunt (1984) used a linkage model to identify relationships to organizations. The authors posited four linkages that identify stakeholder relationships to an organization: enabling, functional, diffused, and normative. Enabling are those that allow organizations to exist such as government legislators and other officials. Functional linkages are those that allow the organization to function by providing resources such as employees, suppliers, and contractors. Normative linkages are associations or groups with which the organization has a common interest. Diffused linkages are those in which the organization must respond to sporadic publics like activists or special interest groups. When publics have organized, the issue stage begins. According to Wilson (2008), there are three types of publics to consider when developing public relations strategies include target publics, intervening publics, and influentials. Target publics are those whose participation and cooperation are required to accomplish organizational goals. Intervening publics pass information on to the target publics and act as opinion leaders. Influentials can either support an organization’s efforts or work against them.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) were the first to posit and describe a typology of publics in an attempt to segment them and to predict and explain their communication behavior based on the situational theory of publics. Situational theory results in publics that indicate when communication should be directed to a public based on the publics’ information-processing and information-seeking behaviors. The situational theory provides a precise identification and segmentation of a public based on a pattern of similar behaviors defined through independent and dependent variables. Problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement constitute the independent variables, whereas information seeking and information process comprise the dependent variables. These scholars distinguished four types of publics: nonpublics, latent, aware and active. These are the most widely adopted approach for the segmentation of publics in research (Kim, Ni & Sha, 2008). According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), nonpublics do not recognize any problems. Thus there are no consequences to an organization. Latent publics are not aware of a problem, but one exists anyway. Aware publics recognize a problem. Active publics are aware and recognize a problem and organize to do something about it. By breaking down publics according to their perceived relationship to an issue, communication messages can be presented in a clearer manner and strategies become more precisely targeted (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). By this reasoning according to Grunig & Hunt (1984), latent publics need more information about the issue to help them recognize the problem. Aware publics with high constraint recognition need information about how they can become involved and make a difference. Active publics seek information and are predisposed to act, so the Grunig and Hunt (1984) recommended communication strategies that involved two-way communication with the public on the issue.

Previous studies have focused on the active and aware publics, the critical subgroups who possess most of the strategic potential because they disseminate similar problem perceptions and are most likely to create organizational problems or a sense of community hostile to an

organization (Ni & Kim, 2009). Ni and Kim (2009) broke down active and aware publics into eight subgroups based on three properties: 1) the history of problem-solving; 2) the extent of activeness in problem-solving; 3) and the openness to approaches in problem-solving. According to the authors, “Aware publics and active publics possess different characteristics regarding their communicative behaviors” (p.230). In this breakdown, the authors acknowledged that inactive publics are also important. They may require different consideration; however, it has been difficult to identify inactive publics because the process of forming inactive publics has not been as easy to observe as that of active and aware publics.

Social media may provide the space to examine the mechanisms by which inactive publics become aware and begin to take action. In other words, social media may unlock further understanding into how latent publics become active publics. Fundamentally, social media is built upon a social network paradigm, which presents a different paradigm through which one can view the world and its interactions.

In this study, we use the United States National Anthem protests during the National Football League (NFL) games as the context for the exploration of how publics interact to expand and grow. The movement started during the beginning of the NFL season in August 2016 by San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick. He was alone at first in kneeling for the anthem, which he did in protest of racial and social inequality. However, in the months and weeks that followed, he was joined by his teammates and other players across the league. Throughout the 2016 season, players across the NFL also took a knee as a sign of protests against social injustice. However, as the 2017 season began, the action by the NFL players to kneel in protest during the National Anthem caught the attention of U.S. President Donald Trump who Tweeted that the NFL players should be fired if they continued to kneel. His comments on Twitter created a widespread reaction across the political and sports spectrum.

The hashtag on Twitter - #takeaknee - served as the mechanism that bound together the network of individuals interested in the issue. Given how this issue grew in popularity and controversy, we wanted to understand the following:

- RQ1:** How did latent publics become active publics?
- RQ2:** How did the discourse evolve as the network increased in size?
- RQ3:** How did the change in discourse impact message resonance?

Method

We collected a sample of Tweets that used the hashtag #takeaknee from three distinct phases during the evolution of the issue. We used the software Crimson Hexagon to collect the sample of historic Tweets, as Twitter’s API limits Twitter collection to only the past seven days. Crimson Hexagon (www.crimsonhexagon.com) is a Twitter business client that offers access to historic tweets and information. The three phases we collected Tweets from including the following:

- Phase 1: Start of the issue in the 2016 NFL Season (September 12, - January 1, 2017)
- Phase 2: Trump’s involvement in the issue (Sept. 24, 2017 – Sept. 30, 2017)
- Phase 3: Aftermath, continued discourse (Oct. 1 – Jan. 1, 2018)

Phase 1

During the first phase, we collected 3,724 tweets out of the 3,395 tweets available by using the Crimson Hexagon software. The content of the Tweets was examined for key topics and top hashtags. The most prevalent topic during Phase 1 had to do with “Takeaknee,” and “BlackLivesMatter,” which represented 26% of the Tweets. The second, third, and fourth topics involved supporting Collin Kaepernick (10%) and “Don’t Lose the Message” (9%).

1. When generating awareness, organizations should keep in mind that the greater the attention created, the more the main topic that could become split and the message diluted. Furthermore, influencers have the capacity to reframe the message, which may overpower organizational efforts. Careful and ongoing management of the message may be required to maintain resonance among publics.
2. As publics form in response to an organizational issue, professionals should consider examining what other publics are also forming and how their efforts to aid the original public or diffuse the original publics' message may impact organizational efforts. Organization-public interaction does not happen in a vacuum, and is certainly not a one-to-one interaction. A social network approach requires considering the connections that publics have with other publics who may be unconnected to the organization, but who may also have influence in in the interaction.
3. Once a message has lost resonance (i.e. from the influence of publics), new social media actions may help refocus the conversation. We posit that the #takeaknee movement needed a new action that reminded people of social justice beyond simply kneeling before the United States during the National Anthem of a football game.

This study contains limitations that are important to note. First, the study did not include all the tweets that were posted with the hashtag #takeaknee. The sample sizes were fairly large, but we acknowledge we may have missed something without 100 percent of all the tweets. Also, this study did not dive into the actual network analysis metrics of how the structure of the tweet network changed over time. We did not calculate density, betweenness centrality, or other network analysis metrics. We purposefully chose instead to focus on the discourse of the tweets rather than the structure. However, we recommend that future research combine the discourse of a social media network with the structure of the network to find quantitative results that correlate between structure and discourse.

Nevertheless, the examination of the discourse was important because it evaluated the impact that interactions among multiple networks had on a major organization and many people associated with it. The NFL experienced a significant loss in ratings over the past two years, and it is equally unclear whether any progress has been made in shifting cultural understandings about social injustice. However, social media discussion may have awoken public consideration of the issue, and this propensity to activate inactive publics makes further investigation of social network theories critical in today's digitally connected world.

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The Financial Impact of Fake News: A Case Study Analysis of Man-Made Crises

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Abstract

Preparing for fake news is increasingly a priority for public and private entities, due to the potential economic, financial, and brand equity impact. Case study analysis of PepsiCo, Kay Jewelers, and New Balance revealed financial impact of fake news stories. The theory of image restoration discourse provided framework for analysis.

Introduction

Fake news is “misinformation that has the trappings of traditional news media, with the presumed associated editorial processes” (Lazer, et al., 2017, p. 4). Trust in “business, government, NGOs, and media to do what is right declined broadly in 2017” (Edelman, 2017, p. 4). It should be no surprise then, that public and private organizations have been adversely impacted by fake news. The most well-known, of course, is *Pizzagate*, in which a man traveled from his North Carolina home to a Washington, DC-based pizzeria to rescue children who were reportedly part of pedophilia ring—all on the basis of fake news originating on fringe websites. The fabricated child-trafficking story, which also involved U.S. Presidential Democratic nominee, culminated in the North Carolina man firing a gun into the restaurant (Reilly, 2016). Comet Ping Pong Pizzeria received a barrage of threatening social media messages and phone calls for weeks. In addition to lost sales, Comet Ping Pong Pizzeria had to raise money to hire a security guard because of the myriad threats, negatively impacting its financial status (Akpan, 2016).

It is common for company executives at the center of wild conspiracy theories to experience emotional reactions early on to false accusations. These companies must also grapple with long-term reputational damage of misinformation. “The growing storm of distrust is powerful and unpredictable. Trust in institutions has evaporated to such an extent that falsehood can be misconstrued as fact,” (Edelman, 2017, p. 3). The authors of this study assert that the financial impact of fake news is of special significance for corporations. Financial implications of fake news are magnified for public companies that rely on investor confidence. A sudden spike or drop in share price translates into real dollars lost or gained—regardless of the accuracy of the initial news reports (Phillips, 2017). Diminished customer trust and lowered employee morale can lead to lost sales (Kuchler, 2017). Corporate communicators must consider the bottom-line impact of fake news to all their stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of image restoration discourse (Benoit, 1997), which explicates message strategies of corporations in crisis, provides a framework for the present study. Image repair strategies necessitate first understanding the origin of a crisis. Fake news cases might not rise to the level of crises companies typically experience, but public perception requires crisis response strategies. Even companies that hold no actual responsibility for an offensive act must actively repair their corporate image, argues Benoit.

Image restoration discourse comprises a typology of five different message strategies that companies employ for the purposes of image restoration following an incident that is deemed offensive: Companies that use *denial* as a strategy either deny that the incident occurred, that they facilitated the incident, or that the incident was harmful. These companies might also shift blame elsewhere. *Evasion of responsibility* involves a company either recasting an incident as a logical response to another action; asserting lack of information or control about the incident; claiming company actions were inadvertent, or asserting that the company had good intentions. To *reduce offensiveness of an action*, a company might describe positive characteristics or past behaviors to offset negative views surrounding the incident; try to minimize negative feelings associated with the incident; differentiate the incident from more offensive actions; place the incident in a more favorable context by claiming that benefits outweigh the drawbacks; attack company accusers, or provide compensation to those affected by the incident. During *corrective action*, a company either promises to resolve a crisis by restoring those involved to their pre-

incident status or promises to prevent the recurrence of the crisis. *Mortification* involves confessing to wrongdoing and asking for forgiveness.

The sheer volume of fake claims shows how brands must be diligent in facing fake news (Boland, 2017, para 10). “Websites like Snopes tackle these myths daily, but only after the stories have already driven considerable attention. The lightning speed of fake news stories requires efficient, effective messaging from corporate communicators.

Literature Review

Industry scholars have long debated editorial content facilitated by public relations professionals (Balasubramanian, 1994; Erjavec, 2005, Wood et al., 2004). “Unlike paid advertising, the sources of public relations efforts are often obscured and more difficult to identify” (Holladay and Coombs, 2017, p. 125). Yet digital media has further blurred the lines between paid, earned, shared, and owned media. Purveyors of fake news have exploited the ease of access in online messaging platforms. The far-reaching effects of misinformation in various communication occupations are evident in the multi-disciplinary nature of media scholarship on fake news as a research phenomenon.

Fake news encroaches on usage of media. Because false stories travel as quickly as verifiable news online, the Internet has become a primary platform for false stories. Young people who prefer opinion rather than fact-based news (Marchi, 2012) and news consumers who rely on ingrained social cues for determining credibility (Haber, 2016). Considering their demographic profiles, public relations majors are prime targets of fake news and could unknowingly encounter misinformation. Holladay and Coombs (2013) argued for *public relations literacy* to “empower consumers of public relations’ actions and messages and to increase the accountability of practitioners” (p. 125). As an offshoot of media literacy, public relations literacy could foster critical thinking and civic engagement of value to a democratic society.

Corporations have had to re-think their media strategies in light of fake news. Weber Shandwick is marketing crisis simulation software to prepare companies for being caught in a social media crisis such as fake news (Kuchler, 2017). Brands have inadvertently advertised on fake news sites because of online advertising designed to automatically appear on high-traffic sites (Alba, 2016). Worse, the sources producing misinformation are oftentimes difficult for algorithms to detect. Bean (2017) suggests that consumers who cannot differentiate between native advertising and news on mobile platforms might also be unable to discern between fact, opinion, and advocacy.

Corporate image and reputational damage of fake news has become so prevalent that public relations firms now include it in their crisis preparedness (e.g., Kuchler, 2017). Public relations professionals are situated at the crossroads between news, consumers, and corporations that disseminate messaging through media. Preparing for and dealing with fake news or intentional disinformation is increasingly a priority for public and private entities due to the potential brand equity impact. Their stakeholders rely on them for sustaining relationships through accurate messages.

In the present study, the authors extend the current understanding of crisis management to include specific issues arising from deliberate misinformation campaigns. The following research question is based on the literature review:

RQ: How do corporations navigate the reputational and financial fallout of fake news?

Method

“Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies,

institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods” (Thomas, 2011, p. 513). Rather than mode of inquiry, case study is defined by individual cases (Stake, 1995, p. 236). A deep understanding of a case necessitates multiple data sources. The dataset for this study comprised news stories, blog posts, social media messages, and company statements of direct relevance to the fake news story.

Case study research enables scholars to study complex phenomena in context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In the present study, the authors chose three cases of companies that experienced varying levels of financial impact as a result of fake news: Kay Jewelers, which was accused of replacing customer diamonds with fake stones, resulting in a 3.7 percent stock drop (Northrup, 2016; Turner, 2016); New Balance, because an expression of support for the President’s trade stance resulted in vocal White supremacist support and a reported 25 percent drop in sales for a week following (Birkner, 2016), and PepsiCo, where general criticism of the US Presidential campaign prompted claims that the CEO criticized Trump voters, leading to a five-percent drop in stock the month following (Huberman, 2017).

In analyses of multiple cases, researchers study the individual cases in depth and then look across cases for similarities and differences (Starman, 2013). As the instrument in qualitative research (McCracken, 1988), the authors analyzed the study data. They used narrative analysis, a process which involves gathering documents of experiences, organizing the documents based on the meaning that emerges (Creswell, 2013), and grouping data thematically (Riessman, 2005). They completed an overview of each case, identifying all of the stakeholders involved, the diffusion of the fake news stories, the public reactions, and how each company responded. Analysis also included resolution of each case and reported financial impact. The next stage of analysis necessitated looking for repeated patterns that represented similarities and differences in how companies responded to fake news stories. Finally, the authors assessed the cases through the lens of image restoration theory.

Cases are analyzed next.

Findings

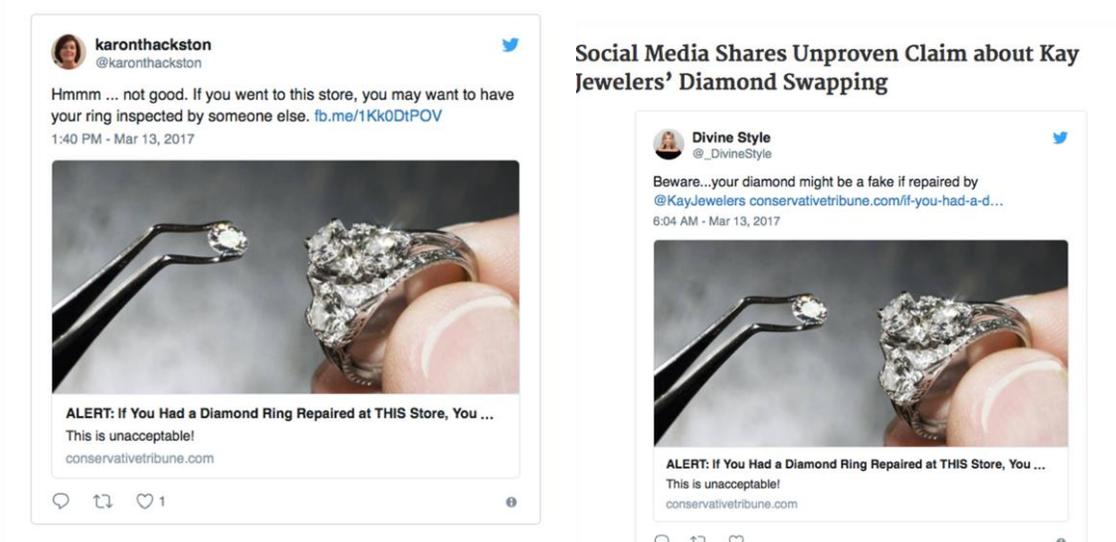
In the first stage of analysis, the authors report the cases in-depth to understand the complexity of a case in the most complete way possible.

Kay Jewelers

In May 2016, BuzzFeed posted a story about a Maryland woman who claimed that Kay Jewelers replaced the diamond in her engagement ring with a manmade stone during repairs (McNeal, 2016). According to the story, seven other women posted on Facebook that Kay replaced their stones. Numerous media websites and social media platforms featured information from the BuzzFeed story primarily from May 2016-November 2016. BuzzFeed tracked down eight women whose engagement ring stones were swapped out with fake ones when the women took their rings to be repaired at the retailer.

Ten days after the BuzzFeed story ran, the parent company of Kay Jewelers, Signet Jewelers, Ltd., issued a statement denying allegations of switching customers’ stones: “Signet has in place vigorous product quality procedures that are consistently monitored... In our design and service centers, we manage more than 4,000,000 service and repair transactions each year, and over 99% are completed without negative customer feedback,” (Signet, 2016). The company specifically called out and denied the allegations on social media about team members mishandling customers’ jewelry repairs or engaging in “diamond swapping.” Signet also expressed a commitment to customer trust, stating that any misconduct was rare and quickly and appropriately addressed.

Figure 1: Examples of how BuzzFeed story about Kay Jewelers was shared on social media



Kay accounted for 39 percent of Signet's sales in Fiscal 2016 and operated 1,129 stores in 50 states as of January 30, 2016. Despite company assurances, stock declined 3.7 percent in one day, and 11 percent for the week (Turner, 2016). Kays implemented a range of in-store and online marketing promotions in June 2016 to entice consumers to support the Kays' brand (Picchi, 2016).

In March 2017, the BuzzFeed story began re-surfacing on social media. A Snopes report then rated the claim as "unproven" (LaCapria, 2017). Employees for the fact-checking website found no evidence of a large number of customers stepping forward with subsequent similar claims. Kay accounted for 40 percent of Signet's sales in Fiscal 2017 and operated 1,192 stores in 50 states as of January 28, 2017.

New Balance

A statement about anticipated U.S. Presidential policy led to a fake news crisis at New Balance (Mettler, 2017). In response to a reporter's question about the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, an initiative that President Trump opposes, vice president of public affairs Matthew LeBretton told *The Wall Street Journal*: "The Obama administration turned a deaf ear to us and frankly, with President-elect Trump, we feel things are going to move in the right direction."

Vocal critics immediately began accusing the company of endorsing the President's entire platform. As the story traveled across social media, angry users posted images of themselves setting fire to New Balance shoes. The company issued a clarifying statement to the *Boston Globe* to defend its opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership and share plans to add business to its U.S. operations. The company then posted a statement on social media to distance itself from the more divisive rhetoric of the Trump White House.



Figure 2: Example of social media users' outrage about New Balance



Figure 3: Company's statement shared on social media

The misinformation campaign spiraled further when neo-Nazi Andrew Anglin published a column in the Daily Stormer White supremacist site declaring New Balance 'The Official Shoes of White People' (Mettler, 2017). New Balance released a longer statement in response, saying the company "does not tolerate bigotry or hate in any form."

New Balance does not tolerate bigotry or hate in any form. One of our officials was recently asked to comment on a trade policy that was taken out of context. As a 110-year old company with five factories in the U.S. and thousands of employees worldwide from all races, genders, cultures and sexual orientations, New Balance is a values-driven organization and culture that believes in humanity, integrity, community and mutual respect for people around the world. We have been and always will be committed to manufacturing in the United States.



Figure 4: New Balance's second statement shared on social media

Remarkably, Anglin posted a follow-up story with altogether fake quotes from LeBretton. In order to sow doubt about the veracity of the New Balance statement, Anglin claimed that the New Balance Twitter account had been hacked. Sentiment analysis during the crisis indicated that the company had a 58 percent negative rating, with only 38 percent of coverage reporting favorably (Brule, 2016). Social conversation volume rose and brand sentiment dropped for New Balance, but sentiment has improved since the end of the crisis (Birkner, 2016).

PepsiCo

PepsiCo also suffered a disinformation campaign as a result of a quote regarding the U.S. Presidential election (Taylor, 2016). In a lengthy response to a journalist's question regarding the victory by President Trump, PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi congratulated Trump on his victory, stated that those who supported the other candidate should mourn, and "We have to come together and life has to go on." The alt-right blog Conservative Treehouse devised a new quote with the headline "Massive Stewardship Fail: PepsiCo CEO Tells Trump Supporters to Take Their Business Elsewhere."

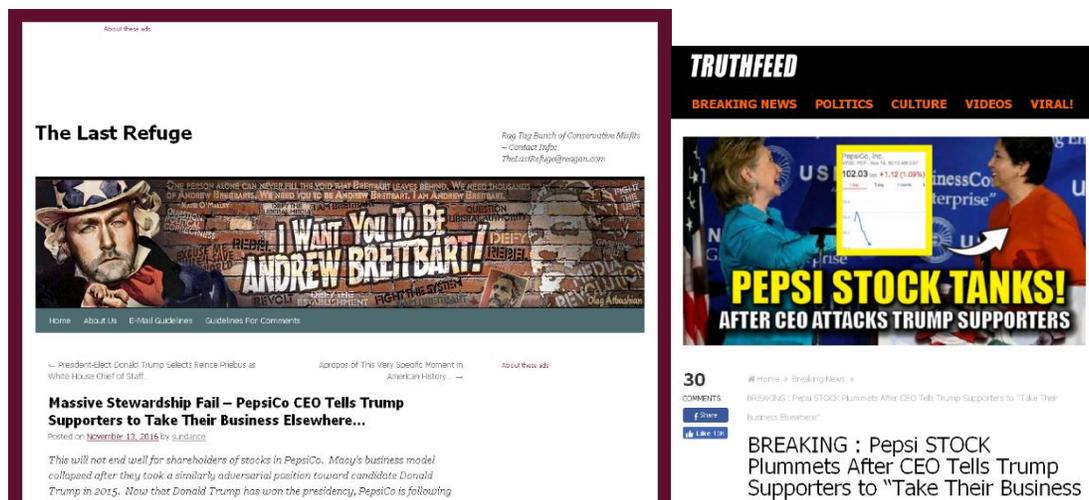


Figure 5: The alt-right blogs Conservative Treehouse and Truthfeed published quotes about Pepsi CEO telling Trump supporters to "Take Their Business Elsewhere."

Other outlets picked up the story in its new iteration, circulating the fictitious quote. As the story became a trending topic on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, people threatened to boycott Pepsi brands via the hashtags #boycottPepsi and #Pepsiboycott. PepsiCo first responded with a clarifying statement by email, placing the quote in context:

Mrs. Nooyi misspoke. She was referring to the reaction of a group of employees she spoke to who were apprehensive about the outcome of the election. She never intended to imply that all employees feel the same way. We are incredibly proud of the diverse views and backgrounds across our workforce, and we are united in our desire for a brighter future (McGregor, 2016).

Then, the company began disseminating positive stories and encouraging employees to serve as brand ambassadors. PepsiCo's stock dropped 3.75 percent the day that the fake news headlines went public. Pepsi's stock price fell 3.75 percent on the day of Nooyi's interview and for the rest of November decreased by 5.21 percent.

In the next stage of analysis, the authors compared and contrasted elements of the cases.

Similarities and differences

Common themes and differentiating factors were evident in story subject and spokespersons, diffusion of fake news stories, and public reactions. The ease with which stories were created, manipulated, and shared via social media contributed to the flow of information in each case. Another similarity across the cases were the compelling visuals—a function of social

media platforms—which aided in message diffusion. The nature of social media lends itself to message diffusion.

Corporate communicators aided each of the companies in navigating from the early stages of fake news that prompted emotional responses, through to objective techniques to manage long-term strategic responses. In each of these cases, public relations professionals employed multiplatform tactics for clients, companies, and brands encountering misinformation campaigns.

The financial impact of these cases was significant; indeed, the drop in sales and profit was substantial. Reports of New Balance reveal a quick improvement on brand sentiment. It remains unknown whether the financial effect was negligible over time.

Company CEOs were situated prominently in two of the cases, suggesting context-based spokespersons selection. The origins of the PepsiCo merited inclusion of the company head at the outset. For Kay Jewelers, the significance of the false claims merited the highest-ranking company executive. Conversely, New Balance maintained distance through non-authored company statements.

The New Balance and PepsiCo cases both stemmed from quotes to mainstream news outlets, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* respectively. Consumers could have granted the (albeit changed) stories credibility because of their mainstream media origins. Yet the perceived partisanship of the seemingly innocuous quotes suggested otherwise.

In the final stage of analysis, the authors analyzed the findings through the lens of image repair theory.

Image repair discourse

Each of the companies employed message strategies for the purposes of image restoration, supporting the assertion from Benoit (1997) that audience perception about who is to blame for an offensive act is more important than who is actually at fault. Neither of the corporations used evasion of responsibility, corrective action or mortification strategies. However, two of the message strategies featured prominently in corporate responses.

Kay Jewelers and New Balance employed denial as a strategy. Kay Jewelers denied published claims of replaced diamonds; New Balance denied that the statement by its vice president was harmful.

All three companies employed dimensions of reducing offensiveness of fake news. Kay Jewelers, News Balance, and PepsiCo issued statements describing positive characteristics, presumably to offset negative feelings connected with the false stories. Kay Jewelers also alluded to compensation to those affected, should the stories have proven to be true.

Discussion

The U.S. President has rightly claimed responsibility for coining, or at least popularizing the term fake news. Messaging from and for the current administration has prompted substantial criticism yet vocal support from the President's social media of choice: Twitter. It was surprising to find that only two of the cases here—New Balance and PepsiCo—were related to the U.S. President.

Results of this study are not intended as generalizations about resolving fake news. However, for corporations whose stakeholders frequent social media, these findings should give them pause. The diffusion of information in the New Balance case could be a function of opinion-based news preferences among young consumers (Marchi, 2012). Social media posts accompanied by hashtags and videos of customers angrily burning sneakers surely drove interest in messages that would have been lost in the transom as straight news stories.

The usage of hashtags to encourage boycotting PepsiCo seems to be consistent with Haber's (2016) assertion that news consumers use social cues to ascertain credibility of digital news. Users who ascribe news value to such trends would seem vulnerable to inaccurate stories. The Twitter algorithm places trending topics at the top of each user's news feed, for example.

It was troubling to learn that BuzzFeed was the purveyor of fake news in the case of Kay Jewelers. The site has risen in prominence as a trusted news source. However, its publication of unsubstantiated reports about dissatisfied customers of Kay Jewelers did more than sully its news reputation. It also points toward the reason some online news consumers have difficulty distinguishing between fact, opinion, and advocacy (Bean, 2017).

The authors only had access to publicly available financial information about Kay Jewelers, New Balance, and PepsiCo. The management of misinformation campaigns could vary widely in public and private companies. Nevertheless, the results of this study will be used as a launching pad for future research into the phenomenon of study. In the next stage, the authors plan to interview corporate communicators who have first-hand experience guiding their companies through fake news crises.

Conclusion

As trust in businesses continues to erode, corporations will likely become more vulnerable to crises generated by fake news. When fake news stories are materially incorrect and have an immediate impact on a company, public relations professionals can refocus some of the media narrative to the corporate mission, vision, and values. Corporate executives at Kay Jewelers, New Balance, and PepsiCo were unable to control the online conversations surrounding fake news. Each company nonetheless successfully overcame the fake news stories outlined here through deliberate messaging designed to correct false information.

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**Emotion-Carrying Messages and Stakeholder Engagement on Facebook:
Behavioral Insights from Fortune 100**

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Abstract

This study investigated Fortune 100 companies' emotion-based content strategies on Facebook and stakeholders' engagement behaviors. Through regression modeling of over two million pieces of Facebook data, results confirmed that emotion-carrying posts and posts with strong emotions led to increased stakeholder engagement. An emotion contagion effect was verified.

Companies frequently use emotional storytelling in their social media content strategy (Arenstein, 2017). Yet, very few academic studies (e.g., Muralidharan, Dillistone, & Shin, 2011) have examined the role of emotions in corporate social media communication. Specifically, it remains unclear whether and how companies' emotion-carrying messages on social media influence stakeholder engagement. This gap between theory and practice is problematic because without solid empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of corporate emotion-based content strategy, public relations efforts dedicated to designing and implementing such a strategy may be easily questioned. Furthermore, emotions are considered a major determinant of stakeholders' information processing and subsequent behaviors (Zhu & Thagard, 2002). As such, developing a robust theoretical understanding of the impact of emotional communication on social media as well as the underlying mechanism that drives it would greatly enrich corporate public relations literature on the topic of stakeholder engagement.

To fill the research void, this study examines whether and how *Fortune 100* companies' emotion-carrying messages on Facebook contribute to stakeholder engagement through a large-scale dataset. By examining a 12-month data of 116,800 Facebook posts and 1,151,587 comments from these industrial leaders, the study looks into how corporate messages with different emotional valences (positive vs. negative) and strengths may produce different stakeholder engagement outcomes. Theoretically grounded in stakeholder engagement literature from public relations, social sharing of emotions and emotion contagion frameworks from social psychology, and information diffusion research from computer-mediated communication, this study yields an interdisciplinary perspective to predict stakeholder engagement on social media. Methodologically, the big data approach captures companies' social media practice on a much larger scale than traditional content analyses and case studies (e.g., Ashley & Tuten, 2015), thus providing more robust evidence on emotion-based corporate digital communication.

Literature Review

The interactive nature of social media has revitalized stakeholder engagement in digital settings (Ji, Chen, Li, & Stacks, 2017). In public relations, engagement is theorized as a communication process, in which meanings are co-constructed and co-managed by organizations and stakeholders to reach mutually beneficial agreements (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Heath, 2014). Social media, by facilitating continual feedback loops, has helped further implement the theoretical construct of stakeholder engagement.

Although corporate communication on social media has been frequently studied in public relations research, conceptual and methodological limitations prevented some important questions from being answered. First, many of the studies designed as one-shot content analyses or experimental designs (e.g., Fraustino & Connolly-Ahern, 2015; Chen, Hong, & Li, 2017) rendered valuable insights, yet paled in macro-level observations. Without investigating stakeholders' actual engagement activities using large-scale data, the real power of social media may be underestimated (Saxton & Waters, 2014). Second, most studies on corporate social media communication focus on corporations' messaging strategies at informational level (e.g., Tao & Wilson, 2015). Few have looked at social media engagement from the emotional perspective. To overcome these limitations, this study uses large-scale real behavioral data to explore how *Fortune 100* companies engage stakeholders emotionally on Facebook.

Emotions and Corporate Communication

According to the communicative theory of emotions, emotions are cognitive evaluations of environmental events, objects, and agents, which inform our goals, plans, and behavioral

decisions (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987). This widely-accepted conceptualization of emotions emphasizes that emotions provide the cognitive heuristics that allow an individual to respond readily and swiftly to environmental stimuli, which is essential in determining the individual's information processing, decision-making, and overt behaviors (Zhu & Thagard, 2002).

Despite the importance of emotions, research on emotions is very limited in the field of public relations. Particularly, a review of existing corporate public relations literature (e.g., Muralidharan et al., 2011) reveals even sparser examination on companies' emotion-carrying content when communicating with and engaging stakeholders on social media. This forms a sharp contrast with the frequent occurrences of emotion-carrying expressions in corporate social media messages, calling for stakeholder attention and as part of online dialogues that strengthen and expand the organization's online community (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). This study answers this call and draws insights from two major theoretical frameworks—social sharing of emotions and emotion contagion—to understand the impact of companies' emotion-carrying messages on stakeholder engagement, with a focus on Facebook.

Social Sharing of Emotion-Carrying Content

Abundant empirical evidence has shown that the emotional aspects of a message influence whether the message is attended to and shared. For example, it has been repeatedly found across online and offline settings that emotion-carrying content is more likely to trigger attention and cognitive involvement (e.g., Smith & Petty, 1996), feedback provision (e.g., Huffaker, 2010), and social sharing behaviors (e.g., Berger & Milkman, 2012), compared with its non-emotion-carrying counterpart such as a purely informational message. The empirical evidence can be supported by the theoretical framework of social sharing of emotions (Rimé, 2009). This framework explains why the emotional component of a message accelerates social transmission of the message and invites interaction among people. It holds that emotions triggered by a source (e.g., companies' Facebook posts) should not be narrowly viewed as momentary, intrapersonal-only states or processes (Rimé, Mesquita, Boca, & Philippot, 1991). Instead, such emotions may be prolonged and become interpersonal phenomena as they motivate individuals to engage in social sharing of the emotional experiences and the associated source (Rimé et al., 1991). By sharing the emotionally evocative source (e.g., emotion-carrying messages) with others, individuals can better regulate their emotions, make sense of their experiences, co-construct or reconstruct their emotional episodes with others, and cultivate social bonding (Peters & Kashima, 2007; Rimé et al., 1991).

Following these theoretical tenets, it can be inferred that the advantage of emotion-carrying messages would persist in corporate Facebook communication. Emotion-carrying content, particularly in the form of Facebook posts, is expected to have greater virality and generate greater stakeholder engagement than non-emotional content.

H1: Emotion-carrying posts are more likely to generate stakeholder engagement on Facebook as measured by (a) the number of likes, (b) the number of shares, and (c) the number of user comments than non-emotion-carrying posts.

In addition to the effect of emotion per se, the theoretical framework of social sharing of emotions pinpoints two specific attributes of emotion-carrying messages and their respective impacts: the valence (e.g., Elster, 1998) and strength (e.g., Rimé, 2007) of the emotions.

Emotion Valence

Emotion valence refers to the positive and negative feeling states induced in the experience, which in turn lead to positive or negative judgments and choice (Elster, 1998). Previous empirical evidence has shown conflicting results when it comes to the effectiveness of

emotion valence in generating stakeholder engagement. Some prior studies have spotted a *positivity bias*, which shows that content with positive emotions is more likely to be shared (e.g., Ferrara & Yang, 2015). However, this positivity effect was challenged by other studies that offer evidence in support of a *negativity bias*, which shows that information with negative emotions is more likely to spread (e.g., Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013).

To address this dilemma, this study argues that the effect of emotion valence on information diffusion is context-specific. The negativity effect showed prominence when the communication context bears uncertainty and skepticism such as political election-related content (e.g., Klein, 1991). In this type of context, people tend to be highly risk averse and are likely to treat the negative emotions as useful heuristics. As a result, the negative emotion-carrying messages may quickly be diffused given their social exchange value of being informative (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). In contrast, the positivity effect was found more prevalent when the communication context involves appealing or entertaining subjects (e.g., Gruz, Doiron, & Mai, 2011). This type of context often activates an individual's self-presentation motive, as sharing positive emotion-carrying information would reflect positively on the message sender (Berger & Schwartz, 2011). As this study focuses on corporate communication, it can be inferred that the positivity effect would be more salient owing to the dominance of positive and appealing content in corporate Facebook posts. Therefore:

- H2:** Posts carrying positive emotions are more likely to generate stakeholder engagement on Facebook as measured by (a) the number of likes, (b) the number of shares, and (c) the number of user comments than posts carrying negative emotions.

Emotion Strength

Apart from valence, the *strength of emotion* is also an important factor that influences social transmission of emotion-carrying content (Russell, 1980). The strength of emotion refers to the extremity or intensity of the emotion (Rimé, 2007). Previous studies found that intense emotions such as extremely positive or negative emotions yield longer and greater impact on an individual's psychological state, compared with mild emotions (e.g., Rimé, 2007; 2009). Furthermore, as emotions grow in strength, one's need to regulate these emotions becomes more pressing, which propels him or her to share the emotions more frequently (Rimé, 2007). Said otherwise, social sharing of strong emotions is essential for an individual to fulfill the psychological needs such as self-soothing, expression of feelings, and receiving support and validation (Bazarova et al., 2015). Since social media platforms such as Facebook make social transmission of emotions convenient (Bazarova et al., 2015), it is expected that the effect of the strength of the communicated emotion on stakeholders' engagement behaviors would be easily observable.

- H3:** Posts of higher emotional strength are more likely to generate stakeholder engagement on Facebook as measured by (a) the number of likes, (b) the number of shares, and (c) the number of user comments than posts of lower emotional strength.

Emotion Contagion Effect

Besides social sharing of emotions, the theory of *emotion contagion* also sheds light on stakeholder engagement with emotion-carrying messages on corporate Facebook sites. This theory holds that one's emotional state may converge with the emotional state of which one is observing or interacting with (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). For instance, early research in psychology and interpersonal communication (e.g., Barsade, 2002) has repeatedly

documented one's tendency to mimic the emotional expressions of someone else to whom one attends (e.g., facial expressions). Consequently, the emotions observed are assumed as the observer's emotions, and emotions become "infectious." While the emotion contagion effect has been well established in offline interpersonal communication context (e.g., Pugh, 2001), recent studies have also demonstrated a contagion effect of emotion diffusion online (e.g., Dang-Xuan & Stieglitz, 2012). Following emotion contagion theory and previous empirical findings, it can be predicted that emotions induced by companies' Facebook posts will have a contagion effect, as reflected in stakeholders' comments to the posts.

- H4:** Compared with non-emotion-carrying posts, emotion-carrying posts would be associated with (a) higher proportion of emotion-carrying comments to the posts, and (b) higher emotion strength in those comments.
- H5:** There is a contagion effect of emotional valence⁴: Valence is positively associated with the proportion of positive comments and negatively associated with the proportion of negative comments.
- H6:** Compared with posts of lower emotion strength, posts of higher emotion strength would be associated with (a) higher proportion of emotion-carrying comments to the posts, and (b) higher emotion strength in those comments.

Method

To test the hypotheses, this study utilized naturally occurring Facebook data from *Fortune 100* companies in 2015. The data were previously retrieved by one of the authors with Python through Facebook's Graph application program interface⁵. Each company's complete Facebook posting data and account information from 2015 were recorded in a structured query language (SQL) database, including textual information of posts and comments, the posting type (text, link, video or photo), the numbers of likes, shares, and user comments. Page level information was also recorded including overall page likes and account information. The textual information was further processed via a sentiment analysis program called Sentistrength. Also, financial information related to the sample was obtained from Compustat, a financial database.

Sampling Procedure

This study used the 2015 *Fortune 100* Company list as its sampling frame. As the industrial leaders in their fields, a test of how *Fortune 100* companies used emotion-based social media content strategies and how stakeholders responded to these strategies bears important implications. Official Facebook accounts of the 100 corporations were verified by linking from their official websites (c.f. Ji, Li, North, & Liu, 2017). To control for any potential impact of financial performance on stakeholder engagement levels, these companies' annual revenue information was also obtained from Compustat. After matching the social media history and financial information, we were able to include 55 of the *Fortune 100* companies in the final dataset for the hypotheses testing. Posts and comments data were subsequently retrieved for the entire year of 2015 for these 55 companies. Each company's complete posting history on Facebook in 2015 was recorded. The final sample yielded 116, 800 posts and 1, 151, 587 comments.

Sentiment Analysis

To measure the emotion valence and strength of the Facebook posts and comments,

⁴ Valence here refers to both the direction and strength of the emotions. The higher (vs. lower) the valence gets, the more positive (vs. negative) emotion the post indicates, with zero being neutral.

⁵ Facebook Graph application program interface (API) is the primary way for researchers and practitioners to mine data from Facebook platform.

SentiStrength program was used. SentiStrength⁶ is an opinion-mining program that analyzes text sentiment based on a sentiment lexicon and an algorithm of how words and phrases matches the lexicon (Thelwall, Buckley, Paltoglou, Cai, & Kappas, 2010). It can recognize linguistic rules and features such as negation (e.g., not happy), emphasis (e.g., very happy), emoticon (e.g., :)), amplifications (e.g., haaaaaapy) and other sentence structures and spelling corrections (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Because a short text could contain both positive and negative emotions, SentiStrength estimates the strength of both positive and negative emotions. The *positive* score ranges from 1 (neutral) to 5 (extremely positive), and the *negative* score ranges from -1 (neutral) to -5 (extremely negative). SentiStrength also reports trinary result, which classifies the text as overall positive/negative/neutral.

Results

Modeling

Various regression models were used to test H1 to H6 with R. Our dependent and independent variables were either directly measured or computed with measured items. To parse out factors that may affect the engagement outcomes, a common set of controls were measured and included in the regression models. The covariates included: (1) each company's financial performance indicated by annual revenue; (2) variables depicting a post's interactivity level including the number of hashtags, the presence of URL, the presence of photo, the presence of video, and the inclusion of an external link (all categorical variables were dummy coded); and (3) the total number of page likes of each Facebook account.

Among the 55 companies investigated, the average number of Facebook page likes by the end of 2015 was 453,400 ($SD = 8,242,851$, $Median = 752$, 600). In the year of 2015, sampled *Fortune 100* companies' Facebook posts on average received 1,717 likes ($SD = 10,996.5$, $Median = 129$), 139 shares ($SD = 1056.8$, $Median = 16$) and 66 comments ($SD = 395.9$, $Median = 5$). As for emotions, positive posts (46.01%) were the most dominant ones followed by neutral posts (35.37%) and negative (18.62%) posts .

Hypothesis Testing⁷

For H1 - H3, three dependent variables were tested as engagement indicators: the number of likes, the number of shares, and the number of comments⁸. Because the dependent variables are based on count data, the count variance is larger than their means. To adjust for overdispersion, H1 - H3 were tested using negative binomial regression, which is typically adopted for modeling count data when variance exceeds the mean. Negative binomial regression requires a log-transformation of the dependent variable. To assess and interpret the results, the regression coefficients need to be exponentiated. The regression models used to test H1 – H3 can be presented as:

$$\log(\text{like/share/comment}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IV + \beta_2 \log \text{revenue} + \beta_3 \text{hashtags_count} + \beta_4 \log \text{page_like} + \beta_5 \text{link} + \beta_6 \text{photo} + \beta_7 \text{video} + \beta_8 \text{url} + r$$

H1

⁶ SentiStrength (<http://sentistrength.wlv.ac.uk/>, n.d.) has been verified by empirical studies with relatively high accuracy than the other opinion mining programs, and comparable to human-level accuracy for short social web texts in English (Abbasi, Hassan, & Dhar, 2014; Thelwall et al., 2010). A number of studies have used SentiStrength for empirical testing (e.g., Dang-Xuan, Stieglitz, Wladarsch, & Neuberger, 2013).

⁷Tables containing detailed statistical results can be found in an extended version of this paper via requests.

⁸In order to perform log transformation on all values of the dependent variables, we adopted a common practice by adding one to each dependent variable to eliminate any zero value.

For H1, three negative binomial regression models were run with each of the three social media engagement indicators (number of likes, shares, and comments) modeled as the dependent variable, respectively. *Emotion* was the focal independent variable in all three models, which was coded as neutral, positive, and negative, and then transformed to a dummy variable with 1 = non-emotional and 0 = emotional.

Results showed that emotion was a significant predictor for $\log(\text{share})$ ($b = -.03$, $\exp(b) = .97$, $SE = .01$, $p < .01$), and $\log(\text{comment})$ ($b = -.07$, $\exp(b) = .93$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$). The regression coefficients were exponentiated for interpretation. Compared to non-emotional posts, emotional posts generated 3% more shares and 7% more comments, after holding all other covariates constant. However, the coefficient was not significant predicting the number of likes. Thus, *H1 was partially supported.*

H2

H2 predicted the positivity effects. To test H2, we computed a new dummy variable *pos_neg* as the focal independent variable representing two categories with 0 = negative and 1 = positive. Results found *pos_neg* was a significant predictor for $\log(\text{share})$ ($b = -.03$, $\exp(b) = .97$, $SE = .01$, $p < .01$), and $\log(\text{comment})$ ($b = .06$, $\exp(b) = 1.06$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$). After exponential transformation of the regression coefficients, the results showed that compared to negative posts, positive posts would generate 3% fewer shares, but 6% more comments, after holding all other covariates constant. *H2 was partially supported.*

H3

To test H3, another set of negative binomial regression models were used. To capture the strength of emotion, we used the same approach by Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) and computed a new variable:

$$\text{Strength} = (\text{Positive} - \text{Negative}) - 2,$$

in which *positive* (1 to 5) and *negative* (-1 to -5) refer to the same scores generated by SentiStrength. We subtract 2 from the sum of absolute values of positive and negative scores, so that the range of sentiment is transformed from [2, 10] to [0, 8]. This procedure makes it more intuitive to follow when a sentiment score of 0 means neutral post. The *strength* variable captures the total amount of emotion, be it positive, negative, or a mixture of both. Results indicated that emotion strength was a significant positive predictor of $\log(\text{share})$ ($b = .01$, $\exp(b) = 1.01$, $SE = .004$, $p < .01$), and $\log(\text{comments})$ ($b = .03$, $\exp(b) = 1.03$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$). The regression coefficients were exponentiated for interpretation. With one unit increase in the total amount of emotional strength, holding all other predictors constant, is likely to trigger 1% more shares, and 3% more comments. Therefore, *H3 was partially supported.*

H4 - H6 examined the emotion contagion effect by evaluating the emotion valence of comments. To ensure that the results were comparable for posts with different numbers of comments, we created new dependent variables based on the *proportion of emotional comments* and the *average comments sentiment score* (i.e., the average score of comments' emotion strength). Because the dependent variables were not based on count data, we used ordinary linear regression models. The same set of control variables were included in the models.

H4

Two models were tested for H4. *Emotion* was the focal independent variable in both models, which was dummy coded with 1 being non-emotional and 0 being emotional. The resulting regression model was similar to the model tested for H1, except for the dependent measures. Results showed that *emotion* was a significant predictor for the proportion of emotional posts in comments ($b = -.02$, $SE = .003$, $p < .001$), and for the average comments

sentiment score ($b = -.04$, $SE = .01$, $p < .01$). Compared to non-emotional posts, the proportion of emotional comments was 2% higher when the posts carried emotions. The average comments sentiment score was also .04 points higher for emotion-carry posts than neutral posts after holding all other covariates constant. Therefore, *H4 was supported*.

H5

To test H5, we used the same approach by Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) and computed a new variable:

$$Valence = Positive + Negative,$$

in which *positive* (1 to 5) and *negative* (-1 to -5) refer to the same scores generated by SentiStrength. *Valence* then measures both the *direction* and the *strength* of the emotion with a range of [-4, 4]. A positive, negative, and zero value of valence represent an overall positive, negative, and neutral emotion of the post, respectively. When the value of valence increases positively or decreases negatively, so does the strength of that emotion. Two models were run with *valence* being the independent variable. It was found that *valence* was a significant positive predictor of the proportion of positive comments ($b = .01$, $SE = .002$, $p < .001$), and negatively predicted the proportion of negative comments ($b = -.01$, $SE = .002$, $p < .001$). Thus, *H5 was supported*. The covariates had small or non-significant effects on the dependent outcomes.

H6

H6 predicted the influence of emotional strength on comments. The focal independent measure was *sentiment*, as previously defined. Results showed that *sentiment* was a significant predictor of the proportion of emotional comments ($b = .01$, $SE = .002$, $p < .001$), as well as a significant predictor of the average comments sentiment score ($b = .02$, $SE = .001$, $p < .001$). Thus, *H6 was fully supported*.

Discussion

Through the analysis of a large scale of dataset, this study examined *Fortune 100* companies' stakeholder engagement on Facebook at the emotional level. Emotion-carrying messages were found to be an important factor influencing stakeholder engagement. Compared to neutral posts, emotionally charged posts generated more shares and comments. Although the effect sizes are relatively small, the findings are consistent with previous investigations (e.g., Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013).

Emotion strength was found to have a moderate effect on shares and comments: compared with non-emotional posts (*sentiment* = 0), posts of high emotion strength (*sentiment* = 8) could generate up to 8% more shares and 24% more comments, controlling all other influences such as visuals and links. In other words, posts with strong emotional expressions (including both negative and positive) can effectively engage the audience, and such an effect appears to be even more prominent for comments. Considering that comments are much more difficult to attain⁹, this notable impact is especially intriguing. Ji and colleagues (2017) considered commenting, especially comments with strong emotions, as *profound engagement* behaviors. Such engagement not only requires considerable physical effort (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011), but also critical creations of content that facilitates a dialogical communication loop (Ji et al., 2017). Content with strong emotions may be the answer to break the barrier by triggering empathy from the audience to create profound engagement.

Interestingly and against our prediction, the number of post likes was not associated with emotion nor its strength. Results did show that most of the covariates (e.g., video, link, overall

⁹ Our data revealed the average number of comments per posts ($M = 66$) is less than 4% of the average number of likes ($M = 1717$), and 47.5% of the average number of shares ($M = 139$).

page likes and total revenue) were significant and strong predictors of likes. This hints that compared with other factors such as multimedia, emotions expressed in textual content do not contribute much to generating likes, which is considered a lower level of engagement behavior (Muntinga et al., 2011).

The study findings also revealed insights regarding the emotion contagion effect. Emotional content was more likely to generate emotional comments. With every one unit increase in post valence (i.e., as the post gets more positive), the proportion of positive comments will increase by 1%. Consequently, a highly positive post (valence = 4) is likely to have 8% more positive comments than a highly negative post (valence = -4). Moreover, emotion strength was found to have a similar effect of diffusion in comments.

Inconsistent with our prediction, results of H2 showed mixed findings regarding the positivity effect. Negative posts were more likely to generate shares while positive posts had a foreseeable effect generating comments. Emotion valence did not significantly influence the number of likes. A factor could have counted for the unexpected finding for H2 is *arousal*. According to the dimensional theory of emotion (Russell, 1980; Russell & Mehrabian, 1977), arousal and valence are the two primary dimensions of emotion (Bolls, Lang, & Potter, 2001). Various emotions can trigger different levels of psychological arousal, with low arousal characterized by deactivation and relaxation but high arousal characterized by action (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Consequently, high arousal content is more likely to be shared than low arousal content (Berger, 2011; Berger & Milkman, 2012). Then, it is likely that the dominant negative emotions are of higher arousal than the positive expressions. However, future research needs to verify the validity of this speculation.

Theoretical Contributions and Managerial Implications

This study provides implications for public relations and corporate communication scholars and professionals. *Theoretically*, this study expands the scope of the stakeholder engagement theoretical framework, especially in the digital realm. Stakeholder engagement in digital media has gained increasing attention in public relations research, especially in recent years (e.g., Chen, Ji, & Men, 2017; Saxton & Waters, 2014). Yet, to date, most studies have been focusing on the informational and functional level where logical arguments are adopted to facilitate stakeholders' rational processing of messages (Laskey, Day, & Crask, 1989). Through examination of the emotion-carrying Facebook posts by *Fortune 100 companies*, this study taps into the relatively understudied area of stakeholders' emotional engagement. Findings confirmed stakeholders' social sharing of emotion-carrying content and the emotion contagion effect. Results regarding the effect of emotion as well as its valence and strength indicate that emotions indeed help predict stakeholders' social media engagement, especially at the profound levels and should therefore be included in the theoretical framework of stakeholder engagement.

Besides contribution to the stakeholder engagement framework, this study provides important interdisciplinary implications. The empirical evidence from this study supports the applicability of the three theoretical frameworks—social sharing of emotions, information diffusion, and emotion contagion effect—to the field of public relations and corporate communication, thereby adding to the heuristic value of these frameworks. Meanwhile, this study also answers Broom's (2006) call for an open-system approach in public relations theory advancement, connecting the stakeholder engagement scholarship in public relations to the broader fields of social psychology, computer-mediated communication, and human behavior.

Furthermore, this study generates insights based on real behavioral data. Many prior engagement studies were based on traditional research methods such as survey and lab

experiment, which unavoidably would have researcher-effect and measurement-effect as byproducts of self-reported data (e.g., Li, 2011; Neuman, Guggenheim, Jang, & Bae, 2014; Parks, 2014). Nowadays, researchers have started to embrace the power of data mining and deep learning to collect and analyze behavioral engagement data from social media in real-time naturalistic settings. The current evidence gained from real behavioral insights lends further explanatory power to the theoretical frameworks under study.

Regarding *managerial* implications, this study presents a strong case for corporations to adopt an audience-centric approach by connecting with stakeholders emotionally. Emotional expressions add a personal touch to organizational posts, which in turn drive profound stakeholder engagement. This study also sheds lights on emotional storytelling. Storytelling is key to public relations practice. A good story needs “conflict, drama, setbacks” (Buboltz, 2015). Emotion is an essential element in a story that will truly connect with the audience.

Although the study showed mixed findings regarding emotion valence and engagement, this result should be adapted with caution. Many posts told stories with mixed emotions. The overall polarity of the posts does not necessarily equate to the emotional theme of the story. Many posts told stories of initially negative situations turning into positive outcomes because of the humane care and help. With this consideration in mind, we recommend companies to ponder ethical considerations when designing and implementing emotional content strategies.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the contribution of this study, there are a few caveats to be addressed. First, the validity of the sentiment analysis program needs to be further verified. Although SentiStrength was proven to have a relatively high accuracy rate (Abbasi et al., 2014) compared with other opinion mining programs and numerous studies have used SentiStrength for empirical testing (e.g., Dang-Xuan et al., 2013; Thelwall et al., 2010), the dispute facing artificial intelligence cannot be denied. There are still discrepancies between machine-learned emotions and human level accuracy. However, given that the current study investigated a large-scale dataset involving more than 1 million pieces of messages, we consider a computer-assisted analysis approach to be more efficient and appropriate. Future research may use content analysis to compare the accuracy of the computer-assisted analysis with human coding. Furthermore, this study only analyzed textual information from Facebook posts, leaving out images, videos, and external links contained in the posts. Images, videos, and external links are crucial carriers of emotions; thus future studies should also consider the emotions revealed by the multimedia elements. Nevertheless, this study is one of the earliest empirical attempts to illustrate a potential association between companies’ emotion-carrying messages and the emotion contagion effect and stakeholder engagement online. With a “big data” approach using computational methods and a large sample size containing one-year data from 55 of the *Fortune 100* companies, the results of this study might be generalized to other corporate Facebook communications.

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**Connecting Organizational Identity and Image Research to Practice:
Using Social Media to Promote K-12 Education Programs**

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Abstract

Social media are a way K-12 schools have begun to recruit future students. This case study utilizes Excellence Theory to examine organizational identity and image. Interviews, focus groups, and a survey examined key publics' perceptions when a public school district proposed creation and maintenance of social media pages.

Higher education has been adept at using social media to highlight students and faculty accomplishments as a way to recruit future college students. K-12 programs, however, have been hesitant to use social media for fear of privacy rights for underage children, losing control of pages/posts, opening content to racial or bullying behaviors, or blurring lines between teachers and underage students (O’Keefe & Pearson, 2011). In a recent survey done by the University of Phoenix, nearly 81 percent of K-12 teachers voiced hesitation over social media classroom integration because “they remain worried about conflicts that can occur from using social media with their students and/or parents” (Chang, 2016, p. 1).

The growth of Charter schools, Magnet schools, government funded school vouchers, education savings accounts, and scholarship tax credit programs affect choices parents have in regard to schooling their children (Whitehurst, 2016). To compete with school choice programs public K-12 schools must market their accomplishments. Social media are a way K-12 schools have begun to promote identity and image to parents and school-age children. This case study examines a mid-sized southern public school district’s key publics and their perceptions of using social media to promote their K-12 programs. *Excellence Theory* suggests public relations should mutually satisfy both the organization’s and the public’s goals. Thus, *organizational identity* (what the members think of the organization) and *organizational image* (what external publics think of the organization) are both important when it comes to marketing to prospective parents and students (Grunig, n.d.).

In order to understand the organizational identity perceptions held by the members and the organizational image constructed for external publics both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to explore the proposed creation and maintenance of social media for the school: 1) interviews were conducted with administrators and school board members, 2) focus groups were conducted with teachers and staff, and 3) surveys were distributed to parents of current students.

Theoretical Framework

According to Grunig (n.d.), for organizations to behave in a socially acceptable manner, they:

“...must scan their environment to identify publics who are affected by potential organizational decisions or who want organizations to make decisions to solve problems that are important to them. Then, organizations must communicate symmetrically with publics (taking the interests of both the organization and publics into account) to cultivate high-quality, long-term relationships with them.”

Grunig (n.d.) indicated three aspects of excellent organizations: first, involvement in strategic management is critical; second, the public relations function is integrated, meaning that an organization’s public relations initiatives coordinate with other management functions to help build relationships with relevant stakeholders; third, a two-way symmetrical system of internal communication increased both employee job and organization satisfaction. According to Verheyden (2017), the theory’s “key focus on two-way symmetrical communication sides well with the affordances of social media technology. However, technological affordances alone do not determine behavior” (p. 21). The use of social media is good for maintaining balanced, dialogic communication, but it does not necessarily lead to excellent communication.

Excellent organizations thus maintain strong organizational identity and organizational image by building strong relationships internally and externally. Good relationships reduce the costs of litigation, regulation, legislation, and negative publicity caused by poor relationships, reduce the risk of making decisions that affect various stakeholders, or increased revenue by

providing products and services that stakeholders need (Grunig, n.d.).

Organizational Identity and Organizational Image

“For the last decade, organizational identity has emerged as a new focus in organizational research. Organizational identity is defined as an enduring, distinctive, and central statement perceived by an organization’s members to answer questions such as ‘Who are we?’ ‘What are we doing?’ ‘What do we want to be in the future?’” (Lin, n.d., p.1). Studies show that organizational identity can, in fact, positively or negatively impact the performance and the attitudes of its employees (Witting, 2006).

Organizational identity, according to Frandsen (2017), is “a shared, collective identity that can be expressed in all the organization’s products, services, communication, and behavior to create a unified image of the organization among its stakeholders” (p. 224). Described another way, organizational identity is an organization’s mission and values. Frandsen (2017) reiterates the well-known idea that “organizational identity is vitally important to successful corporate branding” (p. 222), which also applies to unincorporated organizations.

Organizational image, then, is definitively the culmination of a wide, varied range of (usually external) perspectives. Gilpin (2010) suggests that an “organization must be prepared to adjust its image flexibly and rapidly when working in highly interactive modes such as microblogging, where stakeholders have more power to drive the direction of the conversation” (p. 284). In short, organizational image is an organization’s reputation (Gilpin, 2010), and is comprised of adaptable perspectives.

