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Policy Aside: A Framing Study on Influencing Cultural and
Policy Change within an Organization

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Abstract

Using a posttest-only experimental design (N = 648), this study examines framing theory in public relations when applied to media coverage of women in military combat roles. This experiment manipulates the frame of an article by including either a positive or negative tone to test whether the frame affects perceptions of the Marine Corps. Results indicate that the framing of this issue has a significant effect on the reputation, credibility, and characteristics of the Marine Corps.

Introduction

A public's perception of a military organization and its individual members, is often influenced by many factors, including personal knowledge and background, current events, family history, and demographics (Kleykamp & Hipes, 2015). A critical part of the construction of that perception is how military public affairs officers (PAOs) and the news media use those factors to frame a topic. Broom and Sha (2013) describe framing as "communicating a message in a way that will allow for understanding or agreement" (p. 292). Historically, the frame through which the media and service PAOs present information to the public has been a key element when conveying information about the military (Dobernig, et al., 2010).

One of the most well-known examples of framing theory in military history is the raising of the American flag atop Mount Suribachi during World War II. In his photograph, Associated Press reporter, Joe Rosenthal framed the United States Marine Corps' successes in a way that garnered united patriotism and billions of dollars of support for the war effort in the form of war bonds (Pulitzer.org, 2017).

The image of the Iwo Jima flag raising remains a clear visualization of how Marines respond to the call of the nation. The frame through which the media portrayed this image garnered the national support of the war effort both socially and in more tangible, monetary measures. This study shows that the way in which the media frame topics within the Marine Corps continues to shape public perception of the organization.

Notably, the military recently opened all jobs to all qualified candidates regardless of gender, bringing to the forefront a topic that continues to produce social discourse across the nation and throughout the military - women in combat (Prividera & Howard III, 2014). Despite public attention on this topic, as of this writing, no female officer has successfully completed the Marine Corps' Infantry Officer Course (IOC) (Seck, 2017); an issue which dominates the traditional news media narrative, entertainment mass media in the forms of documentaries, and perhaps most importantly, public discussion (Mesok, 2016; Kumar, 2004; Prividera & Howard III, 2014).

Drawing from the public relations theory of framing, this study investigates the media's framing of the attempts of women to join Marine Corps combat arms units, and the effects each frame has on perceptions of a key demographic - young adults within recruiting age.

Specifically, this study seeks to further understand if a certain frame of this topic will affect the public's attitude about the reputation, credibility, and characteristics of the Marine Corps, as it relates to gender integration.   By exposing participants to either positive, negative, or neutral frames of this issue, and examining their responses to those frames, this study provides a greater understanding into how the media and service PAOs could aid or hinder recruitment and retention efforts - specifically for combat arms occupations. Additionally, the findings of this study could aid PAOs in the development of future messaging to help drive the narrative with accurate information and influence the frame a journalist chooses to use.

Literature Review

Framing Theory

Framing theory originated in 1974 when Goffman described it as a manner of organizing information to determine meaning and contextualize the world (Borah, 2011; Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016). Thereafter, the definition of framing continued to develop, moving from explaining meanings, to describing how media produce influential messages (Gitlin, 1980). Gitlin further postulated that media disseminates ideology, creating and distributing it through

framing for audiences (1980).

Ryan's (1991) definition outlined framing as how news is created, or "how pieces of information are selected and organized to produce stories that make sense to their writers and audiences" (p. 53). Following that, Shook (2000) showed that story selection and production by writers highlight the importance of the focus of the story. The story angle becomes the lens through which readers then interpret the issue discussed. This is what forms the frame for the audience. Essentially, framing involves the creation of a media product; the author of the story develops a socially-shared reality with the media audience (Chattopadhyay, 2012). Thus, frames organize our socially-shared principles, with which both the media and public co-construct thoughts and ideas to conceptualize the world together with shared meaning (Reese, 2001).

Hallahan (1999) expands upon the previous definitions by describing how framing "operates by biasing the cognitive processing of information by individuals" (p. 208). He suggests that each source has a preferred frame - how the source would prefer the news portrayed. The subsequent bargaining between news sources and journalists is, essentially, frame negotiation; the source uses existing narratives and assumptions to push the storyline to a desired end state (Hallahan, 1999). Hallahan (1999) further proposes the existence of frame contests, whereby two interest groups compete for an understanding perspective. Crisis managers, or military public affairs officers, must be aware of their role in packaging information to engender public favor or support (Hallahan, 1999).

Largely applicable to this study is Cooper's (2002) article which discusses how the media's framing of issues can contribute greatly to the ability of social movements to grow, particularly when there are policy issues at stake. This relates to the situation the Marine Corps faces in the gender integration process. Decisions made by media outlets about how to portray certain issues can either reinforce public anxiety or trust (Spiro, 2001). Recent media attention focuses on the military's implementation of gender integration, and thus, public discourse may be influenced by the media's chosen frames.

Framing and PAOs

As the primary spokesperson for the command, PAOs have influence concerning the style and format of information released to the public (JP 3-61, 2016). Therefore, the PAO can frame information released to their stakeholders based on what they assess to best suit the commander