Pampaloni (2010) states that “the perceptions non-members have of an organization directly influences future contact with that organization” (para. 1), indicating how important it is that organizational image aligns with organizational identity, especially in an academic context. Pampaloni’s (2010) viewpoint is further validated by data which suggest that students valued the characteristics of an institution of higher education over any information they received via personal or formal communication when making a decision about college enrollment (para. 8).

Thus, the ideas of organizational identity and organizational image have become more intertwined (Hatch, 1997), perhaps in part due to the increasingly accessible, open structure of communication platforms. When an organization’s consumers are also entrenched within affected communities, its “internal-external boundaries collapse” (p. 358). which is clear in the effects outside influences have on the organization and vice versa (Hatch, 1997).

Research Questions

Guidelines have yet to be set for K-12 programs in terms of how to market themselves to families, promote their current events, and interact with the community via social media channels. Therefore, many teachers and staff are left to their own resources and judgement. Often, personal social media accounts are used as promotional tools for the school system. This study aims to assist in the formation of guidelines as to how K-12 programs should use social media platforms to promote themselves and interact with their stakeholders.

In order to understand organizational identity and organizational image conveyed using social media platforms we posed the following questions:

- RQ1: How do administrators, school board members, teachers and staff feel about the school system using social media to interact with their publics?
- RQ2: How do administrators, school board members, teachers and staff feel about the school system using social media to promote the schools and/or students?
- RQ3: How do parents in the school system feel about efforts made by the school district to communicate and interact with them via social media?

Methods

This research took place from August-November 2015 — beginning approximately one month (social media initiative was launched July 2015) after a mid-sized southern school district began using Facebook and Twitter to promote its public schools. This included four elementary schools, four middle schools and three high schools, all of which are public schools. Approximately 36,000 people reside within the school district. Competing with the public schools in this district are six private schools — two that serve k-8 students, two for middle school students, one for high school students, and one that serves k-12. At the time of this study, this was the only school in the state to have a school district using social media to engage with its publics. The schools were not monitoring employees' social media use at all (though social media was blocked at the schools including all employee computers). In addition, all employees were instructed to communicate with parents and students using school supplied email accounts. Parents had been notified of the social media initiative at the beginning of the school year via fliers, electronic newsletters, and emails.

In order to examine both the organizational identity and organizational image of the social media initiative a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods with several different stakeholder groups was used. This included interviews with administrators and board members, focus groups with teachers and staff, and surveys of parents.

Study 1

In-depth interviews were conducted during the month of October with 13 administrators and school board members. There were nine females and four males. Experience in their positions ranged from 1-27 years. Interviews were recorded and took approximately 1-hour. Introductory questions covered job title, years of experience, familiarity with the social media initiative, and their current opinion regarding social media. Questions were then asked regarding four themes: engagement on the social media pages, promotion of the schools using social media, implementation/oversight of the social media pages, and crisis communication using social media. Interviews were concluded by asking the interviewee if he/she had anything else to add.

Study 2

Focus groups were conducted during the beginning of November with 19 teachers and staff members. There were 13 females and six males, the majority of whom were teachers (n=16). The majority were Caucasian, with only three African-American members. Focus groups were recorded and took approximately 1.5 hours. Introductory questions covered familiarity with the social media initiative, what they liked best about the new social media pages, and what they liked the least about the new social media pages. Questions were then asked regarding three themes: how will/can the school district increase engagement/involvement, how will/can the school district connect community members, and what is the school district willing to do to increase conversation/interaction/trust. Focus groups were concluded by asking the members if they had anything else to add.

Study 3

Fliers with a QR code link to an online Qualtrics survey were sent home with students before Thanksgiving break. There were a total of 40 questions on the survey which took participants approximately 15 minutes to complete. Participants were asked about familiarity with various social media pages and other means of school district communication on 1-5 (definitely false-definitely true) scales. These included: Facebook page, Twitter feed, electronic newsletter, website, social media initiative, community engagement, community involvement, community connection, community inclusion. Section two asked about attitudes regarding

usefulness of each system on 1-5 (strongly disagree-strongly agree) scales. These included: reaching parents, communicating with parents, interacting with parents, participating in conversation, censoring comments, allowing negative comments, controlling community posts. The third section asked about their behaviors on the social media pages to date on 1-5 scales (never-always). Questions addressed: interacting with school district, engaging with other community members, encouraging other community members to interact. The final section of the survey address demographic questions including: age, gender, yearly income, ethnicity, highest level of education, and social media use. Each of these were collected at the nominal level, except age which was collected at the interval level.

A total of 289 parents completed the survey (567 began the survey). Parent ages ranged from 23-50, with 186 moms and 103 dads completing the survey. The majority of participants were African-American (37%) followed by Caucasian (21%). The majority (48%) of participants made less than \$70,000 per year and had not completed a k-12 education (17%) or had completed high school (36%). When it came to social media use, 12.5 percent were comfortable using it, 10 percent considered themselves “advanced” users, and 6 percent considered themselves “expert” users.

Results

Interview and Focus Group Findings

Engagement and Two-way Communication

In regard to allowing two-way communication, one administrator stated, “I don’t think they [the public] should be allowed to post unless it is monitored. Could be inaccurate, or mean, or insulting.” Another stated, “I think it’s more effective to just post photos, where people don’t need to reply because people’s comments may be negative or tricky to answer. Or they may go off on a tangent or pull out other issues. So we’d rather them [the public] not be able to comment.” One school board member stated, “I hope they [the school district] stays with one-way communication. I think that is best. We don’t want to get put into a situation where a conversation turns into a confrontation.” Parents, however, have been complaining about the lack of two-way social media communication, as one administrator stated, “They [the public] want to be able to speak their mind. They want to be able to give their opinions. They want to be able to chime in.” Another school board member stated, “It is a disconnect; they [the public] can’t post what they want to post. If they have a problem with something going on [in school] they want to be able to vent.”

One school board member stated, “I don’t think it’s [social media engagement] what they [the school district] anticipated. They don’t want anyone to respond. They just want to post. When they found out people could respond, they didn’t like that. They didn’t want the negative.” Another administrator stated, “The schools are very careful of what they’re posting. Posting things that wouldn’t require negative feedback.” “One of the fear it that they [the public] will engage negatively,” said one administrator. “There used to be a paper where people could bash the schools anonymously. This led to the fear [regarding social media comments].” Another school board member said, “We can’t chance it. We want feedback, but not to ruin reputations.” All teachers in the focus groups felt parents and other community members should not get to comment on the social media posts, stating “it would be like a war,” as parents like to “bash things” and “are always saying negative things” and “take things too far.”

Conversely, one school board member stated, “We think it [social media] is wonderful. It’s a great way to see what page we’re one and see what other schools in our district are doing. It’s a great way to share with friends and family. It’s a wonderful thing.” Another administrator

said, “I do think it is a good idea for them [the school district] to implement a Facebook Page because a lot of things that parents won’t necessarily read in backpacks they will get on Facebook, and Twitter, and Instagram and keep up with things that are going on in the schools...Parents will click on the phone or computer or look at some type of technology before they sit there and look at a child’s calendar or read newsletters or memos that came from the school. It [social media] is quicker and more convenient.”

Similarly, students seem to like the new engagement. One school board member shared that “A 4th grade class was doing ice cream in a bag. I was just passing through, and they’re like ‘Are you gonna take my picture and put it on the Facebook page?’” A focus group teacher also felt it was important to highlight the kids’ accomplishments by posting them, “Just letting the kids be up there [on social media posts]. ‘Cause then they get excited like ‘Oh, you’re going to be on the Facebook page, ‘cause you did so awesome.’ They would think that was the coolest thing ever.” “It [social media] improves behaviors,” stated one administrator, “They start paying attention to the teacher when they think their picture is going to be put on Facebook.” Another administrator said, “Kids get really excited to see their pictures and posts mentioning them online.”

Oversight of Social Media Pages

Implementation of social media for each school seemed to be an issue. Currently, the school district has one social media page that incorporates all the schools in the district (no school has its own social media sites). Teachers liked this aspect, with one focus group participant stating, “[I] like that it pulls from all the different schools,” and another saying, “[I’m] glad it’s not just focused on one.” However, several of the administrators and teachers suggested this allows some schools (usually those with sports teams) to be highlighted more in posts. Stated one teacher, “[Right now] I think it’s [social media post] more like accomplishments. More older kids. Just as an example, ‘Oh this person got a scholarship to go play football.’ Well that’s great, I’m not saying anything’s wrong with that. Or, ‘MSA releases balloons’; the kids did a lot of activities to raise money about breast cancer. All great things, but I don’t think it’s anything specific to what we’re doing in the class.” Administrators at the different schools want a “better balance” as some schools feel “isolated” and “ostracized.” Said one, “We don’t want Facebook to be centered on extracurricular activities, we want parents to know that we are educating their children and football is secondary to academics. I definitely think there should be some candid shots of students in learning centers, which hasn’t happened yet.” “Right now teachers aren’t allowed to post their own personal classroom photos, and teachers don’t get to pick which pictures are chosen,” said one school board member.

A main issue brought up was that there is one PR representative who visits the schools to find and post content. Teachers in the focus groups did not like the current process as they felt they had no input on whether or not highlights from their classroom activities were incorporated. One teacher suggested, “I think that there needs to be said like ‘Hey, teachers, take pictures and send them into, whoever. Because I take pictures on my phone a lot. And you don’t want to send this stuff through the principals since they have so much stuff going on already. I think we need a point of reference. Like are they the only ones that are allowed to come take pictures?’” One school board member suggested, “If we really want it [social media] to be effective, have a facilitator at each school that can post. Now we have to send pictures to one person.” Another stated, “We have to be very careful in allowing different people — even some teachers and administrators — to post. At the school level maybe there should be a technology person in charge of that. You should have an option where you could suggest a post and it can be reviewed

before it is posted. Parents should be able to write something on Facebook, but there should be a hold until it is approved.”

Another thing slowing down the process is that every child in photos has to have a signed parental permission slip on file stating the schools can use his/her photo. This causes a delay in posting as one school board member stated, “We take photos for events, promotions, we just have to make sure we have parental consent. It’s kind of hard because we take random snapshots and then we have to go back and find permission slips.”

Promotion of the School System

The school board members and administrators interviewed all thought social media was an efficient way to communicate with parents and the local community. “I think it [social media] could be a very good tool if used properly,” said one school board member. “Right now, if I was moving in [to the area] and I looked at the Facebook page it wouldn’t be exciting to me. There really is nothing there that make me say, ‘whoa, come to our school.’” Another school board member stated, “If we can do a good job of showing the positives of our school system, it may appeal to them [parents] to send their kids here.” However, teachers in the focus group felt the social media pages weren’t doing enough, “I think the stuff they put up is good. I just don’t think they put up all of the good stuff that we do. It’s just not a full representation they’re giving to the community.”

Several administrators suggested social media would be helpful in dispelling negative images previously encountered. “We’ve always gotten negative publicity [compared to the private schools],” said one administrator, “And it’s one of my goals to bridge the gap between the school and the community by highlighting the positive about our school.” Some teachers agreed with this sentiment, with one stating, “I feel like we’re a community in itself here, so showing that we’re like a family in itself would draw people in.” Even when school is not in session, the interviewees thought social media would be a good way to highlight things like summer reading lists, summer camps, classroom updates, faculty member trainings, etc.

Using Social Media for Crises

Administrators and school board members were conflicted when it came to how or if to use their new social media pages during crisis situations. One teacher stated, “When tragedies hit, parents want to know where their kids are, which is natural and normal, but our job is to keep the kids together and to make sure they’re safe. I think trying to post at the same time would cause more chaos.” “Right now there isn’t anything for [using social media in] a crisis,” said one school board member. “I think about the shootings all the time and a lot of time when these things happen parents don’t know what to do. But if the schools can keep things updated, like ‘we got the shooter’ or things like that you could keep the parents informed...Just give parents peace of mind being able to post about getting the shooter or securing the bomb threat would be beneficial. I can only call one parent at a time, but if I can post on social media I can let them see their child is safe.” Another administrator said, “Right now, it [social media] is blocked at school. We haven’t had a crisis so far, but right now it’s blocked at school so it’s not in real-time. So if they [the school] posted something via social media, we can’t check it because it’s blocked.” Social media should be implemented into their crisis plan, however, as noted by one school board member, “I think if a crisis or emergency happened, if phone lines were not available, then through social media they [parents] would be able to get alerts. Then from there we could arrange parent pick-ups, things of that nature.”

Survey Findings

Familiarity with School System's Social Media

Despite sending out emails and flyers to parents regarding the new social media initiative, the majority of parents surveyed did not know about the school system's new Facebook Page (44%), Twitter (48%), or even the electronic newsletter (50%) the school had posted the social media initiative in. In addition, the majority of parents surveyed did not know the school system was attempting to do the following via the social media initiative: reach (77%), engagement (73%), connecting (71%), inclusion (71%), involvement (63%). However, 39 percent knew about the school system's website.

Attitudes Toward the School System's Social Media

On the survey parents agreed/strongly agreed that the following were the best ways to reach them: Facebook (29%), Twitter (33%). However, they did not feel the school system was effectively communicating with them via those platforms as only 14 percent agreed/strongly agreed for Twitter and 19 percent for Facebook. Likewise, the parents rated interaction with the school system on these platforms negatively; 8 percent agreed/strongly agreed for Twitter and 21 percent for Facebook, as well as conversations on the platforms; 14 percent agreed/strongly agreed for Twitter and 23 percent for Facebook. When it came to censoring comments, parents agreed/strongly agreed the school system should censor on Twitter (23%) and Facebook (23%); the school systems should allow negative comments on Twitter (17%) and on Facebook (17%); and the school system should remove comments from Twitter (25%) and Facebook (35%). Finally, when asked about controlling community posts, the minority of parents agreed/strongly agreed the school system should control all posts to Twitter (29%) and Facebook (23%).

Behaviors Regarding the School System's Social Media

Current levels of interaction with the school system's social media pages was very low as only 12 percent said they interacted via Facebook fairly/very often and 6 percent on Twitter. Similar low scores emerged for engagement with other community members (Facebook 6%, Twitter 6%), and encouraging interaction with other community members (Facebook 8%, Twitter 6%).

Discussion

This study examined administrator, school board, teacher and staff, and parent responses when one school district implemented a social media initiative that included Facebook and Twitter. The school district was concerned with reaching and engaging with its community with the additional goal of promoting itself within the district. Overall, findings suggest each stakeholder group wants to use social media platforms to promote a positive image, but are uninterested in involving and engaging with community members via these platforms. In terms of organizational identity and organizational image, stakeholders are united in their desire for any social media platforms to promote positive images of the schools and are comfortable using one-way communication and restricted comments to convey their values and intentions. Maintaining an accessible and informational page is important for the cultivation of a positive organization image, specifically in terms of public attitudes toward the school district and its functional components (schools, faculty, etc.), as it is proven that both identity and image can impact the performance of an organization (Witting, 2006).

While the survey results indicated current levels of parental interaction with the school district's social media pages is low, this is likely because the initiative was only launched a few months prior to our research. We anticipate the interaction levels to rise as the parents begin hearing more about posts highlighting their children or others they know. It should be noted that

the majority of parents felt that they should be allowed to post on the school district's social media pages, thus we suggest allowing monitored posts (see below). This will help the organizational image as parents will not feel removed from the identity of the schools their children attend.

Interviews with 13 administrators and board members showed that this group felt the primary point of social media was to positively promote the schools and that all posts (including those by teachers) needed to be vetted/approved prior to posting, with school board members suggesting the board be able to control all posts. They felt any post could receive negative feedback and so comments or any form of two-way communication should not be allowed. Furthermore, they believed that each school in the district should be promoted equally on social media pages, despite accomplishments at any particular school.

Focus groups with 19 teachers found that staff did not want to use social media for two-way communication and were concerned with negative posts on the school's Facebook page. Teachers wanted pages with comments and posts restricted, with the pages being used to "celebrate the school district's accomplishments." Though teacher groups did suggest that classroom accomplishments should be highlighted more than sports accomplishments, and teachers should be able to submit items to the social media sites (with an overwhelming "No" to parent-submitted content).

Excellence, by Grunig's standards, can be achieved throughout this school system so long as the PR initiative (promoting the school's accomplishments via social media) coordinate with the board member's (management) ideals as to the program's image. We suggest a strategically-run Facebook page that can help to create similar notions of the program's organizational identity and image, thus creating positive outlooks from both the internal and external publics perspective. In addition, the school's Facebook page could facilitate two-way, symmetrical communication, providing external publics such as parents a way to offer valuable feedback that could further enhance the school's initiatives. However, we suggest such feedback must be monitored/approved before being shared.

In terms of application per the study's results, it seems ideal that the school system as a whole maintain a Facebook page that promotes the accomplishments of those within the school district. Appointing a small team of one to two staff/board members to approve all content prior to posting would be in the school's favor. Submissions for the page should be sent in from faculty and staff members or accomplished students with a story to share -- so long as the content exuberates a positive image for the school. Two-way communication with the community such as direct messages via Facebook and content created by parents should not be allowed so as to avoid negativity toward the school as a whole or any individual student or faculty/staff member in the public eye. Comments should be monitored by the appointed board/staff member who is running the page.

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**The Effects of Deny, Diminish, and Rebuild Crisis Communication Strategies on
Public Attitudes, Perceptions and Behaviors**

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Abstract

This within-subjects experiment tested 25 different social media crisis responses that fall into Coomb's Situational Crisis Communication Theory strategies of deny, diminish, and rebuild. Results indicate rebuild strategies are best in terms of attitude toward the response, perception of the organization's recovery, and future behaviors toward the organization.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory proposes accommodative or defensive reactive strategies may be employed by organizations during crises. This line of research examines organizational reputation regarding public perception of crisis responses (Coombs, 1998, 2000, 2002). This line of research examines organizational reputation regarding public perception of crisis responses (Coombs, 1998, 2000, 2002). Our expands on this work by evaluating additional crisis response strategies identified by Smith (2013) and their effects on public future behaviors, attitudes toward the organization's crisis response, and perception of organization's crisis recovery.

Additionally, our study examines how newsworthy individuals (e.g., celebrities, politicians, etc.) and organizations can use social media for crisis communication. More and more crises necessitate immediate responses, which allow the organization to share its message without being filtered by the press or commentators. Social media are "owned media" that allow individuals and organizations to immediately control their own narratives. For example, between February 2010 to October 2011 the activist organization Greenpeace targeted Facebook as part of the "Unfriend coal" campaign aiming to increase the use of renewable energies in the IT industry (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). During the crisis, Facebook did not engage with its publics via social networking sites, but rather focused its communication efforts on Greenpeace as the cause of the attack through publishing occasional statements (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). Eventually, Facebook would elect to increase its transparency by publishing a website about its sustainability strategy, sharing its carbon footprint and energy mix (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). However, throughout the crisis Facebook allowed others to filter the story and in many instances control the narrative. Something they could have easily overcome by using social media to respond.

In this within-subjects experiment we utilized existing Facebook and Twitter crisis responses that fell into one of eight different crisis response strategy categories: 1) *offensive response* (i.e., attack, embarrassment, shock, threat), 2) *defensive response* (i.e., denial, excuse, justification, reversal), 3) *diversionary response* (i.e., concession, ingratiation, disassociation, relabeling), 4) *rectifying behavior* (i.e., investigation, corrective action, repentance, restitution), 5) *deliberate inaction* (i.e., strategic silence, strategic ambiguity, strategic inaction), 6) *pre-emptive action* (i.e., prebttal), 7) *vocal commiseration* (i.e., concern, condolence, regret, apology), and/or 8) *nonapology* (Smith, 2013). Our study measured three different audience responses to social media posts: 1) attitudes toward the crisis response, 2) perceptions of the organization's crisis recovery following the crisis response, and 3) future behaviors based on the crisis response.

Literature Review

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Situational Crisis Communication Theory "provides an evidence-based framework for understanding how to maximize the reputational protection afforded by post-crisis communication" (Coombs, 2007, p. 163). This theory details offensive and defensive communicative strategies organizations can employ in times of crisis. SCCT suggests various types of communication in crisis situations affect stakeholders differently, dependent upon reputation, crisis history and attribution of responsibility. This theory can be used not only by for-profit corporations facing crises like product malfunctions or executive scandals, but also for nonprofits and government organizations.

SCCT and the strategies that stem from it seek to protect the reputations. In an ethical approach, SCCT's primary function is "to protect stakeholders from harm, not to protect the

reputation” (Coombs, 2007, p. 165). Coombs elaborates that only after the public is prioritized in the response should an organization consider its own reputation. Depending on the potential amount of reputational damage the crisis could cause, the organization must choose a specific strategy (Coombs, 2006). When an organization properly identifies the amount of reputational damage the crisis is causing and further damage it could cause, it can match a proper response strategy. Coombs designates strategies into three options: (1) denial strategies when no crisis exists, (2) diminish strategies, which “alter the attributions about the crisis event to make it appear less negative to stakeholders”, or (3) rebuild strategies to “alter how stakeholders perceive the organization—work to protect/repair the reputation” (Coombs, 2006, p. 247).

Deny Strategies

A denial strategy attempts to distance an organization, and its reputation, from a particular crisis (Coombs, 2007). Additionally, deny strategies seek to establish a crisis frame (Coombs, 2007). This approach attempts to eliminate negative effects. Coombs notes that if an organization is not involved in a crisis, it will not suffer any damage from the event (Coombs, 2007). That is why most managers will attempt to utilize this tactic as a way to help his/her organization attempt to “save face.” If stakeholders, including the news media, accept the no crisis frame of denial, the organization is spared any reputational harm (Coombs, 2007).

Diminish Strategies

A diminish approach is meant to shift an organization’s reputation and minimize the reputational threat (Coombs, 2007). The diminish approach argues that a crisis is not as bad as people think or that the organization lacked control over the crises (Coombs, 2007). If crisis managers lessen an organization’s connection to the crisis and/or have people view the crisis less negatively, the harmful effects of the crisis are reduced (Coombs, 2007). Solid, irrefutable evidence is needed for this strategy to be successful but with all of this present, Coombs notes that even then, managers still may fail to get the crisis under control (Coombs, 2007).

Rebuild Strategies

Coombs suggests that the use of rebuild strategies are “a main avenue for generating new reputational assets” (Coombs, 2007, p. 172). This approach attempts to reduce negative effects on reputation and how an audience perceives the organization. Rebuild strategies attempt to improve the organization’s reputation by offering material and/or symbolic forms of aid to victims (Coombs, 2007). The rebuild strategies are so crucial that they are only used for crises that present a severe reputational threat such as intentional crises or accidental crises coupled with a crisis history and/or unfavorable prior or relationship reputation (Coombs, 2007).

Smith’s Strategies for Crisis Communication

In *Strategic Planning for Public Relations*, Smith suggests 25 crisis situation responses categorized into a typology of seven reactive strategies. These strategies are suited for all types of crises, from intentional to accidental, from natural to man-made. Each of these strategies contains both verbal and behavioral elements organizations may use to implement each strategy (Smith, 2013). Smith breaks these strategies into seven categories: offensive response, defensive response, diversionary response, rectifying behavior, deliberate inaction, pre-emptive action, and vocal commiseration. For the sake of this study, the researchers designated an eighth strategy by apportioning ‘nonapology’ from an ‘apology’ response as suggested by Smith. More specific strategies fall under these eight categories.

The first category is *offensive response*. This includes attack, embarrassment, shock, threat and standing firm. These are “based on the premise that the organization is operating

from a position of strength in the face of opposition” (Smith, 2013). An attack strategy often attacks the attacker. This strategy attempts to make an accuser look bad. Embarrassment goes along this same line, but instead tries to bring shame on the accuser. Shock is when “embarrassment takes a turn toward alarm” (Smith, 2013). This is an embarrassment attempt with more emotion. Threat is just what it seems, when an organization facing crisis promise harm to an accuser. Standing firm often involves “reiterating its action or position as a matter of principle” (Smith, 2013).

The next category comes from the other side of the field as the *defensive strategy*. This includes denial, excuse, justification, and reversal. Strategies in this category allows for a less aggressive response. Denial is when an organization does what it can to not accept blame. Excuse is a “commonly used defensive strategy... in which an organization tries to minimize its responsibility for the harm” (Smith, 2013). Justification does just what it suggests: justifies the action of the organization that lead to the crisis. Reversal “involves the organization taking criticism and turning it into a positive” (Smith, 2013).

Diversionary response comes in at third, including concession, ingratiation, disassociation, and relabeling. These do just as their name suggests, divert attention from the crisis at hand (Smith, 2013). Specifically, concession gives its public something in an attempt to get them to concede. Ingratiation “charms its publics”, an ethically questionable strategy (Smith, 2013). When an organization uses disassociation, it is trying to distance itself from the situation. Relabeling simply involves the renaming of a situation, product or the organization itself. An example in this study is when military company Blackwater changed its name to Xe Services, then again to Academi (Smith, 2013).

The fourth category is *vocal commiseration*. This includes concern, condolence, regret, and apology (Smith, 2013). This is when organizations openly “express empathy and understanding about the misfortune suffered by its publics” (Smith, 2013). Concern is often tricky because it does not admit guilt, but also does not show indifference. Regret also does not usually admit guilt, but at least shows some remorse for the situation (Smith, 2013). Apology focuses on the public and involves “accepting full responsibility and asking for forgiveness” from the public (Smith, 2013).

Rectifying behavior comes next. This category includes behaviors to repair the damage its done. Strategies in this category are investigation, corrective action, restitution and repentance (Smith, 2013). Investigation does as it suggests by investigating the organization or people who might be responsible for the crisis, like an executive or group of employees. Corrective action involves anything done to fix the problem. Restitution compensates victims and even tries to get situations back to normal (Smith, 2013). Repentance is the highest level of rectifying behavior. This “involves both a change in heart and a change in action” (Smith, 2013).

The sixth category is *deliberate inaction*. This category includes minimal behavior and often no statement from the organization going through the crisis. Specific strategies include strategic silence, strategic ambiguity and strategic inaction (Smith, 2013). Strategic silence involves the use of patience and deciding exactly when to speak. Ambiguity doesn’t necessarily use silence, but often includes strategically answering or avoiding questions from the press or public. Inaction is simple: The organization does nothing. It does not take action, nor make any statements (Smith, 2013).

The seventh strategy is a *prebuttal*, which is categorized as a pre-emptive action. Prebuttals are often used in politics “when bad news is inevitable” (Smith, 2013). Smith points

out two downsides to this strategy, noting it often draws a large audience and hints at a “grasping-at-straws approach” because users of this strategy seem desperate in trying to buffer bad news before it even comes out (2013).

The researchers found it important to separate the final strategy, ‘nonapology’, from Smith’s apology tactic. Smith believes that a nonapology response displaces responsibility of the crisis and can do more harm to the situation (2013). For example, a nonapology response may resemble ‘I regret you were offended,’ shifting to victim blaming or ‘If I offended anyone,’ using the assumption that few to none might have been harmed by the initial crisis cause (Smith, 2013). These responses can be perceived as insensitive and insincere. Despite this, it can be perceived as a form of an apology and has been categorized under a diminish strategy in this study.

In an attempt to synthesize SCCT responses with Smith’s (2013) strategies, we suggest *deny strategies* include: offensive response, defensive response. *Diminish strategies* include: diversionary response, deliberate inaction, nonapology. *Rebuild strategies* include: pre-emptive action, vocal commiseration, rectifying behavior.

Research Questions

Understanding the use of different types of crisis responses is essential for crisis managers. It has been found that publics’ usage of social media increases in time of crises, as well as, the normalization of public involvement in crisis management (Roshan, Warren & Carr, 2016). Publics believe social media have higher credibility than traditional media, citing timeliness and interaction (Liu, Austin & Jin, 2011). With the popularity of social media being a reliable source of information, it is vital to understand the most effective strategies that positively affects an audience’s attitudes, perceptions and behaviors toward an organization and its crisis management. A public relations professional desires to diminish a reputational threat with its crisis response by accommodating to the desires of the stakeholders. In this study, the following research questions were proposed to provide data on the effectiveness of denial, diminish and rebuild strategies:

- RQ1:** How do deny, diminish, and rebuild strategies affect participants’ attitudes toward the organization?
- RQ2:** How do deny, diminish, and rebuild strategies affect participants’ perceptions of crisis recovery?
- RQ3:** How do deny, diminish, and rebuild strategies affect participants’ future behaviors?

The results of research question one is proposed to determine a positive or negative shift in participants attitude about the organization. Research question two is intended to provide context for crisis recovery steps and its impact on attitude shift. Research question three results would allow an organization to predict outcomes of its crisis management method(s).

Method

A within-subjects experiment was used to evaluate differences in attitudes, perceptions and behaviors among the 25 different crisis response types. This allowed for each participant to act as his/her own control group as we take “multiple observations of the same participants” (Zhou & Sloan, 2011, p. 175).

Design

A 25 (crisis response type) x Message Order experimental design was used. Qualtrics was programed for random message presentation orders thereby controlling carryover effects of

previous messages, multiple treatment interference, primacy and recency. Stevens (2002) posits counterbalancing messages in this was distributes message effects, enabling order to become a control variable.

Participants

A snowball sample of 224 of individuals was recruited via Facebook and Twitter and were offered the chance to win a \$50 gift card for their participation. Of the participants, 155 were female and 60 were male, predominantly Caucasian (80%) and Hispanic/Latino (12.5%). with ages ranging from 18-67. The majority of participants indicated they make more than \$150,000 (25%), were Republican (36%), had a bachelor's degree (30%), and were employed full time (45%). In addition, 85 percent indicated they were from the West South Central region (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas).

In terms of social media use, the majority said the Internet (54%) was their main source of news about current events in the U.S. and around the world. Overall, 28 percent noted they used social media tools and consider themselves an advanced user, while 27 percent stated they use social media as a regular part of their work or professional development. Participants noted the following regarding regular use of social media platforms: Facebook (85%), LinkedIn (41%), Twitter (48%), Google+ (4%), Instagram (62%), Blogs (31%), and Pinterest (59%).

Stimuli

A mix of existing Facebook and Twitter posts by organizations and celebrity individuals were identified for the study. Prior to use in the study, a total of 75 items (3 of each type of crisis response) were pretested for the presence of the crisis response type, hedonic valence and arousal. An abbreviated version of the Self-Assessment Mannikin (SAM) was used to measure emotional responses to the stimuli on five point scales from unpleasant/pleasant and boring/excited (Lang, 1995). This helped to narrow down the items to 25 ensuring that high levels of arousal or variations in emotion affected final experiment responses. The resulting posts used in the experiment were:

- 1) *Deny strategies* include: *offensive response* (attack/Nestle, embarrassment/SeaWorld, shock/PETA, threat/Zendaya), *defensive response* (denial/Hillary Clinton, excuse/Rupert Murdoch, justification/Kristi Capel, reversal/Anderson Cooper).
- 2) *Diminish strategies* include: *diversionary response* (concession/Kelly Osbourne, ingratiation/Jerry Rice, disassociation/BP, relabeling/BlackWater), *deliberate inaction* (strategic ambiguity/Willette, strategic inaction/David Vitter, strategic silence/LSU Baseball), *nonapology* (Belvedere Vodka).
- 3) *Rebuild strategies* include: *pre-emptive action* (Marco Rubio), *vocal com miseration* (concern/Seaworld, condolence/Air Asia, regret/Malaysia Airlines, apology/Sia), *rectifying behavior* (investigation/David Boren, corrective action/DKNY, repentance/KitchenAid, restitution/Land Rover).

Measures

The independent variables examined in this study were: age, gender, ethnicity, yearly income, political affiliation, level of education, employment status, current occupation, geographic location, main source of news, social media use, and social media platforms used regularly. Age was measured at the interval level and social media platforms at the ordinal level, all other variables were measured at the nominal level.

Attitude toward the response

Attitude was measured on a 5-point scale (Strongly disagree-Strongly agree) using three statements: 1) I believe the organization's/individual's crisis response was appropriate, 2) The

response positively affected by attitude toward the organization/individual, and 3) I agree with the organization's/individual's decision to respond this way to the crisis. A factor analysis with Varimax rotation produced one factor with qualifying Eigenvalues (over 1.0). All three items loaded on this factor which accounted for 92% of the variance (Cronbach's alpha = .96).

Perception of the organization's/individual's recovery

Perception was measured on a 5-point scale (Strongly disagree-Strongly agree) using four statements: I feel that this response is essential to the organization's/individual's crisis recovery. I feel this response was beneficial to the organization's/individual's crisis recovery. This post makes me feel optimistic about this organization's/individual's future. This organization's/individual's crisis response strengthens their image. A factor analysis with Varimax rotation produced one factor with qualifying Eigenvalues (over 1.0). All four items loaded on this factor which accounted for 85% of the variance (Cronbach's alpha = .94).

Future behaviors toward the organization/individual

Future behaviors were measured on a 5-point scale (Strongly disagree-Strongly agree) using six statements: 1) If I saw an organization/individual respond to a crisis in this way I would be loyal to them. 2) If I saw an organization/individual respond to a crisis in this way I would recommend them to others. 3) If I saw an organization/individual respond to a crisis in this way I would feel very confident about this organization/individual. 4) If I saw an organization/individual respond to a crisis in this way I would trust them. 5) If I saw an organization/individual respond to a crisis in this way I would be satisfied with them. 6) If I saw an organization/individual respond to a crisis in this way I would do business with them. A factor analysis with Varimax rotation produced one factor with qualifying Eigenvalues (over 1.0). All six items loaded on this factor which accounted for 92% of the variance (Cronbach's alpha = .98).

Procedure

Participants were recruited over the course of one week by the researchers via Facebook and Twitter posts. The posts directed them to the opening Qualtrics page which provided them with informed consent. Following informed consent participants viewed each of the 25 stimuli and answered the attitude, perception, and behavior questions in between. Finally, participants completed demographic and social media use questions and were thanked for their participation. If they wanted to be entered into the pool for the the \$50 they needed to provide their email address. The entire process took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

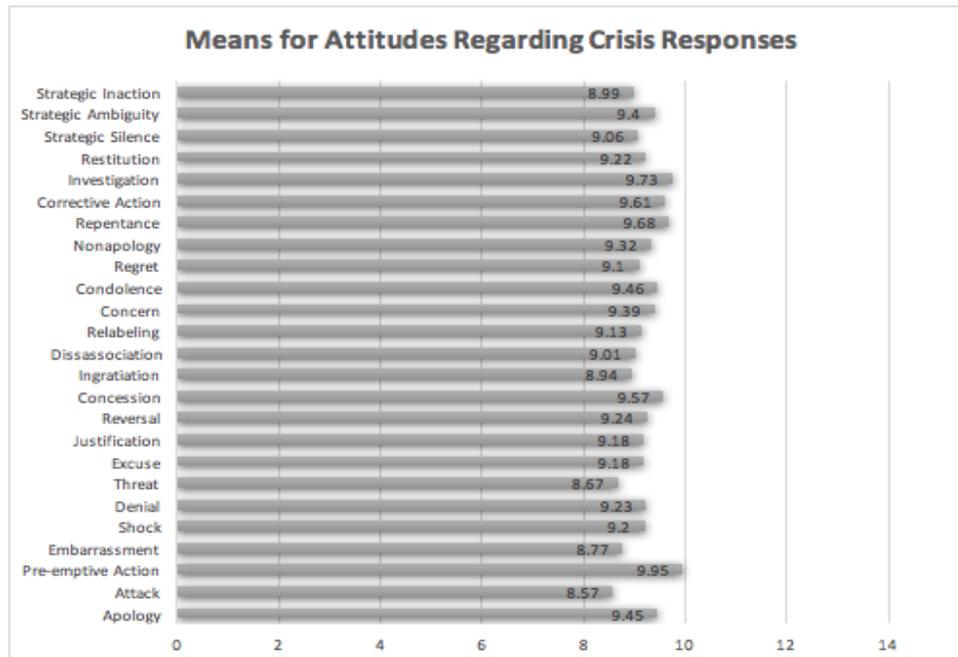
Results

A series of repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to examine the effects of the 25 different crisis response types on attitudes, perceptions and behaviors.

Attitudes

There was a significant effect of crisis type on attitudes, $F(24, 5352)=12.80, p<.0001$, effect size = .05, power=1.0. See Figure 1 for means. Results indicated in terms of attitude toward the crisis responses, participants were most favorable toward *rebuild strategies* (i.e., investigation, corrective action, repentance, condolence, apology and pre-emptive action) and one *diminish strategy* (i.e., concession). Participants were least favorable toward strategic inaction, ingratiating, and the *offensive responses* of threat, embarrassment, and attack (deny strategies).

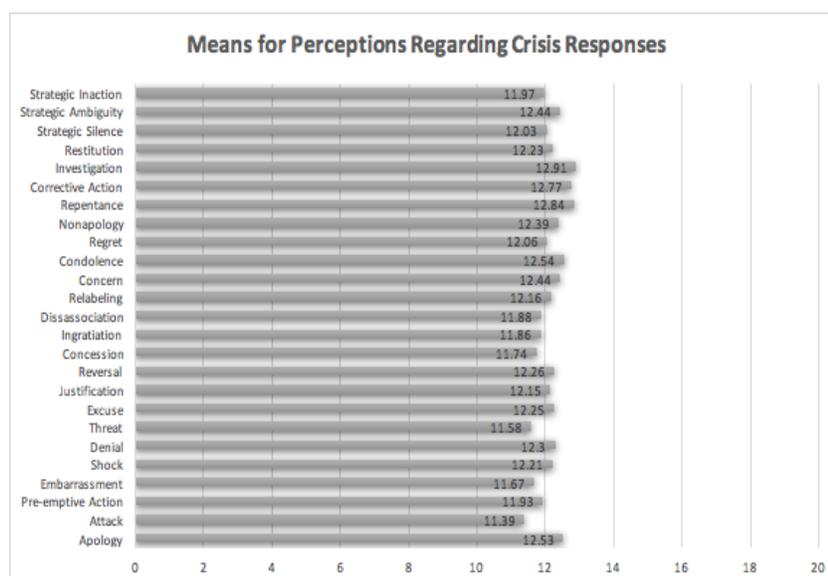
Figure 1.



Perceptions

There was a significant effect of crisis type on perceptions, $F(24, 5352)=12.52$, $p<.0001$, effect size = .05, power=1.0. See Figure 2 for means. Participant perceptions regarding organizational recovery were more favorable when *rebuild strategies* (i.e., investigation, corrective action, repentance, condolence and apology) were used. Participants were least favorable toward strategic inaction, preemptive action, the *diversionary responses* of disassociation, ingratiating, and restitution, and the *offensive responses* of threat, embarrassment, and attack (diminish and deny strategies).

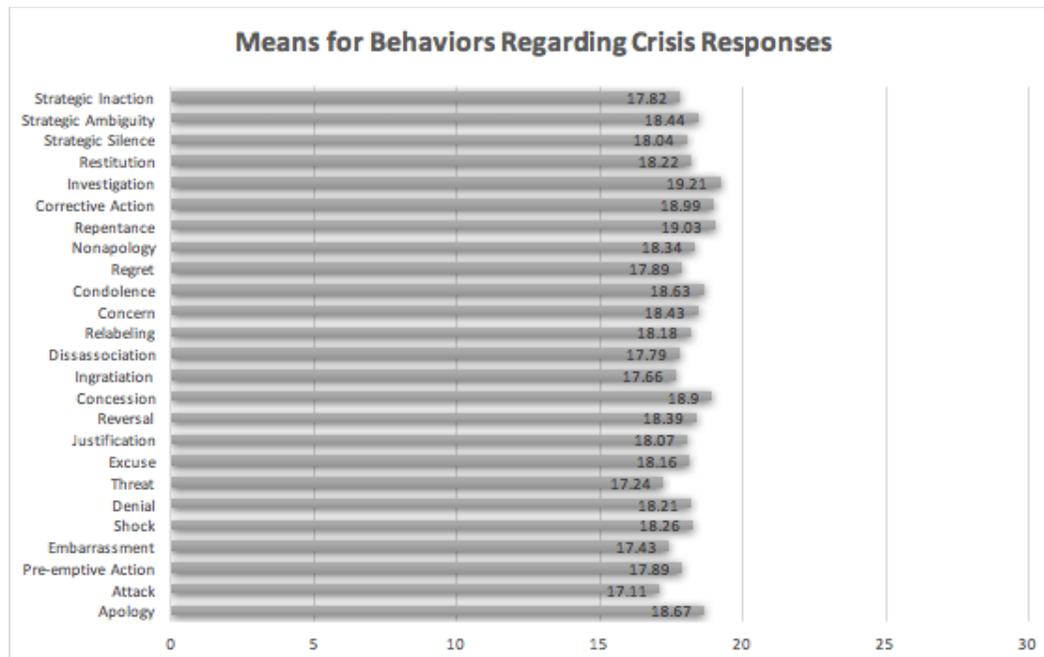
Figure 2:



Behaviors

There was a significant effect of crisis type on perceptions, $F(24, 5352)=11.08, p<.0001$, effect size = .05, power=1.0. See Figure 3 for means. In regard to future behaviors, participants preferred *rebuild strategies* (i.e., investigation, repentance, corrective action, apology and condolence) and one *diminish strategy* (i.e., concession). Participants were least favorable toward strategic inaction, regret, preemptive action, the *diversionary responses* of disassociation, ingratiation, and the *offensive responses* of threat, embarrassment, and attack (diminish and deny strategies).

Figure 3:



Discussion

Results indicated in terms of attitude toward the crisis responses, participants were most favorable toward *rebuild strategies* (i.e., investigation, corrective action, repentance, condolence, apology and pre-emptive action) and one *diminish strategy* (i.e., concession). Participant perceptions regarding organizational recovery were more favorable when *rebuild strategies* (i.e., investigation, corrective action, repentance, condolence and apology) were used. In regard to future behaviors, participants preferred *rebuild strategies* (i.e., investigation, repentance, corrective action, apology and condolence) and one *diminish strategy* (i.e., concession).

According to Coombs, rebuild strategies are the main avenue for generating new reputational assets (Coombs, 2007). It is conceivable then that rebuild strategies are the safest response strategies because they cater to victims so well. However, rebuild strategies are not always the most preferred response among organizations (Coombs, 2007). This is because the more accommodative the strategy, the more expensive it is for the organization to fund (Cohen, 1999; Patel and Reinsch, 2003; Stockmyer, 1996). How an organization desires to respond does not always align with its financial ability to do so.

This study provides empirical data that builds on SCCT, in which, Coombs developed to shift crisis response strategies by prioritizing a crisis' threat to the audience, rather than the threats of the organization itself (Coombs, 2006). Furthermore, this study proves that crisis

managers should lean toward taking corrective action, such as making an apology, rather than hoping that the crisis will simply die away with time.

SCCT started with a system for matching the crisis response strategy(ies) to the crisis situation (Coombs, 2006). This means that the more severe the crisis situation, the response needs to be that much more stronger in order to rectify the crisis. Further research should focus on additional strategies that organizations can take that will satisfy all parties involved because while rebuild strategies are most favored by participants, apologies leave an organization open to legal liabilities and therefore an organization may seek another strategy to eliminate the liability entirely (Coombs, 2006). Overall, this means that social media responses to crises are critical to an organization and the way its reputation is viewed by its publics.

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**Putting Policy into Work with PR:
The Strategic Implementation of Kenya Health Policy**

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Abstract

The Kenyan government, through the Ministry of Health, is challenged to implement a comprehensive health policy, Kenya Health Policy 2014-2030, that affects stakeholders in the Kenyan health system. This paper argues that policy compliance by stakeholders is effectual through an application of relationship management theory to guide its strategic implementation. An integration of a relational perspective in government-publics relationship will elicit compliance as a result of the government's commitment to nurturing and cultivating relationships with its stakeholders. From a relational perspective, this paper defines compliance as a communication quality, an outcome of social-exchange theory, and a product of relationship built on mutuality, trust, openness and commitment.

Keywords: Compliance, Relationship Management, Kenya Health Policy

Compliance is not an organization-friendly word. Many organizations struggle to elicit compliance to new rules, regulations and policies. To the publics involved in this process, compliance is viewed as change, transition, and expectation that may cause resistance, threaten status quo and uncover personal, structural and organizational dereliction. Compliance is complicated because it is personal; it requires personal qualities such as honesty, trust and interdependence. These qualities are rarely discussed in boardrooms, cloakrooms or restrooms. These qualities are hardly addressed by HR hiring and training sessions. These qualities are barely covered in business schools and executive education programs. These are not thought of as organizational qualities, to be juxtaposed with organizational efficiency, competitiveness and profitability. Nevertheless, every organization comes to term with the inevitability of compliance from either within or without its environment. From within, compliance means restructuring, evaluating and multi-level decision-making. From without, compliance means adaptation, consensus-building, and repeated consultation and communication. Compliance is the reality of marketplace survival. Compliance is complex because it is a laborious, time-and-resource consuming process. And, if organizational compliance is a challenge, then government compliance is shrouded with greater contempt.

This paper will attempt to resolve the challenge of compliance-gaining using strategic communication theory. This paper will complete the following: 1) present compliance as a communicative process, 2) explain the importance of Relationship Management Theory as a solution to compliance-gaining, 3) introduce case study of Kenya's Ministry of Health's Policy 2014-2030, 4) apply Relationship Management Theory to this case to illustrate how compliance can be practically achieved and then end with, 5) implications for future study.

Compliance as a Communicative Process

Communication is defined as the act of conveying a message from sender to receiver (Matusitz, 2012). The communication model proposed by Berlo (1960) has ten components: source; encoding process that turns an idea into a symbol; message as an encoded thought; sent through a channel or medium; noise that distorts the message; receiver; decoding process that is opposite of encoding; receiver's answer or reaction; feedback; and context (Berlo, 1960). Berlo's communication process emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the sender and receiver that is interconnected and influence each other (Matusitz, 2012). A relational perspective will be the central theme of this paper.

Compliance is defined as an action, state or fact of according with a wish or command, or meeting rules or standards (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2005). It has a negative denotation as well. Compliance is referred to as the unworthy or excessive acquiescence (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2005). The definition of compliance reflect Berlo's communicative process.

Following Berlo's model, compliance is a communicative process. Compliance exists in the context of a relationship and is determined by relational qualities between sender and receiver. The strength or weakness of the relationship, based on relational history, is the backdrop of the likelihood of compliance; since relationships involve time, the ebbs and flows of relationships may make compliance easier or more challenging depending on the current state of affairs. Both compliance and communication rely on mutual understanding, the basis of accurate coding and decoding. Since sender and receiver may differ in communicative abilities, the process of coding and decoding is interdependent to ensure preservation of the message. Compliance itself is a message. It begins with a request sent by the sender and ends with positive or negative response of the receiver. The message itself is packaged through a channel or

medium to deliver the terms and conditions of the requested compliance. The compliance process is contingent on managing the imminence of external and internal noise. This is what makes compliance complicated.

The complexity of compliance has been explicated in literature in reference to its relationship with power as intertwined concepts (Golish & Olsen, 2000). The compliance-gaining model (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967), heavily influenced by exchange theory, posits that compliance behavior results from the desire to obtain rewards with the least amount of costs. Compliance, therefore, is a choice from several available alternatives. Compliance-gaining research reflects both positive and negative connotations of compliance including physical force, aversive stimulation, punishment, reward and manipulation (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967). The behavioral perspective, exchange theory and power dynamics of compliance informs yet widens the scope beyond the theme of this study. Within the realm of communication there is more discovery needed.

From a communication perspective, compliance-gaining is strategic in nature. Compliance is strategic communication because it is not a haphazard effort. Rather, compliance involves an intentional, methodical and systematic process of engagement with multiple layers, resources, and components. Furthermore, compliance is a public relations effort as it recognizes that both sender and receiver have equal negotiating power that comes from a shared or common interest (Dewey, 1927). The essence of compliance as a communicative process mirrors the view of strategic communication, through the lens of public relations, as an interpretive process (Botan & Soto, 1998). From this definitive foundation, compliance is examined through the lens of Relationship Management Theory.

Relationship Management Theory

Relationship Management Theory is not new to the field of public relations research. Public relations is seen as a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1994). Scholars have always believed that the second name in the term 'public relations' explains a fundamental perspective about the field. The term 'relations,' according to the New Oxford American Dictionary (2005), describes how two entities are connected. The relationship consists of transactions that involve the exchange of resources between an organization and publics that lead to mutual benefit, as well as mutual achievement (Broom, Casey, Ritchey, 2000). Publics are defined as people who are mutually involved or interdependent with an organization (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 2000). With this framework, public relations is regarded as how organizations and publics relate, or how they are connected. The notion of public relations as relational concept represents a shift from manipulation toward building, nurturing, and maintenance of relationships to value and serve the greater society in which the organization exists (Ledingham and Bruning, 2000).

Relationship Management Theory puts relationships, specifically the organization-publics relationship, at the center focus of all organizational goals, plans and initiatives. Scholars explicated Relationship Management Theory to meet the following criteria: the effective management act that produces mutual understanding and benefit under specified conditions that focuses on shared goals, common interest over time (Broom et al., 2000). The notion of mutuality is central to relationship management perspective (Ledingham, 2006).

A relational perspective is rooted in the fundamental belief that the purpose and direction of an organization and its mission is affected by relationship with key publics (Dozier, 1995). A relational perspective of public relations balances the interest between organizations and their

publics through the management of organization-public relationships (Ledingham, 2006). In an organization, this relational view of public relations requires a perspective of communication as a strategic management function that manages relationships with key publics that affect organizational mission, goals and objectives (Dozier, 1995; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998).

The impact of Relationship Management Theory can be measured by the implementation of public relations initiatives. There are three suggested ways to measure impact. The first measures the level of agreement between organizations and publics on key issues, and the second measures the degree of predictability of the other's position as a result of the quality of the relationship between the organization and its publics (Broom & Dozier, 1990). The third can be measured in the context of government-citizenry relationships producing the outcome of public behavior (Ledingham, 2001). In addition, the quality of the organization-public relationships can be measured by dimensions of reciprocity, trust, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction, and mutual understanding (Grunig, Grunig & Ehling, 1992).

This leads to the issue of compliance. A relationship is not defined by what is said, rather it is defined by the partner's expectations for behavior (Littlejohn, 1992). The theory of social exchange, builds upon this relational perspective as one that produces expectancies and outcomes between both parties in a relationship. Mutuality, reciprocity and trust are the commodity of exchanges between what is given and received in a relationship. In the context of the organization-publics relationship, compliance represents what the organization receives when it is intentional in cultivating and nurturing its publics. Failure to meet or exceed these expectations will determine the continuity of the relationship (Thomlison, 2000). The demise of the organization-publics relationship can be a result of incongruence of how both parties define the relationship, differing expectations, and the relationship history (Coombs, 2000). In this case, resistance to compliance could indicate that the expectations of social-exchange in the organization-publics relationship are not adequately defined or met, which could lead to eventual destruction of the relationship. When organizations integrate Relationship Management Theory as the core mission of its identity, it is able to behave in ways that create an environment of openness, involvement and commitment to its publics (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). In response, the publics value the organization and seek to reciprocate commitment to the relationship. This is the essence of compliance.

To understand the practicality of compliance as an outcome of Relationship Management Theory in an organization-publics relationship, a case study will be analyzed. This case study will involve the most challenging type of organization-publics relationship, the relationship between the government and its publics or stakeholders to elicit compliance.

Case Study: Kenya Health Policy 2014-2030

Kenya's health system began with the influence of the British colonialists. Similar to the ideals of Britain's Ministry of Health (Lassey, Lassey & Jinks, 1997), in 1965 the new Kenyan government proposed "free healthcare to all Kenyans" by abolishing user fees for people seeking health care services in local public clinics. In 1970, Kenya's Ministry of Health was established and nationalized health care. But in 1973, stagnation in the Kenyan economy made it financially impossible to operate health services without fees, and in 1989 the Ministry of Health had to reinstate fees and the District Health Management Boards were created to facilitate cost-sharing. More reforms were enacted in the 1990s, and specifically in the 1994 Kenya Health Policy Framework, to decentralize the healthcare system to reach local regions. By 2010, the new Kenyan Constitution provided the policy support to enhance equity in resource allocation and improving service delivery to all Kenyans (Embassy of the Netherlands, Nairobi, 2016).

Recently, the Kenyan government unveiled Vision 2030 as a long-term development blueprint to transform Kenya into a globally competitive and prosperous, industrialized middle-income country providing a high quality of life by 2030 (Ministry of Health, 2014). The Kenyan health system is operated by the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health provides policy support and technical guidance to public health programs, in charge of national referral hospitals, and responsible for health personnel serving in university teaching hospitals, public universities and medical schools (Embassy of the Netherlands, Nairobi, 2016). The Kenyan Ministry of Health has several departments including standards, quality assurance and regulations; policy, planning and financing; coordination and intergovernmental affairs; and administrative services (Ministry of Health, 2017). The pinnacle of the Ministry of Health is ownership and mandate of Kenya Health Policy 2014-2030 (Ministry of Health, 2014).

Kenya's national government spearheaded the creation of Kenya Health Policy 2014-2030. The development process began in 1994 with a policy framework paper that articulated the policy's definition and objectives based on analyses of status, trends and achievement of the country's health goals. In 2012-13, the first draft of the policy was available for review for higher stakeholders such as national, regional and county-level government bodies (Ministry of Health, 2014). The Commission on the Implementation of the Constitution mediated the outputs from the review process through joint sessions between national and county-level governments to incorporate the final draft. The final policy draft was a consensus presented to the Cabinet and National Assembly. The policy development process included the following stakeholders: national ministries, departments, agencies; country-level governments; constitutional bodies; development partners; faith-based, private sector, civil society and implementation partner (Ministry of Health, 2014).

The goal of Kenya Health Policy 2014-2030 is to attain the highest standard of health responsive to the needs of Kenyans, while providing policy principles, facilitate the development of comprehensive health investments and plans, and service provision within a devolved healthcare system (Ministry of Health, 2014).

Application of Relationship Management Theory

When an organization adopts Relationship Management Theory, putting relationships with key stakeholders or publics at the center of all organizational initiatives, then relationships become a central piece of organizational success. Communication becomes a strategic management effort to nurture and cultivate this organization-publics relationship. Thus, messaging is the start of the process.

In this case study, the Kenya Health Policy 2014-2030 is the strategic message, or policy, that frames and guides the Kenyan government's actions concerning future actions. The message's effectiveness, measured through compliance, is determined by the quality of the relationship between the government and its key publics and stakeholders. Therefore, the integration of Relationship Management Theory assures policy compliance. The implementation process of Kenya Health Policy 2014-2030 has barely begun, so the following evaluation is not retroactive. These recommendations attempt to guide future actions concerning implementation of the government's relationship with key publics or stakeholders to elicit compliance to the Kenya Health Policy 2014-2030.

Scholars (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999) proposed a process model for the implementation of Relationship Management Theory named SMARTS PR. The SMARTS process is an acronym for scan (analysis), map (plan), act (produce), rollout (implement), track (evaluate), and steward (adjust) (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999). This model specifies the steps that need to be taken to

manage the organization-public relationship (Ledingham, 2006) and will be implemented to the case study.

The Kenyan Ministry of Health's first step to elicit compliance is to scan or analyze its relationship with publics. The first step requires research to discover if there are common interests and shared goals in creating this new comprehensive health policy. Mutual benefit strategies are not just ethical considerations but can also refer to economic, societal and policy gain for both organizations and publics (Ledingham, 2006). The next step requires a map or strategic planning on how to elicit compliance. This strategic plan differs from the policy document which roadmaps the execution of the organizational agenda. The strategic plan maps out how engagement will take place with the various stakeholders involved; it is not a one-size-fits-all strategy but rather tailors to the unique relationship with each stakeholder party. The third and fourth steps calls for strategic actions to cultivate and nurture the organization-publics relationship. This is the heart of relationship management theory whereby the organization puts the stakeholder publics at the center and utilizes resources and time to develop and maintain these key relationship. The fifth step is to track or evaluate to relationship-building process between the organization and its publics. The organization may choose internal capacity for the evaluative process or hire an outside firm to monitor progress. The importance of evaluation in communication cannot be overemphasized; it is the basis of producing feedback and quantifiable outcomes to guide future action. Finally, after all the steps have been completed and evaluative feedback has been received, the organization stewards or adjusts based on the information gathered. To reiterate, the management of relationship-public relationship requires common interests and shared goals, over time, which results in mutual understanding and benefit for both parties (Ledingham, 2003). Relationship management is not a one-off event, but rather gradual, longitudinal, intentional effort to maintain relationships that meet expectations and achieve organizational goals.

Implications for Future Study

The importance of theory is that it achieves results. Theory functions to organize and summarize how to study public relationships; it focuses on the core domain of investigation; it clarifies what is observed; it specifies the concepts and interaction of concepts studies; it provides guidance on what and how to observe through operational definitions and models of phenomena; it sets direction for future; provides communication value in presenting information; and is normative and descriptive in terms of expectation fulfillment and mutuality of understanding and benefit (Littlejohn, 1995).

The application of Relationship Management Theory in this case study assists efforts to define and resolve the challenge of compliance-gaining in an organization-public relationship. This theory explained that mutual benefit occurs when organization-public relations use strategic communication management, common interests and shared goals, over time (Ledingham, 2006). Relationship Management Theory also provided practical framework to guide action, evaluation and measurement of outcomes for this particular case study. The measurement of outcomes transcends communication frequency, it also contributes to the economic, cultural, and social well-being of the organization-public relationship (Ledingham, 2006). Lastly, the use of theory provided theoretical support and guidance to navigate expected and unforeseen challenges, issues, or opportunities.

Future study should aim at expanding the empirical application of Relationship Management Theory to other studies, contexts and environments. A translational use of theory with strengthen its theoretical fortitude. In addition, the nature of Relationship Management

Theory requires a long-term focus that calls for more longitudinal studies on the quality of relationships over time. A long-term focus would provide a richer understanding of the long-termism of public relationships, which has not received adequate empirical coverage. Finally, future study should provide a multi-dimensional approach to relational value and impact, whether it may be organizational, economic, societal, cultural or political. Most importantly, researchers need to expand relational value beyond the frame of strategic communication, or public relations, as a translational construct studied in other fields and disciplines as an indispensable organizational quality.

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Astroturfing and Its Gain and Loss: Two Experimental Studies on the Disclosure of Motives and Its Effect Boundaries for Ethical and Effective Communication

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Abstract

Astroturfing is the practice of making messages appear to be supported by grassroots participants, when they are in fact originated by an organization. Our experimental studies compare and delineate the gains and losses in credibility, brand, desired public intentions, and megaphoning from the use of astroturfing strategies.

The development of technologies has produced many changes, both positive and negative. On the one hand, Internet communications are cheap in comparison to other technologies (Campbell, 2012). This has had benefits and has permitted companies to expand and develop better communications with their publics (Cox, Martinez & Quinian, 2008).

On the other hand, this entrepreneurial application of technologies has led to a proliferation of public relation practices -such as astroturfing - in an accelerated pace (Demetrious, 2008) or, in other words, technologies produced an “explosive growth in astroturfing” (Campbell, 2012, p. 6).

Astroturfing carries on negative ethical implications (Demetrious, 2008; Boulay, 2012), but there is a blank space in topics regarding other effects. Literature about astroturfing suggests that there is an effect on credibility (Castillo, Mendoza &, Poblete, 2013). Other literature related to blogs, hence, wider than astroturfing, found effects on purchase intention and attitude towards the brand (Ballantine & Au Yeung, 2015).

As well, research about blogs suggests the importance of word of mouth as an effect of blog consumption (Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2010; Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2013). Kim and Rhee (2011) propose an evolution concept of word of mouth, megaphoning, that can be both positive and negative. Astroturfing can have potential effects on megaphoning, since it already was linked to word of mouth.

This paper aims to find out the effects of astroturfing, dividing astroturfing in three categories: astroturfing without people’s knowledge, failed astroturfing and disclosure. Disclosure is the suggested tool to avoid astroturfing and its unethical consequences (Grunig & Gruning, 2009).

Literature Review

Origins and definition of astroturfing

Astroturfing is not a new practice. Its use has increased (Demetrious, 2008; Campbell, 2012), however, there are documents that show astroturfing campaigns back in the early 1900s (Lee, 2010).

An example of this could be a campaign designed to sell paper cups back in 1909. The owner of the paper cups distributed pamphlets that highlighted the health risks of drinking in public cups, but he did not disclose the purpose behind the pamphlets, nor his identity or link with his business (Lee, 2010).

Today, the usage of astroturfing is common in social media, such as blogs, review sites and Twitter; so that some experts have called this phenomenon “astrotweeting” (Lee, 2010, p. 73), although astroturfing today it is not exclusive for social media.

Astroturfing is a “movement that appears to be grassroots, but it is either funded, created or conceived by a corporation or industry trade association, political interest group or public relations firm” (Fallin et al., 2014, p. 322). Then, astroturfing works as a mask for the sponsors of the message (Peng et al., 2016).

The reason behind this practice is to gain support for a policy, product or individual, where in reality such support did not exist (Peng et al., 2016 a). Other authors however defend that the ultimate reason is to benefit the message’s sponsors (Campbell, 2012).

It is important to mention that the sponsors’ message reflects the real opinion of the author (Mathews Hunt, 2015). Astroturfing is dangerous because messages influence people (Mathews Hunt, 2015), so receiving a message that lies and/or hides the truth can make people form an opinion of the policy, product or individual that would not have occurred naturally.

This public relations tool is sometimes considered a way of lobbying, because of the

influence that an astroturfed message can have (Boulay, 2012). Astroturfing can reach a wide spectrum of activities: blogs, lobbies, politics, commercial products, and health issues among others (Boulay, 2012).

The hoax of astroturfing makes publics believe that there is grassroots support when there is not. A current example of this is the Tea Party, originally created by organizations managed by tobacco companies. The organizations gave money, and helped gathering people who wanted less anti-tobacco regulation and less taxes involving tobacco consumption (Fallin et al., 2014).

The first studies regarding astroturfing focused, indeed, in political campaigns. Astroturfing is often considered a kind of propaganda, however the characteristic of a hidden source acting like a grassroots source makes them different (Boulay, 2012).

Another example more focused in commercial astroturfing is the fake blog or *flog* which promoted McDonald's using a fictional character (Demetrious, 2008). Blogs managed by organizations and blogs whose writers are paid to write about certain products, organizations and idea are very common today.

Astroturfing and the Internet

The Internet is the perfect technology to make astroturfing happen easily. The sponsor can stay hidden from publics, this happens so often that there are studies learning how to unmask astroturfers (Bratich, 2014; Peng et al., 2016).

The possible hazard publics can experience also increases because of the Internet. Due to this communication technology, rumors and misleading information are spread with efficiency. Publics can result damaged because they trust the Internet as an information source as much as they trust other media, with the exception of newspapers (Castillo, Mendoza & Poblete, 2013).

Rumors on the Internet can have more effects than what we may expect. In terms of economy and market, according to Bollen, Mao & Zeng (2001), the Internet "puts large groups of individuals that cannot rely on the infrastructure of professional traders at significant disadvantage and may in fact increase market volatility" (p. 7).

The Internet makes information flow fast, displaying search results from the real-time web such as tweets and blog posts, creating a "new bubble of web visibility prompting people to use all sort of deceptive tactics to promote their contents" (Castillo, Mendoza, Poblete, 2013, p. 563).

Besides, social media make possible social contagion, which produce bursts with multiple effects in sales, market and businesses (Bollen, Mao & Zeng, 2011). The Internet has also attracted political propaganda (Castillo, Mendoza & Poblete).

Technology is not responsible of the creation of astroturfing, but a tool that enables its expansion and the masking of astroturfers (Boulay, 2012). Then, communication technologies are first useful tools for astroturfers to spread their messages without being discovered, and second, environments for messages to travel fast and reach wider audiences, affecting people's mood and opinions towards people, organizations, brands and products.

Consequences of astroturfing

Astroturfing strategies are always created by a hidden source who tries to look like a citizen originated or grassroots source (Boulay, 2012). This use of the citizen identity is illegitimate (Boulay, 2012), it is a hoax.

Astroturfing involves a lack of transparency. Transparency it is the main characteristic of ethic public relations (Grunig, 2009). Other than a lack of transparency, it generates an ethic problem because it leads to a conflict with the common good (Demetrious, 2008).

According to critical studies scholars, these ethical problems are "hazardous side effects of progress (...), and some people absorb more effects than others" (Demetrious, 2008, p.107).

Despite of the lack of transparency, some fields tend to disclose the source because of legal requirements. For example, health and safety fields apply disclosure measures due to legal requirements about identification of funding sources (Peng, 2016).

Ethical matters are the main concern in many cases, but the consequences of astroturfing go beyond ethical implications. In literature referred to blogs, credibility is a key issue (Ballantine & Au Yeung, 2015), either studied as a whole or divided in different items; for example, credibility of the blog and credibility of the topic (Castillo, Mendoza, Poblete, 2013).

Peng et al. (2016) explain how “credibility by withholding information about the source’s financial connections, as it is known that people are less inclined to trust messages which they feel are financially or politically motivated” (p. 20).

Astroturfing may or may not be discovered. If the practices are discovered, they can greatly damage the credibility of the sponsor organization or corporation (Cox, Martinez & Quinian, 2008), since the hoax is intentional, and the activity is “unethical” (Cox, Martinez & Quinian, 2008, p.6).

Overall, this technique is a threat to long term relationships between organization and publics, it is only useful to achieve volatile relationships (Demetrious, 2008). Long term relationships need trust, so organizations need to retrieve credibility.

Other than damaging publics and the organization in a long term run, astroturfing damages public relations. Critics point out the fake utility of public relations codes of ethics, and their inability to “protect the public from the frequent lies, exaggerations, and breaches of public confidence perpetrated by the industry, such as greenwashing and astroturfing.” (Demetrious, 2008, p 105).

Research questions and hypothesis

Astroturfing is not a new practice (Lee, 2010; Boulay, 2012) but the Internet has accelerated its use (Campbell, 2012). Previous research has focused in astroturf detection (Peng, Detchon & Ashman, 2017) and ethical implications (Demetrious, 2008; Boulay, 2012); but there is little said about other effects of astroturfing.

Ballentine and Au Yeung (2015) study about blogs defends that credibility and attitude towards the brand can be modified by the type of blog, while behavioral intentions such as purchase intention does not vary. Blogs can be organic or sponsored (Ballentine & Au Yeung, 2015). The nature of organic blogs involves a hoax similar to astroturfing. Blogs are common tools for astroturfers (Lee, 2010).

In term of credibility, many authors have pointed out how astroturfing will negatively affect credibility (Cox, Martinez & Quinian, 2008; Peng et al., 2016) despite of Ballantine and Au Yeung’s lack of significant results regarding to it.

If publics discover the hoax behind the blog they are reading, credibility could suffer variations:

H1a: When publics find out that they have been exposed to astroturfing, credibility will decrease, compared to when they did not know about astroturfing.

As well, Ballantine and Au Yeung (2015) did find significant results concerning attitude towards the brand in their study about blog authors/owners. Because of the similarity of sponsored blogs with astroturfing, we assume results may be similar.

H1b: When publics find out that they have been exposed to astroturfing, their attitude towards the brand will be more negative, compared to when they did not know about astroturfing.

In order to develop ethical public relations strategies, scholars propose disclosing the source (Grunig, 2009), being transparent with publics. Astroturfing shows a lack of disclosure,

but some organizations which produce astroturfed blogs and campaigns let the publics know they are behind these posts and campaigns. There is not research that shows the results of disclosure on credibility comparing it to astroturfing and failed astroturfing. Then:

RQ1a: Does disclosure produce changes in credibility?

RQ1b: Does disclosure produce changes in attitudes towards the brand?

In the case of purchase intention, Ballantine and Au Yeung found significant results. Mathews Hunt (2015) research also supported this idea.

H1c: When publics learn about astroturfing, their purchase intention will decrease, compared to when they did not know about astroturfing.

The same kind of question applied to disclosure its formulated again, comparing the condition of disclosure with astroturfing and failed astroturfing, this time, regarding purchase intention:

RQ1c: Does disclosure produce changes in purchase intention?

As it was explained previously, there is a lack of studies focusing in other effects of astroturfing, such as consumer megaphoning. Word of mouth has been previously mentioned in case studies as an important asset that brands seek when it is positive, and try to reduce when it is negative, specially in the Internet era (Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2010; Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2013).

Megaphoning is a more developed concept which starting point is word of mouth, since it involves affected people diffusing positive or negative information because of their own experiences:

RQ2a: Does astroturfing produce any effect on megaphoning?

The same question is applied to the disclosure condition, in comparison to astroturfing and failed astroturfing conditions.

RQ2b: Does disclosure produce changes on megaphoning?

The ultimate goal of this research is to assess the use misuse of astroturfing because of its negative effects other than ethical matters. To do so it is needed to check these effects by answering this hypothesis and research questions, and compare the results using a gain and loss frame.

Methodology

Participants

A sample of 254 participants completed the study. Participants were 50% male and 50% female. Participants were asked to self- identify their ethnicity. Reports show that 202 of the participants (79.5%) were White, 26 were Black (10.2%), 3 were American Indian or Alaska Native (1.2%), 10 were Asian (3.9%), 9 were Latin American (3,5), and 4 of them belonged to other ethnicities (1.6%).

All of the participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk, then, they were asked to follow the instructions in a Qualtrics to page to proceed with the experiment and the questionnaire.

Design and procedures

This study uses a mixed model 3 x 2 experiment. It is mixed since there are three conditions, but each participant is only assigned to one of them (between subjects) and each participant is exposed to content of two different brands within each condition (within subjects). Conditions were astroturfing, failed astroturfing and disclosure, and the brands were the well-known companies Coca Cola and Wal-Mart.

Condition astroturfing means that astroturfing happens, but participants do not learn about it. Definitions commonly refer to this case. Failed astroturfing involves the knowledge of

the practice; participants learn about the bad practices of the company. Disclosure is the path to follow to avoid astroturfing and other unethical practices (Grunig & Grunig, 2009). While papers recommend to disclose sources, funding and real data, there is not research about consequences of disclosure in elements such as credibility, purchase intention, attitude towards the brand and megaphoning.

Participants first completed a pre-test that measured some of their habits and relationships with the brands Coca Cola and Wal-Mart. This pre-test was a battery of questions about their habits in relation to the brands, as well they have to answer whether they agreed or disagreed in statements referred to loyalty to these brands. Loyalty items were taken from Bagozzi, Batra & Ahuvia (2016), and they were used to rule out possible confounds.

Then, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three possible conditions: astroturfing, failed astroturfing or disclosure.

Condition astroturfing contained the transcription of a video produced by Coca Cola. A real Professor explains how eating junk food or drinking sugary drinks did not affect to people being unhealthy and fat, however, there is no data displayed that supports his words.

Condition failed astroturfing showed the same text with the addition of a news piece transcription. The news piece explains how Coca Cola's money is behind the fake data.

Last, disclosure condition shows the transcription of the astroturfed material, with the addition of the line "Sponsored by Coca Cola" at the beginning of the piece.

After the reading part, all of the participants answered questions that measured credibility, attitude towards the brand, purchase intention and megaphoning. Participants who were exposed to the condition "disclosure" had to answer an extra question to verify if they read the manipulated phrase.

Once again, participants had to read materials. Since this experiment is a 3x2 mixed model, the participants were assigned to one of the three conditions, but then were exposed to stimuli of two different brands within the same condition. Therefore, each participant read another text of the same condition, but a different brand.

The second brand was Wal-Mart. Again, there was a text to read for each condition. A blog post about bloggers traveling across America and sleeping at Wal-Mart parking lots was showed in Astroturfing condition. Failed astroturfing showed the same post, and another post revealing how Wal-Mart was paying the bloggers. The third condition, disclosure, showed the blog post with Wal-Mart logo right after the line "sponsored by".

Once they have read the materials, they had to answer questions that measured credibility, attitude towards the brand, purchase intention and megaphoning. Participants who were exposed to the condition "disclosure" had to answer an extra question to verify if they read the manipulated phrase. Last, they were asked to fill some demographic questions.

Instrumentation

Credibility. Participants answered a total of 6 items from the OPRA Measures for credibility (Grunig & Grunig, 2001) by assessing their agreement or disagreement in a 5-point item scale. In the case of Coca Cola ($M=3.07$, $SD=.88$, $\alpha=.90$), and for Wal-Mart ($M=3.09$, $SD=.99$, $\alpha=.90$). It included aspects such as being treated fairly, concern about people, confidence about the organization's skills.

Attitudes towards the brand. Participants answered whether they agreed or disagreed in a 5 point likert scale with five items referred to attitude towards the brand retrieved from Spears and Singh (2004). They answered these questions for both brands, Coca Cola ($M=3.04$, $SD=1.09$, $\alpha=.95$) and Wal-Mart ($M=2.98$, $SD=.82$, $\alpha=.91$) Items include liking, finding the

company appealing, and considering that the organization's actions are done for good among others.

Purchase intention. To measure purchase intention, participants had to read a scale of four items from Spears & Singh (2004). Again, they had to answer items for Coca Cola ($M=3.22$, $SD=.80$, $\alpha=.91$) and Wal-Mart ($M=3.30$, $SD=.77$, $\alpha=.83$). Items stated the existence of interest towards the brand's product and probability of consumption. Each participant had to rate these statements on a 5-point likert scale.

Megaphoning. Megaphoning is an advanced concept. Its roots are word of mouth. Megaphoning can be positive (Coca Cola: $M=2.20$, $SD=1.08$, $\alpha=.92$; Wal-Mart: $M=2.20$, $SD=1.05$, $\alpha=.90$), when people are willing to speak well and give positive reviews about an organization, product, person or policy. It also can be negative (Coca Cola: $M=2.05$, $SD=1.04$, $\alpha=.90$; Wal-Mart: $M=2.22$, $SD=1.07$, $\alpha=.89$), when people are likely to share their bad opinions and discommmend a product, organization, policy or person. Both positive and negative megaphoning items come from Kim & Rhee (2011), and these items were rated through a 5-point scale.

Findings

H1 and RQ1 test the effect of the three conditions (astroturfing vs. failed-astroturfing vs. disclosure) on the dependent variables (H1a: credibility of the brand, H1b: attitudes toward the brand, H1c: purchase intention) toward two brands (i.e., Coca-Cola and Walmart). To test H1 and RQ1 the study conducted one-way ANOVA tests for each brand.

For the credibility of Coca-Cola, the result shows that there was a significant difference among astroturfing, failed-astroturfing, and disclosure ($F(2,249) = 6.71$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$).

To test the specific difference, post-hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD¹⁰ were conducted. The result shows that astroturfing ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .09$) and disclosure condition ($M = 3.25$, $SD = .10$) are significantly different from failed-astroturfing condition ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .10$). However, there was not significant difference between astroturfing and disclosure condition.

For the credibility of Walmart, there was significant difference among three conditions ($F(2,246) = 4.25$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .03$), and following post hoc test indicates that there was significant difference between disclosure ($M = 3.26$, $SD = .11$) and failed-astroturfing condition ($M = 2.832$, $SD = .11$). In addition, there was difference between astroturfing ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .10$) and failed-astroturfing condition although it is not statistically significant ($p = .08$).

For the attitude toward Coca-Cola (H1b and RQ1b), there was significant difference between the conditions has found ($F(2,248) = 12.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$). Following post hoc test indicates that the mean score for astroturfing condition ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.00$) and disclosure condition ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.09$) were significantly different from failed-astroturfing condition ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.07$). However, disclosure condition did not significantly differ from astroturfing condition.

For the attitude toward Walmart, the similar pattern has found. Specifically, there was significant difference between astroturfing, failed-astroturfing, and disclosure ($F(2,248) = 5.81$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$), and the post hoc test shows that astroturfing condition ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .83$) and disclosure condition ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .82$) were significantly different than failed-astroturfing condition ($M = 2.72$, $SD = .79$), but not significant difference was found between astroturfing condition and disclosure.

For the purchase intention (H1c and RQ1c), there was not significant difference among astroturfing ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .81$), failed astroturfing ($M = 3.10$, $SD = .80$), and disclosure ($M =$

¹⁰ Tukey HSD was used for all following post hoc tests.

3.26, $SD = .80$) for Coca-Cola ($F(2,249) = 1.25, p = .29, \eta^2 = .01$). Similarly, astroturfing ($M = 3.34, SD = .78$), failed astroturfing ($M = 3.22, SD = .77$), and disclosure ($M = 3.33, SD = .77$) condition were not significantly different for Walmart ($F(2,248) = 0.61, p = .54, \eta^2 = .01$). H1c was not supported, and the results of RQ1c were not significant.

RQ2 investigates the effect of the three conditions on positive and negative megaphoning. Regarding negative megaphoning of Coca Cola, there were not significant results reported, astroturfing ($M = 2.01, SD = 1.01$), failed astroturfing ($M = 2.08, SD = 1.04$), and disclosure ($M = 2.06, SD = 1.08$) showed no difference ($F(2,251) = 0.11, p = .90, \eta^2 = .001$).

In the case of negative astroturfing towards Wal – Mart, the conditions astroturfing ($M = 2.31, SD = 1.06$), failed astroturfing ($M = 2.20, SD = .99$), disclosure $M = 2.14, SD = 1.03$) reported similar results, with no significant difference ($F(2,249) = 0.58, p = .56, \eta^2 = .005$).

However, results were different for positive megaphoning. For Coca Cola, conditions astroturfing ($M = 2.38, SD = 1.15$), failed astroturfing ($M = 1.90, SD = .99$), and disclosure $M = 2.30, SD = 1.04$) showed a significant difference ($F(2,245) = 4.74, p = .01, \eta^2 = .04$).

Since the results were significant, a post hoc test was run. The test showed that there is no difference between astroturfing and disclosure, a significant difference between astroturfing and failed astroturfing, and a significant difference between disclosure and failed astroturfing.

Regarding positive megaphoning towards Wal-Mart, conditions were significantly different: astroturfing ($M = 2.39, SD = 1.09$), failed astroturfing ($M = 1.90, SD = 1.02$), and disclosure $M = 2.26, SD = 0.99$). As well as it happened with Coca Cola, results for Wal-Mart showed a significant difference ($F(2,244) = 4.82, p = .01, \eta^2 = .04$).

A post hoc test was developed to test Wal-Mart's positive megaphoning. There was no difference between astroturfing and disclosure found, significant difference between astroturfing and failed astroturfing, difference between disclosure and failed astroturfing although it was not statistically significant ($p = .07$).

Discussion

This research supports most of the ideas suggested by previous research. Astroturfed content negatively affected credibility. Previous research has not made the difference between astroturfing, failed astroturfing and disclosure. The lack of conditions can affect the results and the way to understand this unethical phenomenon both theoretically and practically.

Indeed, failed astroturfing affected credibility negatively. This pattern repeated again in terms of attitude towards the brand. It got negative when the astroturfing techniques were discovered.

One of the hypotheses, however, was not supported. Astroturfing did not modify purchase intention. This can happen because of several factors. First, previous research did not differentiate among conditions. It is not the same being exposed to astroturfing than actually know you have been exposed to it – and this can drastically change someone's perceptions and behaviors.

Second, astroturfing damages long-term relationships (Demetrious, 2008). Credibility for example is necessary to develop long-term relationships (Grunig & Grunig, 2009), while purchase intention is not. Purchase intention is closer to behaviors, and behaviors and attitudes - such as credibility and attitude towards the brand- are different. Relationships may modify behaviors as time passes by, but in this study, purchase intention was immediate.

In addition, other matters such as product quality and price can have effects on purchase intention decisions, resulting as not significant. Purchase intention is more marketing oriented than credibility and attitude towards the brand, which are perceptions.

Megaphoning was a new variable in a study related to astroturfing. Surprisingly, there were differences in the significance of positive and negative astroturfing. The likeability of participants to diffuse negative comments (to both acquaintances and social media) was not significant, but the positive megaphoning reported significant results.

People who knew about astroturfing showed less likeability to engage positive conversations, while both people who did not know about it and people who were exposed to materials with disclosure were more likely to make positive comments. More research should be conducted to understand the lack of significant results regarding negative megaphoning.

The most outstanding result of this research is the lack of difference between astroturfed content and disclosure, in comparison to the negative effects of failed astroturfing.

Organizations and individuals cannot avoid the risk of being discovered. Knowing that disclosure, the ethical solution (Grunig, 2009), reports the same results as astroturfing, it seems clear that astroturfing with no disclosure is not worth to practice.

The risks of astroturfing can damage the image of the brand, its credibility, and its long-term relationships; while disclosing the source of the information, all of this can be avoided, and the results can be as great as when astroturfing occurs without people knowing about it. Unethical practices not only damage publics, but also organizations (Boulay, 2012; Castillo, Mendoza & Poblete, 2013).

This paper has different implications. On the one hand, it has several theoretical implications: first, it has proven how important is to categorize astroturfed in content or sources in astroturfing, failed astroturfing and disclosure. It makes the results clearer and it avoid possible confusions among scholars and participants. Besides, the category of disclosure was considered an ethical solution, although its effects were not measured before.

On the other hand, there are practical implications too. Ethics should be enough not to practice astroturfing, but this research shows astroturfing effects go beyond ethics. Long-term relationships could be ruined, as well credibility, positive megaphoning, and attitude towards the brand. Then, we disregard the use of astroturfing, both for its ethical consequences and for its negative and counterproductive effects on publics.

Conclusion

Astroturfing is a common tool today (Boaluy, 2012), although it is an unethical practice that can damage publics (Demetrious, 2008). This researched aimed to find out effects of astroturfing in elements of the organizations' interest, so that the use of astroturfing can be discouraged also from an organizational view.

Results explain how astroturfing affects perceptions such as brand attitude and megaphoning, and how they affect positive megaphoning. Megaphoning is one of the open research lines for the future, questions regarding the difference among negative and positive megaphoning arise from this paper.

Another possible research interest should focus in purchase intention, and why it does not participate of the astroturfing effects.

A very important finding is the lack of difference between disclosure and not discovered astroturfing. Grunig (2009) points disclosure as the best way to fight astroturfing. An ethical method that permits organizations being transparent can also report good results in terms of effects that benefit long-term relationship among organizations and publics.

In conclusion, this paper reaches its objectives finding significant results, which have both theoretical and practical implications, and it gives practitioners one more reason to be ethical – it will be worth for organization s in the long run.

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Listening as the Driver of Excellent Public Relations Agency and Business Strategy

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Abstract

Studies show that many women, regardless of demographics, face increased health risks due to obesity. Analyzing the websites of two leading national non-profit health protection agencies, through the lens of equivalence framing shows implications for both corporate product and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) health messages to women.

Introduction

Of the challenges facing communicators in the 21st Century, Bentley (2000) suggested that how technology affects listening, how culture affects listening, and how listening affects business and the bottom line (p. 141) are key concerns. Despite such concerns, society has traditionally placed little emphasis on effective listening (Wolvin, 2010) and it appears that organizations and those who must effectively communicate on behalf of them have followed suit.

Listening has received little, if any, attention in public relations theoretical or pedagogical research (Macnamara, 2016a, 2016b; Macnamara, 2018) and is often poorly practiced (Macnamara, 2018). It is perceived as essential to effective business and strategic communication practice (Brunner, 2008), yet it has traditionally been theorized as a function of interpersonal communication, human resources, education, or counseling (Macnamara, 2018, p. 3). To date, the only substantial study to address listening in public relations has been the Organizational Listening Project e.g. (Macnamara, 2016a), which has found that strategic communication practices center primarily on speaking instead of listening (Macnamara, 2016a).

The emphasis of public relations research and practice on environmental scanning, issues management, and relationship development implies a need for listening – to clients, colleagues, and diverse target publics - in order to ensure effective communication management and business survival. According to Grunig (1992), elements of research, *listening*, and dialogue foster relationships with publics and represent public relations in its most excellent form. Indeed, recent research by Vercic and Zerfass (2016) confirmed that the most excellent communication departments engage in listening practices, engage with their stakeholders, and “function as the ears and eyes of their organizations” (Vercic and Zerfass, 2016, p. 279).

Because public relations has failed to address listening, it has essentially failed to substantially develop its theories and models of dialogue, excellence, and relationship-building that promote ethical and participatory communication (Macnamara, 2016a, p.163). In light of this issue, this study aimed to further develop the line of research regarding listening in public relations to describe how listening is utilized in a public relations context and how listening supports excellent strategic communication and business strategy. Whereas the Organizational Listening Project (e.g. Macnamara 2016a, 2016b, 2018) focuses broadly on the concept of listening in public relations, this paper fills the need for site- and case-specific inquiry regarding how listening occurs and supports business strategy at a global public relations and integrated communications agency.

Literature Review

Listening

Listening is defined as a complex function of affective processes (involving motivation to attend to others), behavioral processes (involving verbal or nonverbal feedback), and cognitive processes (involving attending to, understanding, receiving, and interpreting content and messages) (Bodie, 2016). It is described as the practice of giving recognition to others’ right to speak, acknowledging others’ views, paying attention to others, interpreting what others say fairly, trying to achieve understanding of others’ views, giving consideration to what others say, and responding appropriately to others (Macnamara, 2018, pp. 6-7). In order to listen effectively, one must be able to understand the response of the communicators in an interaction, thus employing empathy (Wolvin, 2010, p. 179). Moreover, effective listening means listening actively without interrupting, giving full attention to others, being open minded, considering what has been said before responding, and asking for clarification when needed (Hughes, 2002, as cited by Brunner, 2008). Competent listeners are expected to understand the content of a

conversation, avoid violation of conversational norms, and achieve the goals of a conversation (Cooper, 1997, as cited in Bentley, 2000).

Today, listening in organizations is often mediated – meaning that it is asynchronous and does not take place in “real time among individuals” (Macnamara 2018, p. 3). It relies on “policies, systems, structures, resources, and a range of processes, technologies, and specialist skills” (Macnamara, 2018, p. 3). Listening in organizations has also been found to play a considerable role in how coworkers judge one another’s competency (Haas & Arnold, 1995). Haas and Arnold, for example, found that 32% of all competency descriptors were listening-related (Haas & Arnold, 1995). Listening has also been found to affect the morale and productivity of organizational members (Reed, Goolsby & Johnston, 2016). Supporting the previous work of Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) the authors found that a supportive listening environment can enable a sense of togetherness, or “we-ness,” among employees and are associated with stronger employee attachments to organizations (Reed, Gollisby, Johnston, 2016).

Listening in Public Relations

Listening has received little consideration in public relations research, education, or practice. When listening has been considered or practiced, it has been done so from an organization-centered focus (Macnamara 2016A, p. 153) often as part of social and market research, customer relations, or social media monitoring (Macnamara, 2018). Additionally, listening in public relations contexts, as noted earlier, is mediated, asynchronous (Macnamara, 2018) and is more complex than interpersonal communication contexts, as it typically large scale systems of listening and communication to thousands of individuals at once (Macnamara 2013). Despite receiving little attention, listening in public relations contexts is assumed to foster positive organization-public relationships based on listening, trust, communication (Brunner, 2008) and increased morale, loyalty, and retention of employees (Macnamara, 2018, p. 19). Indeed, Vercic & Zerfass (2016) found that communication departments incorporating multiple listening and research behaviors exhibited indicators of excellent public relations and strategic communication.

The Organizational Listening Project (e.g. Macnamara, 2016a, 2016b, 2018), is one of the only studies to have mapped the concept of listening in public relations and strategic communication contexts thus far. Via an extensive review of extant literature, interviews with public relations professionals, and case reviews, the study found that ultimately, the function of public relations revolves around an architecture of speaking supported by structures, tools and resources (such as emails, reports, video, and websites) that promote the distribution of information (Macnamara, 2016a). Practitioner interviews revealed that organizations typically engage in an 80:20 ratio of speaking versus listening, with many organizations confessing to engaging in a 90% focus on speaking (Macnamara 2016a, 2016b). Terms most commonly used to describe listening behaviors included “engagement,” “listening,” and “consultation,” whereas the terms used most often to describe speaking behaviors included “informed,” “talk,” and “content” (Macnamara, 2018, p. 10). Case reviews conducted as part of the Project indicated that strategic communication was typically utilized to deliver organizational information and messaging. If listening practices were utilized, they were done so selectively in order to promote the fulfillment of marketing needs, provide competitive data, identify methods to better promote and sell organizational products (Macnamara 2016b, p. 143). Illustrating the promotional nature of the practice, terms most commonly utilized by interviewees to describe their work included “disseminating,” “educating,” “telling,” and “distributing” (Macnamara 2016b, p. 144).

To counteract such a predominance on speaking, Macnamara (2018) suggests that

organizations must have a culture and *architecture of listening* that supports listening, addresses the politics of listening, includes polities that require listening, involves systems that are open and interactive (and conducive to listening), uses technologies to aid listening, engages resources and staff and systems to do the work of listening, and articulates the voices of stakeholders and publics to decision makers (Macnamara, 2018, pp. 11-12). To promote listening that focuses on organizational publics themselves, Forman-Wernet and Dervin (2006) have suggested a listening approach that prioritizes publics' use of their own terms to describe concerns and issues.

Recently, scholarship has focused on the use of technology and social media for listening purposes. Social media is considered a prime responsibility of public relations and employee communications departments, often focusing on dialogue and engagement - and thus forms of listening (Macnamara 2016a, p. 156). Examining social media as tool for dialogue and listening, Lovari and Parisi (2015) conducted a survey of Facebook users in Italy regarding online civic engagement. They found that participants perceived that Facebook pages offered opportunities to become involved with city life and civic issues. Social media offered opportunities for citizens to voice their opinions on civic issues and highlights the need for public sector organizations to utilize social media to listen to and engage in dialogue with their online publics.

From the literature regarding listening and its support for excellence in public relations and business strategy, two research questions were developed to guide the study:

RQ1: How is listening utilized in a specific public relations context (a global agency)?

RQ2: How does listening support excellent public relations and business strategy?

Method

In order to best explore how listening is utilized and drives excellent public relations strategy, a case study method (Yin, 2003) was incorporated using a representative single public relations agency as the unit of analysis. The case study method was chosen for its usefulness in explaining or describing phenomena with a particular context and for exploring questions regarding “how” and “why” (Yin, 2003).

Case Design and Data Collection

A single case design was selected, as I expected (pseudonym Agency NYC) to serve as an exemplary case—a leading global public relations agency of more than 3,000 individuals headquartered in New York City, with more than 70 offices worldwide, whose leadership *prioritized listening*. Additionally, a single case design was selected, as “Agency NYC” was assumed to serve as a representative case to “capture the circumstances and conditions” of a situation (Yin, 2003). Upon receiving IRB approval, data was collected in July 2017 in the form of a) documentation (organizational PowerPoints, research reports, and training materials), b) in-depth semi-structured interviews (22 interviews with employees representing senior executive, managerial, and entry-level positions), and c) participant-observation / fieldwork (70 hours of observation with extensive note taking and journaling during the process). Interviewees were chosen primarily using a purposive method, as I aimed to gain representation from senior leadership representing the various practice areas of the firm. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded, and guided by a 16-question protocol including rapport-building questions (e.g. “Tell me what you love best about working at Agency NYC”), grand-tour questions to get an overarching understanding of listening in the agency (How would you describe the role of listening at Agency NYC?), and more specific questions to ascertain the nuances of listening in the agency (How have you recently used listening to support your client?). The resulting sample of interviewees included 11 women and 11 men, 10 of whom represented senior leadership or a chief executive position, and 12 of whom represented a junior

or mid-level position. Interviewees ranged in tenure at Agency NYC from three years to 25+ years. All participants were assigned a pseudonym.

Data Analysis and Limitations

All observation notes and interviews were transcribed fully. All PowerPoint presentations, training materials, and website text were collected, printed, and organized into a central file for review. During analysis, I read and re-read all data multiple times to create a list of themes and patterns, using a pattern matching approach (Yin, 2003, p. 116). Patterns and themes were then assigned to the two research questions. During the analysis process, I strove to bracket my biases (and previous experiences as an agency professional) and remain aware of how my biases, experiences, or interpretations could influence the analysis process. Despite my attempts to create a solid case study design based on multiple forms of evidence, use of an extensive pattern matching process, and utilizing “member checks” to check the validity, clarity, and representativeness of the quotations I captured, limitations still exist. Most importantly, this case is not representative or generalizable to the PR industry as a whole.

Findings

Upon analysis of the data, themes emerged to illustrate listening as a complex process incorporating both interpersonal and organizational forms of listening. Listening functions within the organizational culture and agency leadership’s method of mentoring employees to “listen loudly,” yet be unafraid to respectfully speak up and offer exemplary client counsel. No matter how listening was described, agency members at all levels acknowledged that the evolving listening landscape in public relations has increasingly difficult to navigate – and fraught with, as senior creative lead Nathan explained, “It’s noise on social media...so many influences now... so many media outlets now. Now, individuals are the media channels which makes it even more difficult...Even now, just talking in emojis and different speak and snapping on SnapChat. It’s a whole new language the way people talk.”

Regarding the first research question, listening is used by individuals in a public relations agency to learn and become enculturated into agency life, develop relationships with colleagues and clients, and stay ahead of cultural and industry trends. Evidence describing each of these themes is shared below:

Enculturation into Public Relations

Participants described listening at Agency NYC as central to the agency culture and embodied by all levels of staff. The office layout featuring open and shared desk spaces or tables with very few closed offices facilitated listening. Heather, an account executive, described the overall listening support as, “I’d say that people are always open to hearing thoughts from all levels. Whether it’s the executives or at the very top levels of our company, whether it’s office managers, whether it’s practice leads, they’re opening to listening.” Additionally, listening is the primary means by which new agency employees learn about their practice areas, client needs, and the nuances and expectations of agency work. Sam, an assistant account executive, explained, “Listening helps you to pick up on conversations between senior management and clients. You learn how to react during tough circumstances and how to handle difficult questions. It’s the open floor plan that helps you to learn, listen, and absorb all this...it makes the work more tangible.” Similarly, Kate, a senior account executive, shared, “you realize like there is such a learning curve, and you’re not actually ready to start giving counsel or something like that right out of college. I feel like I was just listening for, you know, six months at least. I started listening into every interview that my clients did.” Following suit, assistant account executive Marianne echoed the value of listening on client calls in order to learn the business of public

relations and agency work. She explained that “you’re gaining really valuable insights on the topic and what the client thinks, so I think that’s really important. Also sitting in on interviews, even if I’m not staffing it. It’s firsthand from our spokesperson’s mouth on what they’re thinking.”

Fostering Relationships

Listening also played an integral part in agency professionals’ ability to forge relationships among themselves and with their clients. Heather, the account executive, cited the need to engage in conversations and listen to her colleagues across the agency. She explained, “One thing that I challenge myself to do is to go outside of my immediate group because we are all in different practices and to make those connections. If someone or if I ever needed anything or someone needed something from me, I could then make that connection point. So that’s listening. It’s asking and then remembering what other people work on, especially since that changes with different client needs.”

Although listening to foster relationships with colleagues was important, participants cited spending considerably more time listening in order to forge meaningful and trusting relationships with their clients. Duke, an executive vice president, explained that listening in support of relationship building is, “taking the time to get to know people and talk to them. Listening is going out to lunch with your client and not talking business for a few minutes. It’s getting to know them.” Humorously, but emphatically, he further explained:

You have to actually *like get off of your chair*, leave the office, go out among the people and things that you are covering, and talk to them. Just sitting around, you know, at the office reading media stories. That’s not how you learn and you’re not having a real dialogue with your clients. Then you don’t build that relationship to the point that it is a strong business relationship. And, then you know...and if you don’t have a good business relationship with a client, eventually you don’t have a client.

Participants described the multiple methods they employed to actively listen in order to engage, understand, and strengthen relationships with their clients. Heather, the account executive, explained how she listens actively to first understand different client styles and nuances. “Different clients have different styles. Some are straight shooters, direct, and others are, they don’t really know what they want until they see it in front of them. What does your client really want? And how do you get to understanding what they want? It’s not just you hearing what they tell you, but it’s the *undertones*.” Then, Heather described how when knows (and is satisfied) when listening supports a comfortable working relationship with a client: “It’s when you get to know your clients on that partner-to-partner level and you know about their kids. They know you love *The Bachelorette* and you guys talk about these things. That’s when you know you want to do right by them, and they’re also going to do right by you when they give you that feedback.” Similarly, William, an executive vice president, explained his use of thoughtful listening and strategic questioning to develop strong client relationships. He said, “Clients like to know that they’ve been heard. So, to respond back and say, ‘You know, just so we’re clear.’ Or, ‘What I’m hearing you asking for is this.’ And then I’ll repeat the way I heard it. That’s really effective to do that, you know, gut check. Because the client might say, ‘Well, no, not really.’ But if you get it right, then the client’s going to feel confident and say, ‘Yeah, that’s exactly what I meant.’”

Agency NYC executive leadership especially emphasized the critical importance of listening to maintain and support client relationships. William, the executive vice president,

shared an example of how poor listening damaged a client's confidence in the account team and heralded the removal of the account lead from the client. He said of a recent client call when an account executive asked a question about something that they had literally just talked about: "You could hear the awkwardness from the client where you could almost hear them looking at each other. If you were listening to what the client was asking, you could have responded with more effective counsel, but when you get into that order ticker mode and you're not listening or you're just listening for who's going to say something next, or 'I'll have fries with that,' you've missed the nuance of the conversation and the nuance here was *clearly missed*." Ultimately, instances where listening is *not used* or taken for granted, it can alienate and insult the client, resulting in a damaged relationship and lack of trust.

Getting "Ahead Of" Trends

The strongest theme regarding the use of listening in Agency NYC, however, revolved around how professionals utilized listening to identify and "stay ahead" of trends. Many interviewees cautioned the dangers of not listening in order remain on top of changing trends and news. William, an executive vice president, opined, "There's plenty of people who come here and they haven't listened to anything before they walked in the door. The newspaper has not been read. Maybe they listened to music on the way in and there's nothing wrong with that. But they have no idea what's going on in the world!" Similarly, Heather, the account executive, worried, "There is that greater conversation going on of things that are happening in the world. And it's a dangerous place to be when you're in an environment where people don't pay attention beyond that bubble. [Agency NYC] does a really good job of making sure that we're aware of things outside of our day-to-day."

Interviewees more consistently touted the benefits of listening to help them identify, understand, and remain adept at discussing cutting-edge trends, cultural phenomena, or emerging issues. Samantha, a senior vice president, explained that listening was even key to identifying issues internal to the agency and responding to them appropriately. She stated, "Listening is essential for prevention and risk management internally. It's getting ahead of the issue so that it doesn't get worse. Listening in my role here is like environmental scanning within the agency itself." Corinne, a chief executive, explained how listening also enabled her to identify trends that the agency should address, especially regarding how to cultivate thought leadership:

It's trying to be out ahead... So one of things is what kind of research can we do that's ahead of the wave? Listening is how it's done. I get asked a question from a client in a meeting or something and I've never thought of. I can't find the answer to. And if I hear one or two people ask me the same question, that's when I'll think, you know what? This may be something that no one's done or thought of. We should do it!

In order to listen "ahead of the trend," agency members engaged in forms of extended listening to diverse groups of individuals with insights or a stake in their client's business - including partners, customers, suppliers or clients of their clients. One chief executive, Laura, explained, how you must "listen in order to know who the *customer's customer* is." She described a trip she had taken to work in the groves of her client's suppliers "meeting with growers and...and in shelling plants and really understanding their business opportunities and pain points." In addition to extensive visits with diverse target publics, vendors, or partners, interview participants described an intense reliance on technology to facilitate listening and remaining ahead of the trends. News outlets, tabloid newspapers, industry websites, YouTube videos, and aggregators such as Reddit were key to identifying unique or important trends that

clients had not yet identified. Mike, a creative lead, shared, “I’m constantly on aggregators to learn about what people are talking about, because that’s a nice way to get some sense of what’s the general zeitgeist around a story or a discussion point and then where is it going from there? Reddit primarily is the way to do that nowadays for all of its benefits and for all of its controversies.” Similarly, Steve, another creative lead, also shared how he actively listens for “what are the things that people are sharing?” He explained, “So, this is stuff like memes and stuff that is on Reddit. Like, all of the things that would get linked to and shared over and over again and we were just like, well what if we just like try to identify what those stories are and then have brands do awesome stuff that becomes part of the stories.”

Regarding the second research question, listening was found to promote excellent public relations practice and business strategy by facilitating the strategic planning process, facilitating respectful and diversity-centered communication, facilitating an excellent client experience, and ultimately cultivating agency-client trust.

Strategic Planning

Participants explained that listening facilitated excellent public relations practice—because and when—it is utilized as part of the strategic planning process. Listening is essential to identifying appropriate goals, objectives, and strategies to meet client needs. Duke, an executive vice president, explained how the process begins with listening to the clients’ goals. “When we work with clients, that’s where your listening comes in. Asking ‘What do you think? Where do you really want to go? What is your goal behind this?’”

Participants also explained that listening to clients via a formal process of inquiry (supported by excellent questioning) facilitates excellent strategy creation. Laura, a chief executive, explained, “Listening is key, but so is asking, right? Inquiry is key. So, listening is only good if you are prompting the right questions. I am very proud of what the firm has done in this area because I think we put rigor and discipline into something that we typically sort of left to chance, you know?” Similarly, Mary, another executive vice president, echoed, “The first thing is understanding how to ask the right questions... We’ve driven a process around how do we go in to ask the right questions about what those business outcomes are. What audiences they really care about. Who are we trying to move and where are we trying to move them to? And then that sets us on a course of actionable recommendations that we can make.” Additionally, Mary explained that listening came full circle during the evaluation process to make sure her strategic recommendations did, indeed, meet the client’s objectives. She explained, “We do lots of literal discussions with our clients about did we achieve what you wanted to, right? There’s the business objectives that we’re mapping against for them, but there’s also did we help you out? Did we do what you needed us to do?”

Respectful and Diversity-Centered Communication

In addition to serving as an integral part of the strategic planning process, listening supports excellence in public relations and business strategy by enabling individuals to communicate in a respectful manner that prioritizes diverse perspectives. Such a focus on ethical listening is embedded into the culture of the agency and supported by senior executives. Corinne, a chief executive, explained, “The leadership team are amazing people. They’re real listeners, and they’re very humble. They all listen and remember what you say, and I think it does stem from the top. They’re very ethical. They’re very focused on the people here, and so it’s just part of the ethos of the organization is good listeners trying to serve clients well.” Similarly, Lewis, a chief executive, voiced how he also supports respectful listening with, “I always encourage people whether they are starting out in the profession or far along to step back, particularly in

today's environment where things are so noisy and perhaps even uncivil, and listen and have empathy for different points of view.”

The agency is so committed to listening to diverse perspectives that it has instituted an employee exchange program. In turn, the listening to diverse perspectives enables the agency to provide the best counsel to its clients. Lewis explained, “we move [employees] to different offices for several weeks, and then they bring those experiences back to their home office and having that exposure to different cultures and different people....you're not just thinking about your own... you broaden your frame of reference because you're listening to people who have different points of view in different parts of the world dealing with different types of challenges.

Excellent Client Experience

Via listening, as part of the strategic planning process and embedded into a listening culture that emphasizes respect and diversity, the agency strives to provide excellence in the overall client experience it provides. Steve, the creative lead, explained, quite simply that it's using “Listening to connect the insights to the client to ensure client success.” Laura expounded upon the ways in which listening fosters an excellent client experience on multiple levels. She explained, “Our client experience is really driven by what our clients say is important to them. We talk to them all the time and aggregate those conversations. We listen to our front line employees who are managing our clients. And, we even have a mechanism now when we have a real time feedback app. Some clients around the world where they can literally, on their phones, give us feedback immediately.”

Additionally, participants explained that having listening structures in place (and gleaning information that is ahead of trends) facilitates excellent client experience by providing cutting edge, interesting, and timely insights. Calvin, a senior account executive, explained, “The way we listen that way is that we have a really, I think, strong structure for being able to pass information really quickly and get things done... Having that knowledge ready and being able to speak about it goes such a long way for our clients. They know that they have partners on the agency side.” Such a listening structure has resulted in the agency being recognized as a leader in thought leadership on a variety of subjects and providing exceptional thought leadership support for their clients. Calvin added, for example, “So we really, really have to listen and be keyed in on what these CEOs and what these leadership teams care about. Because it's up to us to position the head [title] as a thought leader in that area.”

Trust

Listening, when integrated into public relations strategy, ultimately develops a strong client relationship founded on trust. Trust, for participants, indicated that clients and agency have reached level of comfort – and the agency had achieved a level of excellence - where both parties were unafraid to listen to each other and sometimes “push back” when giving strategic counsel. Duke described this as, “The indication of trust is...is when the client asks you to participate in existential work...if a client says, ‘Hey this is the most important thing that we have done. The whole company is riding on this.’” Laura explained that sometimes pushing back is needed as part of a trusting client relationship, based on how the agency has listened extensively to the needs of the client. “Trust is the highest sort of benefit that we are going for with our clients...and that means be willing also to push back and if we think that our clients are wrong, being willing to say you know we were going to do this, but it's the wrong thing for the business...We have to always put [clients] first and bring higher order thinking for them.” Illustrating this, Mike, the creative lead, offered an example of how he pushes back with a client based on listening and evidence he has gleaned:

We are able to build a level of trust where they say, ‘Okay. We’ve seen from [agency] that they’re smart, that they get us, that they understand us, that we can work together and that if they do present something to that’s off or something we weren’t even focusing on they’ll have a good reason for it.’ I think first and foremost even if I have the evidence too, it’s just, a lot of the times we’ll hear just, ‘Well that’s what you think or we get that you think that’s cool, but that’s not about what we’re about.’ Then I say, “According to the outlets you want to reach, this is what people think is interesting and worth talking about.

Discussion

This case study of Agency NYC fulfilled the need for additional and site-specific inquiry regarding the concept of listening in public relations and its links to effective public relations practice and business strategy. From this study, listening can be described as essential for learning about public relations agency and industry life, forging and maintaining relationships with clients, and gleaning insights that will benefit clients strategically and reputationally. Listening also drives excellent public relations and promotes effective business strategy when listening is included as part of the strategic planning process based on active inquiry, is included in an agency communication as part of a respectful and diversity-centered culture, fosters excellent and unique client experiences, and ultimately – fosters trusting and lasting client-agency relationships. Indeed, *listening as a facilitator and indicator of trust*, was viewed as the highest order of excellence and achievement at the agency. When listening occurs, clients then view agency members not as practitioners, but as partners in achieving shared goals.

Mirroring and contributing to the extant research regarding listening, this case study indicates that listening occurs as both a function of interpersonal (e.g. relationship building among colleagues and clients) and organizational (e.g. social listening, thought leadership research, respectful culture based on listening) communication. In alignment with the work of the Organizational Listening Project (Macnamara, 2016a, 2016b, 2018) listening appears to be central to agency life and quite effective --- yet ultimately centered on enabling agency professionals and clients to *speak*. Indeed, although participants offered countless examples of effective listening practices and strategies, most of these were done so in order to fulfill traditional public relations practices of information dissemination (to clients) or effective engagement (of client’s target publics). Thus, this case describes a complex balance of listening and speaking in public relations – that when done *together* – best deliver effective business strategy and public relations counsel. Learning how to appropriately navigate this balance appears to require significant amounts of industry expertise – and listening!

From this case study, the following practical recommendations and emerging theoretical statements can be made, however, extensive research is still required in order to fully understand and map out how listening occurs in the public relations industry. In public relations agencies:

- Listening involves navigating the noisy, complex, ever-evolving system of voices, technologies, and trends. Public relations professionals must engage in systematic and ongoing forms of listening (and reading) in order to learn the new “languages” that are emerging – such as *emoji*.
- Listening must not be taken for granted – and should be taught and cultivated by agency management as a central aspect of client relationship building. When listening does not occur it can result, as we learn from William, the alienation or insulting of a client.

- The practice of listening in an agency requires extensive research by physically putting yourself in the shoes of your client, vendors, or colleagues. It's traveling to listen to the "customers' customers" in order to truly identify needs, worries, and trends that will impact a client or target public.
- Ultimately, an indicator that listening facilitates excellence public relations and effective business practice by creating *trust*. When trust occurs, clients and agency professionals may best engage in communication that mirrors two-way symmetrical communication. Individuals listen, speak and engage in respectful "push back" in order to provide appropriate counsel to each other.

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**Trust and Transparency: A Force Applied to Internal Strategic Communication
in the Department of Defense**

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Abstract

Recently, internal strategic communication was not improving as quickly as one might hope in one office of the Department of Defense. The research supported the need for improved internal strategic communication, but during the lead author's time in the department, she noted that the communication team struggled to make this happen. Why were these communication professionals not successful? What was hindering their success? Earlier research showed that trust and transparency were connected to internal strategic communication—either positively or negatively. The authors asked current and former members of the strategic communication team for their opinions through open-ended interview questions about their experiences. This study illustrates that a lack of trust and transparency are factors in the success or failure of internal strategic communication.

Keywords: federal government, power, strategic communication

“What we’ve got here is [a] failure to communicate.” This quotation from the 1967 film *Cool Hand Luke* could be heard echoing down the bicycle-spoked corridors of the Pentagon. The sentiment that internal strategic communication (SC) was greatly lacking in its effectiveness was shared by many of the Department of Defense (DoD) personnel—both those in and out of communication roles. At a time when senior leaders were doing all they could to streamline processes and improve efficiencies during tough budget cuts, flawless internal SC was needed more than ever.

Rear Admiral Frank Thorp IV (Ret.), former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Joint Communication), expressed the need in 2007 to improve SC in the DoD. In his words, “The U.S. military is not sufficiently organized, trained, or equipped to analyze, plan, coordinate, and integrate the full spectrum of capabilities available to promote America’s interests” (p. 2). He said that this would be possible through good communication at “all levels of the U.S. government in order to maintain credibility and trust” (p. 2).

Admiral Mike Mullen (Ret.), former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff touted the need in 2009 to get back to the basics with SC in the government and military. He postulated that the real problem was not with the communication itself, but with credibility and trust. What does trust have to do with SC in federal government? Botan and Taylor (2005) covered this topic in their research on why communication from the Bosnian government was not effective in its efforts to develop a civil society. Simply put, Bosnians did not trust their government. Could this be the same reason for communication breakdowns in the U.S. federal government?

These statements suggest that in recent years an improvement has been needed in the federal government, specifically in the DoD, with regard to internal SC. They also recognize the impact of trust and transparency on internal SC. During a period of employment and as a participant observe the lead author worked with the strategic communications team in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (P&R). Her experiences with the team, called the Under Secretary’s Initiatives Group (USIG), serve as additional evidence of the need for better internal SC in the DoD. She observed:

Much of the stress, frustration, mistakes, and waste I observed were a result of poor internal strategic communication and leadership buy-in and support. It seemed to be a never-ending cycle fraught with good intentions, but with a lack of knowledge and leadership to fix. (Seeley, 2013, pp. 3–4).

These observations of a lack of internal communication led the authors to the following question: if many people in federal government, specifically in the Office of P&R in the DoD, recognized the importance of internal SC, why were efforts to improve internal SC not working? In February 2011, P&R released its 2012-2016 Fiscal Year Strategic Plan. Strategic Goal 5 was to “develop a P&R strategic communication capability, directly aligned and partnering with the Services and COCOMs [military authorities]” (p. A-1). Despite these intentions, why had very little had been accomplished toward reaching this goal, and why were most efforts to do so met with resistance?

Literature Review

Four main theories provided guidance for the current study: strategic communication, trust, and transparency.

Strategic Communication

Hoover (2010) suggested that strategic communication (SC) is what “moves an organization from strategy development to implementation” (p. 16). Argenti (2017) explained that “an effectively designed and communicated strategic principle drives successful

decentralized decision making” (p. 5). D’Aprix (1996) described SC as designing a strategy to convey goals, values, vision, and intentions of an organization to its audiences. Steyn (2007) stated that most scholars and professionals agree that strategy has to do with the conceptualization of how a communication will be shared before it is implemented. Hoover (2010) proposed that SC should “synchronize organizational units and align resources to deliver a common core message” (p. 17). Taking SC one step further, Hoover suggested that the strategy be active in nature, rather than reactive. This, he said, “establishes organizational clarity and dissuades freelance endeavors that may serve a few well, but detract from the organization’s overall direction and purpose” (p. 17). Hoover (2010) also noted that many government and law enforcement agencies skip the strategy and go straight to a tactical approach when responding to their publics.

In the past few years, many authors have addressed the need for better SC in both the U.S. military and the U.S. government (Thorp, 2007; Mullen, 2009; Lord, 2010; Deutsch, 2010). Mullen (2009) noted that trust and credibility were key ingredients in successful SC. He further suggested that our country needed to work on building credibility.

Internal SC

Cutlip, Center, and Broom (1985) proposed, “No organizational relationships are as important as are those with employees” (Dolphin, 2005, p. 171). Asif and Sargeant (2000) noted, however, that in order for internal communication to be effective, it was critical that organizations develop a culture of communication permeating all corners of the organization. That is one of the main challenges facing many organizations (Johnson, 2001).

Grimshaw and Mike (2008) listed results that can come from poor internal communication: failed initiatives costing the organization millions of dollars, difficulty in establishing credibility and growing loyalty with personnel, and leaders finding it difficult to get personnel to participate in knowledge sharing across the organization, which is necessary in order to efficiently meet objectives. They developed a Strategic Communication Maturity Model that is designed to help improve internal SC by opening up communication between senior leaders and communication practitioners.

Kitchen (1997) advised that personnel who are not well-informed may become unmotivated and therefore less productive. Wright (1995) also submitted that internal publics who are well-informed are more trusting of senior leaders and management.

Trust

Organizational trust can be defined as “the collective level of positive expectations that members have about others and the group as a whole” (Hackman & Johnson, 2009, p. 254). Trust exists when members believe that others will honor commitments. Christen (2004) found that groups were more likely to be willing to negotiate (a process necessary in forming and executing an SC plan) if they perceived trustworthiness in the other group. In order to gain trust, people expect others to be competent, open and honest, concerned about employees, and reliable. They also need to identify with the organization’s fellow workers, management, and culture. In turn, trust encourages teamwork, risk-taking, and cooperation; increases quantity and quality of information flow; and improves problem-solving.

Trust can be increased if strategic communicators are honest. Steyn (2007) explained that someone working in an SC position not only has the responsibility of passing along corporate messages and goals from management to stakeholders and employees, but also of “facilitating the implementation of cultural change within organizations, helping to build a climate of mutual trust and understanding between managers and employees” (p. 143).

Trust is a valuable but fragile commodity. Dishonesty, inconsistency, finger-pointing, micromanaging, and secrecy, to name a few, can all undermine trust (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). Mullen (2009) noted that actions speak louder than words and that the U.S. government reduces its public's trust by not delivering on its promises. In 2012, the Edelman Trust Barometer showed that only 43% of American survey respondents trusted the U.S. government "to do what is right" (para. 1), and even fewer respondents (40%) trusted the U.S. government in the previous year's study ("Government Trust Breakdown," 2012).

Transparency

Many forces have combined in today's corporate world in support of transparency, and corporate America has not been the only target of requests for greater transparency. Despite visible efforts to keep his promise for greater federal government transparency, groups criticized President Obama's efforts to make information more readily available. The National Security Archive released a report ("Sunshine and Shadows....," 2010) suggesting that the Obama administration's efforts had been slow and inconsistent across government offices. They found Freedom of Information Act requests dating back 18 years that were still pending.

While this and other reports illustrate the public's outcry for better outward transparency, very little can be found on inward transparency. The definition of the term inward transparency (Heald, 2006) was refined by Christensen and Langer (2009) as individuals' ability to see activities that are going on inside of their organization. Argenti (2017) concluded in his study that "transparency builds trust, and employees are more engaged with an organization's values and vision if they feel that they are part of the conversation" (p. 11). One example is McDonald's (2011) statement that many government personnel long for better transparency from senior leaders, especially with respect to pending force reductions. He recommended that senior leaders offer places for personnel to vent, as well as provide honest and open communication about what to expect so that rumors do not get out of control. Trust and confidence must be built and established before a crisis situation occurs (Argenti, 2017).

In order to help communication professionals successfully increase transparency, Fairbanks, Plowman, and Rawlins (2007) developed the three-dimensional model in government communication. This model helps communicators create objective communication or public relations plans and consists of four parts: transparency, communication practices, organizational support, and provision of resources. The model uses transparency as the base for all other aspects working in proper order. In other words, if communicators create plans built on transparency, the other dimensions will work, providing a complete communication package. In order to have better transparency, communication professionals must be committed to transparency, work with managers to encourage transparency throughout the department, and be included in management decisions. Though the model was designed specifically for external communication by government agencies, the current study will apply the model to internal SC practices.

Research Questions

Based on numerous examples found in the literature, many people both in the federal government and military—as well as those in academia and the corporate world—have recognized the need for good internal SC. However, ideal SC conflicts with what the lead author observed during her internship in the Office of P&R in the Department of Defense (DoD). This conflict defines the first research question:

RQ1: Why are the Office of P&R's SC team's efforts to improve internal SC floundering?

Much like the literature found on SC, government leaders, academics, and

communication practitioners alike agree that if trust and transparency are present in an organization, internal SC will be successful. This leads to the next research question:

RQ2: How do SC professionals in P&R describe the elements of trust and transparency with regard to internal SC?

These two research questions provide a framework for analyzing the data collected in this study (participants' answers from a qualitative survey) for a qualitative analysis.

Method

While some researchers have stated that the purpose of a case study is to be more theory-building in nature (Woodside & Wilson, 2003), others showed that a case study can also test theories or combine both approaches (Alexander & Bennett, 2005; Woodside & Wilson, 2003). Yin (2014) is one researcher who favored theory-based case studies, even though qualitative research does not always follow this pattern and typically uses grounded theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Fernandez, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Yin (1991) described grounded theory, introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), as a methodology to build theory by identifying emergent themes or categories about a topic. The current study will employ a grounded theory approach.

The authors selected former members of an SC team for this study because of the difficult nature of contacting and scheduling interviews with people currently working in a federal government office. The lead author worked with these former team members during her time in the office and had already established rapport and relationships of trust with them. Interview questions were presented in a Qualtrics questionnaire as open-ended questions. A total of seven questions were asked, including one demographic question. Per the request of a senior leader in P&R on condition of approving this research, the highest level of anonymity was observed. Therefore, follow-up questions were not asked.

Trustworthiness for these interviews was increased by emailing complete drafts of the results and conclusion sections of this study to each participant so that they could make any corrections or add clarity, as suggested by Wimmer and Dominick (2003) and also employed by Fairbanks et al. (2007). Because the authors were not sure which individuals did and did not participate, these sections were sent to all six former members of the team, and, on an honor system, they were asked to only read those sections and add comments or corrections if they had participated. The results gathered from these participant questionnaires will now be discussed.

Results

The results from participant questionnaires are organized by research question. In the direct quotes, any spelling mistakes by the respondents were corrected by the authors.

RQ1

This question asked why the SC team's efforts to improve internal SC seemed to be floundering. All of the respondents reported both good and bad examples of SC. One declared, "From my viewpoint, I do not see effective internal strat comm within the organization." Although many reported poor examples, most responses were tempered with more positive comments, as seen from these examples: "There was some effective internal communication, but not much." "It continues to grow and evolve." "Though a great deal of improvement has emerged over the last year, there are still pockets of greatness and pockets of isolation within P&R."

A few different themes arose from their responses, including lack of resources, lack of trust, and lack of transparency. The topics of trust and transparency will be addressed in RQ2. The following comment from one of the participants indicates that the presence of these themes

is not a good thing:

Changes [are] made or contemplated on a large scale that are never addressed by members of leadership to the far corners of the organization, despite the fact that these decisions can potentially affect many of them, and rumors about when/how/why the decisions may be made are known to be running rampant and affecting morale.

Examples from each of the aforementioned themes will be given below.

Lack of resources. This category includes lack of education, lack of personnel, lack of time to complete required tasks, and lack of research and metrics for measuring effective SC. One respondent noted that education regarding the importance of internal SC needed to occur at all levels of the organization. Many participants shared sentiments similar to this one:

Many of the leaders still do not understand strategic communication and [are] much more interested in tactical pieces without a strategy behind them. They fail to understand that solid strategic communications is based in social science research and is not simply an art form or throwing together something pretty that they like in terms of images or words.

One participant noted that having sufficient money and personnel was important because “you cannot expect to institute a strategic communication plan that supports the mission and goals of the organization without proper resources.” On the topic of the lack of effective personnel, one respondent said, “I think leadership talks a big game about needing internal communications but fails miserably on the execution front because they do not have the right people in leadership positions to be EFFECTIVE and have the desired impact.” One of the respondents stated that although a plan had been presented to improve internal SC, a lack of resources thwarted any efforts to achieve that plan’s goals. They continued in describing what effect this lack of resources had on SC efforts: “Most of the time, strategic comms professionals are working with ‘multiple hats’ and doing a number of different jobs not focused on the communication goals.”

Another participant shared the value of having trained professionals in SC positions. Without trained communication professionals, leaders lacked necessary guidance on how to effectively communicate. The respondent suggested that—because of this lack of professional guidance—people in communication positions without formal training and experience went along with whatever the senior leader said, even if it was not a good strategy.

RQ2

This research question sought to learn how communication practitioners describe the elements of trust and transparency when related to internal SC. The respondents often commented on the obvious lack of both, as described separately below.

Lack of trust. All but one of the respondents said that trust and transparency do not exist within the department. For example, one of the respondents described a time when an idea was planned for creating “an open dialogue to build trust and credibility between [the] USD [Under Secretary of Defense] and his people.” This respondent did all of the work to ready this project’s launch, but it took the front office three months to respond. By that time, changes in the organization made the project’s messages obsolete. The respondent then said that the front office decided that the project could not be launched after all. From this experience, the respondent noted that communication specialists need senior leaders to trust them if they are to succeed. More specifically, the participant stated:

As a leader, you hire people to do various jobs under you and for you. You need to give general guidance, but TRUST that they will carry out your wishes. If you are not getting results, that’s one reason to possibly dive a bit more into the details and maybe “micromanage” a bit

until it is under control, but if you never give a person the chance to actually DO what they were brought in to do, it is failure before they begin.

When asked how they felt about working with people who were either effective or ineffective at SC, a different respondent said that of course the preference is to work with like-minded people. But, two respondents pointed out that this is not always possible. They both expressed a need to overcome barriers by building trust and opening up communication (transparency). One of them said, “We need to serve in a leadership capacity with these components to better understand why they function the way they do and maybe even offer up strategies for improving communication plans.”

One respondent acknowledged that better SC would enhance trust and transparency, but that the right leaders needed to be in place for this to improve. Another respondent said that many leaders needed to be forced to share information. As the participant noted, sharing appropriate information is a balancing act due to the nature of their work; therefore, people need to be educated regarding what is appropriate to share. A different respondent also noted that having “more than six different leaders at the top” over the past three years had created an atmosphere of distrust.

The one person who thought that trust and transparency did exist said that the desire is there at all levels: “I do not believe that there yet exists a mistrust of communications from leadership that would make it a waste of time to try.” However, that statement was followed with the suggestion that if leaders continued to ignore and not address concerns from the lowest ranks, they would “cultivate such a poisonous attitude.” Another participant said, “There was too much fear and misunderstanding within the org [organization] for comm [communication] to be effective. Nobody trusted senior leadership, so messages were not well-received.”

Lack of transparency. All of the respondents shared sentiments that inward transparency within the department was not of a high standard. One respondent noted, “We are not tied together as an organization—[the] right hand has no idea what the left hand is doing.” Respondents commented that many messages were not clearly articulated, which started the rumor mill and negatively impacted morale. A specific example described by one participant was the creation of the USIG team itself, which was originally intended to be an innovation team but later included two communication professionals who were supposed to be focusing on communication—not innovation. The member explained that the mission of the team was never fully explained, causing confusion as to what the members should have been doing.

Contrary to this experience, members from the USIG team later formed the P&R Information Exchange Council (P&RIEC), which was more successful at improving communication from the beginning. Respondents said that the goals and mission of the group were communicated early on to everyone, so P&R personnel knew what the team’s job was. Despite the formation of this group, there were still plenty of negative sentiments related to transparency. One participant said that the lack of transparency resulted in information hitting walls within the department rather than being shared, which then resulted in duplication and inconsistent messages. Another respondent said that although some departments were aware of what others were doing, “most [did] not feel connected to the entire department and some [did] not even realize they [were] part of P&R.”

An example of this was a multitude of employment initiatives that were planned in multiple departments. One respondent shared how multiple offices were working on essentially the same program for the same audience, indicating a waste of resources. The respondent stated that although project leaders were brought together to try to combine their efforts, not much had

been achieved “in spite of active engagement by the communications specialists and limited encouragement by senior leadership.”

A different participant described how leaders shared limited information about budget cuts and efficiencies, leading to confusion about whether employees would lose their jobs or not—which did not create a hospitable atmosphere for good internal SC. One participant who was supposed to be sharing information with employees admitted, “I am constantly wondering what we are doing as an organization, and where are we going?” Another mentioned that some people did not feel connected to the organization as a whole or even recognize that they were a part of P&R. One respondent suggested that senior leaders needed to better guide and direct the organization toward its vision. Another shared how a lack of transparency impacted communication professionals: “Leadership does not always include comms [communication personnel] as decisions are being made. [Communication is] still looked at as an afterthought rather than an entity that is needed in order to help effectively EXECUTE organizational plans.”

One person suggested that the reason for the lack of information sharing was fear—a fear of sharing information that should not be shared due to its sensitivity, which is a common concern in a federal government environment. It was also suggested, however, that it is possible to teach people how to appropriately share information. In contrast, two respondents had more positive things to say: one stated that the situation was improving, and one said that there was enough information sharing for able people in the department to create effective communication strategies.

Despite all of these negative sentiments about trust and transparency, one respondent said that the seeds were there and just needed time to grow. Another said that improvement could be achieved over time through meetings, efforts of the P&RIEC team, and more effective organization-wide e-mails. Another suggested that making sure everyone was included would improve awareness and communication efforts. Another observed: “I feel that the DESIRE for transparency from the top down as well as the DESIRE to trust the organizations’ leaders to speak truth exists.”

To summarize the main themes that arose from the respondent’s answers, it is observed that a lack of trust and lack of transparency can all impact the effective creation of internal SC. The literature helps to explain the results gathered from the respondents and why internal SC improvements were struggling in P&R. These few themes emerged in this study:

1. Better internal SC is a necessary component of a successful organization and could play a significant role in maintaining productivity and retaining good personnel.
2. There was a lack of trust both in senior leaders and personnel in P&R. This lack of trust decreased their ability to execute effective internal communication strategies.
3. Transparency was also a missing commodity in P&R. The literature supports the idea that if transparency and trust are low, communication sharing will also be low.

What does all of this mean and how does it answer the main question set forth by this research study? The answer will be discussed in the following section.

Discussion

The main question asked in this paper was: Why, despite a strong desire to improve internal SC efforts, was strong improvement not evident in the Office of P&R in the DoD? The information collected from respondents in P&R expressed a desire to improve internal SC and

increase trust and transparency. The respondents confirmed what the literature stated: without trust and transparency, internal communication suffers. Unfortunately, the issues experienced in the Office of P&R in the DoD are not unique to that environment alone. Organizations, both large and small, for profit and nonprofit, must effectively create cultures in which there are strong levels of trust and appropriate windows of transparency. This section discusses the results in light of the existing literature to explain why a lack of trust and transparency were having a negative impact on internal SC. While not every aspect of this research will have complete crossover between industries, many of the principles investigated and discussed are important for any group responsible for SC within an organization.

Strategic Communication

When looking specifically at SC, all of the respondents recognized the significance of having good internal SC. The literature states that an SC plan should be built into an organization's structure and incorporated into the overall grand strategy (Hoover, 2010; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2006). Many respondents also described instances when they had participated in developing strategies to convey various messages to internal audiences, following the vision of the P&R strategic plan (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2011). However, in contrast with Hoover's (2010) suggestion that SC should deliver a consistent message, many of the responses reflected a lack of consistency and expressed difficulty in sharing a unified message. One of the respondents in particular noted how communications were often simply reacting to crises, which is also contrary to what Hoover (2010) defined as the ideal.

The respondents' comments indicated that P&R had a purpose statement, goals, and objectives; was slowly empowering key stakeholders; was slowly disseminating the messages through the P&RIEC; and was starting to utilize new technologies to share its messages—all of which align with Hoover's (2010) definition of a good communication strategy. The problem came in gaining approval for those strategies and empowering personnel to launch the tactics that would ultimately drive the approved plans.

Asif and Sargeant (2000) emphasized the importance of an organizational culture that supports good internal communication. As was evident in the participants' responses, some people were on board with changing the culture and supporting SC, while others were not. Dolphin (2005) noted that internal communication is key when organizations are facing changes. The respondents in this study noted that senior leaders had changed often in recent years, and the literature explains why trust and transparency suffered during these transitional times: because of the absence of good internal SC. As noted, one respondent was keeping options open because of experiences in P&R, supporting the idea that a lack of good internal communication can lead to strained loyalty (Grimshaw & Mike, 2008).

Trust

As the respondents noted, trust is often a casualty of poor internal communication strategy, especially when there is a lack of transparency. Many described individuals in the organization who could be trusted and who they felt comfortable approaching to discuss communication strategies, while other individuals did not garner as much trust. Similar to what Christen (2004) noted in her research, team members were more willing to negotiate communication strategy with those they found trustworthy or who could be depended on to follow through. Respondents described how senior leaders were known to change their minds on accepting, supporting, and launching communication strategy, which in turn decreased employees' trust in those senior leaders.

Steyn (2007) explained the role that SC practitioners hold in helping to build trust in upper management and stated that it is important for them to be open, dependable, reliable, and accurate in their information sharing. The team in P&R communicated to the organization as a whole that they were trying to improve communication by taking employees' questions, getting answers from the powers that be, and then posting that information in a place where everyone could have access to it. As one of the respondents noted, however, ultimately senior leaders quashed that idea and the answers to the questions were never released. The literature would suggest that this act decreased personnel's level of trust in both the communication team and the senior leaders. Such an act would also make it more difficult to gain participation from personnel if a similar strategy was tried in the future.

The respondents noted examples of inconsistency, finger-pointing, micromanaging, and secrecy, all of which can undermine trust (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). The literature provides solutions for regaining trust (Hackman & Johnson, 2009); however, no good procedures were clearly stated or made available to employees in P&R to use to overcome trust barriers.

Transparency

Hackman and Johnson (2009), Williams (2005), and Rawlins (2008) all suggested that trust could be improved by increasing transparency. Based on the respondents' comments, the commodity of transparency seemed to be in short supply despite efforts from communication team members and others in the organization to improve information flow.

Fairbanks et al. (2007) suggested that transparency was the glue holding together good internal SC plans in a government setting and that without it, everything else falls apart. The respondents noted that more success occurred in creating and implementing internal SC strategy when there was an increase in transparency.

Future Research

Participants in this study came from different experience levels and lengths of time working at the DoD. Though they sat in different levels of the power structure, no senior leaders were included. Gathering data concerning the senior leaders' perspectives would be beneficial. Future research should include people from all levels of the organization.

Further research should also specifically look at federal government work environments where there is a strong military presence, as a gap in the literature still exists in this sector of the workforce. The rigid military power structure changes the dynamics and makes it a unique environment.

In the future, researchers should consider more longitudinal studies. The DoD has experienced many changes since the lead author's internship and is likely to go through another round of changes due to potential budget cuts and leadership changes. This constant influx causes shifts in power and makes it difficult to build trust and develop effective strategies.

A limitation of this study was using a qualitative survey method to gather responses. Part of the reasoning for this was to increase anonymity for the respondents. However, there were a few responses that could have been fleshed out with more in-depth information if follow-up questions had been asked.

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New Contexts, New Narratives and New PRs

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Abstract

We live in a world of abundance and excess. Those are liquid, fragmented, dynamic and confused times, where we are exposed constantly to a great diversity of contents which are bombarded at us by various media, traditional and digital. In this age of uncertainty, we have a great feeling of empty, caused by an absence of those narratives that could be able to affect and transform us. The way that we are in and we feel the world is changing. Those changes require a new thinking by organizations and PR professionals whom still see communication as a technical-information process. This excessive and forceful character associated to communication impairs attention and retention of contents, which may lead to a communication that may not make sense for the public and much less generate an action on their part. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is a theoretical proposition on redefining the look of PR professionals in these new times. These reflections are part of a research conducted by the Group at Studies of New Narratives at the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo (Brazil), who understand that new contexts require new PR professional profiles to create new narratives consistent with our time, with new technologies and new ways of feeling and being in the world.

Keywords: organizational communication; public relations; new contexts; new narratives; storytelling; micro narratives; organizational memory and history.

Note. This paper was presented in 2017

Reflections based on the optics of a digital, fluid, random, rational excessive context that is exposed demonstrate that there is no space in today's organizations for traditions, deep experiences, myths, stories and affection. The absence of these foci leads some organizations to present narratives that age in view of new contexts and therefore it is necessary to discuss new communication strategies – new narratives – in organizational communication and, above all, a new profile of PR professionals.

New Contexts

Nassar (2013) characterizes our informational society as producing social paralysis upon contextualizing the excess of communication in our society and adapting the concepts of hypnosis and numbing of the senses from contemporary media overstimulation introduced by McLuhan (1964). In other words, the excessive information about individuals leads us to be living a life without history or geography, thus distancing us from our personal and social memories and resulting in a context where identities are absent and current narratives cannot be sustained or communicated¹¹ (NASSAR, 2013).

The current context suppressed the wealth of profound experiences and, as a result, the way of creating, receiving and above all, feeling communication. People and organizations are saturated with information, weakened in terms of experiences and in need of feelings and affection. To Larrosa-Bondía (2002), experience is what happens to us, what takes place in our lives and what touches us. However, in view of this context of information overload, many, many things take place in our lives and barely anything touches or affects us on a deep level.

Larrosa-Bondía's text features important points about the weakening of experiences, reflections on a context where people have no time, mainly for speaking and listening, in other words for communicating. Individuals are more concerned with being informers and informed than being willing to cultivate the art of meeting; they are less prepared to affect and be affected and less willing to make space and time for experiences:

Experience, the possibility that something will happen or touch us requires a gesture of interruption, a gesture that is almost impossible in today's world; it requires stopping to think, stopping to listen, thinking more slowly, seeing more unhurriedly, and listening more steadily; stopping to feel, feeling at a slower pace, lingering on details, delaying opinion, holding off on judgment, postponing will, interrupting the automatism of action, cultivating attention and delicacy, opening eyes and ears, talking about what is happening to us, learning slowness, listening to others, cultivating the art of meeting, keeping silent often, becoming patient and opening space and time (LARROSA-BONDÍA, 2002, p. 24).

When claiming about the impoverishment of experiences before a dynamic and uninterrupted world, the author is especially talking to us about the weakening of relationships, that is, the absence of time and space for affection between people, changes in feeling and communication. Memory does not have the time to undergo profound experiences. Today there is neither space for sustainable and long-lasting relationships, nor for valuing the individual as these have been replaced by mediated and trade relations. Now, emotions have given rise to the rational mode of being, communication has lost ground to simple information and building relationships has taken on new forms and meanings.

¹¹ (Verbal information). Discussion brought up by Prof. Dr. Paulo Nassar during a meeting of the Grupo de Estudos de Novas Narrativas, Escola de Comunicações e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo, on February 27, 2013.

What occurs in the context of abundant information, speed and ephemerality is a constant movement towards disenchantment, since the magic that touches the being grows weak and feeble in the face of new stimuli that rapidly replace them. Currently, concerns are about an individual who is served by new technology and new ways of being and interacting in the world, about an individual who is served by a multitude of symbolic choices, by abundance and automation (PINK, 2007). We are living at a time of weakening experiences, of diffuse attention and little affection, of speed, ephemerality and ambiguity.

To Benjamin, this poverty of experience reflects sad men who are dispirited, tired and lacking energy, because they do not concentrate all of their thoughts into simple and grand plans to be achieved one day, instead, they devour everything, all information, all “culture,” and remain satiated and exhausted (BENJAMIN, 1986, p.118).

Benjamin draws a picture of modernity through Baudelaire (GATTI, 2008), writing about the transitory nature of things, of a fleeting moment, of a world of rapid and transient visions, of magical instances that disappear rapidly. This new view also suggests a new way of perceiving the world such that man disconnects from his memory and lives in a state of shock in the present, his awareness connected to the everyday and not to facts. Man is no longer immersed in his subjectivity, thus generating change in the creation of memories and, consequently a crisis in narratives.

This thought serves as the basis for Sennett (2010) to address the question “How can a human being develop a narrative from an identity and life history made up of fragmented episodes?” (SENNETT, 2010, p.27). And it is precisely on this point that PR must also be considered according to this dynamic context of constant restructuring, where the long-term is not desired, thus encumbering dialogues and relationships where communications also become disenchanting and objective, in other words, neither affective, nor effective.

A context that is fragmented, abundant and constantly exposed to insignificant messages, lacking enchantment, and rapidly made commonplace, rarely achieve a level deep enough for exchanging and engaging. Communication channels and content producers change, since they are already uncomplaining about the industrial pace of at which messages are produced in large machines for producing emptiness.

Emptiness, the product of the absence of an affective narrative in communication, in other words, the absence of a vision that implies the ideas, practices, habits, and dreams of people who make up an organization (BOFF, 2012). Narrative is what enables explaining origins, evolutions and purposes, whether they belong to the individual’s personal or professional life, to his/her stories, of his/her place as a human being in the world, even in the organizational world.

This all means that the speed of the changes, the uncontrollable recording of life out of fear of losing the present, the weakening of personal relationships, the information overload, and the multitude of symbolic choices made possible by digital technology and social networks, by the complex and ephemeral world and the mass production of messages fired off on all media have disturbed our sight, as if it were covered by a constant cloud, undifferentiated and insensitive. Blindness about inexistent communication.

In order to exist, PR must understand this new way of feeling the world, and based on this understanding, be differentiated. It requires a view that can interrupt the continuum and change it into discontinuity, diversification, explanation, representation. It needs to be able to create really profound experiences that stir emotions, where subjectivity surpasses objectivity and rationality.

Otherwise, public relations simply create make-believe communication, where the main

roles are filled by content with no identity and the main scenes dissolution of meaning and the violence unleashed on affection, so that “information is increasingly invaded by this type of ghost content, of homeopathic transplant, of sleep awakened by communication” (BAUDRILLARD, 1981, p. 105). And it is precisely because of this new context that we must conceive new narratives.

New Narratives

From a theoretical and practical point of view of PRs, we live in a phase where we must seek new paradigms to base communication strategies on so that they can be effective. Considering all the points addressed up to this point, we can bet upon the development of the so-called “narrative paradigm” for the re-enchantment of PRs.

By appropriating these concepts, we can consider “narrative” as a differential for the professional in PR, not just from the perspective that he/she is considered a story-teller, or an analyst and interpreter of narrations about the organization, but also, in a broader sense, as a spokesperson of discourses, whether it be for transmitting ideas, concepts, the attributes of a product, of a service or brand, or to impart stories, memories, traditions, beliefs, values, myths, organizational rites and rituals, which build the reality of the company, its narrative reality.

Cogo (2012, p.80), in conformity with this thinking, reveals that narrations are what enable the liberation of opinions, feelings and intentions, the production of meaning for its world, as well as the organizational influence in this definition. This shows that human being need to have symbols to help them understand and interpret the world (SNUNWOLF, 2005, p.305) and that these symbols, lost in post modernity, can be recovered, can be recovered by the stories told and the discourses upheld by public relations and by the those involved in organizational narrating.

Reviving fascination for the world, organizational communication and the PRs is therefore reflected in this new paradigm, in the construction of new narratives, which are capable of “serving as a bridge to connect the different dimensions and conspire to recover meanings, which make people more human, honest, solidary, tolerant, compassionate and able to be one with themselves and with others.” (BUSSATO, 2006, p.12). These are ideas that are connected to the emotions, set aside by organizations in a rational world:

If facts are easily and greatly available, they lose some of their worth. What starts to become more important is the ability to weave these elements into a coherent whole – attaining not just the *context*, but the *emotional impact*, as well. [...] And that is the essence of the capability of stories – context enriched by emotion (PINK, 2007, p.100).

The new narratives of PRs founded on this so-called narrative paradigm need to seek this appearance of human awareness, sharing a community of purposes, which are able to create identification, engagement and an organizational culture that is reconstructed with human values, symbols, stories, heroes, myths, rites, rituals, styles, metaphors revealed at that exact moment experienced by the people of the organization (MARCHIORI, 2009).

Focused on humanization and its values, these narratives should be able to overcome subjectivities, as well as respect for audiences. One must know how to analyze and work with contexts to create space for dialogues and relationships (OLIVEIRA, 2009) where the feelings and dreams of the individuals can flow freely, providing a space for participating, sharing ideas, discussing and co-creating the new world.

To Nassar (2007), in a world in which everything rapidly becomes banal due to mass production, information bombardment and scattered attention, a differentiation that emerges through the history of an organization with its personnel, as well as of those people with the

organization, is an attribute that few organizations still possess. In this context, a Danish researcher, Jensen (2006 apud NASSAR, 2007, p.186) believes in the trend of a society in the near future, where consumption will have to be a lot more emotional than rational. And companies will have to connect their values and history to their products if they want to win the hearts of their clients.

It is upon this backdrop that Pink (2007) reveals the fact that we are no longer an economy and society “based on logical, linear, cold and objective abilities of the information age transitioning to [...] the creative, empathetic and systemic abilities – the conceptual age” (PINK, 2007, p.1). In order for this to happen, this author points to the development of capabilities related to issues about new ways of transmitting messages, which are narrated for the purpose of being personally gratifying and especially emotional, connected to subjectivity, yearning and affective memories.

He believes that logic and rationality are not ideal in this new context, “limiting oneself to the appeal of the rational, logical and functional needs is vociferously insufficient.” (PINK, 2007, p.33) in this new conceptual age. New narratives must understand behavior, establish relationships and be concerned about people lightly and humorously, understanding their aspirations and seeking interaction and the sharing of their ideas.

The author also makes a statement about the importance of constructing meaning, in the transcendence, to reach the essence of life – unattainable values – those that are not possible through information but rather, through communication and sharing of those who, in fact are relevant and create an identity for the audiences of interest to the organization. Society increasingly seeks more values, such as: simplicity, instead of complexity and overloading; creativity instead of standardizing and human humanizing against mechanization; time and space so that affective narratives can be interesting stories, which reconcile integration and participation to overcome hollow meanings.

To Pink (2007), the old narratives would be exactly those connected to a society of excess and abundance, which he conceives as being developed upon High-Tec abilities, that is, objective, logical and rational needs. What he believes is that these narratives no longer work with people nowadays, who need narratives developed upon two other abilities connected to the emotional and the creation of feelings, empathic and comprehensive links: *high concept* and *high touch*.

High concept is the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, of perceiving patterns and opportunities, of conceiving interesting narratives and joining apparently disconnected ideas in order to create something new. *High touch* is the ability to create empathic connections, understand the subtleties of human interactions, find joy and provoke it in others, and look beyond the surface in search of purpose and meaning. (PINK, 2007, p.48)

These concepts can be considered to be the foundations for new narratives. This can also be associated to a new “way of being present, in which the imaginary, the oneiric, the playful, rightly, occupy a fundamental space” (MAFFESOLI, 2010, p.27) and can create narratives that are able to affect, change and inspire.

Micro narratives

In “The Postmodern Condition,” Lyotard (1989) points out the changes suffered by narratives in post modernity. In modernity, the great narratives had a significant power in people’s lives, they gave meaning to the past, present and future of humanity. Plots promised a positive view of the individual in relation to society, with ideas of freedom, transformation and

evolution. Narratives are what upheld patterns, beliefs, security and hopes, in struggles against the challenges for a positive future.

However, these major narratives, which provided explanations about the world and served as references for society started to become weaker starting in the twentieth century and were lost in post modernity, a concept that Bauman (2001) calls Liquid Modernity, when speaking of a world in which all existing references have been liquefied. In other words, an agile, fluid, mutant reality characterized by constant restructuring in which the possible “patterns, codes and rules we could agree with, that we could select as stable landmarks and by which we could be guided, [...] are becoming increasingly rarer” (BAUMAN, 2001, p.14). In other words, the macro narratives are increasingly being fragmented and losing their larger meanings.

Bauman (2001) believes that in a liquid world, power “shifted from the “system” to “society,” from “politics” to “policies for life” – or descended from the “macro” level to the “micro” level for social coexistence” (BAUMAN, 2001, p.14). Touraine (1998 apud BAUMAN, 2001, p.14), discusses the “defense by all social actors, of, their cultural and psychological specificity (...) that can be found within the individual and no longer in social institutions or in universal principles.”

Along the same lines, to Pérez (2008), the complex and postmodern context surrounding globalization brings with it a uniformity of products, cultures, values, management models, yet at the same time reaffirms the preservation of individual values.

Thus, in view of the growing globalization that recently has been made feasible through the rise of new media, which promote the constantly growing flow of information, ideas and knowledge, which promotes the constant updating of concepts about every aspect of our reality, examines the reliability of the principles and identities of institutions from traditional society (BAUMAN, 2001), removing our major references, our dominant meanings, our main stories and our greatest heroes.

Therefore, we fear that a relevant difference between modernity and post modernity is found in the development of narratives. In post modernity “the role of the narrative loses the major hero, the huge risks, the fantastic travels and the grand goals” (D’ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 90). It is the end of the major narratives, which could provide comfort with their explanations about life.

As a result, “in individualized society, the individual must learn, under penalty of an irreversible loss, to recognize him/herself as the focus of the action.” (BECK, 2010, p. 199). The loss of holistic meaning of references and identities leads individuals to start understanding themselves as being “the first.”

Therefore, Lyotard (1989) defends smaller stories instead of large narrations, where we can reclaim a more relational and relative man. There is a contradiction between the global and the local: if on the one hand we have global corporations and brands, we have strategies for miniaturization, micro segmentation, micromarketing and all the other “one-by-one” techniques on the other (PÉREZ, 2008, p. 582).

It is upon these aspects, which, as an example of new narratives, on the narrative paradigm and the strength of the “micro” of today, is where we can work with the concept of micro narratives. These would be, in the context of internal communication, statements by the small parts of an organization, of its target audience, fragments of personal stories to which everyone can contribute with their ideas and feelings, reinforcing the links of empathy and raising intangible values so necessary for the rekindling the charm of PRs.

Providing a voice to individualities enables the creation of interesting and affectionate

narratives based on the understanding of *high concept* and *high touch* (PINK, 2007), in other words, on the emotion, creativity and humanization able to create interactions and collaborations. Narratives are what make space for cognitive and affective expression and reception, for participation. They affect audiences to create a change in them, a reconstruction of their fragmented identities and a new meaning regarding their actions in the world. Therefore, due to this affective and transformative aspect, the concept can be broadened to “affective micro narratives.”

This concept is also in conformity with the considerations by Paulo Nassar (2012) who introduces the idea that there are two opposing narratives in the organization: the organizational macro narrative, which is connected to major pillars of business, mission, vision and values and micro narratives related to the narratives about the experiences of the organization’s target audience. These two ideas are extremely important for the concept of affective micro narratives, since the organization relies on macro narratives being known by their audiences. However, increasingly more so, communicators must pay attention to the micro level of communication to build the macro narratives, especially considering that if the organizational ideas do not communicate with the personal values of everyone who has a relationship with the organization, they will probably stop seeing a reason for continuing such a relationship. Therefore, we are afraid that personal narratives could be considered to be more important than the macro narratives, since

We are our stories. We condense years of experience, reflections and emotions into synthetic narratives that we share with other people and repeat to ourselves. It has always been like this. Yet, personal narratives are now more important, and perhaps more urgent in a time of abundance, where so many people have greater freedom to seek a deeper meaning about themselves and their lives and life goals. (PINK, 2007, p.111).

Therefore, affective micro narratives used by public relations must be able to create engagement and identification by those who receive and interpret them and, as well as touch people, at the point when these short speeches can be creative, unique and intimate, working off of not just the needs of the individual, but their dreams and wishes, with their motivations and fears. They are fun, heroic and evocative anecdotal autobiographies of the individuals in relation to the organization, stimulating the sharing of their experiences, passions, affection and feelings, making up the reflection of their criticism or involvement and of their pride in being part of a larger narrative and can thus lead to understanding themselves and their goals in life.

New PRs

The power of small: The public relations professional of new contexts can not only focus on standardized, technical messages, sent to all audiences equally. PR must think about how much each of small parts that make up or build up an organization have affects, desires, opinions, criticism and positive or negative images about various organizational aspects and that these small parts themselves have their own human networks and relationship capital (inside and out of the organization they belong to), and they can have an influence on other people, leading these ideas and views about the organization.

Unhappy organization that does not produce its heroes: although there are so many differences and complexities between one individual and the next, the stories bring elements of identifications through the cultural-representative signs that are able to affect people’s imagination, that of those who narrate and those who listen, thus, involving them. In this way, a strategic point in PR is the transformation of the “common person,” a participant in the organization, into an everyday hero as a result of his daily activities at work, which is in

conformity with the new feeling of the modern man, who needs acknowledgment of his individuality. Today's heroines are people who struggle, meet challenges and survive in this chaotic world. In the organizational and work world, relationships must take place upon these aspects. PRs must keep organization's macro narratives alive, but need to give them new meanings, reinforcing their references based on micro narratives, acknowledging all the memories and stories of its members, creating its heroes from daily life, surrounded by feelings of acknowledgment and belonging, as well as their emotions, subjectivities and vulnerabilities.

The richness of details - the grain is what makes things grand: The life that people have is not made up of major moments all the time. The small things we experience are what make up our greatness. Therefore, it is important that the public relations professional to value the wealth of day-to-day details in the organizations that are essential for building our being and meaning of life. Naturalization of routine, information overload, high-speed facts, often make "these small miracles in of our lives insignificant." When we realize this phenomenon, the public relations must know how to value and see how great the small details narrated from daily experiences of the audience really are.

Every micro narrative has relevant information: the PRs must reveal that, depending on the purpose of the actions to be created through the micro narratives, it is important to consider both the positive citations to encourage acknowledgment, a sense of belonging, creativity about the mythologies and the organizational heroes, as well as the negative ones, to reconsider some processes or even use them as a source of identification. The extent that the reception and encouragement of communication are connected to affective and cognitive issues (PIAGET, 1969), which are dependent on cultural standards, individual experiences, interpretive experiences, interactions, perceptions, imagination, memories and even the intensity of these memories in each individual. This is why it is so important for public relations professional to understand the wealth of information that comes from these narratives, such as:

1. Externalization of feelings (laughs, reflexive pauses, positive feelings and negative feelings),
2. Manifestation of subjectivities (dreams and wishes, uncertainties, intuitions, likes, beliefs, secrets and guesses),
3. Humor (irony, diminutives, metaphors and fun facts),
4. Mythological presence (origins, mythological figures, myths transformation, rituals, humanization and spiritual act),
5. Heroism (common word/call to adventure, help something or someone, way of tests/difficulties, overcome, apotheosis/be an example and returns),
6. Detailed memories (time records, first memories, social/historical memories and cultural matrixes),
7. Recognition (feel proud, feel motivated, recognize your opportunities, recognize their actions, recognize the organization and having recognized family),
8. Sense of belonging (connections with colleagues, belonging to a project, workplace environment, changing attitudes because of an organization's values and identification with the organization's values),
9. Dissemination of knowledge (trends of the period, problem solutions, technical words, explanation concepts and explanation process/project),
10. Vulnerabilities (something that did not work, out of a job, preconception, did not reach goals yet, something that is not remembered, chaos/confusion and something that is unknown).

So, there are important points can be considered to be a new communication logic to be used strategically by PRs in accordance with new contexts where it is necessary to reconsider the logic of humanization, engagement, subjectivity, acknowledgment, of the mythical, the comical, the collaborative, the dialogue, the individual, the affective, the symbolic, against the saturation, rationality, superficial experiences, standardization and lack of references and meanings.

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Narratives of Experience and Non-Violent Communication as a PR Strategy

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Abstract

This article is a theoretical reflection on Public Relations and the so-called narrative paradigm of communication. The idea is to emphasize the need new narratives that agree with the new contexts, working with non-violent communication and affective narratives of communication, especially regarding internal communication.

Keywords: organizational communication; public relations; narratives of experience; new narratives; non-violent communication; affective communication; micro narratives.

This article seeks to discuss the possible impact on business of successful Public Relations strategies which work with individualities, based on transparency, affection, respect and trust, and understanding the diversity of voices that make up the world as a starting point. This way, PR practitioners can become active agents of transformation for a more inclusive and humanized society, through new narratives, since a society with more equity and justice, in a sustainable world, depends precisely on the capacity to replace the technical and protocol communication for a more interpersonal, people-centered and human-based communication.

Organizations need to consolidate their commitments to the people with whom they interact. For Lipovetsky (2003), mainly because of the new media and the amount of information that is nowadays available, accessible and shared, there is a greater awareness of the subjects about their performance in the world, their power to make the difference and to demand more from organizations in issues such as: environment preservation, quality of life, the listening to the manifestations of their ideas and personalities, and explanations about the contradiction between discourse and some morally unacceptable practices such as corruption, intolerance and disrespect for diversity.

Facing this context, PR practitioners need to think their communication under the new narrative point of view, that is, not only those technical and informative communication, but also a communication based on trust, solidarity, security, on antiracism and humanism, without prejudice. It means treating these questions not exclusively in a rational way of thinking, but also in a more symbolic layer, aiming to produce meaning and affectivity, valuing the potentialities in each one.

Context

For Han (2015, p.88), the huge manifestation of diseases in a great part of society (depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, personality disorder, anxiety and stress, for example) are marks of a positivist society, in which the people feel failed before the uncontrollable, confused, ever-changing and excessive context. Individuals of the twenty-first century demand too much from themselves and self-exploit their capabilities for quick deliveries.

For Sennett (2010), this context makes people to have new working relationships, in which there is no long-term logic. They are (self)pressured to delivery positive results all the time, in several projects. Often, this flattening of time and focus leads to the weakening of social bonds and affections, causing the corrosion of loyalties and mutual commitments.

In addition to this pressure, the excesses of the information triggers difficulties in managing priorities and in which of that information we should focus on. This is what the concept of “attention economy”, coined by Thomas H. Davenport and JC Beck (2001), in the book of the same name, suggests to designate the management of attention – seen as a limited good of increasing importance, due to the growing number of content generated by the varied media, especially the digital one.

The difficulty in keeping the focus on a single task, given the range of information that is available to us, is exactly what Holmes (1997) calls “attention deficit syndrome”, characterized by the individual’s inability to “focus their attention during any reasonable length of time” (HOLMES, 1997, p.331).

However, the fact that we absorb so many different characteristics all the time, as a proof of our adaptability to the environment and of the good performance before the many social roles we submit ourselves, leads us to see only our own selves. The lack of links with the other weakens our capacity for gratitude. For both Han (2015) and Sennett (2010), the gratification crisis is connected to a narcissistic disturbance and to the lack of a relations with the other, which

brings pain and suffering to oneself.

The narcissist is not concerned about the experiences, he wants to live everything in which he finds himself. In experience we meet the other. These meetings are transformative, they change us. Just living through something, on the contrary, extend the self and the other in the world. In self-love, the limit related to the other is clearly bypassed. In narcissism, on the contrary, it fuses (HAN, 2015, p.84).

The weakening of experiences (LARROSA-BONDÍA, 2002) is worsen when people understand to do not have time to dedicate themselves to the other, especially time to talk and listen, to communicate, to interact, to experience this other. Individuals only worried about themselves, trapped in the present of their daily lives and in their performance do not experience the art of the encounter.

The experience, the possibility that something happens or touches us, requires a gesture of interruption, a gesture that is almost impossible in these times. It requires stopping to think, stopping to look, stopping to listen. It requires thinking slower, looking slower, and listening slower; stop to feel and feel slowly, linger in the details, suspend the opinion, suspend the judgment, suspend the will, suspend the automatism of the action, cultivate attention and delicacy, open eyes and ears, talk about what happens to us, to learn about slowness, to listen to others, to cultivate the art of meeting, to be silent, to have patience and to give ourselves time and space (LARROSA-BONDÍA, 2002, 24).

Therefore, this context is of impoverishment of the experiences and of the consequent relational weakening. Because of that, we believe it is fundamental for Public Relations professionals to rethink their role as communicators, as well as the need to create new communication narratives that can truly dialogue with the other. More than to dialogue, they should be able to listen to audiences related to an organization in order to understand them and create these new narratives, which has also to be adapted to these new contexts.

New Narratives

PRs must always be aware of the needs and thoughts of organizations, and their opinions in their social, historical, economic, cultural and political context. For each new contextual reality—for new thoughts, contents, individuals and media platforms—new narratives must be developed, appropriate to it.

When thinking about communication, it is clear that its object of study “is dynamic and changeable, because the problems studied are historical phenomena, institutions, power relations, social classes, cultural manifestations” (Lopes, 2001: 37). Therefore, doing and studying communication cannot mean to be stuck in technical and protocol truths, but rather to be open to reflections on symbology, ideas, opinions, senses and meanings, as well as the values that are in the social and individual imaginary, all dependent on the contexts in force.

It is through these new contexts that the agents of the field of Public Relations recreate the narrative realities of the organizations, from new narratives that are related to subjects that were not previously openly discussed, such as: concerns about environmental, social and economic sustainability; the valorisation of diversity and its potential, through the discourse of female empowerment, or the narrative of respect regarding the sexual choice of its public, or with narratives that speak to the new generations - anxious, hyperconnected and with depression and stress, diseases of the 21st century.

These ideas reinforce the organization’s need to create new narratives. It is clear the perception that today narratives that did not have the same senses in other times are being discussed. There were other truths for organizations. Power-centric, rational, objective, and

focused only on goals and profits (at any cost), they lived in reality that is not acceptable by the new thoughts and by the manifestations of individuals in society, who see their power and require new positions from the organizations - in both, their narratives and, especially, in their actions.

The new narratives of the 21st century should not be closed in centralizing discourses of organization, rational, technical and protocol. On the contrary, they must involve the understanding and the co-participation of the other, of their experience, of their emotion and feelings, of respect, of empathy, and of nonviolent communication.

Talk About New Narratives Is to Talk About Humanization

It is necessary to understand the transformations of the world and to observe that communication must be a reason for humanization in this rational and without affection environment, in which there is no time and context for relationships and interactions. It is important to realize that if the PR field and its communications were characterized by uniformity and homogeneity, with equal messages for all the audiences of the organization, today it is necessary to consider the differences and multiplicity (MUMBY, 2010), and value to the relationships among these diversities, and especially to have respect for them.

Humanization is to reflect, feel, narrate, empathize, understand the diversity, respect – all those things that only human beings can do. In the words of Antônio Cândido, humanization is understood as:

The process that confirms in men those traits that we consider essential, such as the exercise of reflection, the acquisition of knowledge, the good will towards the neighbour, the thinning of the emotions, the capacity to penetrate life problems, the sense of beauty, the perception of the complexity of the world and beings, the cultivation of humour (CANDIDO, 1995, 249).

Daniel Pink (2007) speaks precisely about this importance of the use of humour for the humanization of communication. According to Pink (2007, p.181), unleashing the sorrows of the organizations in the era of abundance and new contexts has become not only more common but also more necessary. It represents quality of life, motivation and involvement, as well as contributes to the improvement in a good organizational environment. This is because it is possible to generate feelings of well-being, relief and lightness through humour, sensations that are necessary to deal with pressures, competitions and stress in a context of speeds, ephemeris, rationalities and lucrative goals.

Pink (2007) also speaks about emotions and the sense of beauty for humanization. For him, the “old narratives” would be exactly those linked to the society of excesses and abundances, which he conceptualizes as developed over *high tech* abilities, that is, objective, logical and rational needs. What he believes is that those narratives no longer work with today’s individuals, who need narratives developed on two other emotional and sense-building skills, with empathic ties and understandings. These skills would be the *high concept* and the *high touch*:

The *high concept* is the capacity to create artistic and emotional beauty, the capacity to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into something new. *High touch* is the ability to empathize with others, understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one’s self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning (PINK, 2007, p.48).

These concepts can be considered the foundation of new narratives. What can also be

associated with a new “way of being together, in which the imaginary, the dreamy, the playful, precisely, occupy a primordial place” (MAFFESOLI, 2010, p.27) and can generate narratives capable of affecting, transform and inspire.

From this point of view, the humanization of organizations (which does not only pass through clandestine routes to official eyes and does not only inhabit fissures, informal or forbidden places) demands an organizational will for the constitution of effective formal places of participation. It has nothing to do with the creation of manuals, rational and technical behaviour, but the real understanding of the need for an environment that enables and/or encourages the manifestation of subjectivities and diversity, the listening (not that which watches and punishes, but that which wants to know and learn) and the realization of self-criticism. In this way, it will be possible to learn/create/innovate, to qualify relationships and links, to constitute legitimacy and to widen the alignment between the organization’s objectives and those of the individuals who are part of it (BALDISSERA, 2009).

Talk About New Narratives Is to Talk About Affectivity

According to Paim (1993), affectivity can be described as the capacity to experience feelings and emotions. This means that implicitly exists in the concept of affectivity, the presence of a relational content: to be affective towards ourselves, to others or to some environmental fact or context. For this experimentation of feelings and emotions to occur, it is necessary to understand the context and narratives of the individuals (micronarratives) that are part of it, both our own, that must be observed with self-criticism, like those of the others, that must be understood with respect and without judgments, seeing all the potentialities of affection that this relationship can generate.

Ey, Bernard and Brisset (1988), describe the affection as the general term used to demonstrate the phenomena of affectivity, including issues of desire, pleasure and pain, present in the experience in the form of vital feelings, besides of humour and emotions. Considering that much of an individual’s experiences are experienced within organizations, it is critical to understand these micronarratives of individuals within organizations, especially how they affect each other.

It is important to notice that, by the end of the day, it is affections that will make the public accepts or rejects the transmitted communication. According to Sodr  (2007), the senses tend to command the sphere of ideas. But at the same time, the author makes it very clear that “more than cognitive and objectively sustainable content (judgments), affections and sensations are those who preside over the discursive games of morality” (SODR , 2007, p.119).

Therefore, when we speak of communication, it only occurs when there is affection. Affecting means to move, provoke a change, to move with the senses and feelings (MARCONDES FILHO, 2008). The affection can bring about a change in the being, which causes one to feel and think differently from before one was affected (Espinosa, 1979). In the same vein, Slywicht (1998) observes that affection is the act of letting itself be touched (and affected) by others and the world, and “when this occurs there is a new visualization of the relation between the being and the world” (SLYWICHT , 1998, p.52). Affection leads the person to have different attitudes and behaviours, leads them to an action, moved by their new feeling.

Thus, we can say that communication happens only when the message can touch, affect and transform the invisible, the interior of the person, his soul, which according to Nietzsche (2003) is a social structure of impulses and affections. When this intensity of affectivities is externalized, it takes the body of the affected person in matter of expression and action. This means that communication occurs only when “affections gain the thickness of the real and take

place” (ROLNIK, 1989, p. 26), when the messages affect the invisible and are externalized in a visible action.

Espinosa (1979), the philosopher of affections, clarifies this understanding by asserting that when a body is affected, that affection can increase or decrease its potency to act by stimulating or restraining it. If the affections produce joy, the power to act is increased. Otherwise, if they are a cause of sadness, it diminishes. Affection, when it in fact occurs, leads one to action, positive or negative.

By these thoughts, Marcondes Filho (2008) defines communication exactly as an “event,” a process that occurs only when it deeply affects a person, generating changes in his mind and heart, leading to action. For the author, communication is not about the transmission of information. Even if there is exchange and sharing, it is more than that, it is a process that can be (re)constructed, fluidly, accordingly to the generated affections and with the reverberations caused within each person.

For these reasons that the thoughts about the attempts of these new narratives of communication in being affective arise. That is: transformative. Being transformative in relation to possible prejudiced attitudes to disrespectful actions towards otherness, even though unconscious biases, present in the culture of the organization and its members.

Through these new narratives, people who still have these thoughts of dehumanization can be affected. Those thoughts in which you find old narratives about what each gesture, every feeling and every dream of the other should be. As if feelings, dreams and future were prepared to be equal to all the people. For the new narratives, made possible by environments in which people can exchange affections, it can create relationships, recognize themselves and self-know themselves, besides getting to know different people.

It is through affective communication that one can also change the thoughts of those who, for some reason, feel overwhelmed with sorrows and fears, anxieties and pressures, in this world of appearances and trends, of controversial ideas and judgments. This can lead to negative actions on their part, such as demotivation, the corrosion of loyalties and lack of commitment, as pointed by Sennett (2010).

Talk About New Narratives Is to Talk About Narratives of Experience

The processes of cognition and affectivity are linked not only to experiential issues, but also to the emotional and the perceptual. More than the lived experiences, people construct senses by the memories that they shape and keep from their relations with the organizational environment, existential conflicts, work conditions, relations of power, professional expectations, vanity, ambition, desire, dreams, frustrations, in short, by its life history in the daily life of the organization and in relation to the other stories in which one is involved in the organization (ROMAN, 2009, 132).

It is on those aspects between experience and memories that Kahneman (2012) addresses the existence of two selves: the *experiencing self* and the *remembering self*. The *experiencing self* has a quiet voice, since “memories are all we have to retain our experience of living, and the only perspective we can take when thinking about our lives is, in effect, the self-remembering” (KAHNEMAN, 2012, p.476). This means that the knowledge, affections and feelings that are learned and apprehended with the past become sources for future memories, not necessarily for future experiences. Therefore, what is most relevant to think is that new narratives are the expression and reception of the “narratives of experience” (NASSAR; COGO, 2011).

The narratives of experience are related to the memories of experiences and to the background that one has, and are also related to the functioning of the *remembering self*: it gets

stories together and retains them for future reference and therefore can also lead to engagement. A story is about significant events and memorable moments, not about the passage of time. It is about producing sense.

Sense has to do with aesthetics, which comes from the Greek “*aisthetikós*” - development of ways to achieve sensitivity and sensibility of the people - with the objective to cause an immediate adhesion, a stimulus. The new narratives need to have this role of provoking in their audiences a pleasurable sense of involvement and enjoyment, to generate an interest, an engagement or an action. “Interest is the self-orientation to every act of mental assimilation” (Piaget, 1969, p. 38), so that when a work seems interesting to us, the fatigue diminishes, and it seems easier and more enjoyable. New narratives, by working with narratives of experience in their communications, can therefore generate that interest and engagement.

Talk About New Narratives Is to Talk About Dignity and Respect

Through the understanding of the narratives of existing experiences in an organization, it is possible to perceive that the individuals involved are different in several aspects. And each one can only be present in what is. For Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), dignity is an inherent quality of human beings, related to everything that is priceless, and therefore irreplaceable for something else, since there is nothing that has the same value. To the men - the only possessors of dignity - an equivalent value cannot be attributed, like you could do with things, which can be exchanged for other things of the same price.

Thus, for the philosopher, dignity is a characteristic that distinguishes human beings, who possess their individual personalities, distinct and irreplaceable and, therefore, dignity cannot be negotiated. The dignity of man is linked to his autonomy, which characterizes him as a person (KANT, 1973).

When we are talking about a new narrative (affective and respectful in communication), we are talking about the one that underlies the dignity, just like the ideas, the practices, the habits and the dreams of the people who are part of an organization (BOFF, 2012). Through this affective narrative, it is able to explain origins, personalities, affections, developments and purposes, whether in the personal or professional life of the individual, of his stories, of his place in the world as a human being, including in the organizational world.

There are within each individual an infinite number of characters who sometimes exhibit themselves, sometimes conceal themselves. Personalities that poli-exist is the real and imaginary. Each has within oneself universes of dreams, but also galaxies of uncertainties and fears. Explosions of happiness and implosions of unhappiness. Insatiate impulses of desires and non-wills. Loaded with absences and silences sometimes, and sometimes full of presences and voices. We are all equal as humans, we feel this constant turmoil of ideas and feelings. But we are unique stories and experiences. we all have our own dignity, distinct and irreplaceable.

Equality consists in that: because we are all human beings, we possess our particularities, our differences and, therefore, equally, everyone should have the right to this freedom to be different, to think and to stand in a different way. The equality that should exist is that of respect. Respect for the human being, his dignity and all his diversity of ideas, opinions, choices and ways of being and being in the world.

When one speaks of affective communication, one speaks of respect. “Respecting involves taking an interest in the other, developing empathy and finding common ground, even, perhaps, winning admiration for those who are different from us” (SALES, 2017, online). The act of respecting is conceived as “treating with reverence or reverence; venerate, honour” (FERREIRA, 1986, p.1495). An affective communication recognizes the individual from his

particularities, his narratives of experience, and finds in this diversity the great wealth and potential that exists within each member of the organization.

Talk About New Narratives Is to Talk About Empathy and Non-Violent Communication

There is no egalitarian value in the self and the you. Each one is unique and has its background, its history. Empathy is not just putting yourself in someone else's shoes. That would be impossible. Empathy is the respect and appreciation for the experience and perspective of the other. "It is the respectful understanding of what others are living" (ROSENBERG, p.133, 2006).

Empathy is to respect and value the another, creating a connection, valuing the story and feeling of the other, emptying the mind of pre-judgments and interpretations and "listening with our whole being" (ROSENBERG, p.134, 2006). When there is a connection, there is humanization. The humanization of organizations is not about manuals, rational and technical behaviour, but about the real understanding of existing needs and affections.

The rational, the intellectual understandings block empathy. With the connection of real listening on unmet needs, it is possible to remain in empathy, allowing the interlocutors to reach deeper levels of themselves.

As mentioned by Andrade (2017), empathy, inherent capacity of the human being, carries with it an evolutionary process, ranging from synchrony, identification, emotional contagion, emotional sensitivity, reaching the identification with the community and the construction of citizenship. The author reminds us that the subject, anatomically speaking, brings correlations with the profession: "Although empathy is not summarized or restricted only to brain regions, there is a correlation between the cortical spaces in which the neurons involved with empathic actions are located and the areas associated with language, imagination and emotions ", thus relating, in a certain sense, to the proposal of the new Public Relations narratives - truly connective.

With the connection of the true listening over unmet needs, it is possible to remain in empathy, allowing the interlocutors to reach deeper levels of themselves. When we speak of narratives related to empathy, we propose new narratives capable of connecting people, allowing them to know each other more deeply and to awaken their transforming critical spirit, beyond restricted organizational interests.

Moreover, empathy is the basis of nonviolent communication, in which theorized steps are taken to understand the other with whom one communicates, with the purpose of generating a connection, understanding their needs. It is to observe without evaluate, without judging. Identify feelings without confusing pure feelings with pseudo-feelings (those we believe others have caused us), to identify there what is felt and needed for a more assertive and effective communication.

New Narratives to Create Engagement and Impact for Business

Studies conducted by the Gallup Institute published in the Brazilian magazine *Você RH* and analysed by Maurício Goldstein and Fábio Betti (2013) revealed that companies with highly engaged employees had an increase of 342% in profit, when compared to other companies that did not have actions related to the engagement. Companies listed among the best place to work by *Você S.A.* and the Great Place to Work show a return on shareholders' equity four percentage points above the average of the 500 largest companies.

When working with respect to diversity, the results are also extremely positive for the business. Research by the Gallup Institute has also identified that companies with gender diversity policies are 15% more likely to exceed the targets.

Another McKinsey study, published and commented in the *Valor Econômico* Magazine

by Adriana Fonseca (2012), carried out 180 publicly traded companies from France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, demonstrating that companies ranked at the top of the Diversity ranking had ROE (return on equity) 53% higher on average and EBIT (earnings before interest and taxes) 14% higher.

A research carried out by a Brazilian agency called *Santo Caos*, specialized in engagement, commented by one of its idealizers Jean Soldatelli (2018) in an interview for the Brazilian *CBN radio*, pointed out that, after interviewing more than 900 people all over Brazil, he identified that disengagement can bring about a loss to Brazilian companies of R\$ 12.8 billion (US\$ 3.6 billion) every year.

These surveys show how the lack of attention and respect with the people who are part of the company can impact - a lot - the business, causing damages and more disengagement.

Conclusions

The new narratives of the organization are, therefore, those that form a communication based on the affection, the understanding of the otherness and the self-criticism about the culture of that organization, made possible by environments of respect, of real listening by the ideas and opinions of its members. This affection is a consequence of the constant valorisation of human dignity, regardless of the individual's way of being and being in the world.

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Intermedia Agenda Setting and Perceived Message Credibility

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Abstract

Using intermedia agenda setting as a theoretical foundation, this posttest-only experiment manipulated source attribution within a western media outlet news article among three experimental groups ($N = 676$). Examining the influence of message source attribution on message credibility, results indicated participants attributed greater credibility to information subsidies from state-run sources, vice non-government news sources. These results are key for public relations professionals working with nations employing state-run media or propaganda practices.

Keywords: intermedia agenda setting, credibility, state-run, propaganda, public relations

Author Note

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or official position of the U.S. government, Department of Defense, or Department of the Navy.

Although not its initial creator, Donald Trump thrust the concept of “fake news,” or false information, into the spotlight during his 2016 campaign. With the recent digital and social media boom (Gottfried & Shearer, 2017), allowing citizen journalists to post and publish what they please, determining authentic information is a critical issue for readers and reputable news organizations alike. Contemporary public relations studies indicate the paucity of accurate information combined with the proliferation of fake news may lead to changes in public knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors (Krishna, 2017). As the media environment grows increasingly complex, public relations professionals must understand how the audience perceives credibility to achieve better public relations efficacy in the dynamic information environment.

While the public should question false information written by an individual or news organization, audiences should also recognize the dissemination of government propaganda through state-run news media outlets. The U.S. government and U.S. businesses regularly interact with six of the top 10 most censored countries including: North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Iran, China and Cuba (Committee to Protect Journalism, 2015). These nations do not allow freedom of the press.

Governments can control messages released within and outside of their country in many ways. One such way is for the government to control large news agencies and media distribution systems that may be “owned and run by the state, or nominally private but in fact under government control,” often referred to as state-run news agencies (Walker & Orttung, 2014, p. 71). State-run outlets are employed to shape the political and cultural narrative, “prais[ing] the powers that be” while also discrediting the enemy or opposition to the status quo (Walker & Orttung, 2014, p. 72). Many state-run media outlets utilize propaganda to carry out their mission.

Lasswell defined propaganda as “the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, to speak more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumors, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communication” (Lasswell, 1927, p. 9). Lasswell also identified four major objectives of propaganda: mobilizing hatred toward the enemy; preservation of allies’ friendship; preservation of neutral party’s friendship; and demoralization of the enemy (Lasswell, 1927). Most often, state-run media’s propaganda style is characterized by one-way, asymmetrical communication from the government to the public via the intermediary news organization.

When it comes to media control, China leads other nations (Committee to Protect Journalism, 2015). The *Xinhua News Agency* in China is the Communist “party’s throat and tongue,” as dubbed by Mao Zedong, the first president of China (Kuan & Brosseau, 1991). As the propaganda tool for the Communist Party in China, *Xinhua* reports national and international news, taking orders from the State Council regarding what to report and how to report it (Walker & Orttung, 2014).

China in particular is not just disseminating its state-run media messages and propaganda to an internal, Chinese-only audience. In the summer of 2016, A Chinese propaganda ad played 120 times a day for two weeks on a giant video screen in Times Square (Bing & Zhen, 2016). At three minutes and 12 seconds long, the video makes the case for China’s territorial claims in the South China Sea, claims opposed by the U.S. government and many international partners (Bing & Zhen, 2016).

The video played in Times Square highlights one of the most important issues with state-run media systems: consumers may not understand that messages from a news agency

like *Xinhua* are not from a western-style independent, objective press. Rather, these messages are carefully selected to support the government. While it appeared as three minutes of ocean imagery, the Times Square video was propaganda carefully selected by the Chinese government. Kim & Kioussis (2012) found that public relations materials with appealing messages can lead audiences to regard featured organizations more favorably, a point of concern for public relations professionals attempting to address propaganda messaging.

Drawing from intermedia agenda-setting theory (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lennon, 1998), this study investigates audience-assigned message credibility when presented with a western media outlet news story in which a state-run news outlet is quoted. Specifically, this study seeks to understand if the public perceives propaganda messages from a state-run news outlet as credible.

To create effective communication plans, public relations practitioners must understand their working information environment and how the public assigns credibility to applicable issues and sources. Through understanding how the public perceives messages from state-run news outlets when presented by a free-press outlet, public relations practitioners can shape their own communication plans to reveal or counter state-run messages with appropriate programming. Findings may also provide insight not only to public relations professionals, but to the dominant coalitions of organizations impacted by state-run media. At no time has the distinction between credible and non-credible sources been so important as in our current media dialogue.

Literature Review

Intermedia Agenda-Setting Theory

Since its introduction in 1963 by Bernard Cohen's famous question "does the news tell us what to think in society, or what to think about?", agenda setting has become an overarching communication theory with nested levels of study. McCombs and Shaw's original Chapel Hill study (1972) surrounding the 1968 presidential election investigated the original agenda-setting hypothesis showing that the media indeed influences the public agenda. Agenda-setting theory explores the effect of the media agenda on issue saliency in the public agenda (Golan, 2006).

Decades of research expanded and expounded on the Chapel Hill study, while adding theoretical derivatives including second-level agenda-setting research and agenda building.

Intermedia agenda-setting theory, grown from the original agenda-setting hypothesis, provides one explanation of where the media themselves get their agenda. The theory refers to the influence of mass media agendas on each other (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998). Like the original hypothesis investigating who or what sets the public agenda, numerous research projects delved into who or what sets the *media's* agenda. Historical research concludes intermedia agenda setting has effects both within media channels and between media channels (Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008).

Breed (1955) found that large, nationwide newspapers and wire services had a significant effect in shaping the agenda of smaller newspapers. Reese and Danielian's (1989) study of drug coverage found the New York Times to set not only the agenda for other newspapers, but also television newscasts. Similarly, Protess and McCombs (1991) found elite newspapers shape the news agendas of local newspapers and local television news programs, while Golan (2006) identified the significant influence of the New York Times on the agendas of the three top evening newscasts. Intermedia agenda setting, they demonstrated, does not only

apply within media channels, but between them as well (newspapers influencing the agenda of television broadcasts).

Rooted in the intermedia agenda-setting idea that mass media agendas influence one another, Garnett and Kouzmin (2007) described severe instances of media self-promotion and

vying for increased salience as “media narcissism.” Media narcissism can occur when media outlets report on themselves or other news agencies as part of news stories. This self-reporting can both aid and harm news agencies and the messages they deliver to the consuming public. *International Intermedia Agenda Setting*

Maintaining its place as one of the most relevant public relations theories, intermedia agenda-setting research expanded to encompass both the digital world and international news. Lim (2006) explored the tendencies of three South Korean online news sources and found that two online newspapers influenced the agenda of wire services. Golan (2006) also concluded international news coverage is influenced by the agendas of other news agencies when he studied the effect of the New York Times’ international news coverage and the subsequent material highlighted on three broadcast evening news programs. Golan’s (2006) work supported the connection between New York Times’ media products and similar network coverage.

Taking global intermedia agenda setting a step further, Cheng, Golan, & Kiouisis (2016) studied whether *Xinhua*, a state-run news agency from China, influenced coverage by the New York Times. Qian concluded that *Xinhua* had a significant impact on the issue agenda of The New York Times regarding its coverage of the then-new Chinese president Xi Jinping. The current study attempts to expand current understanding of intermedia agenda-setting effects by studying how it can affect perceived message credibility.

Source Credibility

Source credibility plays an important role in public relations as the attribution of believability to a particular source by an audience (Callison, 2001). Explicated in Hovland and Weiss’ (1951) seminal study on persuasion, trustworthiness and expertise were the most highly matched traits associated with the credibility of a source. Source credibility is increasingly

difficult for news consumers to parse with the vast amount of crosstalk and chatter loudly crowding global information markets. Unregulated “news” sources proliferated by mobile technology and modern social media narratives, are often not subject to rigors of accuracy and may influence consumers (Pennycook, Cannon, & Rand, 2017).

Berlo, Lemert and Mertz (1969) found that the receiver’s image, or preconception of a source also influences credibility. They found that image, much like images projected by media agencies online, is a dynamic dimension of credibility, both projected by the source and refracted by the receiver as they choose (Berlo, et al., 1969). The rise in the number of news sources and anonymity of the Internet gives a voice to government-run news agencies like *Xinhua* News Agency from the People’s Republic of China. Presented alongside media products from western media outlets as equal images, state-run media agencies create further difficulty for news consumers in differentiating source credibility (Reporters without Borders, 2016).

Pornpitakpan’s (2004) critical review of five decades of research found that source credibility varied with many factors including: media modality, length and intensity of message, and geographic region. Pornpitakpan found the most common and most-cited measures of

credibility were expertise and trustworthiness (2004). As expertise and trustworthiness increased, subsequent increases in subject persuasion, source favorability, and behavioral compliance were also noted (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Each of these elements is critical in the practice of public relations and successful organizational communication programs.

Recent studies demonstrated that traditional measures of source credibility are complicated by technological advances in the media landscape. Kiouisis and Dimitrova (2006) found that key stakeholders gave equal credibility to stories released by online news agencies and public relations functions. The trends toward both a flattened media structure and the diminishing dominance of information gatekeepers demonstrates the need to ensure messages and their sources achieve credibility (Callister, 2000; Taraborelli, 2008). These findings support and inform public relations planning and programmatic delivery organizational communication materials.

Media in China

Xinhua News Agency, China's Communist party-controlled news agency, entered an era of expansion over the last decade as part of a shift in the country's engagement strategy with the world, assisting the country in projecting a new international image as a responsible and peaceful global player (Li & Sligo, 2012). During this time, *Xinhua* moved beyond solely serving as the propaganda arm of the Communist Party into a multidimensional and multi-purposed media platform that provides content globally (Cheng, Golan, & Kiouisis, 2016).

Presenting itself as a key information subsidy for journalists around the world, *Xinhua* may serve an important intermedia agenda setting function competing with other western and state-sponsored global news agencies. Although the credibility of *Xinhua* is often undermined by its perceived role as a propaganda platform, it does provide insights into China not available through western media sources (Cheng, et al., 2016). Chinese media offers western audiences a different view on current events (Xin, 2006). Alternately, western audiences exposed to state-run media sources from China question the credibility and links to functioning propaganda producers (Li & Sligo, 2012).

Although China has the second-largest economy, Chinese media influence is currently minimal (He, Xianhong, & Xing, 2012). The present one-way, asymmetrical flow of communication is thought to have threatened the credibility and status of the Chinese media (Li & Sligo, 2012).

U.S. Media Perspective on China

The few studies that examine the overall framing of China in the American news media point to a largely negative tone of coverage that is generally consistent with the U.S. government's stance toward the Chinese government (Golan & Lukito, 2015). In examining editorial content of two major U.S. newspapers, Golan and Lukito (2015) described four ways that American media was framing its country's relationship with China either as an economic partner, an economic threat, geopolitical threat, or as a country with internal strife. The analysis breaks down into two predominant viewpoints: framing China as either a global partner or rival to U.S. interests.

Elite media outlets in the U.S. often set the agenda for other domestic media (He, et al., 2012). In reporting on the succession of Xi Jinping to the Chinese presidency, the attributes being reported by *Xinhua* were incorporated into the reporting of the New York Times (Cheng, et al., 2016). Some of those attributes trickled into other U.S. media, but ultimately *Xinhua*'s attempts to set the agenda for elite national media had limited success. One explanation for this is that *Xinhua*'s style, characterized as one-way communication, did not resonate with the

international news media (Cheng, et al., 2016). Despite the limited influence, media framing remains important when nations lack political and cultural proximity, such as the U.S. and China (Cheng, et al., 2016).

Research Questions

Based on this established research of intermedia agenda setting, source credibility, current overall media environment, and the desire to understand how the public perceives message credibility from state-run news outlets, the following research questions were proposed:

- RQ1.** How do audiences perceive credibility of state-run sources and propaganda messages when quoted in western media?
- RQ2.** How do audiences perceive credibility of western media when quoting state-run news outlets and propaganda messages?

Method

Conducted in 2017, this posttest-only experiment with one control group ($N = 676$) altered message attribution within two experimental cells to better understand perceived message credibility. Researchers manipulated an article published by *Reuters* that contained messages from *Xinhua* regarding China's reaction to a U.S. Navy activities in the South China Sea.

Design

The only information manipulated across all three experimental cells was the attribution of Chinese messaging, depicting *Xinhua* as a state-run news agency, simply as a news agency, or an absence of attribution. The rest of the news article remained the same within each cell. The experimental cells were manipulated as follows:

- *State-run* ($n = 225$): The *Reuters* article cited messages from *Xinhua*, "a state-run news agency run by the Chinese government."
- *News agency* ($n = 226$): The *Reuters* article cited messages from *Xinhua*, "a news agency based in China."
- *Control* ($n = 225$): Messages about the Chinese reaction were written as statements without attribution.

A manipulation check determined whether participants could accurately decipher the cell to which they were assigned. A chi-square showed participants were able to recall if they saw *Xinhua* quoted in their article or not and how *Xinhua* was defined whereby $\chi^2(6) = 29.69$, $p < .01$.

Sample

To ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, researchers obtained approval from the San Diego State University Human Subjects Review Board via the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting the experiment (protocol number HS-2017-0337). Study participants were comprised of a convenience sample collected from currently enrolled students in professional studies and fine arts courses at a public university ($N = 676$). The average age of participants was 20 years old ($SD = 4.27$), and in those that reported a gender preference, the majority were female ($n = 539$, 80%) with smaller numbers of male ($n = 127$, 18%) and transgender ($n = 2$, 3%) participants. Four participants declined to identify a gender. Given that young people consume their news online more than any other population subset (Gottfried & Shearer, 2017), and that the bulk of media messages propagate online (Pew Research Center, 2017), the sample of young, Internet-using adults in this experiment is appropriate to evaluate perceived message credibility in an online news story.

The majority of participants reported no prior knowledge of *Xinhua News Agency*, the world's largest state-run news media outlet ($n = 620$, 92%) (Fish, 2010).

Instrument

Each participant completed the same posttest questionnaire, regardless of cell assignment. Researchers assessed credibility of four different entities, China itself, *Xinhua* itself, the overall article and the reporter, using an Appleman and Sundar (2015) unidimensional credibility scale. The scale measured nine items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Separate credibility indexes were created for the assessment of each entity (China, *Xinhua*, source, reporter). The alphas for each index were similar and illustrated reliability of the credibility concept: China $\alpha = .88$, *Xinhua* $\alpha = .87$, article $\alpha = .88$, reporter $\alpha = .88$. The reporter had the highest overall credibility ($M = 3.29$), with the overall article ($M = 3.28$), *Xinhua* ($M = 3.01$) and China ($M = 2.94$) following. In general, participants rated credibility neutral to low.

Results

This posttest only experiment with one control group ($N = 676$) manipulated source attribution of messages to better understand reader-assigned message credibility. A five-point Likert scale was used to assess assigned credibility of four entities: China, *Xinhua*, the article itself, and the reporter. Researchers questioned how the public would perceive message credibility of state-run sources and propaganda messages when quoted in western media, as well as credibility of western media when quoting state-run news outlets and propaganda messages.

Only 7.7% of participants were familiar with *Xinhua* before this study ($n = 52$). When determining a general level of knowledge of state-run media, 30.8% of participants demonstrated complete understanding of propaganda (see Table 1) as evidenced by correct responses on all four knowledge items ($M = 2.36$).

Credibility

Credibility items were used to determine how a reader processed the messages they read. RQ1 asked how audiences perceived credibility of state-run sources and propaganda messages when quoted in western media. Comparing credibility scores, researchers found higher credibility given to China by readers of the state-run article compared to those in the news agency cell.

An initial ANOVA showed statistically significant main effects among the three cells in regard to the measures of China credibility when quoted in western media outlets, $F(2, 651) = 4.15$, $p = .016$. Those in the state-run article cell rated China's credibility .161 higher than those exposed to the news agency article ($p = .012$). The news agency article readers reported a lower China credibility score (see Table 2) than participants in either the control or state-run cells.

RQ2 asked how audiences perceive credibility of western media when quoting state-run news outlets and propaganda messages. The study did not reveal any significant findings concerning readers' credibility regarding the reporter or the *Reuters* article itself.

Discussion

Rooted in intermedia agenda-setting theory and the concept that media outlets shape each other's agendas, this study attempted to understand how credible the public perceives state-run media message when quoted within a western media news story. By understanding perceived credibility, public relations practitioners can effectively identify, explain and counter

state-run propaganda, and confidently create effective communication plans knowing their audience can identify propaganda messages or not. This study also provided new insight into the positive or negative effects of intermedia agenda setting. Results shed a new light on how the public responds to and perceives state-run media messages.

When the stimulus story quoted *Xinhua* as “a state-run news agency run by the Chinese government,” participants assigned the message significantly more credibility than when attributed to a news agency in China or not attributed at all. Researchers believe participants associated the fact that *Xinhua* was said to be “run by the government,” its messages must be more credible. Researchers also suspect that participants understood *Xinhua* to be similar to objective information subsidies released by the U.S. State Department or Department of Justice, versus propaganda released by the Chinese government to sway opinion.

This highlights a vital task for public relations practitioners working with state-run media sources or nations with controlled media systems. Public relations practitioners must incorporate identifying and explaining propaganda and “state-run” media so there is no confusion or added credibility to propaganda messaging. If the public does not perceive a lower level of credibility when examining a propagandist news source, they run the risk of identifying the presented information as factual, especially when quoted within a western media outlet. This only furthers the success of the propagandist agenda.

Another important factor this study highlights for public relations practitioners is the potential domino effect of intermedia agenda setting. This study used *Reuters*, a major international news agency, to quote a state-run news agency from China. As Reese and Danielian (1989) and Protess and McCombs (1991) found, major news outlets like *Reuters*, *The New York Times*, etc. can shape the agenda of smaller, local news outlets. These major outlets quote propaganda messages and smaller outlets continue to highlight said propaganda messages. Public relations practitioners must be aware of the widespread effects of intermedia agenda setting. This study allows practitioners to understand how the public interprets these messages and highlights the need to counter them through public relations campaigns.

Limitations and Future Research

Various limitations existed in this experiment. Primarily, the age demographic of the participants was narrow. The research team sourced participants from a database which is primarily comprised of college students aged 18 to 22 with a shared education level. These two factors may prevent the study from being totally representative of the American public. The recent prominence of “fake news” as a media concept may have also affected the perceived credibility of any presented news source. If this study were conducted at a different time, or using a different method to source participants, results may have differed.

Future research should include comparing and contrasting perceived credibility of overall American news sources and state-run news sources to determine if a statistically significant difference is present. This could help identify and define a knowledge gap and aid in developing future communication plans and products. Furthermore, research should focus on the American public’s knowledge of propaganda itself and the ability to identify propaganda messages. Until public relations professionals can determine the public’s awareness level of propaganda, they won’t truly be able to define the areas that require specific attention. Despite the described limitations with sample age and education, the results of this study emphasize the importance of key public relations roles and responsibilities and encourages additional scholarship exploring source credibility and state-run messages. The results of this study are of

particular use to practitioners educating the public and communicating on behalf of the U.S. government through public affairs and political communication.

Conclusion

While the concept of fake news may have been thrust into the spotlight by politics, the importance of understanding perceived credibility of intermedia agenda-setting messages is vital to the public relations field now more than ever. Excellent public relations practitioners must understand the media environment in which they work, including the media's tendency to build one another's agendas. As nations with closed media systems gain global, economic, and military influence, public relations practitioners must understand assigned credibility to state-run propaganda messages. This study found that assigned credibility was significantly higher when attributed to a state-run news agency.

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Table 1

Measurement of Knowledge

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Knowledge questions concerning state-run media <i>Please answer the following true-false questions</i>		
State-run media means the government controls the media (True).	.555	.497
State-run media means the government has editorial control of the content (True).	.550	.498
State-run media is independent of the governing party (False).	.512	.500
State-run media can be used as propaganda. (True)	.740	.439
Knowledge Index Score	2.36	1.45

Note: Measures were asked on a true, false, and I do not know scale. Items were recoded into correct and incorrect responses.

Table 2

	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Reporter Credibility</i> (alpha = .88)		
Accurate	3.39	.757
Error-Free	2.92	.827
True	3.37	.727
Authentic	3.34	.798
Believable	3.63	.834
Reliable	3.20	.806
Authoritative	3.30	.859
Reputable	3.26	.770
Trustworthy	3.20	.800
(Reporter Credibility Index)	3.29	.567
<i>Article Credibility</i> (alpha = .88)		
Accurate	3.39	.784
Error-Free	2.98	.851
True	3.34	.744
Authentic	3.32	.773
Believable	3.58	.809
Reliable	3.22	.810
Authoritative	3.28	.857
Reputable	3.25	.786
Trustworthy	3.18	.805
(Article Credibility Index)	3.28	.575
<i>China Credibility</i> (alpha = .88)		
Accurate	2.84	.829
Error-Free	2.59	.791
True	2.87	.806
Authentic	2.96	.850
Believable	3.07	.879
Reliable	2.79	.833
Authoritative	3.62	.874
Reputable	3.03	.837
Trustworthy	2.69	.825
(China Credibility Index)	2.94	.591
<i>Xinhua Credibility</i> (alpha = .87)		
Accurate	3.00	.658
Error-Free	2.81	.649
True	2.98	.643
Authentic	3.04	.677
Believable	3.09	.719
Reliable	2.92	.664
Authoritative	3.30	.765
Reputable	3.06	.682
Trustworthy	2.89	.633
(Xinhua Credibility Index)	3.01	.473

Mean Scores for Reporter, Article, China & Xinhua Credibility

Note: All measures were asked on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Communicating Confidence in U.S.-Based Multinational Organizations:
A Cross-Cultural Confidence Model**

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Abstract

Guided by the theoretical framework of uncertainty reduction, a qualitative analysis that revealed how leadership communicators intend to communicate confidence U.S.-based multinational organizations. Interviews were conducted to better understand the experience, strategies and interpretations of leadership communicators. Results include a model, theoretical and practical implications.

Rationale

United States-based businesses have transcended en masse national borders and formed multinational organizations. These contemporary organizations grow, merge, and migrate with unprecedented rapidity. Heedless of conventional global and political boundaries, multi-national organizations are home to increasingly dynamic and cross-cultural workplaces. The upshot of this proliferation is a growing and compelling need for leadership to communicate effectively across a spectrum cultures within a single organization. Accordingly, leadership communicators no longer desire, but require (Hirst et al., 2015; Ferraro and Briody, 2017) strategic corporate plans that upgrade the outdated *one-size-fits-all* approach to leadership communication, with newfound emphasis on diversity, inclusion, worldwide economy, and cultural integration distilled into a global elixir that contemplates the entirety of the increasingly diverse workplace.

It is well settled that culture dramatically affects the perception and meaning of communication and impacts an organization's likelihood of acculturation and success in cross-cultural environments (Zaharna, 2000). National dissimilarities, miscommunication and assumptions lead to considerable conflict in international business and give heightened importance to proactively bringing culture into the conversation (Nguyen and Kleiner, 2003).

Communication is arguably the most critical leadership function in the modern cross-cultural workplace and is key in creating and maintaining a global orientation (Berger and Meng, 2014), within an organization. Today, global leaders are tasked with a growing list of goals, deadlines, and alignment of often-co-located multinational teams and the resulting balance between culture, commitment, and communication is not only logistically, but culturally complex. It is thus no surprise the front-running leaders believe that successful global expansion is tithed to understanding the unspoken structures that typify the culture where business is done. Intercultural gestures and awareness are representative of common ground (Breiner and Minei, 2017) and have amplified import in the cross-cultural work environment. The bottom line is, business leaders in multinational organizations need to know the value of communicating effectively in a cross-cultural environment, and how it's done.

"Intercultural communication apprehension" (Neuliep and Ryan, 1998; Neuliep and Grohskopf, 2000; Neuliep, 2012, Pouget et al., 2016) often manifests in cross-cultural work environments. Whether real or perceived, communicating about cultural differences in the workplace is hallmarked by discomfort and anxiety, and therefore often suffers avoidance (Neuliep, 2012; Minkov and Hofstede, 2014). Intercultural communication avoidance creates a ripple effect of uncertainty that results in unattractive and unintended business results (Breiner and Minei, 2017). Conversely, global workplaces with long-term viability are those whose leadership openly engage in reciprocal intercultural communication (Harvey and Griffith, 2002).

Leadership addressing cultural differences plays a large role in reducing uncertainty and communicating confidence in cross-cultural environments (Berger and Calabrese 1975). Among other U.S.-based organizations, Best Buy®, eBay, Groupon, Mattel, and Starbucks, paid insufficient attention to the host culture during international expansion, thus failing to sustain longitudinal success cross-culturally (Bernal, 2015). Certainly, the global market existed for these organizations, but cultural insensitivity (Rohlfers and Zhang, 2016) especially when culture is of paramount concern (Hassi and Storti, 2017), not only begins a cycle "intercultural communication apprehension" and uncertainty (Neuliep and Ryan, 1998; Neuliep and Grohskopf, 2000), but ultimately closes the doors for businesses that fail to address it.

In contrast, U.S.-based multinational Leviathans, IBM and GE, have been lauded for their longitudinal global success, much of which senior leadership attributes civic-mindedness. IBM identified Africa as an opportunity for technological growth in 2012 and while IBM is in the business of technology, CEO Ginni Rometty wanted to first learn of the people, government and culture of Nigeria to help solve their challenges in a collaborative and culturally appropriate manner. Together, Rometty, IBM, and the people of Nigeria used data analytics to address an array of issues, including water sanitation, energy management, financial services, transportation, public safety, healthcare, and agriculture (Berman, 2004).

GE likewise focused on commitment to cross-cultural communication, as demonstrated through internal training projects (Schank, 2002), education, communication, and training in emerging markets. All told, GE spent more than six months on infrastructure development and workforce training in Western China before successfully opening a manufacturing facility dedicated to employing native talent (Berman, 2004).

When leaders are tasked with reducing uncertainty across cultural lines and within their workforce there will always be a need for those leaders to embrace every culture and successfully communicate confidence (Fransen, Steffens, Haslam, Vanbeselaere, Vande Broek, and Boen, 2016) in a way that every culture can hear it. Much research has been done in the communication and leadership fields, but the parameters of communicating in cross-cultural environments are relatively nascent and thus continue to evolve and pique interest. More specifically, limited research has explored the precise case of communicating confidence to an internal audience in U.S.-based multinational organizations (Chaney and Martin, 2013; Rohlfer and Zhang, 2016).

This study focuses on leadership communication with the intention of confidence in U.S.-based multinational organizations through the reduction of uncertainty in cross-cultural environments. Possible organizational implications of cross-cultural confidence as an intention of leadership communication are identified.

Literature Review

Global Business

The last twenty years have proved an unprecedented accelerant for global organizational expansion and cross-cultural workforce connectedness (Hirst et al., 2015; Ferraro and Briody, 2017). Between 1990 and 2013 American globalization, multinational organizations, licensing agreements, joint ventures, and foreign capital investments increased U.S direct foreign investments 790 percent, from \$46 billion, to \$365 billion (Jackson, 2013). While identifying a single cause for the rise in global business is “difficult to pin down,” direct attention and collaboration between national governments combined with decreased global trade regulations and increased technology have contributed to the “United States’ (...) unique position in the global economy as the largest investor and the largest recipient of foreign direct investment” (Jackson, 2013, p. 1). Ferraro and Briody (2017, p. 33) partly attribute the rise in global business to the ease of connectedness, commerce and communication between countries, and cultures. Schuler and Jackson (2001) report that despite significant proliferation of international business, the success rate of companies who sustain remains humbling, as three quarters of companies who venture into global operations fail over the long term.

Leadership and Communication

Leadership and communication enjoy a foundationally sound and mutually beneficial relationship as historical and contemporary topics of interest, and the nature of leadership in this context continues to enjoy diverse cultural exploration (e.g., Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014a,

2014b; Tourish, 2014). The inexorable link between communication and leadership thus enjoys heightened academic and organizational significance as individual, group, educational, spiritual and organizational milieus contextually frame and steer the contemporary communication practice (Dinh et al., 2014). While amalgamation of leadership and communication is seemingly well settled, the majority of academic inquiry positions communication not as an equal partner to leadership, but rather as a strategic element of transmission in the panoply of available tools (Ruben and Gigliotti, 2016). Irrespective of which tactical vantage point of communication is used on approach, the broad and robust theoretical landscape undergirding leadership communication invites diversity to its overall understanding and application.

Against a baseline of historical interpretations, Ruben and Gigliotti (2016) elucidate the foci of common approaches to leadership, which are characterized as classical, contemporary, and competency. Classical approaches to leadership conceptualize leadership as a trait (Bass, 1990; Jago, 1982), a skill (Katz, 1955), a style (Blake and McCause, 1991; Lewin, Lippitt, and White, 1939), and as situational (Hersey, 1984; Hersey and Blanchard, 1969). Similarly, contemporary approaches prefer leadership as a practice, such as transformational (Bass and Avolio, 1994), authentic (George, 2003), and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002). Only slightly astray from contemporary approaches, competency approaches consider leadership as an acquired expertise, skill, or conglomeration of acquired knowledge (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Kotter, 2012; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000; Ruben, 2012; Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Smith, 2007; Wisniewski, 1999). The specific lens through which leadership is explored notwithstanding, the approaches to its nature overlap in their concern with its influence as a tangible product and seek to meld the scientific and conceptual relationship between leadership and communication by interpreting leadership as a covalent compound, the atomic mass of which is comprised in part of both communication and leadership (Barge and Fairhurst, 2008; Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014a, 2014b; Fairhurst and Sarr, 1996; Ruben, De Lisi, and Gigliotti, 2016; Witherspoon, 1997).

Friedman (2000) characterizes the last several decades as an era of unprecedented global communication, but also one of unparalleled intolerance, fear, and cross-cultural ignorance. Ferraro and Briody (2017, p. 43) warn “failure to consider the cultural context in the domestic organization can lead, and has led, to misunderstandings, miscommunication, costly marketing blunders, lawsuits, and generally an undermining of organizational goals.” Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall (1992) stress communication as a paramount responsibility for managers in international business. Thomas (2002) typifies the failure of international expansion as a combination of leaders’ inability to communicate values cross-culturally and overreliance on technical expertise as a method of global relationship building. Maurer and Li (2006, p. 31) indicate “cross-cultural relationships,” “cross-cultural perspectives,” and “cross-cultural communication,” as critical leadership skills and “determinants” of performance for leaders working outside of their native cultures. Alder (2002, p. 256) asserts a strategic corporate voice, committed to cross-cultural communication echoes within local cultures, communities, markets, and even governments. As one example of impactful cross-cultural leadership communication, Friedman (2002), referenced the unprecedented commitment to cross-cultural communication of U.S.-based multinational superpower, GE during the 2002 India-and-Pakistan-near-nuclear war. Not just an industrial power, but a political power, GE used cross-cultural communication to form allies, create influence, and ultimately maintain peace in the face of distinct political and cultural differences (Ferraro and Briody, 2017, p. 34).

Openness and Awareness vs. Avoidance

Cross-cultural barriers account for 87 percent of international business failures (Miller, 2002). Baba, Gluesing, Ratner, and Wagner (2004) suggest “natural human behaviors” include cultural and communicative similarity. The correlation between international business failure and “natural human behavior” is evident as U.S.-based multinational organizations abroad continue to experience growth, but also significant business problems once abroad (Mattioli and Strumpf, 2015). Ferraro and Briody (2017, p. 40) place communication at the epicenter of most U.S.-based multinational business mistakes or the “miscalculation of the cultural dimension of global business.” Ferraro and Briody clarify their position through the experiences of Perdue® chicken and the American Dairy Association. Their respective slogans “It takes a strong man to make a tender chicken,” and “Got milk?” lost more in translation than either company bargained for, as the Spanish versions read “It takes a virile man to make chicken affectionate,” and “Are you lactating” (2017, p. 40). Nguyen and Kleiner (2003) add context by positing a global model of strategic business communication that identifies uncertainty as the single largest problem facing organizations as cultures, languages, locations, beliefs, and values continually shift.

The Science of Confidence

Pouget, Drugowitsch and Kepecs (2012, p. 1322) identified the relationship between the central nervous system and confidence as one that is “relatively simple,” and not mutually exclusive (Kepecs et al., 2008). The data adduced suggests that the experience of confidence is cognitively indistinguishable from certainty and that lack of confidence may be likewise characterized as lack of uncertainty (Pouget et al., 2016, p. 367). The process by which one becomes confident (or certain) or unconfident (or uncertain) is dependent on order. Further, the complexity of higher-order animals, coupled with the subjective nature of perceptual beliefs and the underlying constraints of quantitative measurements impels interdisciplinary alignment between the physical and social sciences (Kepecs and Mainen, 2012).

Applied, this premise holds that in uncertain situations, low-order animals rely on experience to create certainty. For example, a mouse will decide to take a path because there was food along that path before and probability suggests there will again be food and thus, the mouse is confident that there will again be food on the chosen path. High-order animals are similar in the sense that probability guides their search for confidence, but engage in more expansive information-seeking behavior to increase confidence. Thus, the data suggests that whereas confidence is absolute for low-order animals, it is relative for high-order animals. The relative strength or weakness of confidence is, however, associated in both instances with the certainty they feel about the information received (Kepecs et al., 2008). Smith, Shields, and Washburn suggest humans correlate increases and decreases in confidence with specific events (2003).

The reciprocal relationship between confidence and uncertainty is further bolstered by Seeger, Griffin and Padgett, who describe the uncertainty and information-seeking cycle as highly demanding, ubiquitous, capable of occurring in virtually any setting, including home, family, and the workplace (2010). Minkov and Hofstede denote the outward expression of uncertainty as a behavior influenced in-part by cultural factors (2014). And, when faced with a dynamic environment, an uncertain workforce remains an audience ready for leaders to communicate confidence because uncertain audiences are ready to hear comprehensive and affirming information (Seeger, et al., 2010).

Confidence and Uncertainty Reduction

The following paragraphs demonstrate the central concepts of uncertainty reduction and provide definitional support for confidence as a reduction of uncertainty and intention of leadership communication in cross-cultural environments.

Berger and Calabrese (1975) contributed uncertainty reduction as one of the most widely known applications through which communication exchanges are built asserted seven axioms that work conjunctively to direct human transactions, reduce uncertainty, build relationships (1975). Berger and Gudykunst (1991) later added an eighth axiom, followed by Neuliep and Grohskopf's (2000) ninth axiom. Goldsmith (2001) expanded the theory's original scope from initial to ongoing communicative systems a dimension Neuliep (2012) lauded as especially important in cross-cultural environments (2012). Uncertainty reduction theory reveals that through communicative interactions, these axioms present reduce uncertainty a denouement that fosters increased confidence.

Establishing a pattern of regular communication behaviors Berger and Calabrese (1975) asserted seven axioms that, work conjunctively to direct human transactions. Berger and Gudykunst (1991) later added an eighth axiom followed later by Neuliep and Grohskopf's (2000) ninth axiom.

1. Verbal communication: As verbal communication increases, uncertainty decreases. However, if the amount of verbal communication from one party is perceived to be too much by the other party, uncertainty and information-deficit may increase on behalf of the perceiving party.
2. Non-verbal affiliative expressiveness/warmth: As non-verbal cues such as eye contact, hand gestures, body language, proximity and signals of invitation increase, uncertainty will correspondingly decrease.
3. Information seeking: Initial interactions between individuals dictate relatively base-level information-seeking behavior and questions, i.e., questions regarding name, background, day-to-day activities. As base-level knowledge increases, uncertainty accords and information-seeking behavior decreases.
4. Intimacy-level of communication content: Uncertainty level dictates communication-content intimacy; high uncertainty equals low intimacy. As uncertainty decreases, intimacy increases.
5. Reciprocity: Higher uncertainty results in higher reciprocity. Lower uncertainty results in lower reciprocity.
6. Similarity: When people discover likenesses between each other, uncertainty decreases. Dissimilarity produces the opposing effect, increased uncertainty.
7. Liking: Increased uncertainty decreases liking. Decreases in uncertainty increases liking.
8. Shared networks: Uncertainty is reduced through shared networks, and is increased through the lack of network sharing, i.e., mutual friendships and friends in common.
9. Communication satisfaction: Uncertainty is reduced through the achievement of communication goals, i.e., communication satisfaction. The reverse is also true, uncertainty is increased through communication dissatisfaction or the lack of goal achievement.

In terms of categorizing uncertainty, uncertainty reduction theory looks at both behavioral and cognitive constructs; behavioral classification contemplates the actions of a person in a communication exchange for the purpose of reducing uncertainty, while cognitive classification looks at the opinions or views a person holds and how they might influence a person as they work to reduce communicative uncertainty (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). While classification provides the point of origin, further distillation of the uncertainty reduction theory takes aim at the manner in which individuals process uncertainty, either proactively or reactively. Applied to communication, proactive processors would endeavor to reduce uncertainty through strategic planning in communication.

Research Question

Aligned with this literature, this study explores leadership communication with the intention of confidence in U.S.-based multinational organizations through the reduction of uncertainty in cross-cultural environments through the following research question:

RQ: How do leadership communicators intend to create confidence in cross-cultural environments?

Methodology

A grounded theory research approach guides the exploration of confidence as an intention of leadership communication in diverse cultural business environments, specifically, U.S.-based multinational organizations. This study invites focus and clarity to the interpretation, definition, and framework for confidence as the reduction of uncertainty, among leadership communicators whose intentions are to instill confidence. Ultimately, the grounded theory research journey is a methodological tradition grounded in data from the field, especially actions, interactions, and social processes (Creswell, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to identify leadership communication intentions set forth to create confidence through the lens of uncertainty reduction. It is from this vantage point that this study provides professional and academic utility, imparting communicative clarity through rich evaluation and explanation (Berger, 2011; Goldsmith, 2001). Qualitative grounded theory research methodologies not only constitute inquiry, identification and investigation of confidence-building communication characteristics and behaviors but commission a practical strategic communication blueprint.

Sampling

Equal parts theoretical and purposeful sampling methods (Patton, 1990) were utilized to fully elaborate and explore the process leadership communicators use when actively intending to communicate confidence in cross-cultural organizations. Criterion sampling narrowed participants to include leadership communicators in U.S.-based multinational organizations, as this study specifically sought to understand the individual leadership intentions of communicators intending to communicate confidence in U.S.-based multinational organizations. Participants were primarily recruited through professional organization membership. The researcher met with participants in person and participants were provided comprehensive screening, inclusion, and exclusion criteria.

Data Collection

Data was collected by conducting face-to-face, in-depth interviews. While guided by research questions and the axioms of uncertainty reduction theory (Berger and Calabrese, 1975) these interviews were pioneer opportunities to unearth a framework for intending to communicate confidence in U.S.-based multinational organizations. Preliminary data, and categories emerged, to form a draft pictorial. The initial draft was taken back to participants in

the form of a focus group for feedback, validation, and further development. Interviews were recorded, notated, transcribed, and coded in an open, axial and selective system.

Sample Size

Fifteen participants from four similarly sized U.S.-based multinational organizations agreed to participate in interviews; four females from an engineering firm, four males from a computer technology firm, five females from an events firm, one female, and one male from an insurance firm. Initial in-depth interviews provided a manuscript-level description of data with concepts within categories reoccurring, calling for focus group validation.

Data Analysis

This study was guided by the principles of grounded theory data analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Data points, mainly interviews were micro analyzed, coded, and successively build upon one another through a constant comparative method, as contextual pieces to the process of confidence as an intention of leadership communication in U.S.-based multinational organizations.

Results and Interpretation

RQ: How do leadership communicators intend to create confidence in cross-cultural environments?

The following paragraphs detail strategies, tactics and challenges utilized by leaders intending to communicate confidence in cross cultural environments, specifically U.S.-based multinational organizations. Three structural components reflect a model of cross-cultural confidence, as well as represent the prominent and interrelated perspectives of these collective data, (1) Ask versus Act, (2) Easy Speak, (3) Openness to Differences. These three components demonstrate the strategy most heavily relied upon by leadership communicators intent on communicating confidence in cross-cultural business environments and are connected through listening as the concept that emerged as central to cross-cultural confidence.

A Cross-Cultural Confidence Model

Vehicle	Sample Raw Data	Secondary Concepts	Central Concept	Theoretical Attribution
	<p><i>“I try to act as if there is nothing I know about the job when I walk into a new location in a new country, even though I’m technically the boss. If I just as how the job is done there, I’ll get much further.” (R9)</i></p> <p><i>“A treasured mentor once told me never to answer a question before asking one. This small practice has paid me generously as a</i></p>	<i>Ask vs Act</i>		

Leadership Communication	<p><i>multicultural leader.” (R2)</i></p> <p><i>“I try to gain as much knowledge from the team, as quickly as possible – I realize that as a leader coming from a foreign culture, I owe them a feeling of comfort and asking their conventions seems like the most natural way to start that process.” (R7)</i></p>		Listening	Cross-Cultural Confidence
	<p><i>“My first boss told me my job was stare at the ceiling during leadership team meetings as an opportunity to recognize and decode our daily jargon as a growth strategy.” (R6)</i></p> <p><i>“Languages are so incredibly provincial, even accents. I’ve made some mistakes! Food is a particularly tricky one. I’ve found simplicity is the best thing any one person can do, and an apology goes a long way of course.” (R15)</i></p>	Easy Speak		
	<p><i>“Our UK office is a huge conglomeration of global cultures. We have very serious ways of doing business here and very relaxed practices too. The one thing I won’t compromise is listening, every culture needs that</i></p>	Openness to Differences		

	<p><i>to know we can achieve our goals, but some cultures prefer I do my listening with them on a bicycle, in a wing-back chair, in a coffee shop, on a mobile phone, honestly, none of it matters to me, as long as they are comfortable and we are meeting our goals effectively.” (R10)</i></p> <p><i>“I was a member of a Swiss-owned company who was bought by a U.S.-company many years ago. The U.S.-based leadership was specific not to assert a cultural preference, organizational, or otherwise on the Swiss employees. We felt like we had a choice, not necessarily in terms of what needed to be done day-to-day, but the feeling, the environment, was not dictated to us. I still let the way that process made me feel guide me as a leader today.” (R11)</i></p>			
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Listen

Respondents expressed a clear desire to create confidence or reduce uncertainty through their communication. The reduction of uncertainty was channeled through listening as leaders reported their intentions of cross-cultural confidence.

Ask vs. Act

Respondents expressed their intention to make their team members feel certain that while they could not always accommodate the multitude of cultural requests and differences, it was important that the requests be shared. A sheer desire to listen was clear. Many leaders knew right away that they wouldn't be able to do anything about what the employees were asking, but that had no impact on how earnestly these leaders wanted to hear what the employees had to say.

Many leaders showed physical discomfort when stating that their team members may not be honest with them.

“I am Muslim, I am supposed to pray five times a day, but I don’t, because it is not convenient to do it here. And I didn’t ask my boss about it when I got here, and she didn’t ask me. I’m a team leader now, and I know to ask all of my Muslim team members, because what if they felt like they couldn’t ask me?” (R1)

“We lost the contract with them, we sent one car to pick them up at the airport. It was a huge sign of disrespect. Not so much that we sent the one car, but that we didn’t call to tell them that was the plan, that we didn’t send someone to organize. They called us later and told us they felt like they were being herded like cattle. Can you imagine being treated like that? All we had to do was ask, but we didn’t,” (R7)

“It’s very common for us to have employees here from different global offices on Fridays, and on Fridays we donate \$3 to charity and wear jeans. I’ll be honest, I’ve never given it a second thought, until those poor guys from India, they do not do casual Fridays – it’s just a huge sign of disrespect, to their education. They’re surgeons. And, I understand now, to our business, but here we are, passing the jar around, because we think we’re doing a good thing for charity. All we had to do was ask. It would have been fine, they wouldn’t have been bothered by that. You live and you learn.” (R12)

“We remodeled the office for them. I was happy to do it. In their culture, they don’t sit in open office environments. I would have been mortified if he didn’t open his eyes wide, and I wasn’t able to catch it. When I asked him if he wanted to erect cubes, he shined smartly.” (R13)

Easy Speak

Respondents expressed a distinct effort in directness. In the especially culturally diverse environments of these leaders, multiple languages, disciplines and backgrounds abound yet respect remained the primary factor. Each leader spoke with clarity, compassion, direction, and above all to insure confidence.

“In Europe, engineers are ‘chartered,’ and that’s a very important term in parts of the world, but in others, it’s not, so, in general, I ask, but we’re all human, and we’re all smart, so we’re all the same on one level or another.” (R1)

“In Singapore, employee engagement is extremely complex because of communication norms. It’s doable, but getting everyone on the same page in one day, is difficult, because group meetings are frowned upon. In general, everyone expects a separate meeting for you to personally break down the jargon for them, and get their buy-in, and this is expected at all phases, not just once, subtle, but important cultural differences.” (R3)

“Clarity is something I took for granted, and I really felt bad about that, it wasn’t fair. I made very little sense when I said ASAP to my French counterpart. That was Saturday for her! And she did not know what it meant, she used the internet. These are things you hear, and learn after. It is so important to respect the differences in language and interpretation no matter where you are coming from, or going to, to be fair.” (R9)

Openness to Differences

Respondents expressed an awareness that differences were going to happen in culturally-diverse workplaces, and most importantly, that those differences were ok. There was a strong message of acceptance from respondents, including body language, hand gestures, and facial cues.

“We are all incredibly different, and we have different ways of doing things. We have everyone take a communication test. You’re a red, yellow, blue, or a green. And you wear your color, and we all talk about it. No secrets. It’s key to our success, really, because we’re so diverse, we need to be able to talk about what we need.” (R1)

“France enjoys a more serious culture, that’s ok, I think we need to respect that. And we need to talk about it too, so everyone knows what’s going on, and no one gets their feelings hurt over a frank email.” (R4)

“Americans are quite direct. That’s no secret. So, you may not be able to speak without a senior role in another country, but in America, you don’t need to be senior to speak, we need to respect that.” (R5)

“When our partners from Israel visit, we have a bowl of fruit ready in the mornings, it’s a sign that we appreciate their contributions, and long travel. It is not kind if we do not do it, we are not taking care. Work is work, culture is human, it’s human to put fruit out.” (R14)

Discussion

It was the intent of this study to better understand the intention of confidence as a product of leadership communication in U.S.-based multinational organizations through the reduction of uncertainty in cross-cultural environments. This study accomplished its intended goals the exploration and explanation of cross-cultural confidence through leadership communication and uncertainty reduction. Uncertainty reduction contributes a unique theoretical perspective and proffers a model of cross-cultural confidence while achieving the goals of this study as a powerful lens for leadership communication and interesting opportunity for public relations scholarship and practice to consider.

As a practical matter, this research most notably repositions listening at the epicenter of leadership communication, and in the larger picture of relationships, and basic human interactions. Ferraro and Briody (2017) captured the power of listening as a communication tool in their description of an up-down-side-to-side head nod. While side-to-side head nod means “no” in the United States, and “yes” in India, the genuineness of expressions is global. This study embraces listening as a culturally ubiquitous skill.

Framed within its theoretical context, the results of this study call attention and bring support to the cross-cultural context of uncertainty reduction. Berger and Calabrese’s (1975) original theory has enjoyed rigorous exploration (Gudykunst, et al., 1985) as well as scholarly discussion throughout the years. Expanding from initial to ongoing relationships (Goldsmith, 2001) and from intracultural to intercultural (Neuliep, 2012) relationships, initial consensus indicated similarity in a communicative relationship incited uncertainty reduction. Later, similarity proved a relatively weak indicator of uncertainty reduction if communicative exchanges included higher levels of self-disclosure (Gudykunst, et al., 1985). Results from this study and the model of cross-cultural confidence presented in this research demonstrate support for the latter. Self-disclosure, as described under *Act vs. Act*, as an intention of confidence via the sender, the receiver feels reduced uncertainty as a result of disclosure with the sender, mitigating the need for similarity.

Ultimately, the intention of confidence as presented in this study suggests thought-provoking prospects for the role of leaders as strategic communicators in the contemporary business landscape. Cross-cultural confidence model as communicated from a leadership communicator, advances as well as challenges some cultural traditional assumptions, specifically listening as opposed to speaking and cultural communication as an open topic of communication

as opposed to avoided. As a matter of intention, confidence in cross-cultural business environments increases certainty and is associated with increased business success.

Practical Implications

The model proposed in this study offers a framework for cross-cultural confidence. Managers and communicators with diverse cultural populations would benefit from (1) embracing a culture that emphasizes and values listening, (2) engaging in day-to-day conversations with employees, that include simple inquiries about their lives, (3) limiting work-related, and heavy industry jargon in general conversation with employees, and (4) refraining from forcing work culture that contradicts an employee's personal culture, such as casual dress or mandatory fraternization.

Limitations

This study, like all, is not without limitations. While the methodology of this study is well founded, any limitations of the researcher and the participants must be taken into consideration. Moreover, this study addressed cross-cultural communication from the standpoint of U.S. based organizations and future studies that contemplate similar data from the perspective of foreign corporations expanding operations into the U.S. would add significant context and depth to this proposed framework. While of high quality, procedures implemented to maximize the validity and consistency of participants and data naturally feature small degrees of variability. Similarly, the perspectives considered for this research remain diverse, and there remain additional, perhaps contradictory perspectives that merit consideration in the larger cultural communication spectrum.

Conclusion

This study makes an important contribution to the growing knowledge base on cross-cultural confidence as an intention of leadership communication and expands the theoretical scholarship of uncertainty reduction in the ever-growing global communication environment. Further, this study has continued the evolving research, and conversation on the importance of organizational relationships. Stressing culture as a continuing and imperative dialogue in the workplace is among the most important contributions of this study, bringing focus and resolve to strategic communication as a business strategy for long-term success. Above all, this study trumpets cross-cultural confidence as the confidence to listen.

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Scale Development for Stakeholder Crisis Response Strategies: A Stakeholder-Oriented Approach

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Abstract

In the previous decades, a large amount of crisis communication research has followed a management-centric perspective and focused on exploring organizational crisis response strategies to minimize negative reputational damage. Our study is among the first to conceptualize and operationalize stakeholder crisis communication strategies. In the context of the United Airlines crisis in April 2017, we conducted two separate online surveys. Results confirmed that a seven-factor instrument of stakeholder crisis response strategies was valid and reliable. Findings also suggested that information was the most important need of stakeholders and offered a sophisticated profile of stakeholders in crises, who used a host of active response strategies from constructive to destructive. Theoretical and practical implications were discussed.

Keywords: stakeholder crisis response strategies, crisis communication, assessment, validity, reliability

For the past couple of decades, most research on crisis communication has approached the topic from a management-centric perspective and developed measurement of organizational crisis response strategies (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007, 2014). For example, Benoit's (1997) image repair theory (IRT) proposed five main strategies to help organizations maintain a positive reputation, consisting of denial (simple denial or shifting the blame), evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness (e.g., bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attacking accuser and compensation), corrective action, and mortification (i.e., organizations can apologize for act). Originated from the IRT, Coombs (1995, 1998, 2007, 2014) proposed in his situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) a continuum of crisis communication strategies ranging from the least to the most accommodative level, which included attacking the accuser, denial, scapegoat, excuse, justification, remind, ingratiation, compensation and apology. A recent comprehensive review of 18 years of research on crisis response strategies from 1991 to 2009 identified 51 articles focusing on *organizational* crisis response strategies (S. Kim, Avery, & Lariscy, 2009). Similarly, the most recent meta-analysis of research on SCCT (Ma & Zhan, 2016) assumed crisis response strategies as organizational.

To further extend the crisis communication scholarship from a stakeholder perspective, some scholars have examined stakeholder desired strategies on the Internet (Stephens & Malone, 2009), stakeholders' conative coping (Jin, Fraustino, & Liu, 2016) and information seeking or messaging behavior (Brummette & Sisco, 2015; H. K. Kim & Niederdeppe, 2013; Schultz, Utz & Goritz, 2011).

However, few of previous studies ever provided a systematic and comprehensive conceptualization and valid and reliable measure of stakeholders' crisis response strategies. Our study is among the first to do so, in the context of the United Airlines crisis in April 2017, involving the violent removal of an Asian American passenger. Specifically, drawing from the strategic management, organizational communication, and public relations literature on the topics of stakeholders, activism, and public relations strategies, we propose a seven-factor conceptual and operational framework of stakeholder crisis response strategies, namely information seeking, persuasion, consulting, threat, mobilizing, partnering, and no response. Using data from two online surveys, we seek to contribute to current crisis communication research and practice through: a) enriching crisis communication scholarship by developing a multiple-item scale for stakeholders' crisis response strategies and prioritizing stakeholders as the center of analysis; b) enhancing the practice by providing a reliable and valid evaluation tool that can be used by crisis communication practitioners.

Conceptualization

Centering on Stakeholders

Research on crisis communication has investigated how stakeholders attribute responsibility to organizations, represented by the stream of research on Coombs' SCCT (2007, 2014). Common outcomes are organizational reputation and organizations' crisis response strategies. Based on the attribution theory, the basic assumption of SCCT is that rational stakeholders attribute responsibility to organizations during a crisis. When stakeholders determine that an organization shares minimum, low or high responsibility, accordingly organizations should adopt different crisis response strategies for victim, accident or preventable crises (Coombs, 2007). For instance, if stakeholders deem an organization as minimally responsible, the organization may employ denial or excuse strategies.

According to SCCT, crisis response strategies differ on the extent of accommodation. The nine strategies—attacking the accuser, denial, scapegoat, excuse, justification, remind,

ingratiation, compensation and apology—range from the least to the most accommodative to stakeholders. Coombs (2014) suggested that, to maximize the effectiveness of these strategies, the more accommodative crisis response strategies should be used when stakeholders increase their attributions of crisis responsibility to an organization. More recently, Coombs and colleagues have begun to identify the impact of organizational crisis response strategies on stakeholders, such as consumers' brand switching and positive word-of-mouth behaviors (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Nevertheless, taken together, although the SCCT takes into consideration of the rational thinking of stakeholders (attribution of responsibility), the main research trend has been to prescribe ways to repair the tarnished organizational images and reputation.

To address this gap in research, more scholars have started examining stakeholders' own emotions, attitudes, and behaviors (e.g., Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Jin & Liu, 2010; Jin, 2009; Kim & Niederdeppe, 2013; Schultz et al., 2011; Stephens & Malone, 2009; Tai & Sun, 2007; S. Yang, 2016). For example, Jin (2009) tested a cognitive appraisal model that explored the differential impacts of four main negative emotions (i.e., anger, sadness, and fright, and anxiety) on publics' coping strategy preference and organizational crisis strategy acceptance based on an experiment study. Stephens and Malone (2009) expanded stakeholders' crisis message strategies by content analyzing several main strategies such as the stakeholder's desired and technical translation strategies in the 2007 pet food recall crisis. However, based on the passive observation of multiple new media sources such as blogs and press releases, this study was constrained by only exploring the stakeholder messaging strategies coded from media contents. A more comprehensive examination of possible stakeholder crisis response strategies is needed.

In sum, the majority of current crisis communication research followed a management perspective to maintain organizational reputation and image (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007, 2014; Utz, Schultz, & Goritz, 2013). A few recent studies (Jin, Pang & Cameron, 2012; Jin, 2009; Utz et al., 2013) are moving toward a stakeholder-oriented approach to crisis communication, but they did not fully examine stakeholders' full range of potential response strategies and some still were using the identified stakeholder reactions to prescribe best practices for organizations (Fraustino & Liu, 2016). Accordingly, this study sought to advance the crisis communication scholarship by centering on stakeholders' response strategies in crisis situations both at the conceptual and operational level.

Stakeholder Crisis Response Strategies

Crisis response strategies according to SCCT and IRT are the actions and messaging by management to minimize the negative impact on an organization (Coombs, 2014). These strategies are used to manage stakeholders' perceptions of the organization. To shift the focus from management to stakeholders, we conceptualize stakeholder crisis response strategies as what the stakeholders do and say after a crisis hits.

Past research on stakeholders in organizational communication and public relations suggested some useful strategies such as identifying circles of power within the organization, forming alliances with either marginalized groups or organizational functions who could assist them becoming influential in the environment (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; Lerbinger, 2001; Spicer, 1997). Lerbinger (2001) summarized confrontation tactics for discontented grassroots groups to press demands, solicit public approval, and attract media attention. More recently in crisis communication, studies have investigated stakeholders' responses in crisis situations, including stakeholders' willingness to seek out information about a crisis, face-to-face and online messaging behaviors, and ways to cope with the negative emotions incurred during a crisis

(Brummette & Sisco, 2015; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Jin et al., 2012; H. K. Kim & Niederdeppe, 2013; Schultz et al., 2011; Stephens & Malone, 2009; Tai & Sun, 2007).

Yet few of these studies presented a comprehensive and systematic conceptualization and operationalization of stakeholder crisis response strategies. To do so, we turned to literature on stakeholders, public relations strategies, and activism, in the fields of strategic management, organizational communication, and public relations. We herein propose seven stakeholder crisis response strategies: information seeking, persuasion, consulting, threat, mobilizing, partnering, and no response (e.g., Cammaerts, 2005, 2007; Freeman, 1984; Gibson, Römmele, & Ward, 2003; Gregory, 2007; Hazleton & Long, 1988; Savage, Nix, Whitehead, & Blair, 1991; Utz et al., 2013; Werder, 2005, 2006).

The information seeking strategy is concerned with stakeholders searching for more crisis-related information from an organization in crises. Information needs are common during risk and crisis situations to reduce stakeholders' anxiety and provide emotional support (e.g., Griffin, Z. Yang, Huurne, Boerner, Ortiz, & Dunwoody, 2008; H. K. Kim & Niederdepp, 2013; Liu, Jin, & Austin, 2013). Stakeholders often look for, share, and discuss crisis information with friends and families, either face to face or on line (e.g., Jin et al., 2012; Y. Kim, 2016; Schultz et al., 2011; Utz et al., 2013).

The persuasion strategy refers to stakeholders' actions to gain compliance from fellow affected stakeholders to fight together against the organization, by selectively sharing crisis-related information with and appealing to their emotions or values (Cammaerts, 2005, 2007). The persuasion strategy has been commonly used as a public relations strategy (Hazleton & Long, 1988; Werder, 2005, 2006). Activist groups also frequently resort to persuasion techniques as they more often than not have less power and fewer resources than organizations (Cammaerts, 2007; Derville, 2005).

The consulting strategy is used when stakeholders attempt to resolve the problems together with the affected organization in crises (Gregory, 2007; Savage et al., 1991). It has been suggested as a management strategy to involve supportive stakeholders in brand building or in a labor strike crisis, or as a general public relations communication strategy (Gregory, 2007; Savage et al., 1991; Werder, 2005). To apply this strategy to crisis communication, we anticipate that supportive stakeholders are willing to resolve the crisis, actively engage and initiative dialogues with the organization and offer their suggestions.

Another stakeholder crisis response strategy is threat, a compliance-gaining strategy through the use of coercion and pressure. Werder (2006) recommended that public relations practitioners use a threat and punishment strategy with stakeholders to gain compliance, when stakeholders do not wish to change their positions and a problem solution is needed immediately. Activists also often resort to threatening messages to gain more power over organizations (Derville, 2005). Accordingly, we expect active stakeholders to employ the threat strategy to ensure changes from an organization during crises.

An additional typical stakeholder crisis response strategy is mobilizing, a means to build alliances among affected stakeholders via the use of media tools so as to demand organizational actions in a crisis (e.g., Gibson et al., 2003). Activists may utilize both traditional and new media tools to spread information rapidly, and they organize internally and externally to disseminate discourses and host debates against organizations whose actions have wronged these stakeholders.

The partnering strategy takes the supportive and collaborative stance of the consulting strategy one step further, indicating stakeholders' complete engagement with organizations

(Gregory, 2007). Stakeholders who choose to partner with an organization act as ambassadors and members of an organization's crisis management team, instrumental in the success of an organization's crisis management efforts (Savage et al., 1991). Organizations have been advised to cultivate such a base of champions and loyal stakeholders who can be immensely helpful in resolving a crisis (Freeman, 1984; Gregory, 2007).

Lastly, no response reflects no engagement and withdrawal from stakeholders. In interpersonal relationships, people often choose to withdraw from a conflict, either giving little attention to the other relational party or leave the conflict scene physically (Hess, 2003). A couple of crisis communication studies have also confirmed that in crisis situations, stakeholders often either desire no strategies from the organization (Stephens & Malone, 2009) or engage in passive cognitive coping behaviors (Jin, 2014). We anticipate that stakeholders may opt to refrain from communication or involvement with the organization during a crisis.

To summarize, based on the above reviewed literature we identified seven stakeholder crisis response strategies: information seeking, persuasion, consulting, threat, mobilizing, partnering, and no response. Considering the exploratory nature of this study, we propose the following research questions:

RQ1: What crisis response strategies were used by stakeholders during the United Airlines Crisis, if at all?

RQ2: How to measure these stakeholder crisis response strategies validly and reliably?

Method

Data Collection & Participants

We used the participant pool from Amazon Mechanical Turk and conducted a pilot study (N = 109) and the final survey (N = 579). Results from the pilot study helped us refine the measuring instrument for the final survey. Both studies had a similar participant profile.

In the pilot study (N = 109), 53.2% were males. In terms of racial composition, 47.7% were Caucasians, 39.4% Asians, 2.8% African Americans, 6.4% Hispanic, 0.9% Native Americans, 0.9% others, and 1.8% preferring not to answer. With regards to their employment status, 62.4% were employed for wages/salary, 24.8% self-employed, 4.6% unemployed, 5.5% a homemaker, 0.9% retired, and 1.8% others. Their annual household income was widely dispersed, with 20.2% less than \$24,999, 33.0% \$25,000 to \$49,999, 35.8% \$50,000 to \$99,999, and 11.0% \$100,000 or more. Regarding their marital status, 48.6% were single, 42.2% married, 4.6% divorced, 0.9% widowed, and 3.7% in a domestic relationship.

In our final survey (N = 579), 44% of A participants were males. Participants comprised 49.1% Caucasians, 32.1% Asians, 0.5% Pacific Islanders, 6.1% African Americans, 6.5% Latinos, 1.7% Native Americans, and 3.8% others. The majority of the participant (60.7%) were employed for wages or salary, while 20.7% self-employed, 5.8% unemployed, 5.4% a homemaker, 4.2% retired, and 3.2% others. In terms of marital status, nearly half of the participants (42.1%) were single, and 46.5% were married. The remaining participants were 4.7% divorced, 0.9% widowed, and 5.8% in a domestic partnership. Regarding education, 48.8% had a bachelor's degree, 17.7% a master's degree, 9.5% a technical or associate degree, 17.2% some college without a degree, 4.4% high school diploma, 1.5% a doctoral degree, and 0.9% 12th grade or less. Participants' income was diversely spread: 26.0% less than \$24,999, 34.6% between \$25,000 and \$49,999, 29.1% between \$50,000 and \$99,999, and 10.4% making \$100,000 or more.

Measures

We used a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). Based on conceptualization from the reviewed literature, we developed measures for the stakeholder crisis response strategies. According to the reliability analysis results in the pilot study, one threat item was deleted. All measures in both studies were reliable with alpha values above .80.

Analysis

SPSS and the EQS 6.1 program (Bentler, 2005) were employed. In both the pilot study and the final study, we performed descriptive statistics to examine RQ1 (see Table 1). Then, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was done in the pilot study and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in the final study to evaluate measurement reliability and validity (see Table 2). For the two-step structural equation modeling testing, we used the data-model fit criteria by Hu and Bentler (1999): Comparative Fit Index (CFI) $\geq .96$ and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) $\leq .10$ or Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) $\leq .06$ and SRMR $\leq .10$.

Results

RQ1 inquired about which crisis response strategies were actually undertaken by stakeholders during the United Airlines Crisis. Descriptive statistics in both the pilot study and final study showed that respondents used all of these crisis response strategies to some degree. Specifically, the most used response strategy was information seeking (pilot study: $M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.08$; final study: $M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.16$) while the least used one was no response (pilot study: $M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.56$; final study: $M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.57$). The remaining strategies were used moderately: persuasion (pilot study: $M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.23$; final study: $M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.30$), consulting (pilot study: $M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.43$; final study: $M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.41$), threat (pilot study: $M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.63$; final study: $M = 4.51$, $SD = 1.61$), mobilizing (pilot study: $M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.42$; final study: $M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.48$), and partnering (pilot study: $M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.39$; final study: $M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.48$). This suggested that information was the most important need of stakeholders and stakeholders were quite active, responding and reacting in a variety of ways during the United Airlines crisis.

All the seven response strategies were significantly correlated at the .01 level with each other in both the pilot study and final study, with the exception of no response (see Table 1). No response did not correlate significantly with partnering, consulting, persuasion, and threat response strategies in both studies. No response was negatively and significantly associated with info seeking in the final study ($r = -.24$, $p < .01$) whereas the correlation in the pilot study ($r = -.18$, $p = .06$) was only borderline significant. This meant that in the United Airlines crisis, stakeholders reached out to and persuaded other affected stakeholders, but they also were willing to engage and have a dialogue with the organization to possibly find a solution to the problem, even in a crisis when the United Airlines was apparently at fault. They would rather not withdraw from communication about the crisis. Our study offered a sophisticated profile of stakeholders in crises, who used a host of active response strategies from constructive to destructive.

RQ2 dealt with the measurement validity and reliability of our instrument. We conducted EFA with Varimax rotation in the pilot study and CFA in the final study. First, Cronbach's alpha analysis suggested a necessary deletion of a threat item. All remaining items were reliable (alpha $> .80$). EFA results (see Table 2) helped us identify a seven-factor structure of stakeholder response strategies in crises, accounting for 78.10% variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure

of Sampling Adequacy value = .84, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity chi-square = 2805.60, $df=435$, $p < .00$. No items were deleted due to low or cross loadings.

CFA results (see Figure 1) in the final study further confirmed the structure. Structural equation modeling analysis showed great data-model fit: Model chi-square = 1,306.92, $df = 353$, $p < .00$; CFI = .93, SRMR = .06, RMSEA = .07. All measures loaded highly and significantly on their respective factors, with standardized factor loadings ranging from .67 to .94 and significant ($p < .05$), showing high convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1998).

To further evaluate construct validity, we calculated the amount of variance extracted. A value above .50 was desirable. The variance extracted for all seven stakeholder crisis response strategies exceeded the threshold: information seeking = .55, consult = .62, threat = .82, mobilizing = .77, partnering = .73, and no response = .80, meaning that our seven-factor framework demonstrated good construct validity.

In addition, we calculated coefficient H (Hancock & Mueller, 2001) to assess construct reliability. Ranging between 0 and 1, values above .70 for coefficient H indicate good construct reliability. Our seven-factor model exhibited high construct reliability: information seeking = .83, consult = .88, threat = .94, mobilizing = .95, partnering = .94, and no response = .93.

Discussion

This study is among the first to conceptualize and operationalize an important aspect of crisis communication research: stakeholder crisis communication strategies. We critiqued and extended existing crisis communication research by proposing a seven-strategy framework. Furthermore, data from two separate studies helped confirm that our new measuring instrument was valid and reliable in the context of the United Airlines crisis in 2017.

Theoretical and Methodological Implications

First, this pioneering study adopted a stakeholder-oriented approach by developing and examining a scale of stakeholder crisis response strategies, filling the void in extant body of knowledge in crisis communication that centers on organizational outcomes. Different from previous studies reinforcing organizational power and viewing stakeholders as negative entities (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2014), this study valued the responses from stakeholders and treated them as crucial allies to work with. For example, this study prioritized stakeholders in crises by presenting a full examination of their adopted strategies. Stakeholders are positioned as powerful entities who may significantly influence the strategic management of organizations (Fassin, 2009).

Second, this study enhanced our understanding of stakeholders and their crisis response decisions. The results of stakeholders' simultaneous use of multiple response strategies, including collaborative ones, challenge the traditional assumption of passive and hostile stakeholders, which actually helps explain from a stakeholder perspective why the more accommodative *organizational* crisis response strategies are most effective (Coombs, 2014). Notably our data also confirmed prior research that information is most desired by stakeholders in crisis and risk situations (e.g., Griffin et al., 2008; H. K. Kim & Niederdepp, 2013; Liu et al., 2013). Stakeholders in the United Airlines crisis in 2017 search for information both face to face and online. Not only did these active stakeholders search for crisis information, they also chose to engage with the organization and contribute to resolving the crisis, even when the organization United Airlines was found responsible for the crisis. While remaining hopeful and collaborative, they did not neglect to empower themselves by using persuasion and media tools to build a strong network with other affected stakeholders. They also were willing to use the threat strategy, warning the United Airlines of possible boycott and lawsuits against them. In other

words, these stakeholders in both the pilot and final study were prepared for the worst and hopeful of the best from the organization.

Relating these stakeholder crisis response strategies to organizational response strategies, we hope to remind crisis managers that today's tech-savvy stakeholders actively persuade and mobilize with fellow affected stakeholders but they are also willing to contribute to and partner with the organization to resolve the problems and end the crisis. While noting the second most frequently used organizational crisis response strategy being denial (S. Kim et al., 2009), we again confirm the usefulness of accommodative organizational responses.

Methodologically, our study represents a starting point to evaluate stakeholder crisis response strategies. Compared with previous studies investigating the crisis response strategies based on content analysis of news articles, press releases, or blogs (Ngai & Falkheimer, 2017; Stephens & Malone, 2009), this study adopted the survey method. The survey research can help collect first-hand data on participants' response strategies during a crisis. Statistical analyses such as correlations, regression, and structural equation modeling can be used easily to examine the antecedents and outcomes of stakeholders' crisis response strategies. In contrast, content analysis can only collect passive observations based on media contents (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), the data of which are difficult for advanced statistical analysis. Furthermore, data collected from the survey research are timely and maybe urgently needed in a crisis context. Especially with the rapid dissemination of information on social media platforms, the crisis response time of organizations is limited (Cheng & Cameron, 2016). The other common method of laboratory experiment of using fictitious crisis vignettes (Ma & Zhan, 2016) is also not ideal for quickly gathering stakeholders immediate emotions and behaviors. We encourage the use of survey method prior to, during, and after a crisis.

Practical Implications

As social media have empowered stakeholders and provided a convenient platform facilitating the information dissemination and transmission in a crisis situation (Cheng, 2016), it becomes important to monitor stakeholders' reactions in the crisis communication. This study found that the stakeholders response strategies were multidimensional and complex, including a variety of active response strategies from constructive to destructive. Crisis managers in the future can use our instrument of stakeholder crisis communication strategies as an effective evaluation tool before deciding on the appropriate organizational response strategies.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

Our study has a few limitations. First, this scale of stakeholder crisis response strategies was only examined in one crisis scenario and should be tested and widely applied in multiple crisis situations and contexts. For example, future studies may apply this scale in a natural crisis occurred in a non-Western context, where the political, cultural, economical environments may totally be different from the Western one. A cross-scenario or cross-cultural analysis of our scale will an interesting avenue of future research. Second, since stakeholders include both external and internal ones such as employees from organizations. Future study may adjust the scale of stakeholder crisis response strategies in internal crises to assess the generalizability of the instrument. Last but not least, this study only investigated a for-profit organization, scholars in the future may evaluate the scale with a nonprofit or governmental organization.

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Table 1.
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations (Pilot: N = 109; Final Study: N = 579)

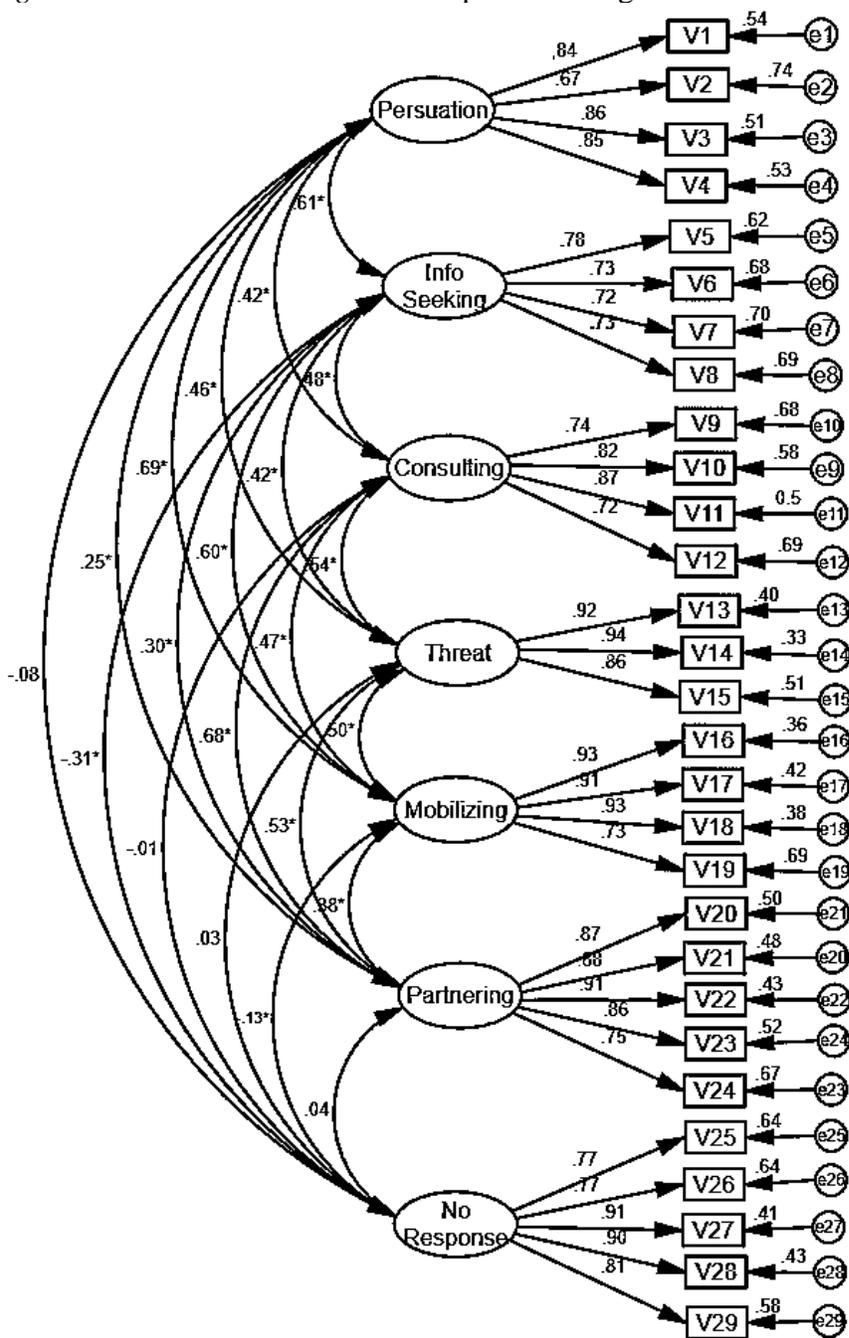
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Information Seeking	5.31 (5.29)	1.08 (1.16)	1.00						
2. Persuasion	4.59 (4.68)	1.23 (1.30)	.49** (.50**)	1.00					
3. Consulting	4.57 (4.54)	1.43 (1.41)	.43** (.39**)	.59** (.38**)	1.00				
4. Threat	4.56 (4.51)	1.63 (1.61)	.27** (.37**)	.51** (.42**)	.52** (.50**)	1.00			
5. Mobilizing	4.38 (4.49)	1.42 (1.48)	.41** (.52**)	.60** (.62**)	.59** (.43**)	.60** (.47**)	1.00		
6. Partnering	4.32 (4.41)	1.39 (1.48)	.37** (.24**)	.44** (.23**)	.60** (.62**)	.48** (.36**)	.56** (.36**)	1.00	
7. No Response	3.77 (3.53)	1.56 (1.57)	-.18 (-.24**)	.15 (-.03)	-.00 (-.02)	.06 (-.03)	.05 (-.08)	.07 (.00)	1.00

** $p < .01$. Final study results in parentheses.

Table 2.
Items, Variance Explained, EFA Factor Loadings (Pilot: N = 109)

Construct	Item	Variance Explained	Factor Loadings
Persuasion	In this situation, I would appeal to the emotions of other affected stakeholders to agree with me.		.78
	In this situation, I would provide information selectively to influence the opinions of other affected stakeholders.		.78
	In this situation, I would talk other affected stakeholders into siding with me.		.80
	In this situation, I would ask other affected stakeholders to fight against United Airlines.		.74
Info seeking	In this situation, I would find out detailed information about the crisis from other affected stakeholders.		.71
	In this situation, I would check news websites to find out relevant information.		.80
	In this situation, I would check my own social media channels to obtain relevant information.		.78
	In this situation, I would talk with my social circles (friends/relatives) to find out relevant information.		.73
Consulting	In this situation, I would indicate to United Airlines my willingness to engage with them.		.68
	In this situation, I would request from United Airlines its next steps to resolve the crisis.		.68
	In this situation, I would request to visit United Airlines to discuss solutions to the crisis.		.81
	In this situation, I would request a dialogue with United States.		.71
Threat	In this situation, I would warn United Airlines of possible boycott actions.		.82
	In this situation, I would warn United Airlines of possible protests against them.		.86
	In this situation, I would warn United Airlines of possible lawsuits against them.		.84
Mobilizing	In this situation, I would work with other stakeholders to widely expose United Airlines on our own media channels (e.g., webs, blogs, & podcast stations).		.82
	In this situation, I would work with other stakeholders to widely expose United Airlines on mainstream media.		.79
	In this situation, I would work with other stakeholders to widely expose United Airlines on social media channels.		.83
	In this situation, I would work with other stakeholders to widely expose United Airlines using text messages.		.77
Partnering	I would participate in high-level consultation hosted by United Airlines to resolve the crisis.		.81
	I would participate in campaign planning by United Airlines to resolve the crisis.		.85
	I would participate in joint problem-solving efforts by United Airlines to resolve the crisis.		.87
	I would participate in social responsibility initiatives by United Airlines to resolve the crisis.		.86
	I would participate in webinars hosted by United Airlines to resolve the crisis.		.78
No Response	In this situation, I would not be involved in any way.		.90
	In this situation, I would not engage in any way.		.89
	In this situation, I would not exchange any information with anyone about it.		.89
	In this situation, I would not comment on the crisis.		.86
	In this situation, I would not care about how United Airlines resolves the crisis.	78.10%	.84

Figure 1. The Stakeholder Crisis Response Strategies Model with CFA Results (N = 579).



Ending the Silence of Sexual Assault Victims: The #metoo Campaign on Twitter

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Abstract

A grassroots movement exploded on Twitter after actress Alyssa Milano invited users who had been sexually harassed or assaulted to tweet with the hashtag #metoo. This study examined opinion leadership within the context of social network analysis to understand how users engaged with the campaign and others on Twitter.

On October 5, 2017, the *New York Times* broke the story that film producer and executive Harvey Weinstein had for decades paid off sexual harassment accusers (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). This particular story started a grassroots movement on Twitter on October 15, 2017, after actress Alyssa Milano invited users who had been sexually harassed or assaulted to tweet with the hashtag #metoo (Milano, 2017).

Although many forms of Twitter activism are criticized for being passive expressions of solidarity with little to no follow-through, this grassroots campaign was effective on Twitter and other social media sites because it encouraged victims to end their silence and also demonstrated the extent of the problem. As a recent topic of conversation and an important social movement, it is critical to understand the role of social media in starting conversations and how influencers impact the diffusion of the topic in social media. Analyzing the #metoo campaign on Twitter is an important first step in this process.

People are turning to Twitter and other social media platforms to share political opinions, engage with other users, share personal experiences, speak directly to companies, or comment on news stories. As described by Bruns and Burgess, Twitter's "news coverage also consists of significant amounts of broader commentary on current events, reflecting mainly the sender's own perspectives and intended more as markers of those perspectives than as formal contributions to debate" (2012, pp. 805-806). Social media sites provide rich resources for scholars to study usage, engagement, and content production by individuals and organizations. Individual tweets can be studied as well as connections between users.

Literature Review

Online Social Movements

Végh (2003) classified online activism into three categories: awareness/advocacy, organization/mobilization, and action/reaction. The #metoo campaign falls into the awareness/advocacy category because it creates contrary information to raise awareness of the issue of sexual assault and harassment. Crow and Longford (2004) categorized online social movements as being conducted by 1) institutionalized groups that use online platforms as one method to share information, 2) established organizations that primarily rely on online communication, and 3) a completely online movement that mobilizes individuals around a topic. The #metoo campaign falls into the final category because it is not sponsored by any established organization, but serves to engage people on social media in a grassroots campaign to shed light on the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in society.

Online social movements have been criticized for encouraging "slacktivism." Kristofferson, White, and Peloza define slacktivism as "a willingness to perform a relatively costless, token display of support for a social cause, with an accompanying lack of willingness to devote significant effort to enact meaningful change" (2014, p. 1149). Examples of slacktivism include liking, sharing, or commenting on posts on social media platforms, sharing photos related to the campaign, signing a petition, or wearing a certain color or ribbon.

Previous studies have examined how Twitter is used for grassroots activism. Bosch (2015) studied youth activism on Twitter for the South African student-led campaign called Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF), which referenced the statue of British colonialist Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. Using a qualitative content analysis and network analysis, Bosch found that Twitter was a central place for youth participation and also helped set the agenda for traditional news coverage and public debate. The author explained how although two-way communication is a hallmark of social media, many posts were isolated comments that did not receive any engagement from other users. For the #RMF campaign, clusters of

communication were identified and communication between clusters was also noted. Bosch also found that influencers, particularly journalists and other news personalities, but also popular students and a Rhodes University professor, were at the center of many of the clusters.

In a study of library advocacy, Ewbank (2015) examined the hashtags of #savelibraries and #getESEArighT. An analysis of tweets found that both hashtags were moderately successful in reaching users outside of the “echo chamber” of people who shared similar attitudes. For both hashtags, the out-hub and spoke network was observed. The #savelibraries hashtag by the Library Campaign was able to achieve out-degree links from the central hub through a tightly-connected group that tweeted and retweeted the hashtag. The American Library Association was able to circulate the #getESEArighT hashtag, particularly because of an influential user who was retweeted 200 times.

Jackson and Foucault Welles (2015) examined early tweets with the hashtag #Ferguson in the aftermath of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Using network analysis, the researchers studied how the regular citizens, activists, and journalists engaged on this topic and concluded that regular people, not just experts and activists, can influence public debate. In this case, this finding is even more significant because the “regular people” were members of a marginalized community. This study combined quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the network of the conversation on Twitter surrounding the hashtag and also looked at the discursive trends in the early days.

Twitter Topic Network Structure Taxonomy

Researchers have studied how discussion about a topic spreads through the Twitter network. Many of these studies focus on the role of influencers. These influencers, also called opinion leaders, are critical players in the two-step flow theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). They are able to mediate between the source of a message and a broad audience through their connections to followers online.

Smith, Rainie, Shneiderman, and Himelboim (2014) identified six Twitter topic network structures. Political topics tend to divide into separate, “polarized crowds” where the groups do not interact with one another, typically dividing into liberal or conservative groups. The polarized groups will generally have prominent people or organizations at the center of the conversation, and each group is referencing a different set of influencers. The second structure is called a “tight crowd,” which refers to groups that are highly connected. Professional groups or conferences as well as people connected because of a hobby generally follow this structure. “Brand clusters” occur around products or brands as well as celebrities. Users are tweeting about the brand/celebrity but not engaging with one another. Generally, the larger the population discussing the topic, the less likely that users are connecting. The fourth structure is called a “community cluster.” Generally, major news stories will create community clusters where different hubs of conversation are formed about different audiences, influencers, and information sources. At the same time, there are still many isolates who share a tweet but then do not engage with anyone. A “broadcast network” is created when people react to what prominent news organizations or influential people tweet. People will retweet those tweets and then possibly engage with others in smaller groups. The broadcast network demonstrates the power of agenda setting and conversation starters. The final type is the “support network” where people direct tweets to accounts with large followers, such as governments, businesses, and other groups. Sometimes the purpose is to communicate a customer service issue.

Network maps are important to show how social media function in society. The maps not only demonstrate the size and composition of a population tweeting on a certain topic, but also

illustrate the key people or organizations at the center of a conversation, which is measured through centrality metrics. This study will first examine the structure of the Twitter topic network and describe it as either a polarized crowd, tight crowd, brand clusters, community clusters, broadcast network, or support network (Smith, Rainie, Shneiderman, & Himelboim, 2014). The following research question will be answered:

RQ1: What is the structure of the network map for the Twitter conversation about #metoo?

Twitter User Centrality

Feng (2015) identified five types of central users: conversation starters, influencers, active engagers, network builders, and information bridges in a study of Starbucks' #RaceTogether campaign. A "conversation starter" has a concentration of in-degree links (mentions) but few out-degree links to the network. This user initiates the conversation, but has little control over the flow of influence. The conversation starter is generally the link between many isolates who are not connected to one another. An "influencer" also has many in-degree links (retweets and mentions) and few out-degree links, but serves as an opinion leader in the network. The influencer also connects isolates. Although influencers not initiate the conversation like the conversation starter, they create tweets that are frequently retweeted. Usually, influencers are media organizations or people with special knowledge or involvement in the issue. An "active engager" has many out-degree links (mentions of other users). This user will participate in the discussion and engage with other users. The "network builder" has few out-degree links and few or no in-degree links. The purpose of a network builder is to connect two influencers in a network. Finally, an "information bridge" connects an influencer with an active engager. For example, this user might retweet an influencer's tweet and then an active engager will retweet the tweet from the information bridge.

This study will determine the most central users in the campaign and classify them as either conversation starters, influencers, active engagers, network builders, or information bridges (Feng, 2015). This analysis will answer the following research question.

RQ2: Who are the most central users in the #metoo campaign on Twitter?

Conversational Tools on Twitter

Twitter users have access to a range of conversational tools to engage with others on the platform. First, users can reply to a user's tweet using the reply button under the tweet. Users can also either retweet or "retweet with comment" with the retweet button. A retweet presents the tweet in its original form to the retweeter's followers in their timelines. A "retweet with comment" also presents the tweet to the retweeter's followers, but additional commentary can be added by the retweeters. Finally, users can mention another user with the @ symbol plus the Twitter handle of that other user. Hashtags (using the # sign in addition to a keyword or keywords) allow users to follow and view a conversation stream around a topic, which might include a major news event, a television show, a political candidate, a marketing campaign, an emergency or crisis, or a grassroots campaign, among many other reasons.

A study by Chung (2016) on a smoking cessation campaign found that many tweets in the sample were retweets, which were more commonly used by individuals and non-profit organizations than for-profit and media organizations. The mention tool had low use, particularly by individuals and the media, although non-profit and for-profit organizations were more likely to use mentions. Replying was the least used conversational tool. This tool was more likely to be used by governmental organizations and individuals than for-profit and non-profit organizations. Hashtags were used extensively by users, with almost three-quarters of tweets using at least one

hashtag. Non-profits and for-profit organizations were more likely to use hashtags than individuals and media organizations. The researchers concluded that government and non-profit organizations posted the highest number of original tweets and others, including individuals and for-profit organizations, were critical to the dissemination of the messages through retweeting, even though their follower counts were lower. Additionally, the fact that individuals were less likely to use a hashtag suggested that campaigners could promote it more vigorously. The low rates of mention and reply functions demonstrate the inability of the campaign to generate true two-way communication.

In a study of tweets related to the online campaign Movember, Jacobson and Mascaro (2016) found that almost half of the tweets contained a URL; approximately 60 percent used a hashtag or a mention, with many using both; and that almost 13 percent used a mention as the first word in the tweet, indicating a conversational tweet. Almost one-third of tweets were retweets. The researchers concluded that participants were more focused on broadcasting content than engaging with other participants, as suggested by the low percentage of tweets that start with a mention.

This study will answer the following research question about conversational Twitter tools:

RQ3: How extensive were the use of conversational Twitter tools such as URLs, retweeting, mentions, and retweets with comments?

Content of Tweets

Many studies examine the content of tweets to determine how users are talking about the topic. In a study of more than three million Zika-related tweets, content disseminated and amplified by journalists and the news media was found to center on public health updates, actions, and advice, and not on prevention measures (Vijaykumar, Nowak, Himelboim, & Jin, 2017). To examine the content of such a large data set, the researchers searched the tweets for keywords rather than coding each individual tweet.

RQ4: What keywords were most commonly used in #metoo tweets?

Conversation Peaks and Valleys

Finally, this study will look at the conversation over time and answer the following research question.

RQ5: What were the trends in the conversation peaking and then fading?

Methodology

Twitter offers a directed network, where users not only choose to follow other users (and those users may not necessarily return the follow), but also retweet or comment on tweets from other users or mention other users in their tweets. Another important conversational tool is a reply, which is a message directed at a specific user. Directed networks can be viewed in terms of two degree metrics: in-degree and out-degree. In-degree measures the incoming edges (retweets, replies, or mentions) to a vertex (Twitter account) and out-degree measures the outgoing edges from a vertex. When a Twitter user is referenced in the tweets of others (mentions), has tweets retweeted or quoted by others, and has replies to his or her tweets, the in-degree metric will be increased. When a Twitter user mentions, replies, or retweets other users, the out-degree metric for that user will be increased (Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2010).

Tweets were collected using Sysomos, a social media analytics service that provides access to the Twitter API. Data collection started at 3 p.m. EST on October 15, 2017, 21 minutes before Milano sent her tweet, and continued for one week until 3 p.m. on October 22, 2017. From October 15 until October 22, 1,589,890 #metoo tweets in the English language were

posted. Searches were conducted on Sysomos throughout the time period, and from each set of results, a 10 percent sample was randomly extracted through Sysomos and exported to a CSV file. (No more than 50,000 results could be exported from any given search so each search had to generate 500,000 or fewer tweets to reach the 10 percent sample.) The total sample size was 158,773, approximately 10 percent of the population of tweets. T2G (Tags to Gephi), a Python program created by Deen Freelon, was used to extract retweets and mentions from the data set and eliminate singletons. The program stripped the tweets of all information with the exception of the username of the sender and the usernames of any Twitter accounts mentioned in the tweet, whether a retweet, reply, or mention. If a tweet used two or more @ symbols, it was separated into separate edges. After running T2G, the sample had 171,486 edges. The data set was then loaded into NodeXL and the data were prepared by merging duplicate edges (a Twitter user who mentioned the same Twitter account more than once), which reduced the sample to 162,715 edges and 125,506 vertices (i.e., nodes). Because NodeXL was not capable of handling such a large data set, 12.5 percent of the data set was randomly selected in Excel (n=20,404). Then, remaining isolates (n=49) that were not removed from the T2G process were deleted, followed by a removal of insignificant edges where the two nodes in the edge both had degrees of 1 (n=3,431) (e.g. where one user had only mentioned one other user who was not mentioned by any other user) for a total sample of 16,924.

Results

Network map

The structure of the network map for the Twitter conversation about #metoo can be described as a broadcast network. Many of the users in the sample are retweeted or mentioning tweets from prominent people and organizations related to the #metoo cause and as well as media organizations. Users are more connected to the hub news source, without connecting to one another. They are, however, mentioning many several users across individual tweets or in the same time. For example, a popular tweet and retweet mentions both @womensmarch and @TaranaBurke. Figure 1 shows a Fruchterman-Reingold graph clustered into groups using the Clauset-Newman-Moore algorithm with each group in its own box. Gephi was used to visualize the data in another way. Figure 2 shows the users with the most mentions or retweets surrounded by the many accounts that mentioned or retweeted them.

Central users

Five types of central users were identified in the sample including a conversation starter, active engagers, influencers, network builders, and an information bridge.

Conversation starter. Although Alyssa Milano's original tweet is not included in this data set because she tweeted "me too" instead of "#metoo," the hashtag analyzed in this study, her tweet served as the conversation starter. As of March 2018, her original tweet had been retweeted more than 24,000 times, likely with the majority of these retweets occurring within hours and days after her tweet was posted. An examination on Sysomos showed that it was Milano's tweet prior to 4 p.m. on October 15, 2017 that started the spike in conversation.

Active engager. An active engager is an account that vigorously retweets and mentions other users. The top five engagers included @Youareonradar, which calls out harassment on Twitter, (out-degree = 121), @rjakes65, an anti-Trump account with a logo that says "resist" (out-degree = 26), rapper Alsace Bowdry (out-degree = 18), author Dewayne Watts (out-degree = 16), and @milknturing, the account for a book about Harvey Milk and Alan Turin (out-degree = 16).

Influencer. An influencer is a central user who is retweeted or mentioned frequently in others' tweets. The top five influencers included @womensmarch (in-degree = 727), journalist Alexis

Benveniste (@apbenven with an in-degree = 658), @alyssa_milano (the conversation starter with an in-degree = 441), gymnast McKayla Maroney (@mckaylamaroney with an in-degree = 400), and nationally syndicated radio host and NRA spokeswoman Dana Loesch (@dloesch with an in-degree = 292). All these influencers are in the top 13 of users in terms of betweenness centrality, which indicates they are often the shortest path to connect two nodes.

Network builder.

A network builder mentions or retweets tweets from influencers and as a result, can build high betweenness centrality. @Stopthestatute is an account that created six tweets, with many of them directed at influencers, such as The New Agenda President Amy Siskind (@amy_siskind), feminist/writer @rvawonk, CNN, and the *New York Times*. @Stopthestatute was 12th in terms of betweenness centrality (betweenness = 9594132). In another example of a network builder, @Goodluckbeer created only two tweets, but one tweet mentioned CNN and the other mentioned gymnast McKayla Maroney, two influencers. The account was 14th in terms of betweenness centrality (betweenness = 5975326).

Information bridge.

An information bridge will transmit content from an influencer to an active engager. User @rjakes65 is the best example in the sample of an information bridge. Although the sample contains 26 tweets/retweets sent by @rjakes65 directed to or from influential users, the full data set from Sysomos shows although not the most active engager, other Twitter users did engage with this user through mentions and retweets. Table 1 shows the top central users.

Conversational Tools

The #metoo movement on Twitter spread through a high percentage of retweets or quoted tweets, at 59.6 percent of tweets, as shown in Figure 3. Mentioning users through an @Reply occurred for 5.1 percent of tweets and original tweets accounted for 35.3 percent of tweets. Finally, 41.2 percent of tweets (n=695,760) included a link.

Prominent Keywords

The word cloud and its corresponding table were analyzed to find the most common keywords (see Figure 4). Keywords from the word cloud table were then grouped with similar keywords and searched in the full data set (see Table 2). Searching the complete data set for keywords provides an efficient way to analyze the text.

Not surprisingly, tweets were most likely to mention women, sexual harassment or assault, rape, and sharing stories. Tweets also mentioned victims or survivors, their bravery, and taking a stand. The words “owe” and “reminder” were used in a popular tweet that countered the #metoo movement by serving as a reminder that victims do not owe their story to anyone else. President Trump was mentioned in tweets mostly related to women who have accused him of sexual assault and rape. This process was repeated for just original tweets and replies, excluding retweets. Figure 5 shows the word cloud for the original tweets and replies. New words in the table included men, believe/think/feel, time, years, abuse, alone, post, campaign, problem, happened, and life (see Table 3).

Conversation Trends

The conversation during the first week of the #metoo grassroots campaign showed a quick ascent on the second day and then a quick descent. During that week, there were no breaking news stories to generate new conversation on the topic (see Figure 6). Between October 22, 2017, and March 4, 2018, #metoo has peaked on several dates, including in 2017 on November 16 and December 6, and in 2018 on January 8, January 20, and January 29, but none of the peaks are as high as the initial level of conversation on this topic.

Discussion

The #metoo campaign provided a case study of a grassroots online social movement. This movement generated a large number of tweets in a short period of time, but those who tweeted were less likely to share personal stories than show solidarity with the movement and appreciation for the tweets of influencers through retweets. Twitter might be an appropriate vehicle for generating awareness of a cause or issue, but less useful for connecting with others over personal experiences. The network map, which was described as a broadcast map, and the most prominent central users for the campaign, such as Women's March, Alyssa Milano, Tarana Burke (who started the "Me Too" campaign more than 10 years ago), journalists, and other celebrities, support the idea that many Twitter users sharing content with the #metoo hashtag were retweeting and directing tweets to key people and organizations. On Twitter, as this study demonstrates, there are agenda setters and influencers who direct conversation and can have a powerful impact on the nature of the conversation. Comparing #metoo to recent movements like #neveragain demonstrates how #metoo needs to move beyond expressing support and speaking out about sexual assault and harassment to more actionable items, including legislation.

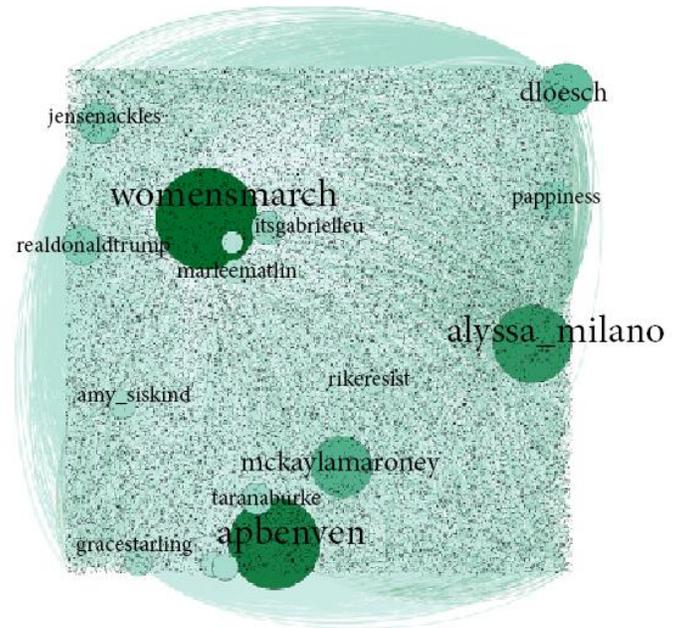
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Figure 1
Network Map (NodeXL)

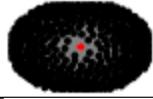
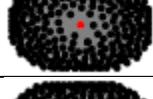
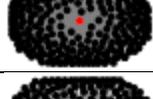
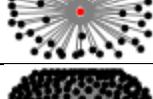
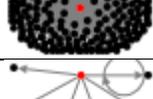
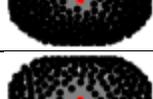
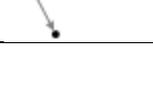


Figure 2
Network Map (Gephi)



*Note: This network map was created by the
USF Advanced Visualization Center*

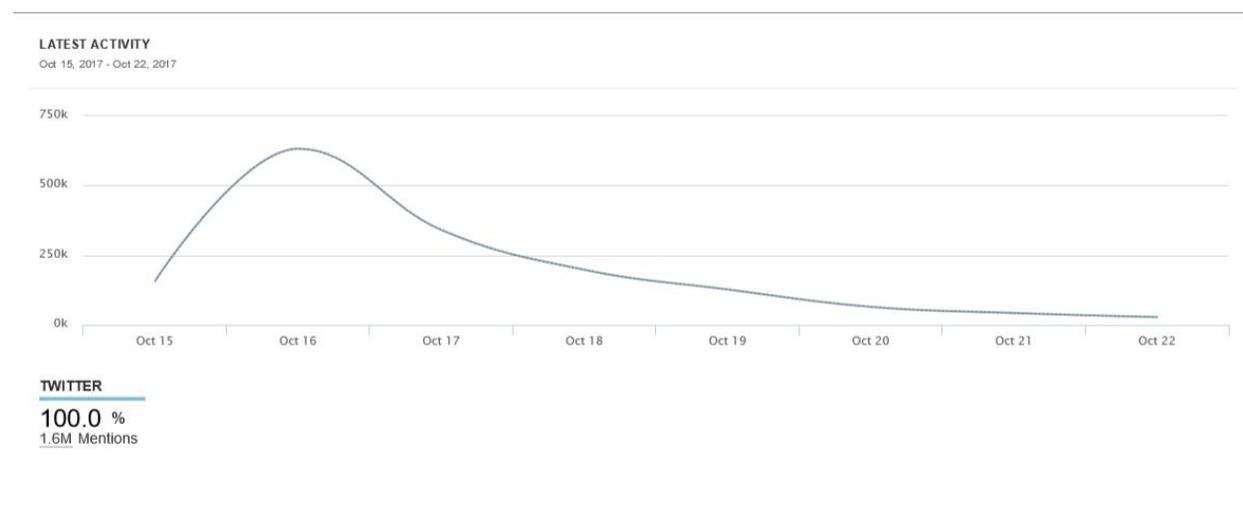
Table 1
Top 14 Central Users in #metoo Campaign (Plus Two Other Notable Central Users)

Rank	User	Subgraph	In-degree	Out-degree	Betweenness Centrality
1	@womensmarch		727	1	27566393.111
2	@alyssa_milano		441	0	25202032.241
3	@taranaburke		196	1	18288767.995
4	@apbenven		658	0	17726930.543
5	@rvawonk		45	0	13189957.848
6	@amy_siskind		173	6	12444791.913
7	@pappiness		267	0	12065399.270
8	@dloesch		292	1	11074187.053
9	@realdonaldtrump		241	0	11060448.434
10	@cnn		53	0	10520179.679
11	@itsgabriellev		234	0	10174493.190
12	@stopthestatute		0	6	9594132.379
13	@mckaylamaroney		400	0	8374647.488
14	@jensenackles		265	0	8102555.631
18	@goodluckbeer		0	2	5975326.617

Post	8,078
Campaign	9,544
Problem	9,130
Happened	9,086
Life	6,990

Note: Because some tweets mention more than one keyword, the total exceeds the population.

Figure 6
Timeline of #metoo Tweets from October 15-22, 2017



The Influence of Organizational Environment on Corporate Messages of Japanese Companies

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Abstract

Organizations collect information needed for decision-making through multiple boundary spanning units that communicate with the environment, including public relations and other departments in an organization. Thus, organizations must integrate and coordinate information to reconcile their goals with stakeholders' various expectations. Drawing on organization theory, this study examines how organizational environment affects public relations activities and products. More specifically, I investigate relationships among organizational environments (need for integration), public relations practitioners' involvement in the integration process, and the quality of Japanese companies' corporate messages. The sample comprises 30 major Japanese manufacturing companies. Each company's environmental condition and the quality of its corporate messages are measured using publicly available data, including annual securities reports and news releases. The findings suggest a possible influence of the organizational environment on corporate messages. However, the relationship between practitioners' involvement in the integration process and message quality is relatively weak. I discuss the moderating effect of practitioners' involvement in the integration process and practical implications.

Keywords: organization-environment relationships, contingency theory, boundary spanners, integration process, corporate messages

The public relations literature often emphasizes that “public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness when it helps reconcile the organization’s goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies” (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992, p. 86). However, these constituencies include various stakeholders who hold different interests and expectations, such as employees, customers, shareholders and investors, local communities, suppliers, and government. Moreover, these expectations are collected not only by public relations but also by communicators in other departments, such as human resources, sales and marketing, production, research and development (R&D), purchasing, and legal. This requires organizations to integrate or coordinate all information collected by such communicators to make the right decisions. However, little research in this field has focused on the integration/coordination process.

Organizational studies emphasize integration. Because the relationship between organization and environment has been a central theme in organizational studies, the literature acknowledges that the “need for integration” varies depending on an organization’s internal and external environments. For example, the size of an organization directly affects its structure, including its number of subunits (departments). Environmental uncertainty, another factor, increases the amount of information that decision-makers must process and may even require more specialized departments. Thus, environmental uncertainty affects organizations’ structure, strategies, and resource allocations (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Galbraith, 1974; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967a; Thompson, 1967).

The integration required from environment is likely to affect public relations’ internal communication activities. The integration process fosters better understanding of diverse stakeholders’ expectations and provides details about an organization’s decisions. Thus, the involvement in the integration process may alter the substance of corporate messages. Using the theoretical frameworks of organizational contingency theory and organizational information processing theory, this study examines the relationships among organizational environments, public relations practitioners’ involvement in the integration process, and the quality of corporate messages in Japan.

Organization–Environment Relationships

Perspectives from Organizational Studies

Organizational contingency theory emerged during the 1950s and attracted considerable attention. The basic idea is that there is no one best way to manage an organization. Early studies include Dill (1958), Burns and Stalker (1961), Lawrence and Lorsch (1967a, 1967b), Thompson (1967), and Duncan (1972), who established a clear empirical proposition about “fit” between

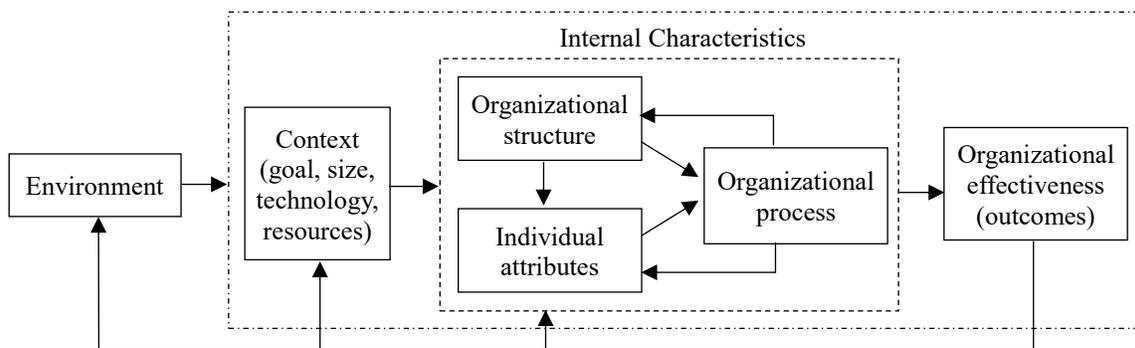


Figure 1. Integrated Contingency Model of Organizational Phenomena. Adapted from Nonaka et al. (2013, p. 14) and Translated into English.

organizations and environments. Figure 1 shows major internal and external environmental constructs examined by researchers in contingency studies.

Following Nonaka, Kagono, Komatsu, Okumura, and Sakashita (2013, p. 19), major environmental constructs include general, task, interorganizational, and enacted environments. The organizational structure includes the organizational climate, and individual attributes include needs, motivation, personality, and value. The organizational process includes power, conflict resolution, leadership, decision-making, integration, coordination, control, communication, boundary spanning, and organizational change. Organizational effectiveness includes goal attainment, adaptation, innovation, integration and latency, satisfaction, identification, and alienation.

Researchers have focused largely on “task environment,” which is “(t)he selectively perceived slice of reality which confronts the organization” and “includes only those environmental elements consistent with the more narrowly construed goals of the organization” (Segal, 1974, p. 212). Lawrence and Lorsch (1967a) defined an organization as “a system of interrelated behaviors of people who are performing a task that has been differentiated into several distinct subsystems, each subsystem performing a portion of the task, and the efforts of each being integrated to achieve effective performance of the system” (p. 3).

Lawrence and Lorsch (1967a) focused on “differentiation” and “integration” as important factors that affect organizational effectiveness. The former is defined as “the state of segmentation of the organizational system into subsystems, each of which tends to develop particular attributes in relation to the requirements posed by its relevant external environment” (pp. 3-4) and the latter “as the process of achieving unity of effort among the various subsystems in the accomplishment of the organization’s task” (p. 4). Lawrence and Lorsch (1967a, 1967b) examined firms’ patterns of differentiation and integration, specifically, differences in formal structures, members’ goal orientations, time orientations, and interpersonal orientations, and the means of achieving integration. They found that firms whose patterns of “differentiation and integration” matched the requirements of their external environment tended to achieve higher performance.

Galbraith’s (1973, 1974) information processing model emphasized that firms must build organizational structures that can process uncertainties. This model considers the “fit” between an organization’s information processing capabilities and its need to handle information. Galbraith (1974) stated that organizations can act either to reduce the amount of information that must be processed or increase their capacity to handle more information, and that they must consider the cost of each strategy. He then offered two methods to reduce the need for information and two methods to increase processing capacity (pp. 29-30).

Although these early studies were criticized because of their static nature, they became the foundation for later studies that focused on more dynamic and strategic processes of organizational adaptation and survival.

Public relations Studies on Organization–Environment Relationships

Public relations researchers have referenced or cited the above literature (e.g., J. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig, 1987, 1992; Grunig & Grunig, 1989; Grunig et al., 1992; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992; Okura, Dozier, Sha, & Hofstetter, 2008; Schneider, 1985). However, they discussed mainly public relations’ behaviors, perceptions, and departmental characteristics with little attention to other communicators’ contribution to an organization’s effectiveness. Much of empirical studies measured environmental conditions with public relations practitioners’ perception. However, top managers who decide organizational strategies and resource allocations

may perceive the environment differently as Lawrence and Lorsch (1967a) argued that each subsystem (department) in an organization “copes with its respective segment of the total external environment” and “develops particular attribute which would be predictably related to characteristics of its relevant external environment” (p. 5). This might be one of the reasons that researchers (e.g., Grunig & Grunig, 1989; Schneider, 1985) found only weak relationships between environmental factors and public relations’ behaviors. On the other hand, Lauzen and Dozier (1992), who also collected data from public relations practitioners but used improved measurement, provided the evidence that environmental factors influence public relations practice (manager role enactment). Then researchers paid more attention to internal factors such as power balance (departmental arrangement) and support from the dominant coalition (e.g., Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

More recently, Okura et al. (2008), who examined relationships among the environment (as perceived by public relations practitioners), public relations activities (including boundary spanning roles such as environmental scanning), individual attributes, and decision-making of top management, found that “perceived environmental conditions were less important to management decision-making than how those conditions were translated or packaged as decision-making inputs through formal environmental scanning mechanisms.” (p. 51). The public relations literature often emphasizes the importance of both environmental scanning and reporting methods but rarely discusses (if public relations failed to do so) how organizations respond to their environment, nor how public relations practitioners collaborate with communicators in other departments to scan the environment. Indeed, while Lawrence and Lorsch (1967b) were concerned with conflict between subsystems (departments) who perform a portion of the task, Okura et al. (2008) focused on conflict between an organization and the public.

Suda and Miyabe (2016) investigated differences in public relations practice between business-to-business (B2B) companies and business-to-consumer (B2C) companies in Japan. Because these two types of companies address different groups of stakeholders meaning that they face different types of environment, this can be a factor that affects public relations activities and products. Suda and Miyabe (2016) examined practitioners’ communication efforts by focusing on corporate messages and user interface functions on the corporate websites. They found that the effort to express internally shared corporate values in external messages vary greatly among B2B companies. Although the authors suggested some other factors which influence corporate messages including organizations’ stakeholder-management capabilities and cooperation across departments, no evidence has been presented.

The term “boundary spanner”, which is often used to describe public relations roles, was developed originally in organizational studies. The roles include absorbing uncertainty from external environments to protect an organization’s technical core (Thompson, 1967), processing different types of information from external environments (Aldrich & Herker, 1977), and representing the organization in a favorable light to enhance its legitimacy and attract needed resources (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Daft, 1998). Importantly, the literature states that an organization has multiple boundary spanners (e.g., purchasing, sales, R&D, customer support, human resources, labor, and legal). However, as mentioned earlier, little research in the public relations field has considered other communicators’ contribution to an organization’s effectiveness, nor has it discussed public relations’ contribution in the “integration” process.

Assuming that the environment causes a need for integration, which affects public relations’ internal communication activities (such as involvement in the integration process) and

its products (such as corporate messages), this study addresses the following research questions:

- H1:** How are environmental conditions that likely affect the “need for integration” related to the quality of corporate messages?
- H2:** How does involvement in the integration process affect the quality of corporate messages?

Method

As a first step, this paper addresses the research questions by performing a quantitative analysis with publicly available data.

The Sample and Data Collection

To examine practitioners’ efforts to respond to dynamically changing environment, I focused on the fiscal years 2007 through 2015, which include two major events that affected Japanese companies and the public: the 2008 global financial crisis and the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake.

The sample consists of 30 major Japanese manufacturing companies. This study focused on manufacturing companies because stakeholders of manufacturing versus non-manufacturing companies have different expectations. For example, most manufacturing companies try to build good relationships with their multiple suppliers of materials and parts. These companies also have to consider their relationships with community residents near their plants. The companies in my research conform to the following criteria: (1) they must be listed as a major company in each industry category listed in *The Japan Company Handbook* (Kaisha-shiki-ho) (Toyo Keizai, 2017) and (2) they must have disclosed their annual securities reports (*Yukashoken hokokusho*) for fiscal years 2007–2015 and provided news releases available on their websites. As described later, these data were used to measure each company’s environmental condition and the quality of their corporate messages.

Annual securities reports were downloaded from the Electronic Disclosure for Investors’ NETwork (EDINET) site, and news releases were collected from the selected companies’ websites, comprising a total of 270 annual securities reports and 37,525 news releases issued between 2007 and 2015. Statistical analysis was performed using R (x64) version 3.4.3. A quantitative content analysis was performed using KH coder¹² version 2.00f.

Measurement

Environmental Conditions

To measure each company’s environmental condition, I used data from each company’s annual securities report, including number of employees at the end of FY2015, which represents the organization’s size, and two types of financial data: R&D expenses and capital expenditures for the entire nine-year period. These financial data are often treated as indicators of decision-makers’ perceived environmental uncertainty (PEU) in studies of organization, management, finance, accounting, and economics. Although some researchers (e.g., Keller, Slocum, & Susman, 1974; Pennings, 1975; Pfeffer & Leblebici, 1973) developed objective measures of environmental uncertainty, subjective measures such as the perception of an organization’s members have been more commonly used. Ghosh and Olsen (2009, p. 193) noted that “unlike

¹² A free software program for quantitative content analysis developed by Koichi Higuchi, an associate professor of Social Sciences at Ritsumeikan University, Japan. Available at <http://khc.sourceforge.net/en/>. I used this program to perform a morphological analysis (word segmentation and part-of-speech tagging), merge files, count word frequency, and calculate the proportion of files that contain keywords.

sales, technological characteristics [i.e., R&D and capital expenditures] are more of a response by management to the external environment than as opposed to a direct measure of environmental uncertainty.”

However, relationships between each financial indicator and PEU are different. In general, R&D strengthens firms’ innovative capability and competitiveness in an uncertain environment. Therefore, R&D expenses relate positively to environmental uncertainty. On the other hand, firms attempt to avoid irreversible investments in an uncertain environment, attempting instead to postpone or annually adjust capital investment, a process more difficult to accomplish with R&D spending. Therefore, capital expenditures relate negatively to uncertainty. In addition, fluctuation in each financial indicator represents an unstable environment. Because capital expenditures are a relatively short-term investment and R&D expenses are relatively long-term, correlation between the two indicators would represent a stable environment. Moreover, the literature acknowledges that R&D spending has a substantially greater impact on a firm’s risk capital expenditures (Kothari, Laguerre, & Leone, 1999) and “R&D investment by large firms is less responsive to uncertainty” (Czarnitzki & Toole, 2013, p. 16). Based on the above, I used four variables listed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Indicators of Environmental Conditions

Variable		Measured as
UC_RD	Uncertainty	Average ratio of R&D expenses to sales over the nine-year period.
UC_CE	Uncertainty	Average ratio of capital expenditures to sales over the nine-year period (an opposite effect)
IS_COV	Instability	Square of the correlation coefficient between UC_RD and UC_CE over the nine-year period (an opposite effect)
SIZE	Size of organization	Natural log of the number of employees (at the end of FY2015)

Quality of Messages

Creating messages is often regarded as a technician role. However, this study does not merely examine practitioners’ writing ability, rather examines the quality of messages in connection with the writer’s understanding of corporate values and stakeholders’ expectations. The quality of corporate messages was determined using two variables. One was message consistency (MC). Applying a method that I developed in previous studies (Suda & Miyabe, 2014, 2016), I assessed how well news releases convey corporate values, which form the basis of organizational decisions to a broad range of stakeholders. The second variable was FIT between decision-makers’ PEU and MC. Combined with an environmental variable, I examined how dynamically news releases reflect changes in decision-makers’ PEU. This variable is important because it is likely to indicate the degree of public relations’ involvement in the integration process.

I used two types of official corporate documents to measure MC. One was annual securities reports which are supposed to contain a company’s mission, vision, goals, and internally shared corporate values. More specifically, in the “Business Overview” section (Item 2 in Part I), organizations provide the following information: (1) overview of business results, (2) overview of production, orders received, and sales, (3) management policy, business

environment, and future tasks, (4) risk factors, (5) material agreements, (6) R&D activities, and (7) analyses of the company's consolidated financial position, operating results, and cash flows. In my previous studies (Suda & Miyabe, 2014, 2016), I used core documents, such as mission and vision statements, corporate philosophy, and codes of conduct. However, these documents are not always available on companies' websites. Some companies have only one or two documents, and their length differs from company to company. Annual securities reports, though, solved this problem, because they are filed electronically in the Investors' Network (EDINET) system and all companies use the same format. These reports are often used in management, organization, financial, accounting, and economics studies for several purposes (e.g., Fukui & Ushijima, 2007; Hennart, 1991; Rose & Ito, 2008). Thus, these documents help determine keywords that represent corporate values.

The other source was external messages that convey corporate values to stakeholders. I chose news releases as conveyors not only because they have been widely used as a communication tool to reach multiple audiences (Vorvoreanu, 2008) but also because they continue to play a traditional role in communicating with the media. This is especially true for Japanese companies. Unlike companies in other countries, Japanese companies do not usually have a website section designed for the media, such as a "Press Room." Instead, they place news releases in the corporate information section. In other words, news releases address all visitors and a broad audience, making them ideal material for my study.

Each company's MC was measured using a quantitative content analysis of the official documents described above, with a KH coder. The steps were as follows. First, I compiled a list of frequently used verbs that express an organization's goals, mission, vision, plans, or values, such as aim, address, challenge, try, insist, and others. Second, I determined the five most frequently occurring nouns with a list of verbs in the "Business Overview" section of each company's individual annual securities report as keywords (excluding proper nouns and commonly used nouns such as corporation, customers, or year). Third, for each company, by dividing the number of news releases that contain any of the keywords by the total number of news releases, I calculated the proportion of news releases that contain these keywords annually. Proportional data were arcsine transformed prior to the analysis.

Another variable (FIT) was measured by calculating the square of the correlation coefficient between MC and UC_CE, which represents decision-makers' PEU during the nine-year period. I chose UC_CE as an environmental variable because capital expenditures are a relatively short-term, annually adjustable investment, as mentioned earlier. Table 2 lists the two variables that indicate the quality of corporate messages.

Table 2. *Indicators of Message Quality*

Variable	Measured as
QM_MC	Message consistency Ratio of the number of news releases that contain keywords extracted from annual securities report to the total number of news releases (calculated annually).
QM_FIT	Fit between PEU and MC The square of the correlation coefficient between UC_CE and QM_MC over the nine-year period.

Findings

Overall Relationships between Environmental Conditions that Likely Affect the Need for Integration and the Quality of Corporate Messages

To examine overall relationships between environmental conditions and corporate messages, I tested the two hypotheses. These hypotheses concerned the influence of environmental factors on each indicator of quality of messages: message consistency (QM_MC) and fit between environment and messages (QM_FIT). Under uncertain environmental conditions, organizations need more support from their stakeholders, and as mentioned earlier, “need for integration” likely increases public relations practitioners’ involvement in the integration process. Thus, positive relationships between environmental factors and both QM variables are expected. This led to the following hypothesis.

H1: Environmental factors that likely increase “need for integration” are positively related to both message quality indicators.

However, on one hand, achieving (and maintaining) a higher level of QM_MC requires a deep understanding of a company’s corporate values and communication goals and an ability to express these values in messages. On the other hand, achieving a higher level of QM_FIT might be more difficult under uncertain environmental conditions, because this variable measures how dynamically corporate messages reflect changes in decision-makers’ PEU. These changes are likely to be greater under uncertain environmental conditions than under less uncertain ones. This led to the following hypothesis.

H2: The two indicators of message quality are weakly related.

The relationships were examined by Pearson’s correlation analysis. As shown in Table 3, the ratio of R&D expenses to sales (UC_RD) and the size of organization (SIZE) were positively related to both QM variables. Other two environmental variables, the ratio of capital expenditures to sales (UC_CE) and the square of the correlation coefficient between UC_RD and UC_CE (IS_COV), were negatively related to both QM variables, because these variables indicate stable and/or less uncertain environment which does not require a high level of “integration”. Thus, the result indicates that environmental factors that likely increase “need for increase” were positively related to both message quality indicators. However, as expected, the correlation between QM_MC and QM_FIT was relatively weak ($r = .20, p = .30$). Thus, H1 and H2 were both supported.

Table 3. *Summary of Correlations between Environmental and QM Variables*

	QM_MC	UC_RD	UC_CE	IS_COV	SIZE	QM_FIT	ENFI
QM_MC	1						
UC_RD	.29	1					
UC_CE	-.43 *	-.03	1				
IS_COV	-.37 +	-.07	-.14	1			
SIZE	.33 +	.45 *	-.19	-.19	1		
QM_FIT	.20	.37 +	-.15	-.15	.40 *	1	
ENFI	.45 *	.79 **	-.38 *	-.11	.85 **	.46 *	1

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .1$.

One pharmaceutical company was excluded from the analysis because its UC_RD was much larger than that of other companies.

Differences in Quality of Corporate Messages Between the Two Groups, Divided According to the Environmental Condition

To closely examine the relationships among environment, public relations practitioners' involvement in the integration process, and the quality of corporate messages, I constructed a variable named estimated need for integration (ENFI). This is a composite measure of environmental condition, developed by applying a principal component analysis to the three variables (UC_RD, UC_CE, and SIZE). ENFI was constructed as a linear combination of the three variables by using eigenvector of the first principal component as the corresponding weight. The first principal component explains 50% of the total variance. Each company's ENFI was computed as:

$$\text{ENFI} = 0.648 \times \text{UC_RD} + (-0.307) \times \text{UC_CE} + 0.697 \times \text{SIZE}$$

With this variable, I divided sample companies into two groups according to the level of ENFI. Table 4 shows means and standard deviations of environmental variables in each group and the results of *t*-test. Although differences in UC_CE and IS_COV were not significant, means of both variable were larger in the group of companies with a low level of ENFI whose environment is likely to be stable and/or less uncertain.

Table 4. Means and Standard deviations of Environmental Variables with Different Levels of ENFI and Test Results

Variable	Level of ENFI		<i>t</i> test result		
	High (n = 14) M (SD)	Low (n =15) M (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
UC_RD	0.24 (0.03)	0.18 (0.03)	5.77	27	.00 (< .001)
UC_CE	0.22 (0.04)	0.24 (0.04)	-1.31	27	.20 (n.s.)
IS_COV	0.17 (0.16)	0.18 (0.21)	-0.13	27	.90 (n.s.)
SIZE	5.11 (0.29)	4.52 (0.35)	4.92	27	.00 (< .001)

The third and fourth hypotheses concerned differences in message quality between the two groups of companies. The companies whose environment require a high level of ENFI are likely to achieve higher scores in message quality (QM_MC) than those with a lower level of ENFI. However, for the reason mentioned above, the two groups' QM_FIT might be similar. This led to the following hypotheses:

H3: The QM_MC of companies with a higher level of ENFI is greater than that of companies with a lower level of ENFI.

H4: The difference in QM_FIT (the possible degree of public relations practitioners' involvement in the integration process) between the two groups is small.

The third hypothesis was examined by comparing the means of QM_MC between the group with a high level of ENFI and that with a low level of ENFI. As expected, the former group had a larger QM_MC mean score than the latter group. Because the assumption of homogeneity of variances was not confirmed with Bartlett's test, the fourth hypothesis was tested by Welch's *t* test. Although the group with a high level of ENFI had a higher mean score in QM_FIT than that with a low level of ENFI, no significant difference in QM_FIT was found between the two groups. On the other hand, there was a significant difference in QM_MC. This was tested by Student's *t*-test after confirming the assumption of homogeneity of variances with Bartlett's test. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Means and Standard deviations of QM Variables with Different Levels of ENFI and Test Results

Variable	Level of ENFI		Bartlett's test of the homogeneity of variances			t test (Welch's t test for QM_FIT)		
	High (n = 14) M (SD)	Low (n=15) M (SD)	K-squared	df	p	t	df	p
QM_MC	0.97 (0.12)	0.85 (0.14)	0.31	1	.58 (n.s.)	2.46	27	.02 (< .05)
QM_FIT	0.23 (0.22)	0.14 (0.12)	4.71	1	.03 (< .05)	0.15	19.69	.23 (n.s.)

Differences in the Strength of Relationships among Environment, Organizational Process, and Quality of Corporate Messages between the Two Groups

Lastly I examined the strength of relationships among three variables: need for integration (ENFI), public relations' (possible) involvement in the integration process (QM_FIT), and message quality (QM_MC). No hypothesis test was conducted because I have not confirmed whether QM_FIT actually represents practitioners' involvement in the integration process. Here, I report the results of Pearson's correlation analysis. The correlation between ENFI and QM_FIT in the group with a high level of ENFI ($r = .63, p < .05$) was stronger than that in the group with a low level of ENFI ($r = .36, p = .20$). The correlation between ENFI and QM_MC was not significant in both groups but the group with a high level of ENFI ($r = .29, p = .31$) showed stronger correlation than did the group with a low level of ENFI ($r = .14, p = .62$). However, no correlation between QM_MC and QM_FIT was found in the group with a high level of ENFI ($r = .02, p = .96$) whereas there was a weak correlation between the variables in the group with a low level of ENFI ($r = .27, p = .33$). These results suggest that although public relations practitioners in the company whose environment requires a high level of integration are likely to participate more in the integration process if the demand from environment is higher, participating in the process would not guarantee high quality of messages.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationships among these three variables (QM_MC was converted to a standardized value). By looking at companies with a high level of ENFI (on the right side of the figure), I see that some companies with a lower level of QM_FIT (representing public relations practitioners' possible involvement in the integration process) achieve higher scores than those with a higher QM_FIT. These results do not support the assumption that involvement in the integration process affects the quality of corporate messages. This requires further investigation.

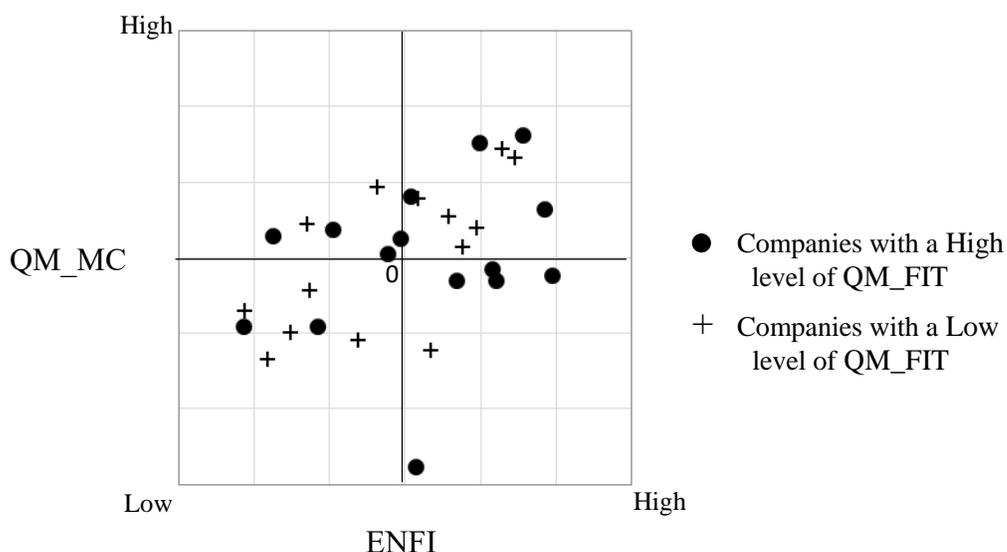


Figure 2. Relations among Three Variables.

Discussion

This paper attempted to explore how organizational environment are related to public relations activities and products by focusing on organizational need for integration that has not been considered by past public relations researchers. The results suggest that environmental conditions affect public relations practitioners' participation in the integration process and quality of corporate messages. Environmental conditions were objectively measured with the financial data which are often treated as indicators of decision-makers' perceived environmental uncertainty (PEU) and the size of organizations. Message quality was measured with two QM variables. The first one was to assess how well corporate messages (news releases) convey corporate values which form the basis of organizational decisions to a broad range of stakeholders. The second one was to assess how dynamically corporate messages reflect changes in decision-makers' PEU. The latter variables was also used as an indicator that represents the degree of public relations practitioners' involvement in the integration process.

Although the results showed a possible influence of environmental conditions on both QM variables, the relationship between the two variables was relatively weak. This was especially true for public relations practitioners in the company whose environment requires a high level of integration. The results suggest that although those practitioners are likely to participate more in the integration process if the demand from environment is higher, participating in the process would not guarantee high quality of messages. Some of the companies whose environment requires a high level of integration achieved high scores in the first QM variable and showed a low level of the second QM variable. It is possible, of course, that such companies with a greater need for integration have a highly sophisticated or complicated integration system that cannot be seen from the outside. However, the result can be seen as a natural form of an organization's adaptation to its environment. As Galbraith (1974) argued that the level of decision-making becomes lower under greater environmental uncertainty, delegation of authority to relevant communicators or boundary spanners may accelerate. This would affect public relations' roles in an organization.

Aldrich and Herker (1977), who argued that the least costly way of monitoring

environment is to rely on the professional identification and ethics of boundary personnel, noted that “attempts to indoctrinate boundary personnel in organizational policies, norms, and goals, prior to their engaging in interorganizational contacts” (p. 227) as one of the “more obtrusive strategies.” Although the latter strategy sounds more practical, especially in an uncertain environment, organizations must continue to ensure that all boundary personnel correctly understand the company’s policies, norms, and goals. In such cases, by participating and enhancing information sharing among boundary spanners, public relations contributes not only to organizational effectiveness but also to the creation of a better society.

Future Research

Because this paper’s analyses were based on publicly available data, I need to investigate how the companies actually collect information about their stakeholders’ expectations and how they actually integrate and coordinate those expectations. Then, I might be able to provide better explanations for the findings of this study. In addition, analyzing links between the answers and each company’s corporate culture, philosophy, and history would provide us with a better understanding of their practice and contribution to their organizations. Furthermore, by using the framework of the integrated contingency model (Nonaka et al., 2013) I introduced in this paper, I will be able to explore linkages among organizational environment, context, organizational structure, organizational process, individual attributes, organizational effectiveness, and the findings provided by past public relations studies.

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**Dialogic Communication and Thought Leadership:
Twitter Use by Public Relations Agencies in the United States**

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Abstract

This study examined how the 117 Twitter profiles maintained by U.S. headquartered agencies appearing in the 2017 Global Top 250 PR Agencies list from the Holmes Report are using this platform to communicate with their publics. Guided by the dialogic communication theory, a content analysis of 1,120 tweets (from the 112 agencies identified as having public active accounts) published between January and October 2017 were analyzed to better understand the content strategies implemented by these agencies as well as the relationship between levels of public engagement and the implementation of dialogic principles. Additionally, this study placed a special emphasis on thought leadership and the means being employed by agencies to introduce and promote their ideas. The study's results suggest that while media vividness increases the public's levels of engagement, interactivity has an inverse effect. At the same time, the findings indicate that agencies are not fully employing the dialogic capacity of Twitter. From a strategic point of view, this study provides significant implications for social media communication practices by public relations agencies.

Keywords: dialogic communication, thought leadership, social media, engagement, public relations agencies

Public relations (PR) agencies regularly recommend that their clients share effective content, build communication bridges, and establish meaningful connections and relationships with their publics on social media. They also spend time educating their clients on the impact of social media and on how to strategically and effectively utilize different social networks. However, are agencies executing the practices they preach with their own social media platforms? What message strategies are they using and are they fostering dialogue with their publics?

As engaging in dialogue is considered an effective strategy for building and maintaining relationships with the publics (Bruning, Dials, & Shirka, 2008), several studies have explored how the Internet's potential to enhance dialogic communication can positively impact organization-public relationships (Kelleher, 2009; Kent & Taylor, 1998). Unfortunately, researchers have found that organizations are not fully utilizing available dialogic communication strategies (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Even though efforts have been made in researching how different types of companies and organizations are applying Kent and Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles on social media (e.g. Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; Sundstrom & Levenshus, 2017), there is a lack of empirical data on the extent in which PR agencies in the United States are utilizing popular social media platforms such as Twitter, and more specifically, how effectively they are being used. Additionally, this study places a special focus on the means being utilized by agencies to communicate their thought leadership practices. While the term has been extensively used among consulting firms and communications specialists, it has no standard definition and has received scarce attention in academic literature (Young, 2013). Setting themselves apart from competitors through thought leadership is a common strategic communication tool implemented by firms worldwide. Literature has not addressed if, and to what extent, agencies are developing and implementing novel ideas and implementing social media as a platform to share their thought leadership. This study addresses that current gap.

Guided by the overarching theoretical framework of dialogic principles, we conducted a content analysis that compared how the 117 Twitter profiles maintained by U.S. headquartered agencies appearing in the 2017 Global Top 250 PR Agencies list from the Holmes Report are using Twitter to communicate with their publics. A total of 1,120 tweets published between January and October 2017 were analyzed to better understand the content strategies implemented by these agencies (such as media vividness, interactivity, and theme of posts), as well as the relationship between levels of public engagement (defined by the number of *Replies*, *Likes*, and *Retweets*) and the implementation of dialogic principles.

This study provides important implications for scholars and practitioners working in PR agencies. Theoretically, it extends the growing body of knowledge on social media engagement and dialogic principles among large, medium, and small-sized PR agencies in the United States. Practically, this study helps provide important insights for public relations agencies to better understand the social media landscape in the United States.

Literature Review

Social Media Engagement Strategies

Engagement is often assessed as a processing function, thus some studies conceptualize engagement as cognitive, affective, or behavioral (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009). Cognitive engagement refers to mental focus and intimates active attention to an issue (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2016). Users who are cognitively engaged and attentive are able to interpret social media texts, and recognize user replies, as compared to an affectively engaged user, whose engagement is more enthusiasm-centric (Dessart, 2017). Engagement as a behavioral

process (Javornik & Mandelli, 2012) also enjoys discrete research attention in public relations and social media. Public engagement on platforms such as Twitter can be gauged through measures such as *Reply*, *Retweet* (or *Share* as specified on other platforms), and *Like* attached to a specific post or string of posts (Men & Tsai, 2013). As each of these actions require a somewhat distinct level of effort, scholars analyzing Facebook have separated these behaviors into three levels: low (*Like*), moderate (*Share*), and high (*Comment*) (Cho, Schweickart, & Haase, 2014). On Twitter, a *Retweet* is the equivalent of a *Share* and a *Reply* is the equivalent of a *Comment*.

In terms of message strategies, this study focuses on message vividness and interactivity. The interest that communication researchers have shown for these constructs (Koolstra & Bos, 2009), and their potential to enhance public engagement (Jiang & Benbasast, 2007) and positive attitudes toward companies (Fortin & Dholakia, 2005) were the reasons that led to the selection of these constructs.

Vividness

At its core, vividness refers quite simply to the ability to recreate the equivalent of a direct sensory experience in the recipient (Coyle & Thorson, 2001). Vividness comes most often in the form of text, photo, graphics, video, or even emoticons and ranges from low vividness (text only) to high (e.g., video animation) (Liu, Li, Ji, North, & Yang, 2017). Scholarship has found that high levels of vividness can garner attention and lead to longer-lasting memories with increased accuracy (Liu et. al., 2017). Scholarship has added context to this premise through studies showing that vividness increases the recipient's arousal level which in turn can change the person's attitude (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012).

Interactivity

Conventional scholarship has generally conceptualized interactivity as "the extent to which users can participate in modifying the format and content of a mediated environment in real time" (Steuer, 1992, p. 84). Included within the ambit of hyperactivity are hyperlinks, hashtags, related URL's, volume control, downloadable video, audio and GIFS and form fields (Stromer-Galley, 2004). Scholarship on interactivity has shown that higher interactivity enhances engagement, self-efficacy, and satisfaction (Liu et. al., 2017).

Dialogic Principles

Kent and Taylor (1998) proposed a framework for developing and maintaining relationships between organizations and their publics through websites. Using dialogic communication theory as a guide, the relationship between dialogic communication and two-way symmetrical communication inspired the development of the dialogic principles. While two-way communication offers organizations and their publics an outlet to seek mutual benefit, dialogue is the result of that interaction (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Watkins, 2017). Their research led to the creation of five principles that offer guidelines on how to integrate dialogic public relations and the Internet: dialogic loop, usefulness of information, generation of return visits, ease of the interface, and conservation of visitors (Kent & Taylor, 1998). The dialogic loop is concerned with providing opportunities for users to ask questions and receive responses from the organization (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Usefulness of information, the second principle, states that organizations should provide information that meets the public's needs—not just the organization's needs (Haro-De-Rosario et al., 2017; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). The third principle is the generation of return visits, and it addresses the level of attractive features available in the website (or social media feed) that will motivate users to return (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). The fourth principle, ease of interface, suggests that websites

should be intuitive and easy to navigate and understand (Kent & Taylor, 1998). While this is an important principle for website design, it has typically been left out of studies with a social media focus (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). The fifth principle is the rule of conservation of visitors, and it states that organizations should act in ways that encourage users to stay in their online spaces (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Although these principles were originally conceived for websites, researchers have also analyzed how these principles are being used in blogs (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007), Facebook (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009), and Twitter (Linvil, McGee, & Hicks, 2012; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Watkins, 2017). Regardless of the setting, there is consensus that these platforms were underutilizing their two-way dialogic capabilities (Linvill et al., 2012; Lovejoy et al., 2012).

Based on the previously discussed topics, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What dialogic principles are present in the agencies' tweets?

RQ2: What message strategies (e.g., vividness, interactivity, themes) are being used by agencies to engage publics?

RQ3a: How do publics engage with the agencies on Twitter (*Replies, Retweets, Likes*)?

RQ3b: How do media vividness/interactivity/dialogic principles/themes impact engagement behavior?

Thought Leadership

Often described as a firm's "intellectual firepower" (Brocklebank-Fowler, 2008, p. 8), thought leadership is a term that is commonly used by consulting firms, technology industries and communication specialists. While the term has been extensively used, it has no standard definition and has received scarce attention in academic literature (Bourne, 2015; Young, 2013). McCrimmon (2005) suggests that it "is based on the power of ideas to transform the way we think. (...) Thought leadership can be shown by example, logical argument, factual presentation, or an emotional appeal where necessary" (pp. 1065-1066). Young (2013), on the other hand, suggests the following statement of meaning: "The creation or adaptation of an innovative concept for direct or indirect business advantage" (Loc 1016 of 7152). By providing helpful content and demonstrating the knowledge and capabilities of the organization, thought leadership may help build relationships and enhance reputation (Young, 2013). Thought leadership is treated as a specialism among some companies (Bourne, 2015), with teams focusing on generating "white papers", opinion editorials, email 'alerts', proprietary research and policy documents (Noble, 2014). Over the years, the term has broadened and a wide range of communication tools have been incorporated to familiarize customers and potential customers with a firm's products and services through speeches, seminars, videos, articles, and blogs (Noble, 2014; Young, 2013).

PR specialists will often disseminate thought leadership for their clients or organizations. However, literature has not addressed if and to what extent agencies are using social media as a platform to share their thought leadership. Based on this literature gap, the following research question is proposed:

RQ4: How are agencies implementing thought leadership through Twitter?

Method

A content analysis of the 117 Twitter profiles maintained by U.S. headquartered agencies appearing in the 2017 Global Top 250 PR Agencies list from the Holmes Report was conducted. The company's profile required at least 20 posts and the latest post had to have been made within a month of when the sample was drawn to be included in the population of Twitter profiles; if not, the profile was considered inactive. 112 U.S. headquartered agencies were identified as

having a public and active Twitter account. The profiles were all accessed from the same computer at approximately the same time. All profiles and 10 posts (i.e., every other post appearing on the profile's first page) were coded. Thus, two units of analysis were used (a) the companies' Twitter profiles (n=112), and (b) the tweets on each profile (n=1120). Three coders were selected to code the content of the tweets. A written coding instrument was developed, and a six-hour training was conducted. During the pretest, each coder coded 10% of the sample. Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff, 1970) was used to calculate intercoder reliability, and reliability coefficients for each category ranged from 90.2% to 100%.

Coding mechanism

Vividness, interactivity and theme of tweets

Coders determined which of the following formats were included in each tweet: text, photo, graphics/GIF, video, and emoticon/emoji. Additionally, message vividness (Coyle & Thorson, 2001) was coded as "1=low vividness" when tweets only included texts, "2=moderate vividness" when tweets included photos or graphics/GIFs, and "3=high vividness" when posts included videos. Interactivity (Steuer, 1992) was measured by counting the number of clickable hyperlinks and hashtags. Tweets that included no extra links/hashtags were coded as "1=low interactivity". Those that included one link/hashtag were coded as "2=moderate interactivity", and those with at least two additional links/hashtags were coded as "3=high interactivity". Researchers first read through the sample of tweets and developed taxonomies of sixteen themes that were not mutually exclusive.

Dialogic principles

To measure the use of the dialogic principles (Kent & Taylor, 1998), categories were developed based on previous research (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Means of communicating thought leadership

The following means of communicating thought leadership were included in this study: (1) Link to white paper; (2) Research related; (3) Link to blog; (4) Media interview; (5) Training session/workshop/webinar/seminar/panel participation; (6) Book; (7) Independent study; (8) Other (if other, specify).

Engagement behavior

Coders measured *Replies*, *Retweets*, and *Likes* by recording the total number indicated in each tweet.

Results

At the time the current study was conducted, the 112 analyzed agencies had tweeted an average of 4,356 times, followed 1,627 accounts, had 6,773 followers, and had a mean income of \$64 million and a median income of \$14 million. The study categorized agencies into three different groups based on their total revenue during 2016: agencies making less than \$10 million (which will be referred to as lower-revenue agencies during the remainder of this paper); agencies making between \$10 million and less than \$25 million (moderate-revenue agencies); and agencies making \$25 million or more (higher-revenue agencies).

RQ1: Dialogic Principles Present in the Agencies' Tweets

On average, agencies utilize 15.5% of their capacity for dialogic communication in each tweet (Table 1). The dialogic loop, applied by 18.9% of the tweets was the most widely used among the analyzed dialogic principles, and it was followed by generation of return visits (15.4%) and information of interest to stakeholders (13.0%). With 9.4%, conservation of visitors was the least often utilized dialogic principle. Mentioning users in tweets (67.7%) and the use of hashtags (61.6%) were the most common features utilized by agencies. Links to websites were

additional information can be obtained (59%) and summaries of agency activities (40.4%) were the following two most utilized features. Among the analyzed features, the provision of surveys for users to express opinions on the agency (0.3%), links to discussion forums and FAQs on the agency's website (0.5%), request to ask a question or leave a comment (0.7%), and questions posted by the agency to solicit feedback (0.7%) were the least utilized.

RQ2: What message strategies (e.g., vividness, interactivity, themes) are being used by agencies to engage publics?

Regarding media vividness, 21.2% of posts only used text (low vividness), 75.3% used photos or graphics (moderate vividness), and 3.6% used videos (high vividness). In this study, interactivity was measured by the amount of links/hashtags included in each post. Although only 8.8% of posts had low interactivity (no extra links/hashtags), 61.8% had moderate interactivity (either a link or a hashtag), and 29.5% had high interactivity (both extra links and hashtags). The most popular themes among all agencies involved agency news and events (48.8%), client information (31.8%), and thought leadership building (30.4%). Agencies participating in forums and conferences (19.8%), leadership activities (18.0%), and greetings or congratulatory remarks (13.5%) were also used relatively frequently. Holiday wishes (0.1%), company vision/mission/strategies (2.1%), and personal life (2.2%) were among the least utilized themes.

RQ3a: Public engagement with agencies on Twitter (Replies, Retweets, Likes)

An analysis of the 1,120 tweets found that 284 (25.4%) were *Retweets*. As *Retweets* do not measure the engagement received by the agencies, but the engagement received by the original tweet, a separate analysis of the remaining 836 tweets (including original tweets, replies, and retweets with comments) was conducted. These results highlighted low levels of engagement: each post received 0.09 *Replies*, 1.12 *Retweets*, and 2.83 *Likes*.

RQ3b: Impact of media vividness /interactivity/dialogic principles /themes on engagement behavior

The analysis showed that vividness played a significant role in the total number of *Likes* that each tweet (including original tweet, reply, and retweet with comment) received ($F(2, 89.43) = 5.610, p < 0.01$). Tweets with low vividness had significantly fewer *Likes* ($M = 2.28, SD = 2.103$) than tweets with moderate vividness ($M = 3.08, SD = 4.848$). It is important to add that while there were no significant differences in engagement between posts that had and did not have graphics, photos played a significant role in the total number of *Likes* ($t = 3.747, df = 617.047, p < 0.001$). Tweets that included photos had significantly more *Likes* ($M = 3.46, SD = 5.422$) than those that did not have photos ($M = 2.30, SD = 3.373$). Vividness also played a significant role in the total number of *Retweets* ($t = 3.119, df = 809.010, p < 0.01$). Tweets that included photos or graphics had significantly more *Retweets* ($M = 1.25, SD = 3.073$) than those that did not have photos or graphics ($M = 0.77, SD = 1.287$). Interestingly, results also showed that interactivity had a negative effect on total number of *Likes* ($F(3, 61.759) = 4.315, p < 0.01$). Among original tweets, low interactivity received significantly more *Likes* ($M = 4.44, SD = 4.124$), than tweets with moderate ($M = 2.96, SD = 4.768$) and high interactivity ($M = 2.03, SD = 3.028$).

To measure how the use of the dialogic principles impacted engagement, this study separated posts that included at least one of the features in each of the four dialogic principles from those that did not include any. An independent sample t-test found that the use of at least one of the features included in the dialogic loop ($t = 24.827, df = 290.277, p < 0.001$) and in the use of information of interest to stakeholders ($t = 3.467, df = 681.473, p = 0.001$) significantly increased the number of *Likes*. At the same time, the use of information of interest to stakeholders also significantly increased the number of *Retweets* ($t = 2.571, df = 834, p < 0.05$). Regarding the impact

of themes on public engagement, tweets that referred to agency news and events ($t=6.667$, $df=797.323$, $p<0.001$), agency receiving award ($t=4.058$, $df=89.028$, $p<0.001$), and greetings or congratulatory remarks ($t=3.251$, $df=141.891$, $p=0.001$) significantly increased the number of *Likes*.

RQ4: Thought Leadership

Links to blogs/websites and training sessions/workshops/webinars/seminars/panel participations were the most common means of communicating thought leadership. Of the total amount of tweets, almost one out of five (18.5%) included a link to a blog/website in which the agency developed their thought leadership and one out of ten (9.8%) tweets showed agencies expressing thought leadership through training sessions/workshops/webinars/seminars/panel participations. Much further behind, independent assertions (2.1%) media interviews (1.7%), and research related tweets (1.3%) followed in popularity. The least utilized means of communicating thought leadership were books (0.4%), and links to white papers (0.1%). Three out of four (75.9%) of the 112 analyzed agencies engaged in thought leadership at least once. Among the analyzed posts, three out of five agencies (60.7%) engaged in thought leadership at least 20% of the time, and one out of two (50%) engaged in thought leadership at least 30% of the time. Almost one out of ten agencies (8.9%) engaged in thought leadership at least 80% of the time and 1.8% engaged in thought leadership 100% of the time. Although posts addressing thought leadership did not have a significant effect on *Retweets* and *Replies*, they had a negative effect on total number of *Likes* ($t=-3.161$, $df=812.514$, $p<0.01$). Posts including thought leadership had significantly fewer *Likes* ($M=2.25$, $SD=2.529$) than those that did not include thought leadership ($M=3.08$, $SD=5.049$).

Additional Findings: Revenue Influence

A series of one-way ANOVAs were performed to test if agency revenue played a role in the use of thought leadership and engagement strategies. Significant differences were found between the percentage of tweets involving thought leadership and agency revenue ($F(2, 109) = 7.728$, $p=0.001$). The percentage of tweets among higher-revenue agencies that were thought leadership related (44.3%) was significantly higher than the percentage obtained by moderate-revenue (24.9%) and lower-revenue agencies (22.1%). Agency revenue also played a significant role in determining the total amount of tweets in which the agency expressed thought leadership through a training session/workshop/webinar/seminar ($F(2, 67.502) = 7.291$, $p=0.001$). The percentage of tweets among higher-revenue agencies that involved this type of thought leadership (19.2%) was significantly higher than it was among moderate-revenue (5.6%) and lower-revenue agencies (4.7%).

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to better understand how public relations agencies have been utilizing Twitter by examining the utilized dialogic principles, the implemented content strategies, and how these strategies have impacted public engagement. Additionally, this study placed a special emphasis on thought leadership.

Dialogic Principles

Applied by 18.9% of the tweets, the dialogic loop was the most widely used dialogic principle. Among the eight features included in this principle, only two of them were frequently utilized: mentioning users in tweets and using hashtags. Although these two features are important steps that can be taken to increase the likelihood of dialogue, it is important to note the distinction between facilitating dialogue and genuine dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Several other relevant features in this principle, such as posting questions to solicit feedback (0.7%) or

replying to a user's tweet (1.7%) were rarely considered. These findings suggest that while agencies value certain aspects of the dialogic loop, two-way communication is rarely occurring. While social media is a tool that provides a wide range of features that can be utilized to encourage two-way communication, this study supports previous research revealing that these capabilities are underutilized by diverse organizations (Levenshus, 2010; Watkins, 2017).

Message Strategies and Public Engagement

Both media vividness and interactivity had significant yet opposite effects on engagement. Tweets with low vividness had fewer *Likes* than those with moderate vividness. These results are aligned with previous studies indicating that vividness plays an important role in generating *Likes* and *Shares* (Liu et al., 2017). Low interactivity received significantly more *Likes* than tweets with moderate and high interactivity. Previous studies have suggested that the presence of hyperlinks (interactivity) might be perceived as a sign of more information, which would require higher levels of cognition efforts (Tremayne & Dunwoody, 2001). Thus, users with lower levels of motivation may ignore posts they perceive as being too demanding (Liu et al., 2017). The results also indicated that utilizing at least one of the features included in the dialogic loop and in the use of information of interest to stakeholders increased engagement levels. These findings support previous studies that have shown that providing information of interest can be a significant predictor of responsiveness to the communication efforts displayed by organizations (McAllister-Spooner & Kent, 2009) and can create a positive attitude between the organization and its publics (Watkins, 2017). Unfortunately, regardless of the message strategies being utilized, public engagement with public relations agencies on Twitter is consistently low.

Thought Leadership

As suggested by Young (2013), thought leadership is intended to generate a genuine two-way process of communication that inspires thinking and learning. Under this perspective, agencies were not successful in their process of communicating thought leadership. Although three out of every ten agency-posts addressed thought leadership building, these tweets were neither increasing engagement nor generating a two-way process of communication. When large global firms decide to use thought leadership, they will often invest significant sums of money to develop ideas, distribute, endorse, and evaluate ideas and content (Young, 2013). Naturally, public relations agencies have substantially lower incomes than large global firms that invest millions of dollars in thought leadership (Young, 2013). As a result, publics may perceive differences in the quality of the produced thought leadership and will, consequently, be less likely to engage with the content produced by firms that are not heavily investing in thought leadership. By providing thought leadership that is timely, accurate, and useful (Thomas, Zolin & Hartman, 2009), PR agencies may increase their engagement levels and will build trust in their firm's expertise (Bourne, 2015). Additionally, this study found that sharing links to blogs or websites was the most popular way of implementing thought leadership. Although links to blogs can certainly help in sharing an organization's thought leadership, this study's findings suggest that agencies were not placing significant efforts in using this content to develop conversations and seek feedback. To be advantageous, thought leadership needs to be communicated effectively. A common principle shared by successful users of thought leadership is their interest in engaging in a two-way process of communication involving dialogue and response with interested audiences. Thought leadership is intended to generate a genuine debate that inspires thinking and learning (Young, 2013). The development of substantial research related reports (1.3%), white papers (0.1%), and books (0.4%) was done very infrequently and, perhaps, may

have been a more effective and powerful way to set themselves apart from their competitors.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Findings from this study assist in extending the current knowledge on social media and public engagement. The dialogic communication theory provides researchers a tool to study how organizations are using social networks to develop online relationships with publics. Thus, this study provides a significant contribution to our understanding of this theory as well as the message strategies implemented by agencies and their effects on engagement. Additionally, this study placed a special emphasis on how public relations agencies are building trust in their skills and expertise and helps fill the research gap on how they are setting themselves apart from competitors through thought leadership, a topic that has received limited attention in academic literature (Young, 2013).

From a strategic point of view, this study provides significant implications for strategic communication and thought leadership practices among public relations agencies in the digital era. Engaging publics through Twitter and other social media platforms gives agencies an opportunity to develop meaningful interactions and provide helpful content that demonstrates their knowledge and may help them build relationships and enhance their reputation. Unfortunately, the low levels of engagement show that agencies are not using social media effectively for engagement purposes.

Limitations and Future Studies

In-depth interviews with public relations agencies would help provide further insights and would allow researchers to explore practitioners' perceptions on their engagement strategies and on how important it is for them to communicate their thought leadership practices. Additionally, this study only considered Twitter. Other platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, could also be analyzed in future research. This study focused on public relations agencies headquartered in the United States. Acquiring further data on how public relations agencies in other countries are communicating with their publics on social media could also be pursued in the future.

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Appendix

Table 1

The Features of Dialogic Principles

TWITTER CONTENT	MEAN	SD
Content index of the capacity for dialogic communication	15.5%	0.21
Conservation of visitors	9.4%	0.08
1. Link to the agency's official website	17.4%	0.38
2. Link to other social networking sites in which the agency is present (Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Instagram)	1.3%	0.11
Generation of return visits	15.4%	0.22
3. Links to websites where additional information can be obtained	59.0%	0.49
4. Links to news related to the agency issued by external media	13.4%	0.34
5. Links to discussion forums and FAQs on the agency's website	0.5%	0.07
6. Option to request information by mail/e-mail	2.1%	0.14
7. The use of other social networking sites to introduce information (Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Instagram)	1.8%	0.13
Dialogic loop	18.9%	0.27
8. Reply by the agency to a user's tweet	1.7%	0.13
9. Like by the agency to a user's tweet	14.0%	0.35
10. The provision of surveys for users to express opinions on the agency	0.3%	0.05
11. The use of hashtags	61.6%	0.49
12. Request to ask a question or leave a comment (request can be done via text/video)	0.7%	0.08
13. Questions posted by the agency to solicit feedback	0.7%	0.08
14. Tagging users in a tweet	4.5%	0.21
15. Mentioning users in a tweet	67.7%	0.47
Information of interest to stakeholders	13.0%	0.13
16. Media releases	1.0%	0.1
17. Speeches by members of the agency (text, audio or video)	8.6%	0.28
18. Statement of the agency's vision/mission/goals	2.0%	0.14
19. Details of how to participate in activities or services organized by the agency	7.7%	0.27
20. Summaries of activities of agency	40.4%	0.49
21. Written statement or column by a member of the agency (doesn't have to be company/product/service related)	18.5%	0.39

**Audiences and Publics: Building a More Definitive Understanding of
Public Relations Outreach Terminology in the Era of Social Media**

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Abstract

Public relations is failing to distinguish between audiences and publics in today's megamarketing era while the business literature discusses "brand publics." This article presents a content analysis of the literature and introduces residual publics, which describes unintended recipients of messages that can be identified through social network analysis.

What's the value of a properly defined term? Is an industry benefited when it circulates terminology that is clear and widely accepted? By contrast, does a profession lose credibility when its terms are poorly defined, blurred, or sloppily interchanged until they become indistinguishable and unimportant? Is the latter the case when it comes to public relations?

Consider the following scenario: A company sends a trial advertisement to selected influencers about a new community alarm system that will generate more efficient response to emergencies. The intent is to ensure that the community will accept the ads when aired over television next month. However, one recipient of the trial ad believes the alarms will increase noise in the early hours when trains already roll through the city with their whistles piercing the night air. This recipient, despite requests not to share the ad due to its trial nature, sends the ad to a national anti-noise activist leader, who in turn posts it over Facebook with negative comments about the alarm system and the company. The postings unleash a firestorm of criticism, which jeopardizes the rollout timeline and costs millions of dollars.

This scenario hints at a distinction between a collection of individuals who simply receive a message from a given source versus the purposeful coalescence of individuals into some action to support or oppose a given source or issue. These groups may be respectively characterized as *audiences* or *publics*. Many who practice public relations today fail to grasp or even seem to care whether there is any difference between these two terms. As Newsom, VanSlyke Turk, and Kruckeberg (2013) pointed out, "You might imagine that 'public' and 'audience' are synonymous. But in important ways they are not." Then they added, "It is essential that a practitioner grasp the distinction" (p.88) between the two.

Public relations literature has long stressed the importance of *publics* (J. Grunig, 2007). Indeed, this seemed to be the very cornerstone of the practice—after all, it is *public* relations, and most basic definitions of the field have included the term. But lately, the term *audiences* seems to have evolved into a re-domination of the field's terminology over the *publics* lexicon (Hutton, 2001; Wilcox and Cameron, 2012). At the very least, there seems to be a somewhat haphazard mixing of both terms, as if the field has happily accepted their interchangeability. This may seem trivial on the surface, but for one thing it tends to confuse young practitioners (Macnamara, 2006; and most of our own students, for example, are already so indoctrinated toward audiences that they ignore the term *publics* altogether). This blurring of terms also could mask real differences that need to be clarified in order for the function to function more effectively.

One could ask several pertinent questions here: If publics and audiences are *the same*, why use both terms—shouldn't the field settle on one and clarify and strengthen their meaning? If the two terms are *different*, when and how would it be important to connect with audiences? When and why would it be more effective to engage with publics? Furthermore, in the social media era, when anyone, anywhere in the world, can see a posted message, is it possible that the longstanding dismissal of a *general public* is no longer accurate? *Is there now a general public?* Or is it a *general audience*? Finally, would clearer understanding of the definitions and distinctions of these terms help guide better communication practices?

This paper is intended to bring greater insight around this topic of audiences and publics. The paper delves into the literature to identify definitions, worldviews and distinctions with the two terms, as well as potential differences between targeted and general outreach groups. The goal is to show that there *is* an important distinction between the terms. This is not in any way to imply that any one of the terms should be seen as better or more appropriate than the other for public relations practitioners. Instead, the authors propose that *both* of these outreach targets are important in their own way, and that understanding of these distinctions can guide public

relations professionals into more effective communications and engagement activities.

Literature Review

In the earlier days of our communications industries, publics and audiences seemed relatively distinguishable. Specific definitions were conceived for each term, and the outreach to publics by public relations people and to audiences by advertisers seemed to be fairly clear.

Audiences and Publics

Audiences typically are seen as “people ... who watch or listen to a performance, movie, public event, etc., either together in one place or separately” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/audience>). While scholars have tried to portray audiences as active (active listeners, interactive audiences, engagement, etc.), the innate characteristic of audiences targeted to receive or interact with a message by first listening, watching, or reading is still difficult to argue. Wilcox and Cameron (2012) contrasted passive audiences and so-called active audiences, but at the end of the day the only real behavior of audiences as defined by these authors was to “come to messages ... seeking information” from a specific source (p. 171). In virtually every characterization we could find, the audience would not really exist unless there was first some original source message or topic motivating said audience to act. Newsom, VanSlyke Turk and Kruckeberg (2013) noted that audiences “are recipients of something—a message or a performance”; they “may react to a speech or performance, but [are] basically passive” (p. 88).

By contrast, *publics*—particularly in the literature of public relations—have been conceptualized as those who recognize a problem that affects them and organize to do something about it (J. Grunig and Hunt, 1984; J. Grunig, 2006). A public is seen as forming due to their collective interest in an issue and a mutual need to *do something*, rather than as a body to be acted on or to act only after receiving some message from an institutional source (J. Grunig and Hunt, 1984). *Stakeholders* have been characterized similarly to publics, as a group of individuals who share some vested interest in a given organization and therefore have sufficient incentive to coalesce into action if necessary (Freeman, 1984; Freeman, *et. al.*, 2012; Rawlins, 2006). Such a connotation of collective action to achieve a specific purpose rarely crosses into descriptions of audiences unless it is simply a follow-up to the message or topic they have received.

From its earliest days, the public relations field revolved around targeted outreach to publics who can be affected by an organization and, in turn, create consequences for the organization. Before the mid-20th century, *PR News* stated that public relations operates “with the public interest ... to earn public understanding” (Wilcox and Cameron, 2012 p. 7). Cutlip and Center (1952) defined public relations as “mutually beneficial relations between an organization and ... various publics” (p. 25). Even in this century, publics have been assessed as predominant. Newsom, Turk, and Kruckeberg (2013), in their basic textbook on the practice, introduced the term *publics* on page 2; audiences did not warrant any significant mention until page 68 nor any real definition until page 88. Similarly, Baskin and Aronoff (1998) introduced publics on page 10 of their textbook, while audiences did not enter their discussion until page 160.

When looking at publics and audiences, then, we find two essential differences—*the catalyst* for gathering, and *the resultant behavior* of the group, as explained below:

1. An audience rarely gathers on its own; rather, it comes together as a reaction, because some institutional source – an organization or individual, has attempted to generate an actual or virtual gathering to convey a message or performance to them. If subsequent action occurs from this gathering, it reflects the audience’s interests around that original message or source. Thus, resultant behavior can be seen as ultimately reactionary.

2. An organization or influential individual can attempt to entice people to form a group that acts (donating toward a perceived need, for example). But publics usually are their own catalysts, organizing to support a cause (hurricane relief, for example) or because an influential source has angered them enough to want to group together to force some corrective behavior (open up more parking spaces, construct overhead crosswalks to improve safety, crack down on drinking and driving, stop using animals for testing or cutting down forests, etc.).
3. We believe *an audience can turn into a public* after receiving an institutional message if feeling compelled to organize and act on that message—but then it becomes a public and not an audience; and by contrast, *a public will not turn into an audience* because it already has formed on its own; and it often creates its own behaviors that *force organizational response* instead of *organizational message initiation* that marketers always prefer.

Confusion of Terms

All of this should seem straightforward. Yet, in discussions around either *publics* or *audiences* there often seems to be, at the very least, a bit of muddling, and at worst, flat-out contradictions—both *between* the two terms and *within* each term. Evidence abounds of the interchanging of the terms. It can get particularly confusing when this happens in the same article or treatise on the topic, or sometimes even in the same paragraph or sentence. Co-mingling is seen in many of the textbooks for future professionals in the field. An older text by Baskin and Aronoff (1992) suggested an interesting interplay between audiences and publics in its index. Its listing of the term Audiences included the note, “See also Publics” (p. 491), but this cross-reference to the term Publics then revealed, “See also Audiences: Public opinion” (p. 499). The blurring of terms continued in the book. The first paragraph of the preview to chapter eight, called “Action and Communication,” stated: “. . . most public relations actions can be described as attempts to spread information within a target audience.” The second paragraph described “certain critical paths that facilitate adoption of new ideas by target publics” (p. 155). That five-paragraph review included the term *publics* four more times and *audiences* once more, with no acknowledgment of any similarities or differences between the terms. The text then noted that, “The action process begins and ends with the target audiences. Once each public is identified, its characteristics can be studied” (p. 160).

No wonder public relations students get confused. And the intermixing can be found in virtually every textbook—even recent publications. Wilcox and Cameron (2012) stated, “public relations should also foster open, two-way communication and mutual understanding, with the idea that an organization—not just the target audience—changes its attitudes...” (p. 7). The book follows up with an entire chapter on audiences and another major section of the research chapter devoted to audiences. They have little discussion at all on publics.

The exception to this trend seems to be the Newsom, VanSlyke Turk, and Kruckeberg (2013) text cited earlier for arguing the need to distinguish the terms. On pages 87-89, the authors clearly explained the differences and similarities between the concepts of audiences, publics, and stakeholders. Stakeholders were described as relatively similar to publics with the exception that stakeholders tend to be more continually involved with the organization than publics—they “have more than the peripheral exposure to an organization than some publics might” (p. 87). Both publics and stakeholders were described as more active and often less predictable than audiences.

Even the Official Statement on Public Relations promulgated by Public Relations Society

of America (PRSA) — the one organization observers could rightfully view as the ultimate arbitrator of terminology in the field — muddied the waters. PRSA’s official statement on Public Relations asserted that, “to achieve their goals ... institutions must develop effective relationships with many different audiences or publics” (Hendrix, et. al, 2012, p. 4). The statement apparently assumed these two targets are both important but did not explain why both are needed in the same phrase. It becomes easy for the reader to assume that they are simply interchangeable. A more recent version of PRSA’s description of public relations, appearing now on its web site, resolved the problem by not mentioning either publics or audiences ((<https://www.prsa.org/all-about-pr>)).

Sloppiness in description also exists *within* presentations of each term. For example, one element of audiences is the growing idea of audience interactivity. Of course, the suffix of “activity” suggests that audiences can go beyond merely passive reception of a message. Yang and Coffey (2014) described *interactive audiences* as those “who take full advantage of web interactivity and may be most valuable to advertisers.” However, they then stubbed their toes by adding, “watching videos is only one aspect of interactive behaviors online” (p. 78). Watching videos? Certainly a video watcher has the option of joining and participating in some online “interactive” community surrounding that video or topic. But watching alone cannot conjure up anything other than passive absorption. And said video or movie or television show generally has to be available for the audience to see and react to before any type of interactivity occurs. Thus, comes the contradiction between interactivity and passivity when it comes to audiences.

Yang and Coffey (2014) also summarized definitions of interactivity as “the extent to which communicators and the audiences are willing to respond and interact.” In advertising, they added, “interactivity is viewed as a critical factor to the successful implementation of a promotional message involving interaction between consumers and advertisers” p. (79). But to the authors of this paper, again, Yang and Coffey’s so-called interactivity is no more than a promotional message that grabbed the audience’s interest and sparked a subsequent discussion or engagement community—one which would not exist were there no promotional message in the first place. In this and most or all other cases, this type of institutional source-produced audience interactivity should not be confused with a public formed to demand an organization’s response.

Blurring of Stakeholders and Publics

In discussions of publics, this same sloppiness regularly occurs, and there are two main reasons for this. First, the terms *publics* and *stakeholders* are often intermixed; and second, while most perceive the reality of publics, plural, as in publics that are segmented, many still use the term in singular form, connoting the idea of some kind of *general public*—a notion most scholars seem to eschew but which pops up frequently in the literature anyway, directly or indirectly.

One example of this comes from Newsom, VanSlyke Turk, and Kruckeberg (2013). Despite their clear distinction between stakeholders and publics, they sprinkled the book with references to “publics/stakeholders” (see pp. 62, 89, 90), as if the terms are interchangeable. McBeth, Lybecker, and Stoutenborough (2016) also distinguished between stakeholders and publics: “Stakeholders ... are highly vested in a policy issue, have influence, and interest,” they explained. But then they referred to the term *public* in singular form: “... and are ideally representative of a larger swath of the public” (p. 424). They also contributed to the confusion on this topic by highlighting audiences instead of publics in the title of their article.

The General Public

This problem of referring to a public, often called a *general public*, is relatively common. The term shows up widely in discussions about communications, in a vast array of disciplines

(Carr, 2016; Darker, et. al, 2017; Gasco, et. al, 2017; Ranacher, et. al., 2017). With some public relations treatises, as well, this usage can be seen. Wukich and Mergel (2016), for example, used this concept liberally, with statements such as, “informing and educating the public” (p. 305), or “government agencies ... did not seek to engage the public” (p. 306). Gascó, Bayerlb, Deneffc, and Akhgard (2017) similarly stated, “communications of crisis publics play two meaningful roles ... they can indicate whether or not the crisis response messages have been accepted; on the other hand, the public’s messages are important in shaping organizational reputation (p. 637).

Despite this widespread usage of the term, many public relations scholars and certain practitioners have long believed that a general public does not or cannot exist (J. Grunig, 2006; Newsom, Van Slyke Turk, and Kruckeberg; 2013; Meyer, 2012). And such an assessment seems to make sense. To qualify as a general public for any given message, everyone in a given society would need to (1) have an equal opportunity of receiving and acting upon the message, and (2) care about the message enough to feel a need to respond (or to join with others to act upon it). If such a public truly existed, there would be no need for targeting to any specific group. The authors contend that these two criteria have never surfaced—that no message has ever had such broad appeal and consequences as to affect everyone in this way.

However, most of these assessments were made before the advent of social media. A significant difference between traditional media messages and those on social media is the possibility of immediate, direct response. Before social media, when organizations sent out messages over traditional media, they would have to measure response through indirect means: attendance at their event, coupons used at stores, and other mechanisms. But with social media, message recipients can respond to the organization directly through the same social media channel, with little elapsed time between the original message and the response. In addition, there is little way to limit the original message to so-called targeted publics. Anyone with Internet access over computer, phone, or other technological device can access the message and respond. While the theory of selectivity suggests that only a small percentage of any intended or unintended message recipients will actually see any given message or post, it is possible that unintended recipients can see the message and act in ways the organization had not anticipated.

Reassessment of “General Publics?”

Given this reach and immediacy of social media, one may be compelled to ask: Is it possible that in the social media era, a general public actually *does* exist? Perhaps now this notion that there is no general public needs to be re-evaluated if not outright challenged.

Even with social media, though, we likely have not reached a point where there is a general public as defined above. For one thing, the possibility of an entire given society actually caring about a message is still fairly remote. However, there arises an intriguing possibility of an organization sending out a message and having many more recipients than planned (or hoped) actually respond to it in some way. The challenge, then, is how to identify a broader range of potential recipients—or a larger public than anticipated.

Plowman, Wakefield, and Winchell (2015), called these unintended message recipients *latent diffused publics*—a term that combines the theoretical work of James Grunig (J. Grunig and Hunt, 1984) and the linkages of Esman (1972). The latent element suggests people who are prone to respond but will not until they become aware of an incident or unsatisfied expectations and are triggered to respond. The diffused aspect is the part that is difficult or impossible for an organization to identify until this public surfaces and acts in some way.

Unanticipated Publics, Positive and Negative

We suggest a simpler description from latent diffused public. They are *unanticipated*_

publics. These individuals are not targeted by a source communicator but become an unanticipated actor once she or he has received the message. This person or public can create either positive or negative fallout for the original message source by organizing with others, and so we distinguish them by *unanticipated positive public* and *unanticipated negative public*.

Examples of unanticipated publics and their effects are plentiful. Unanticipated positive publics can play out this way: We authors know a young man who founded a business in Texas that in its first year cleared close to \$1 million. Two years previous, he was in debt and fighting to extract himself from legal issues surrounding another business. In July 2017, he told his story on an entrepreneurial podcast to drum up more business in Dallas and to encourage other budding entrepreneurs. This occurred, but the podcast also unleashed contacts from numerous entrepreneurs around the nation wanting him to help them set up similar businesses in their cities. This launched him into a coaching business, an opportunity he did not anticipate and which would not have happened without the podcast. Such unplanned cooperative ventures and partnerships happen frequently through social media by virtue of unanticipated publics.

On the other hand, unanticipated negative publics can severely harm organizations. Early this year, the Sweden-based H&M clothing firm introduced an advertisement that its communicators thought would help sell hoodies. The ad depicted a boy wearing a hoodie that said, “Coolest monkey in the jungle.” Unfortunately, the advertising agency for H&M used a Black youth as its model, and this sparked a global firestorm over calls of racism. In South Africa, H&M was forced to close all of its stores after several were trashed by an activist group (Mwakideu, 2018). The Weeknd, a Canadian musician who had been promoting H&M products, cut ties with the company after seeing the ad, and NBA star LeBron James also no doubt harmed sales after sending out tweets opposing the company’s unintentional racism (Curtis, 2018).

Because people generally are more motivated to lash out against issues they oppose than to publicly support something, unanticipated negative publics are likely more possible and plentiful than their positive counterparts. But both types of unanticipated publics can be attributed to the rise of social media, where people anywhere in the world can see information that piques their interest, respond to the information, share it with friends or others with like interests, etc. The H&M controversy probably would have occurred before the days of social media, but its extensive reach and instantaneous protests likely would have been much less than the global impacts that occurred. It thus seems propitious for us to be aware that unanticipated publics can quickly appear and deliver powerful consequences to organizations.

Balance Theory from Social Network Paradigm

To better understand an unanticipated public and how to classify them in our minds, we recommend considering the work in sociology by Fritz Heider on balance theory. Heider (1946) examined the consequences of sentiments in friendships among three people. He observed that the positive or negative relationships among the three people could lead to the change in the structure of the relationships. For example, if Bob and Jane form a positive tie between themselves, and Jane and Susan also form a positive tie between themselves, but Bob and Susan do not like each other and have a negative tie between themselves, then the relational system between the three people is unbalanced. Either Bob and Susan will work out their differences to form a positive tie, or Susan will influence Jane to the point that she dissolves her tie with Bob.

Heider (1946) explained that a triadic relational system could be balanced in three different ways. First, if everyone likes each other, then the system is balanced. If everyone dislikes each other, then the system is also balanced. Third, if two people dislike each other, and they have a common enemy, then the system is still balanced. However, if Person A likes Person

B, and Person B likes Person C, but Person C and Person A do not like each other, then the system is unbalanced (See Figure 1). In common terms, this triadic relational system is often described through the following phrases: My friend's friend is my friend. My friend's enemy is my enemy. My enemy's friend is my enemy. But my enemy's enemy is my friend.

Cartwright and Harary (1956) generalized Heider's explanation by proposing a definition of balance that could be used to describe configurations beyond the triadic system. They made it possible to examine relational balance in statistical and probabilistic terms (p. 292), especially if new people join the network. Following the development of these insights more than 50 years ago, scholars have explained how balance theory operates in a variety of social structures, including the social structures of animals. Ilany, et al. (2013) tested the theory of structural balance in social networks of a wild mammal, a rock hyrax. They found that the mammals did indeed change their social configurations over time to achieve balance. We propose that balance theory offers public relations scholars a pathway to operationalizing the terms unanticipated negative and unanticipated positive publics. One simple reason is that they exist in part because of ties that anticipated publics have to others, who can view on social media the actions and messages of the organization.

Discussion

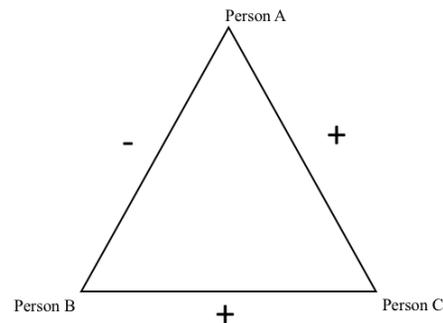
Public relations now risks losing ownership over the term *publics* (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015). This may not seem concerning, except it continues a trend where actions previously owned by public relations—activities that helped place the field with organizational management—are being reframed by marketers. Today, social responsibility can be seen as cause marketing, reputation management is brand management, and building of relationships is now relationship marketing. This happens partly because public relations scholars have been too insular—publishing in journals of public relations rather than in business journals where the terms can be frequently seen. In that vacuum, marketing scholars stepped in, thinking they were seeing unresearched phenomena, and invented their own terms. Such encroachment is reduced when public relations scholars and practitioners better understand the field's terminology.

In trying to clarify and defend the importance of publics, we argue vociferously that *both* audiences and publics are important – still. We do not attempt to suggest that one of the terms is more important than the other; rather, each term is important in the circumstance with which it is defined. Audiences are important recipients of messages, and organizations sending out messages are completely justified in calling those recipients audiences. On the other hand, organizations also should always anticipate the formation of publics related to their activities, and should be able to also anticipate why, how, and when the publics will form. Organizations that can most effectively make those predictions will have the better chance of being proactive and positive in their relationship building attempts with the various publics that are affected by or affect the organizations' behaviors and direction.

So, let us return to our hypothetical case introduced early in this article. We propose that communications practitioners would never have incited this furor over their community alarm test and the subsequent loss of time and money for their company had they clearly understood the differences between audiences and publics. They needed to know that messages have the possibility of not only mobilizing their audience to behave as they would like, but also to anger publics—intended or unanticipated—as happened in this case. The firm's executives also would have helped themselves had they understood the nature of balance theory, and what that theory means in terms of the influencers having relationships with other influencers (in this case the one who had a relationship with the activist, who in turn had a negative relationship with the firm).

What Professionals Should Do with this Information

Figure 1: Balance Theory (Heider, 1946)



Like with all scholarly articles, we set out to research, observe, and explain theories and terms that are in public relations. But we also believe that public relations scholarship sometimes fails somewhat without then offering guidance to help practitioners succeed. So, what can practitioners learn from what we have discussed in this article? Here are a few concepts:

1. When an organization sends out a message to promote a product or service or build awareness of an issue, it generally is seeking *an audience*—likely large numbers of people who are not necessarily connected but can be targeted according to demographics, psychographics, etc. It is hoped this audience will receive the message, understand it, and perhaps individually act on it (buy the product, strive to improve their lives by exercising, etc.).
2. In and around the organization are employees, community leaders, regular citizens, media, activists, and others who often monitor the organization to see if it upholds expectations of transparency, trust, responsibility, etc., as it produces goods or services. These are *latent publics* who, when sufficiently motivated due to unmet expectations or organizational incidents, can quickly organize and spring into action, or *active publics*. If an organization anticipates these possibilities, it can respond quickly and proactively; and if it monitors and builds relationships with these publics, it can entice them into positive support. However, if it focuses only on consumers and potential consumers, it is likely to ignore or misread other important publics that can arise and will be caught reacting to its publics and look defensive in the process.
3. Audiences generally are passive; they *receive* messages, usually at the invitation (either directly or indirectly) of the organization (which schedules a speech or meeting, sends out a message over social media, etc.). Audiences *can* behave, but generally the behavior is for *individual* fulfillment based on the persuasive appeal of the message (buy product, get more exercise, donate to a cause, etc.). Publics, on the other hand, are *active*, formed to effect change. This formation often comes from the publics themselves, when they recognize a problem and organize to do something about it; but a proactive organization, as mentioned, can also entice people to form into publics. When this formation comes, though, the resulting action comes more as a *group* than as individuals. Audience behavior toward the entity usually is positive or, at worst, neutral—they help the entity achieve its goals by doing what the entity wants. Behaviors of publics toward entities CAN be positive but more often is negative and forces entities to react.

4. Organizational messaging always has the potential for being received positively or negatively, particularly in today's social media environment. Every organization needs to be aware of not only those *audiences* who will receive and respond positively, but also those *publics* who may not. Who are these potential unanticipated publics? What is happening around the organization that might be enticing them to watch the organization and all of its activities? What kind of reactions might each message or each organizational action generate that could spin the organization off of its normal course and result in lost time and revenues? These questions rarely affect communication with *audiences*, but they always face the possibility of affecting communication with or from publics, and the organization must have mechanisms for anticipating and proactively responding to this potential communication.
5. Balance theory suggests the importance of organizations understanding the nature of relationships that can foster unanticipated publics. In the hypothetical case, the influencer who had a relationship with the activist had created an imbalanced relationship—a positive relationship with the company *and* a positive relationship with the activist who opposed the company. This put the company's influencer into a position of having to become aligned with either the company or the activist, and the influencer chose the latter to the peril of the firm. Had the company better known this influencer who received its trial ad, it could have possibly avoided controversy by taking this influencer off its list of recipients. The lesson here is that the organization should have taken greater care to develop a stronger relationship with the influencer because of the other relationships the influencer had and the need for balance in the system.

Conclusion

In our mega-marketing era, too many organizations have turned their attention to just getting audiences to consume messages, and too many public relations professionals have jumped on that bandwagon. As a result, practitioners are forgetting about publics and focusing instead on the marketing-generated audience mentality. This marketing focus has the potential to generate harm for the public relations industry and for all of the organizations it represents. As authors, we are not anti-marketing; we just want the public relations industry to understand that within the increased focus on audiences, publics are still important separate and apart from what is needed for communicating with audiences.

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**The Outsiders: Understanding How Activists
Challenge and Change Corporate Behavior**

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Abstract

Although activists increasingly pressure corporations, research on how these critical publics identify and exploit target firms' weaknesses lags behind practice. Drawing from interviews with 21 activist practitioners, organizational documents, and news articles, this study introduces the Corporate Campaign Model, which depicts and describes the various phases of activists' corporate campaigns.

Keywords: activism, corporate campaigns, issues management

Campaigns targeting corporations and their reputations are increasingly prevalent as activists seek to hold corporations and other entities to higher standards of social performance (Coombs, 1998). The challengers have also become more diverse (Manheim, 2001), representing various issues ranging from the abolition of genetically modified foods to the right to life. What these groups have in common, however, is their mission to identify a problem, unite to do something about it, and doggedly pursue the issue through a variety of strategies and tactics (Deegan, 2001). Recognizing corporations are often susceptible to reputational attacks (Hart & Sharma, 2004), activists adopted tactics and strategies pioneered by labor groups for corporate campaigns. Manheim (2001) defined the corporate campaign as “a coordinated, often long-term, and wide-ranging program of economic, political, legal, and psychological warfare” fought in the media, marketplace, and courts (p. xiii). He explains “every well-conceived corporate campaign will probe for a potential weakness in the target company and then systematically exploit that weakness until the benefit of doing so declines” (p. 85). What is lacking is an examination of *how* activist organizations probe for and exploit these weaknesses. To address this gap, this study identifies strategies and tactics used by activists and introduces the Corporate Campaign Model, which depicts how these publics seek to incite changes in corporate practice and policy.

Literature Review

To persuade corporations to alter their activities, activists seek to damage corporate reputation, disrupt organizational routines (Luders, 2006), and divert revenue from the target entity (Friedman, 1999). Often, corporations perceive activists as threats and resist interacting with these critical publics (Smith & Ferguson, 2001). However, activists have proven to be astute at recruiting new members and volunteers, gathering resources, and invoking a variety of strategies and tactics to force corporate engagement through issues management.

Issues Management

Issues management explores the long-term strategic management process that seeks to monitor, identify, and respond to issues (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). Issues are “unsettled matters which are ready for decision” (Jones & Chase, 1979, p. 11) that arise when “one or more human agents attaches significance to a situation or perceived ‘problem’” (Crable & Vibbert, 1985, p. 5). A problem morphs into an issue when it becomes a publicly discussed concern (Hallahan, 2001). Issues management benefits activists by helping them establish their role, legitimacy, and value to society (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Activists seek to gain traction and legitimacy for their issue(s) to incite change (Coombs, 1992) and must frame issues in a compelling manner, often to alter the knowledge, attitudes, and actions of individuals (Hallahan, 2001). The catalytic model (Crable & Vibbert, 1985) illustrates how issues are dynamic rather than static, moving between different stages of a lifecycle. Issues progress and develop following a cycle composed of five different stages: potential, imminent, current, critical, and dormant.

First, an issue reflects potential status when stakeholders demonstrate interest in an issue and construct arguments to support their perception of the problem (Crable & Vibbert, 1985). Second, when stakeholders begin to accept the issue, it moves to imminent status, gaining legitimacy as individuals realize their connection to the issue and accept its importance. At this stage, the issue is gaining attention but is not widely recognized. Next, the issue reaches current status when it is communicated to a wide array of stakeholders, often through media or Internet coverage. The current stage is of particular interest because it “signals the point when a large number of stakeholders know about an issue” (Coombs, 2002, p. 217). Depending on the amount of attention the issue gains, it may then progress to critical status (Crable & Vibbert, 1985) as individuals identify with the issue, prompting the firm to respond. Finally, if an issue is resolved,

or interest fades, it moves to dormant status as issues “are never solved in the sense of a final answer” (Cralle & Vibbert, 1985, p. 5). Individuals or groups may recognize an issue’s potential and attempt to revive it. Additionally, an issue may become dormant at an earlier stage of the model, such as if an issue fails to achieve legitimacy or does not gain significant attention. To grab a corporation’s attention, activists must seek to elevate issues to critical status.

Punctuated Equilibrium

Adopted from the biological sciences (Eldredge & Gould, 1972), punctuated equilibrium proposes organizations do not evolve gradually but alter between relatively long periods of stability when things basically stay the same (equilibrium) punctuated by short periods of revolutionary change (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). Organizations operate in established patterns, creating “deep structure,” which “persists and limits change during equilibrium” and is what “disassembles, reconfigures, and enforces wholesale transformation during revolutionary punctuations” (Gersick, 1991, p. 12). Thus, small changes will likely not accumulate to generate transformation; rather, change, when it happens, is usually “rapid and discontinuous” (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994, p. 1141). Revolutionary change results from the “jolt” to the system, a perturbation which can alter the deep structure (Burke, 2008). Drawing from multiple data points, this paper introduces the corporate campaign model, outlines the communication strategies and tactics used by activist organizations, and explains why these publics use particular communication strategies and tactics to understand how activists aim to initiate this “jolt.”

Methods

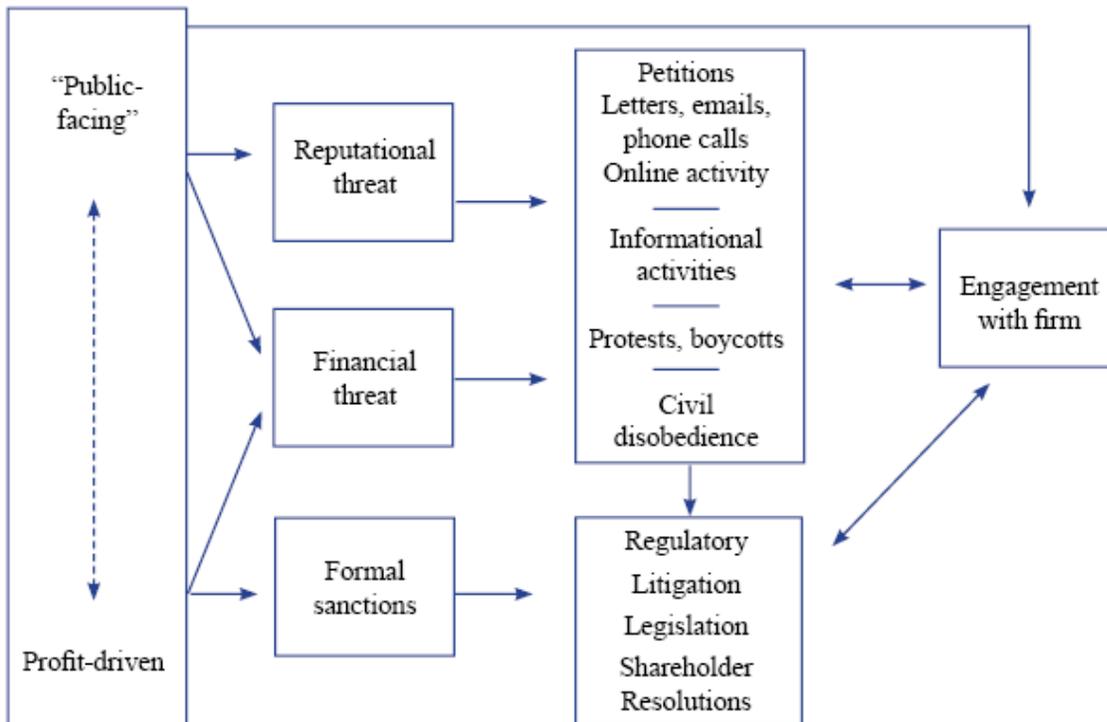
To understand the process employed by activist organizations to construct campaigns, this study used a qualitative approach (Stake, 2010). Twenty-one telephone interviews were conducted with representatives of 21 activist organizations. These participants represented various issues and were challenging a corporation. A total of 473 organizational documents (e.g., press releases, reports, blog posts) and 613 media reports supplemented the interviews and permitted triangulation. The data set included information pertaining to 61 campaigns.

Inductive analysis was used to identify patterns, themes, and categories present in the data through locating and defining key phrases, terms, and practices (Patton, 2002). First, after reading through the data to gain a general understanding of its contents, I read the data word by word to obtain codes, which are often captured using the exact words from the text. Next, I made notes of the initial impressions, thoughts, and early analysis. Third, I sorted these codes into categories (themes) based on the relationships between the codes. For each category, I crafted a label, often employing in-vivo coding by using the participants’ own words and identified exemplars from the data. Fourth, once the patterns, themes, and categories were established, the “final, confirmatory” stage of analysis followed a deductive approach by “carefully examining deviate cases or data that don’t fit the categories developed” (Patton, 2002, p. 454). Fifth, the constant comparative method was used for each category to ensure each category was mutually exclusive (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Sixth, the final themes were recorded and supported using thick, rich description drawn from interviews, organizational documents, and media reports.

The Corporate Campaign Model

Although Anderson (1992) contended “the trouble with pressure campaigns is that they are irregular” (p. 153), the findings from this study identified patterns in activist organizations’ behavior. The Corporate Campaign Model (see Figure 1) differentiates between corporate priorities (profit driven versus “public-facing”), which determines what threat is most likely to be appropriate (e.g., reputational, financial, formal sanctions), influencing the tactics utilized by these groups.

Figure 1: Corporate Campaign Model



Corporation Priorities

First, participants noted their campaigns differ based the type of corporation according to whether the firm appears to favor its reputation or bottom line. The first type of firm (“public-facing”) is concerned about its reputation and social impact (e.g., Disney, Johnson & Johnson, Procter & Gamble, Trader Joe’s). These firms embody what Waldron, Navis, and Fisher (2013) termed a *moralistic* culture, meaning they “view the broader interests of society as their primary obligation” and “emphasize organizational integrity over short-term profit maximization” (p. 403). Given their focus on both social responsibility and reputation, participants claimed they are often more likely to engage with the activist organization and even establish some sort of a relationship, although such interaction may not be immediate.

On the other end of the spectrum, “profit-driven” targets have low levels of social legitimacy and frequently face “public animosity” (Hearit, 1995). These firms gain their legitimacy from their financial performance rather than widespread social approval, reflecting Waldron et al.’s (2013) *egoist* culture as they “tend to view economically interested external stakeholders as their primary obligation” (p. 402). A representative from Greenpeace explained a firm in this category is often “so powerful it doesn’t need to negotiate” because it is “insulated from any kind of market impact that we might have on them, like the oil and gas industry... They’re like a cosmic foe. You’re never going to be sitting at the table with them, not in this country.” Examples of profit-driven entities identified by participants include firms in oil and gas (ExxonMobil, Shell), energy (Duke Energy, Puget Sound Energy), pharmaceutical (Mylan), and tobacco industries (Phillip Morris).

Activists analyze the priorities and culture of the firm as part of their campaign research. This investigation includes determining whether or not the firm has taken stances on social issues

previously, what types of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs these firms engage in, and how these corporations previously responded to activists. Firms' stances are often driven by stakeholders, who hold certain expectations for the firms they support (Dodd & Supa, 2015); some may expect a company to engage in certain behaviors whereas others do not. Importantly, as corporations must be profitable to exist, firms range on a continuum and may be driven by desires to increase profits while also building a strong reputation as a respected corporation. Therefore, target corporations may fall at various points along the spectrum.

Identifying the Appropriate Threat

Activists must carefully analyze the corporations to identify what threat(s) will be most effective. A member of 18 Million Rising explained that "one of the challenges of corporate campaigning is that there are very few levers that are available to advocates" to challenge corporations in an effort to "hit them where it hurts." After determining whether the firm is more profit-driven or "public-facing," activists decide whether or not to focus on challenging the firm's reputation, harming its bottom-line, and initiating more formal change strategies, such as government regulation. Certainly, any combination of threats can be used; some activists may rely on all three over the course of a campaign in an effort to "jolt" the system (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994).

While strategies challenging the bottom-line may be effective for both types of firms, reputational damage will be more effective on "public-facing" firms. When pressuring these corporations, activist groups target the firm's public relations efforts to "make a PR nightmare" because "it takes up their resources and distracts them" (Other 98). Because corporations often respond through CSR initiatives, these programs can easily become new fronts for activists to attack, generally because such efforts are symbolic as the firm shows "the things they are doing and just hope that's good enough to shut you up" (Appalachian Voices).

Groups pressuring profit-driven corporations aim to attack the bottom line (e.g., boycotts) or engage in formal sanctions (e.g., regulation, legislation, shareholder resolutions). A member of the Other 98 noted, "as long as they don't start losing money, there's no reason for them to give a shit." According to 18 Million Rising, "more drastic things" such as shareholder activism and boycotts are "footholds in those cases" when firms are concerned more about profits than public opinion. For firms at the profit-driven end of the spectrum, activists often must engage "other decision makers, like national policy or state policy makers" as "tactics that are effective with ["public-facing" firms] generally don't have anything to do with them" (Greenpeace). Given many firms exist on the continuum between "profit-driven" and "public facing," activists must often spark a combination of public criticism and financial threats (Appalachian Voices), requiring the implementation of several strategies and tactics.

Strategies and Tactics

Depending on whether the corporation is more likely to respond to reputational, financial, or formal sanctions, the activist group proceeds with establishing strategies and tactics. Most participants stated they reach out to the corporation prior to launching a public campaign. If the corporation fails to acknowledge the activists' concerns or dismisses them, activists then initiate the public side of the campaign. Analysis of the data identified six primary strategies employed by activists: 1) "getting the news out there," 2) message framing, 3) empowering supporters, 4) the shame game, 5) engage multiple stakeholders, and 6) "be very annoying." "Getting the news out there"

Activists disseminate information using various forms. First, several organizations desire to be a resource for consumers, including the Center for Food Safety, which prides itself "on

being a knowledge source,” providing access to scientific reports and blog posts explaining that information. Second, activists involve the media. A representative for U.S. Right to Know, who worked in the coalition with Environmental Working Group (EWG) challenging Johnson & Johnson about the chemicals in the company’s baby products, explained the media attention was a turning point for the campaign as “the media is a really important partner in holding institutions accountable.”

Message framing

To ensure the message gains traction, activists must use appropriate frames. First, messages should be timely. Journalists want to know “why should my outlet report on it at this particular time?” (Sierra Club). Activists must also identify “ways to react to the coverage or response in order to shift the story and keep it relevant.” Second, activists must carefully pitch to the media be careful not to oversaturate a particular market. PETA noted “it’s not always necessarily the story that matters. It’s how you craft the pitch.” Third, activists may embrace culture jamming, by using “a company’s own elaborately planned marketing campaigns against it” (Gell, 2014, para. 22). Moms Demand Action used Facebook’s “Look Back” video to show gun sales, complete with the same stock music, used “Facebook moments and turned them to our advantage” which “really got Facebook to sit up and take notice.” Fourth, the Other 98 emphasized the importance of “keeping it simple.” As You Sow’s work on the chocolate industry “focuses on highly tweetable nuggets of information, easily understood by the masses” to make the message “digestible” (Cahalan, 2015, para. 45). Fifth, participants emphasized the need to stay positive in campaign messaging. A representative from Appalachian Voices explained that “trying to turn a sad feeling about something into action can be really tough...That doesn’t make [individuals] want to do anything.”

Empowering supporters

Activists must ensure supporters “feel like they’re part of the solution” (Center for Food Safety). First, activists offer “easy and quick” steps (PETA). Individuals often fail to take action because they don’t know what to do (Moms Demand Action). Second, convenience is crucial. Social media works because “People feel like they’re doing something without taking too much time out of their day” (Center for Food Safety), such as negatively reviewing a new beverage on Amazon (unnamed environmental organization).

The shame game

Activists challenging a firm’s reputation frequently try to embarrass the target into altering its policies and practices. First, activists often call out firms engaging in what the activists perceive to be irresponsible behavior. Some, including Gays Against Guns, “shame and blame” targets. Activists may publish a list of companies engaging in improper behavior, such as Life Decisions International’s “Boycott List,” which contains information about corporations funding Planned Parenthood. A second strategy entails “lifting up the work of the forward-thinking” firms (Sierra Club). Greenpeace provided a list of responsible tissue providers in an effort to “recognize the more progressive members of the industry who are making change” (Brooks, 2009, p. A9). Often, this praise is combined with a reprimand for the target firm. Third, when activists are successful in their mission to alter corporate policy, many “spank and thank,” praising the corporation they once shamed (Gell, 2014).

Engaging multiple audiences

Activists disseminate information to multiple audiences to increase pressure on the corporation. First, a key audience is consumers. An unnamed environmental group explained “we try to motivate general consumers to apply pressure onto major corporate brands to convince

them that they need to take responsibilities for the impact of their supply chains or their brand will be hurt.” A second stakeholder group for activist organizations to incorporate is corporate shareholders because “corporations are more beholden to their shareholders than to us” (Other 98). Third, activists also identify decision makers. Regulators are a key target; according to the Sierra Club, “if we know regulators are going to make a decision that would affect a coal plant’s ability to operate, like EPA regulators, then we’ll target those folks.” Legislators are also important. An unnamed progressive group is “constantly updating our records of who we should be sending these things (petitions) to.”

Fourth, employees are a popular audience. A Kimberly-Clark spokesperson admitted Greenpeace’s increasing presence at offices and facilities impacted employee morale (Penzstadler, 2014). The Center for Food Safety added this strategy only works for certain companies. When targeting Bayer, the organization recognized that a factory employed area residents, whose main priority is “bringing home a paycheck.” Thus, “You have to be aware of who the demographics are in a given area and what they depend on that company for.” Fifth, because corporations engage in partnerships with other businesses, activists frequently identify and pressure those firms. PETA’s representative explained, “By working at the roots, you can bring down a company’s bottom line a little bit.” Sixth, if the firm does not engage, activists may focus on “secondary targets.” Moms Demand Action used this approach after failing to make headway on its Kroger campaign, shifting to regional chains like Albertsons and Fresh Market. “Be very annoying”

All activist groups must exhibit persistence; most strategies and tactics “are just meant to be very annoying and non-violently confrontational so that it’s not an issue they can ignore” (unnamed environmental organization). For Greenpeace’s Kimberly-Clark campaign, the “nuisance” was “much larger” than the economic effect, as the CEO eventually said, “I’d like this to go away” (Gell, 2014, para. 54).

Tactics

While the strategy offers a roadmap for how the organization plans to achieve its goals (Smith, 2009), tactics are “the specific activities and outputs through which strategies are implemented” (Botan, 2006, p. 226). The various tactics are listed with an example in Table 1. While the specific tactics employed vary by type of activist organization, all activists begin with lower impact informational, legalistic, and symbolic activities. Informational activities help activists disseminate messages, enabling them to generate awareness about their issue, issue stance, and proposed solutions; examples in this stage include social media posts, reports, or websites. Legalistic activities are more formal approaches, including petitions and filing information requests. Finally, symbolic activities also seek to advance an issue by demonstrating “how strongly it feels” (Jackson, 1982) while embarrassing the target firm; during this stage, symbolic activities may include email campaigns, letter writing, or call-ins.

If activists do not receive the response they desire, they progress to less invasive offline informational activities (e.g., leafleting, press releases, advertising). The third step is more invasive offline tactics, including protests (at a corporation’s physical location or potentially the CEO’s home), petition deliveries, or performances. For some activist organizations (e.g., As You Sow, Campus Pride, Moms Demand Action), these activities are more subdued. For others (e.g., Gays Against Guns, PETA, Other 98), these actions are more pronounced, entailing the use of die-ins and flash mobs. Some activist organizations, particularly progressive groups, engage in more extreme civil disobedience actions, such as blockades, illegal activities, or simply questionable approaches during which individuals are “showing courage, showing bravery,

Table 1. *Activist Tactics and Examples*

Tactic	Example
<i>Organizing Activities</i>	
Town Hall Meetings/ Public Hearings	Appalachian Voices held public hearings about Duke Energy's coal ash pits
Leafleting	Center for Food Safety distributes literature at events
<i>Informational Activities</i>	
Reports	EWG uses reports to have a "major impact in the media"
Advertising	PETA posts controversial ads to gain attraction for its issues
Websites	2 nd Vote regularly shares information about corporate donations
Social Media	All groups used social media to amplify their messages and establish relationships with supporters
Films	Appalachian Voices showed a series of films on the effects of coal, followed by a letter writing campaign
<i>Symbolic Activities</i>	
Email Campaigns	EWG emails representatives ("When they get emails, a large number of emails about a particular issue, they notice.")
Letter Writing	PETA mailed copies of <i>Blackfish</i> to members of Congress
Call-Ins	The Other 98 encouraged members to call target banks
Hijacking	Greenpeace accessed and swapped out Kimberly-Clark CEO's PowerPoint for slides on deforestation at an event
Guerilla Activism	An environmental organization placed stickers on a retailer's price tags containing information about the firm's practices
Petition Deliveries	Unnamed progressive organization delivered a petition at a technology firm's headquarters, gaining news coverage
Protest	May be held in a storefront (Collectively Free), at the location of corporate partners (Greenpeace), industry conventions (unnamed environmental organization), or CEO homes (PETA)
Performances	May involve flash mobs (Action on Smoking and Health) or die-ins, where activists pretend to be dead (Gays Against Guns)
Boycotts	Other 98 and DeFund DAPL encouraged customers of banks funding DAPL to close accounts
<i>Civil Disobedience</i>	
Blockades	The Other 98 staged a blockade at a Seattle port using kayaks to delay Shell's oil rig from leaving
Illegal Activities	Greenpeace held an elaborate protest, breaking into Procter & Gamble's headquarters to hang banners
Hoaxes	18 Million Rising created a faux website and Twitter for Gap
<i>Legalistic Activities</i>	
Petitions	Moms Demand Action posted a petition for Chipotle, which quickly received more than 10,000 signatures, forcing Chipotle to respond within 24 hours
Stakeholder Resolutions	As You Sow proposed at resolution for McDonald's to eliminate Styrofoam packaging
Regulatory Agencies	PETA filed a petition with OSHA to prohibit humans from

	physically interacting with animal
Legislation	The Sierra Club pushed a Washington State bill encouraging Puget Sound Energy to phase out Colstrip
Lawsuits	PETA sued SeaWorld, claiming that five wild-caught orcas performing is a violation of the 13th Amendment
Information Requests	U.S. Right to Know files Freedom of Information Act requests

showing the power of creativity and willingness to stand for something” (Greenpeace). As a fifth step, some organizations turn to more formal approaches, including legislation, regulatory pressure, or litigation after other efforts fail. Maintaining the ability to escalate is necessary as “You don’t want to go all out in your first couple of steps... We need to plan for room for escalation” because reaching a resolution with the target in the first months is unlikely (PETA).

As the model depicts, firms concerned with their reputation are more likely to be targeted by activists using highly-visible strategies (e.g., shaming firms and comparing competitors) and tactics (e.g., protests) that can easily be picked up by the news media because of the imagery and symbolism, amplifying the message, and recruiting more supporters, and elevating the issue to critical status (Cralle & Vibbert, 1985). For firms located closer to the profit-driven side of the continuum, pressure on the bottom-line may also be inflicted through public campaigns. By raising attention about the firm’s behavior, activists of all types may seek to incite a boycott, should other tactics (e.g., petitions, social media posts) fail. However, the nature of some of these corporations (e.g., Duke Energy, Mylan) may render a boycott ineffective because consumers have no feasible alternatives. Larger industry leaders are also less likely to succumb to pressure from activists, peers, or competitors (Pfarrer et al., 2008; Waldron et al., 2013). As a result, many activists rely most heavily on legalistic activities, such as regulation or litigation. These groups also use shareholder resolutions in an effort to incite change from the inside, generating support among shareholders for their issue stance.

In addition to considering the target corporation, activists also consider their own organizations’ strengths and issues when identifying appropriate tactics. Large organizations can stage elaborate actions, including blockades. A member of Greenpeace explained that “We’re just really good at actions. That’s what we do.” Strategies and tactics also depend on the issue. Organizations addressing health-related concerns, such as tobacco and cosmetics, employ legalistic tactics and generate reports rather than using symbolic actions. Environmental groups use legalistic tactics, hearings, reports, protests, and guerilla activism. Animal rights activists gravitate toward actions that generate high amounts of visibility and face-to-face contact. Progressive organizations prefer to build a strong social media presence and are more willing to embrace civil disobedience whereas conservative organizations depend on boycotts and informational tactics. Throughout the campaign’s lifespan, activists will “switch up the styles of our actions” (Collectively Free), fluctuating between different tactics. This variety also keeps supporters interested as repeating the same actions would “get kind of boring” (unnamed environmental organization). Similarly, activists will use a variety of messaging strategies, including changing social media posts (Center for Food Safety).

Finally, the corporation’s response to activists influences the tactics used by these organizations, including whether or not campaigns escalate. An unnamed environmental activist explained they “match the tone,” using informational tactics if discussions appear to “be going well” but escalate if the firm is “resistant to change.” Resistance may manifest in a number of ways from not responding to meeting invitations (Center for Food Safety) to meeting with

groups where “they’re just going to say what they think you want to hear” (unnamed progressive organization). If activists do move on to more public actions, conversations may continue behind the scenes. A Greenpeace activist explained, “You create a public face, you create a corporate villain, you go at them really hard. But you’re sitting at the table with them behind the scenes, working on their corporate policy.”

Engagement

Nineteen of the 21 activist practitioners interviewed for this study claimed their organizations desired to engage in a dialogue and negotiations with the target *before* enacting a public campaign, and that engagement is a key goal of the campaign. Greenpeace sends letters to the organization to request a face-to-face meeting to ensure the conflict is “over questionable policies or actions, not a lack of information” (Linaweaver, 2009, para. 18). Known for its flashy campaigns, PETA claims it would prefer to solve concerns “before we even print signs” because “we can put our funds, our very limited funds, toward more obstinate targets.” Moms Demand Action believes reaching out “is a good faith effort to not blindside companies.”

A handful of participants noted that corporations respond to these requests and meet with the groups. In some cases, the corporation altered its behavior; for most, the firm issued a perfunctory response, promising to change or largely paying lip-service to the activists’ concerns rather than following through or inciting substantial alterations. Failure to engage with the activist group, or stalled conversations, results in activists executing tactics. According to participants, engagement often does not occur until after the campaign goes public, and then drags on for years, requiring significant resource allocation. Corporations must often be publicly challenged before they will agree to meet with activist organizations. Although Chick-fil-A reached out to Campus Pride shortly after the launch of the campaign, other corporations, including Procter & Gamble and Johnson & Johnson, responded to groups only after reports or demonstrations generated media involvement, thereby inflicting potential reputational damage.

Implications

Should an activist campaign emerge, firms should first analyze the accuracy of the claim. In some cases, activists may be misinformed and the company must be prepared to offer information and supporting evidence to correct the misperception. At other times, the activists may be correct, requiring the corporation to then analyze the extent of the alleged wrongdoing and potentially adopt a process of adaptation and change. Such responses should also be taken early. Representatives at Kimberly-Clark advocated that other companies should not “ignore the fair warning. Take that phone call and just have the conversation” (Gies, 2014, para. 13). Heath (1997) suggested that early involvement in issue discussions may have a greater impact as these issues have yet to become fixed in publics’ minds and generate significant media attention.

However, firms should be careful when employing CSR as a “quick-fix” as participants quickly disparaged this response as “greenwashing.” Although CSR initiatives may generate financial and reputational perks, such efforts should not be implemented lightly as a figurative attempt to suggest change, glossing over concerns. Activist organizations often monitor for this behavior and will attack such programs in an attempt to expose the hypocritical nature of the organization that is failing to live up to its rhetoric. Finally, the corporation should research the activist organization(s) behind the claims; the profile of the activist group may also shape corporate response. Some participants indicated they had no desire to work with the target because they are fundamentally opposed to its existence rather than a specific policy or practice. A member of the Other 98 claimed that negotiations or conversations with the target would be futile because “Exxon can’t do a thing to make us like them. There’s not a thing they can do to

make anything about their business model acceptable to us.”

While some scholars (e.g., Deegan, 2001) suggest that firms must respond to all activist groups, certain participants in the study suggested that they don't expect an invitation and may not accept it if offered. Dialogue can only occur if publics “are willing and able to articulate their demands to organizations” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 26). Moreover, such relationships must begin with a desire to interact (Taylor, Kent, & White). In such cases, the issue stances of activists and their targets are too far apart, providing no ability for these parties to identify areas of shared significance and prohibiting them from building “mutually beneficial relationships” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2012). Firms cannot respond to every issue or potential issue (Wang, Wezel & Forgues, 2016), often forcing management to prioritize issues (Jones & Chase, 1979). In some circumstances, firms may be better served realistically to meet with those activists who have a genuine interest in posing solutions that generate feasible and sustainable organizational changes. Although activists may refuse to compromise on their issues or objectives (Stokes & Rubin, 2010), these publics should be prepared to offer practical solutions to the firm.

As part of their own issues management, firms should research the activist organization to learn if it has worked with other corporations in the past and the results of such efforts to gain insight into the organization's true intent. Firms may also employ vicarious learning, examining previous cases to identify effective and ineffective responses. Importantly, while prominent and resource-rich activist organizations receive more attention, firms should not dismiss activist groups they perceive as small (Deegan, 2001) or as ‘slacktivists’ (Veil, Reno, Freihaut, & Oldham, 2015). Small organizations can effectively challenge corporations. Using traditional activist strategies, Moms Demand Action convinced Starbucks to issue a “no guns” policy at its locations. Similarly, firms should also not ignore ‘slacktivists.’ Animal rights activists successfully hijacked #AskSeaWorld in 2015. The case illustrated how activists can use the Internet to engage new audiences and gain mainstream media coverage of failed corporate public relations campaigns, creating a digital nightmare (Woods, 2018).

Finally, corporations must recognize the ongoing nature of activism. If an agreement is met with any activist organizations, the firm should remain committed to this resolution. Activists will continue to monitor corporate behavior even after negotiations end. Should these firms fail to adhere to the agreed-upon terms, activists will not hesitate to re-ignite a public campaign and challenge the corporation based on its original misbehavior and broken promises.

Conclusion

This study outlined the strategies and tactics used by activists to challenge corporations and presented the Corporate Campaign Model. The model proposes that some firms are more likely to be motivated to alter their practices or policies according to various threats (reputational and bottom-line) and formal sanctions. This model also shows that activists determine what threat will be most effective, based on whether the firm is more profit-driven or “public-facing.” Finally, this paper offered implications for the corporation-activist dynamic, including the need for corporations to consider the ultimate goal of activist organizations to determine whether or not engagement will be fruitful while also taking caution not to dismiss activists because of their size or methods.

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What Happens When Organizations Lie: Deception, Reputation, and the “Lie Bias” Among Stakeholders

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Abstract

Perceptions of organizational deception alter the relationship between a corporation and its publics. Situational crisis communication theory understands the success of an organization managing issues as grounded in previous reputation. Integral to reputation is the capacity by which publics can trust an organization, however, no research has yet examined the role of trust-formation and maintenance after instances of deception, both real and perceived, in an organization. By introducing the paradigm of adaptive truth, or truth default theory, this study evaluates organizations with a history of deception and extends SCCT to include a public relational “truth bias” to explain stakeholder perceptions of truth and trustworthiness of organizations. Through case studies of three major organizations, the present study articulates the means by which organizations damage public trust and proposes a “lie bias” as a new theoretical construct to analyze public perception following instances of perceived deception and resulting public distrust in an organization. Using this new construct, an outline for improving public relations given a compromised organizational adaptive truth is developed. Public relations practitioners can utilize these findings to better understand the “lie bias” that publics may hold toward organizations following deception.

Keywords: Public relations, truth default theory, SCCT, organizational deception

Coombs and Holladay (2015) express the need to move beyond an oversimplified interpersonal “relationship” ideograph in public relations, emphasizing a call for public relations research that “includes weak relationships” (p. 694). The idealism of appropriating interpersonal terms for organizational-person communication which, as Heath (2010) notes, “all too often assumes that relationship is a code word for something that is good and enduring,” fails to nuance the dynamic perceptual influence of constitutive reputational discourse (p. xiii). Instead, a focus on the actual processes that co-create meaning is required to develop public relations research on stakeholders and organizations beyond a reductive interpersonal “relationship” (Coombs & Holladay, 2015, p. 691).

Few crisis situations illustrate co-creation of meaning in greater contrast than organizational deception; Mattson, Allen, Ryan, and Miller (2000) located deception as a unique context for theoretically marrying interpersonal and public relations. Through an exploration of organizational deception, the present study proposes multiple synthesizing constructs to support a nuanced theorization of mediated organizational-individual relationships, particularly when that relationship is no longer good or enduring. Through analysis of three diverse case studies, a socially mediated “lie bias” will be proposed as an extension of SCCT to better inform crisis response strategies in a mediated world.

Literature Review

Deception in Public Relations

Most literature in public relations have approached deception from either pragmatic, strategic management (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) or as a moral impetus to be ethically reconciled (Botan, 1997; Berg, 2012; Gower, 2017). The dearth of work theorizing the context around organizations lying comes from the absence of an operational definition for deception. While some researchers have examined the circumstances that surround conflicting stakeholder perceptions of truth (Seiffert-Brockmann & Thummes, 2017; Englehardt & Evans, 1994), few have successfully integrated this work with practical theorizations of organizational action.

Research has long understood that it is not easy to correctly detect deception (Ekman & O’Sullivan, 1991), and Thummes’s (2018) findings emphasize the inconsistent dualism by which organizations are judged for deception, demanding a more concurrent approach to examining not only the values of public relations (Heath, 2000) but also deception. Particularly in a heavily mediated news world, many factors besides objective truth must be considered when analyzing deception. Lee and Boynton (2017) recognize the dialectic and contextualized creation of transparency through mediated situations and stakeholders, and Coombs (2015) also recognizes what he terms “challenge crises” as the stakeholder reconceptualization of organizational irresponsibility. These conflicts between stakeholder perceptions and organizational identities require a reconciliation between concrete messages and discursively-created perceptions.

However, as Ji, Li, North, and Liu (2017) have recently cautioned, “public relations scholars seem to have not yet taken enough action in investigating how stakeholders are responding” to crises, instead focusing on “analyzing organizations’ online profiles, communication models, and so forth” (p. 202). A theorization of stakeholder response is necessary to better understand the cultural-psychological context by which stakeholders are perceiving deception in organizations and subsequent construction of organizational reputation.

Although deception scholarship has long taken the construct of unchallenged trust, or a “truth bias,” for granted in interpersonal communication (Street & Masip, 2015), Levine’s (2014) recent contribution of truth-default theory (TDT) predicts “credibility assessment and deception detection accuracy and inaccuracy” (p. 379). In effect, Levine’s theory examines the processes

under which individuals “are expected to suspect a lie, when people conclude that a lie was told, and the conditions under which people make truth and lie judgments correctly and incorrectly” (p. 379). As Harwood (2014) summarizes, “Understanding lying as a situationally determined activity changes our perception of the act and the people who do it” (p. 409).

TDT finds credence in the contextual, semantic, and formal cues that cause individuals to perceive deception in another party. TDT emphasizes that “verbal content must be understood in the context it was produced” (Levine & McCornack, 2014, p. 438). As a receiver-based theory, the organizational perspective of a crisis is irrelevant; rather, the situation as it appears to stakeholders becomes the basis for judgements of deception. Furthermore, TDT not only accounts for the interpersonal perception of individuals, but articulates the process that constitutes the organization-individual relationship and thus is a strong theoretical grounding of interpersonal theory for public relations. As a result, this situational deception is a salient construct for public relations in describing the iterative, mediated landscape of truth and trust that organizations must navigate to avoid future crises.

Stakeholder Perceptions and Reputation

Modern public relations scholarship indicates that the relationship between organizations and stakeholders can no longer be considered unilateral, but discursively informed (Kuhn, 1997). Continuous, mediated contact with stakeholders and salient issues is necessary to maintain positive relationships with publics and prevent crises (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Jaques 2012). The new organization is receptive to the demands of numerous stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 1998) and dialogically manages these relationships to create and maintain reputation before and after crises (Kaul et al., 2015; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). Stakeholders contribute feedback images of an organization that dialogically construct organizational reputation.

Through situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), Coombs (2007) articulates a dynamic evaluation of crisis response through the reputation of an organization, using the term “reputational capital” to describe the accumulation of stakeholder good will towards an organization (p. 165). Grounded in attribution theory, SCCT conceives of crises as symbolic events that can be managed through discourse designed to recover organizational image (Coombs, 1995). As a crisis response strategy, SCCT seeks to “offset the negatives from a crisis with current or past good works” through discursive framing (p. 172). Attribution is key to an understanding of responsibility at all stages of a crisis, and perceptions of attribution function to affect future stakeholder constructions of organizational reputation (Coombs, 2010).

Coombs (2018) has pointed to paracrises as the most salient contemporary issue in SCCT “by making crisis risk management visible to stakeholders” and requiring organizational response in a precrisis stage (p. 32). However, this visibility and continued engagement comes at the cost of introducing more competing interpretations, and risks internal organizational miscommunication developing into external, situational deception. Situational deception requires an understanding of the relationship between organization and publics as perceptually-constitutive of deception; while SCCT makes specifications for strong attribution of blame in a crisis, the theory operates from an organizational perspective. Coombs (2010) prescribes crisis managers “determine the frame stakeholders are using to categorize the process” and, once the frame is established, the effects of the intensifying factors “crisis history” and “prior reputation” be considered (p. 39).

Prior reputation can either improve (Coombs & Holladay, 2002) or further damage (Coombs & Holladay, 2006) stakeholder perceptions of a current crisis based on the previous behavior and actions of an organization. Similarly, an extensive crisis history intensifies

stakeholder perceptions of the current crisis even when past crises have been accidental (Coombs, 2004). Both prior reputation and crisis history increase the threat of a crisis by increasing the attribution of organizational responsibility (Brown & White, 2010). With the rise of paracrises, however, the distinction between prior reputation and crisis history are more difficult to articulate from one another, complicating response strategies and requiring closer examinations of the construction of stakeholder perceptions.

The SCCT frames and intensifying factors for understanding attribution in a crisis are complicated by social media (Coombs, 2012) and are similarly distorted through accompanying mediated perceptions of situational deception. In order to expand Coombs and Holladay's (2015) call for research understanding the processes that make up organizational-individual relationships, TDT will be proposed to integrate stakeholder perceptions with prior reputation and crisis history. Because the crisis response strategies in SCCT are based on attribution, bridging the theoretical gaps to understanding stakeholder perceptions of attribution in a crisis is necessary to improving crisis response.

Methods

The purpose of case study research is to develop the boundaries of contemporary phenomenon, cognizant to the larger context surrounding the process; as Yin (2002) observes, "The case study is the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context" (p. 4). As Creswell (1998) notes, case studies explicate the problem through observable mechanisms, including "a discussion of important elements, and finally, 'lessons to be learned'" (p. 221). Yin (1981) advocates a scholarly recognition of the narrative implicit to crisis events through qualitative and critical research; case studies can "provide description, test theory, or generate theory" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 535). As a heavily theoretically-grounded piece, the present study seeks to analyze organizational decisions and stakeholder perceptions through an appropriate, ontologically reflective methodology.

The following case studies were chosen to provide distinct examples of the continuum of deception; variations in contexts, chronemics, and culture articulate the differences and similarities in diverse communication crises. To understand key elements of the crisis and establish a timeline, an online search was initiated for articles regarding the impacted product and brand. Each article retrieved was reviewed for relevant information and links with new information were followed until no new information was uncovered. A case summary was written and then modified based on additional case evidence of government documents and press releases. The evidence examined for each case is included in Table 1.

Case Studies

Apple's Throttled iPhones

In mid-December 2017, a *New York Times* article cited the "nefarious plot" that consumers have suspected for years: "The company, they said, was slowing down their older iPhones to get them to buy new ones" (Choksi, 2017, para. 1). Weeks before, in early December, consumers coalesced on Reddit and Geekbench to discuss evidence that low battery-life resulted in slow performance (Choksi, 2017). The practice, known as performance throttling, means that users with older iPhones would encounter shutdowns and reduced speed due to the batteries. The public took issue with the fact that "When owners of older iPhone models experience slow performance, the usual course of action is to buy a new phone" instead of replacing the relatively inexpensive battery (Villas-Boas, 2018, para. 5).

In a press release on December 28th, Apple apologized but did not admit that it had slowed down old phones, instead offering background on battery-wear and several monetary

compensations for consumers including batteries at reduced prices (Apple, 2018). The move failed to placate customers, instead resulting in lawsuits filed in France, South Korea, and at least thirty class-action lawsuits in the United States (Toh, Geier, & Kottasová, 2018; Smith, 2018) all accusing the tech-giant of planned obsolescence.

A tone of both betrayal and vindication characterizes articles and commentary posted in the following weeks, as the technology-website *BGR* describes “how crazy all those conspiracy theorists sounded” talking about Apple slowing down older products, before concluding, “Apple was effectively lying the entire time, or at least willingly misleading the public” (Epstein, 2018, para. 1). On *NPR* Ari Shapiro began his show assuring his listeners that “you’re not crazy. Apple has confirmed something that iPhone users believed for a long time” (Chappell, 2017, para. 2).

Similarly, an article in *Slate* begins “You weren’t imagining it, after all” (Oremus, 2017, para. 1), however, the author goes on to defend Apple’s technology issue, if not their discourse following the problem. An article in *TechCrunch* also noted, “this is a lithium-ion chemistry issue, not an Apple issue,” but both articles still take issue with the culture of secrecy around Apple and find blame in Apple’s disclosure (Panzarino, 2017, para. 15).

US Senator John Thune, chair of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, articulated concerns with feelings of deception in a letter, asserting “the large volume of consumer criticism leveled against the company in light of its admission suggests that there should have been better transparency” (Shepardson, 2018, para. 3). Apple’s handling of the crisis suffered from what was perceived as a longstanding lack of transparency and culture of secrecy, leaving consumers angry and eager for reparation.

Intel’s Insider Trading

In December, 2017, the digital world took notice of Intel CEO Brian Krzanich selling all but his minimum number of shares in the company (Eassa, 2017). Two weeks later, a vulnerability was found with Intel’s chips that “could slow down every processor in the world, with no perfect fix short of a gut redesign” (Brandom, 2018, para. 3). *TechCrunch* describes how, usually, companies “would come up with a solution, quietly apply it, then announce both the flaw and the solution at the same time” (Coldewey, 2018, para. 27). However, investigative reporting by several news sites forced Intel’s hand in the wake of Krzanich’s stock unloading.

Intel initially denied reports that the bugs were unique to Intel products, insisting the vulnerabilities did “not have the potential to corrupt, modify, or delete data” (2018a, para. 1). The next day, the company issued a press release promising updates to protect against malware (Intel, 2018b). However, *Reuters* (2018) reported that these patches caused reboot problems. *Forbes* noted how Intel “strains credulity” to insist that no problem exists with their processors, concluding that the company was attempting to reduce the possibility of a recall or reconcile Krzanich’s stock selling (Kam, 2018, para. 1). At the 2018 Consumer Electronics Show, Intel made six announcements in what was perceived as an attempt at “using various degrees of showmanship and technological acumen to try to change the subject” (Miller, 2018, para. 12). Stakeholders’ concerns center around doubting the transparency and questioning the future of Intel. *The Washington Post* described how the \$24 million stock sale drew scrutiny from legislators, stockholders, and consumers alike (Merle, 2018). Other news sites also discuss the possibility of a federal investigation of insider trading (Beyers, 2018; Kenwell, 2018).

The appearance of insider dealings has lent an atmosphere of doom to an already serious product flaw, leaving stakeholders distrustful of both Intel’s leadership and future salience as a company. Public response to Krzanich’s Wall Street dealings and Intel’s subsequent bug announcement has paid special attention to the ordering of events; continued corporate

reassurance that Krzanich's stock sale was unrelated to the vulnerability has produced only skepticism among publics and a significant drop in Intel's stock (Wolverton, 2018). *CNN* summed up the overwhelming sentiment about the stock dumping and bug when it wrote, "Related or not, it doesn't exactly give investors the warm fuzzies about Intel's stock prospects" (Goldman, 2018, para. 4).

Chipotle's Foodborne Illnesses

Chipotle's ethical-fast-casual dining dominance has taken a hit due to a number of foodborne illness outbreaks. Between 2015 and 2017 Chipotle has experienced salmonella, *E. coli*, and norovirus outbreaks, impacting over 500 customers across the country. These outbreaks have left investors and consumers alike reluctant to trust the burrito mogul. Chipotle is facing a criminal investigation regarding the summer of 2015 *E. coli* outbreak and a lawsuit due to the 2015 norovirus outbreak in a Simi Valley, California chain, claiming Chipotle attempted to cover up the outbreak (Close, 2016; Mason, 2016).

The Simi Valley norovirus outbreak impacted over 200 customers but the brand answered only to local news channels (Fickenscher, 2015; Schwartz & Avila, 2015). The *New York Post* printed an article at the end of 2015 titled "Turns out Chipotle's Been Making People Sick for Months" taking issue with the brand's lack of transparency regarding the multiple foodborne illness outbreaks. Commenting on the salmonella and norovirus outbreaks in August and September, Fickenscher states "the earlier outbreaks received little notice beyond media reports" (2015, para 3). In July, 2017 a Virginia franchise was temporarily shut down due to norovirus. While norovirus, a highly contagious virus passed through human contact, was due to a sick employee and thus an isolated incident, press outlets still criticized the fast-casual dining chain for its public relations handlings regarding the outbreak and the brand's lack of transparency (Archer, 2017). "Chipotle may be repeating the same mistakes during the last round of outbreaks as the company has failed to get out in front of the media coverage by making its own statement" (Bowman, 2017, para. 6)

Chipotle's press releases regarding the outbreak utilized qualifying language and positioned the brand as hesitant to assume responsibility or admit to faulty food safety standards. The first press release on November 3, 2015 referred to the outbreak as the "issues in Washington and Oregon" and included multiple uses of "out of an abundance of caution" in reference to closing responsible restaurants and getting rid of potentially contaminated food (Chipotle, 2015). Publics took issue with CEO Steve Eells taking "at least five months to apologize for making some customers ill" (Fickenscher, 2015, para. 3) as well as the brand's lacking presence and awareness on social media regarding the outbreaks. In the midst of 2015's four foodborne illness outbreaks, Chipotle was "basically absent on social media, which [was] a huge mistake" (Jennings, 2015, para. 14).

While foodborne illnesses are not necessarily the kiss of death for restaurants (Kline, 2016), the patterns of concealment regarding the outbreaks have negatively impacted Chipotle's reputation and bottom-line. As recently as December, 2017, both *CNBC* and the *New York Post* reported a potential new foodborne illness outbreak as customers at a Los Angeles franchise location utilized the website, *iwaspoisoned.com* to self-report symptoms associated with food poisoning after eating at Chipotle (Sadowski, 2017; Whitten, 2017). While not confirmed to be true, the brand's lack of transparency in past incidents has resulted in public outcry for upfront information regarding any foodborne illness issues.

Discussion

Transparency, Disclosure, & Discourse

When analyzing the construction of organizational falsehood, research must consider the dialogic context in which a crisis takes place. The case studies examined did not recognize the situational communication factors underpinning the initial crisis and thus led publics to assume deception on the part of the organization; timeliness and agency of disclosure informed stakeholder perceptions of deception. In all three case studies, the salient information regarding the flaw in each product was disclosed by third party sources, prompting the organizations to respond retroactively. In a mediated world, the conflict between timeliness and agency of disclosure calls into question stakeholder perceptions of an organization's transparency (Holland, Krause, Provencher, Seltzer, 2017).

Transparency as an aesthetic constructs the narrative of the crisis at hand; publics individually conceptualize and assign attribution when learning of new crises (Coombs, 2007). Public perception that the organization knew of the crisis situation and chose to not be transparent led to situational deception and negatively impacted the brand's reputation and bottom line. As an example, Chipotle's ad content rhetorically cultivated a culture of transparency that was in direct contrast with the organization's handlings of the foodborne illness outbreaks. While not necessarily outright deception, the appearance of contradiction led publics to hold the brand under greater scrutiny in future crises. As Bowman (2017) observed, "Perception is the key factor here, and Chipotle seems not to have learned its lesson, that it needs to maintain its image even if it doesn't consider the norovirus incident to be serious," fully articulating the notion of the individualized perception stakeholders establish regarding organizational responsibility which in turn informs the organization's reputation (para. 12). Alternately, Apple faced issues of an under-used transparency aesthetic by neglecting to inform stakeholders of the reasons why older phones were slowing down. Apple's lack of transparency rhetoric regarding the situation confirmed stakeholder perceptions of deception regarding the common belief that the company was secretly forcing consumers to upgrade. Similarly, Intel's lack of disclosure regarding issues with product vulnerabilities in conjunction with Krzanich selling the majority of his shares gave the auspice of inconsistent messages. These case studies illustrate the processes at play between stakeholders and organizations, and the relationship between individual perception and discursive construction.

The dynamic transparency aesthetic of these case studies highlights the role of discourse in determining stakeholder perceptions as instrumental to grounding situational deception in organizations. While SCCT requires an understanding of the organization's prior reputation and crisis history, an integration of TDT demands consideration of the relational, dialogic space between organization and stakeholders. Recognition of the discursive element of situational deception allows for a re-working of the response strategies outlined by SCCT.

Expanding SCCT & the "Lie Bias"

As deception research shows, lying is a situationally determined activity which "changes our perception of the act and the people who do it" (Harwood, 2014, p. 409). Under the umbrella of deception research, TDT examines how individuals assess the likelihood of deception in an interaction (Levine et al., 2014). The tenets of TDT align with crisis literature as both take into consideration the individualized nature of each phenomenon. As public relations practitioners address publics during organizational crises, an understanding of the importance of individual, receiver-based interpretation of deception can better inform appropriate organizational responses.

In the construction of organizational reputation, the stakeholder's perception regarding the organization as having engaged in deception, particularly at the time of a crisis, can inform the organization's reputation and future crisis handlings. SCCT offers the framework for practitioners to choose the proper crisis response strategy based on attribution but lacks consideration of the impact of situational deception on assessing prior reputation and crisis history. Within prior reputation and crisis history assessment in SCCT lies the opportunity for a new element which considers the dialogic environment between stakeholders and the organization, the lie bias. This bias is not necessarily based on organizational falsehood, but rather individualized stakeholder perception of deception. Considering this rhetorical-relational situation invites crisis managers to recognize a "lie bias" among stakeholders perceiving the crisis based on criteria beyond Coombs's (2010) organizational-based factors. With roots in TDT, the idea of the lie bias informs perceptions of the organization and in turn, the organization's reputation.

Crisis response strategies utilized by public relations practitioners should take into consideration this potential bias in order to most effectively communicate with publics. Through analysis of the preceding case studies, practitioners can understand that handling deception is not as easy as telling the truth, and requires more theoretical attention in the future to explore the lie bias and further develop the relationship between organizations and stakeholders. SCCT has proven to be a successful framework in crisis response strategies, but it must continue to adapt to a new mediated environment and examine the processes of the changing stakeholder-organizational relationship.

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Table 1

Case	Evidence	
Apple	Media and Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apple. (2018, December 28). <i>A message to our customers about iPhone batteries and performance</i> [press release]. • Chappell, B. (2017, December 21). You're not crazy: Apple deliberately slows down older iPhones. <i>NPR</i>. • Choksi, N. (2017). Is Apple slowing down old iPhones? Questions and answers. <i>The New York Times</i>. • Epstein, Z. (2018, January, 10). How to easily check to see if Apple is slowing down your iPhone. <i>BGR</i>. • Oremus, W. (2017, December 20). What's wrong with Apple "slowing down" older iPhones? <i>Slate</i>. • Panzarino, M. (2017, December 20). Apple addresses why people are saying their iPhones with older batteries are running 'slower.' <i>TechCrunch</i>. • Shepardson, D. (2018). Senator wants Apple to answer questions on slowing iPhones. <i>Reuters</i>. • Smith, C. (2018, January 11). Apple now faces more than 30 class-action lawsuits for slowing down iPhones. <i>BGR</i>. • Toh, M., Geier, B., & Kottasová. (2018, January 12). Global backlash spreads over Apple slowing down iPhones. <i>CNN</i>. • Villas-Boas, A. (2018, January 3). How to check if Apple is slowing down your iPhone. <i>Business Insider</i>.
Chipotle	Media and Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archer, S. (2017, July 20). Chipotle is falling after it confirms norovirus is behind the recent illness outbreak. <i>Business Insider</i>. • Bowman, J. (2017, July 19). The biggest problem with Chipotle's latest outbreak isn't what you think. <i>The Motley Fool</i>. • Brumfield, B., Sutton, J., Kounang, N., & Christensen, J. (2015, November 4). Chipotle shuts dozens of locations as more confirmed E. coli cases emerge. <i>CNN</i>. • Fickenscher, L. (2015, December 11). Turns out Chipotle's been making people sick for months. <i>New York Post</i>. • Jennings, L. (2015, December 10). Experts unimpressed with Chipotle's crisis management. <i>Nation's Restaurant News</i>. • Kline, D. (2016, February 10). Here's everything Chipotle has done to handle its E. coli crisis; is it enough? <i>The Motley Fool</i>. • Little, K. (2015, December 9). Chipotle grilled for E. coli, norovirus crisis response. <i>CNBC</i>. • Mason, A. (2016, January 20). Lawsuit claims Chipotle tried to cover up California norovirus outbreak. <i>NBC New York</i>. • Schwartz, G. S., & Avila, W. (2015, August 24). Dozens of customers report feeling sick after eating at SoCal Chipotle. <i>NBC4 Los Angeles</i>.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whitten, S. (2017, December 20). Chipotle shares drop on yet another report of possible food safety issues. <i>CNBC</i>.
Intel	Media and Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beyers, T. (2018, January 13). Intel's CEO sold millions in stock before disclosing a chip flaw. How worried should investors be? <i>The Motley Fool</i>. • Brandom, R. (2018, January 11). Keeping Spectre secret. <i>The Verge</i>. • Coldewey, D. (2018, January 3). Kernel panic! What are Meltdown and Spectre, the bugs affecting nearly every computer and device? <i>TechCrunch</i>. • Eassa, A. (2017, December 19). Intel's CEO just sold a lot of stock. <i>The Motley Fool</i>. • Goldmann, D. (2018, January 4). Intel CEO's massive stock dump raises eyebrows. <i>CNN</i>. • Intel. (2018a, January 3). <i>Intel responds to security research findings</i> [press release]. Retrieved from https://newsroom.intel.com/news/intel-responds-to-security-research-findings/ • Intel. (2018b, January 4). <i>Intel issues updates to protect systems from security exploits</i> [press release]. • Kam, K. (2018, January 8). 2 possible reasons why Intel still says their CPUs are not flawed. <i>Forbes</i>. • Kenwell, B. (2018, January 10). Should Intel CEO be investigated for insider selling? <i>TheStreet</i>. • Merle, R. (2018, January 11). Timing \$24 million stock sale by Intel CEO draws scrutiny. <i>The Washington Post</i>. • Miller, R. (2018, January 12). Intel tried desperately to change the subject from Spectre and Meltdown at CES. <i>TechCrunch</i>. • Reuters Staff. (2018, January 11). Intel says patches can cause reboot problems in old chips. <i>Reuters</i>. • Wolverton, T. (2018, January 3). Intel was aware of the chip vulnerability when its CEO sold off \$24 million in company stock. <i>Business Insider</i>.



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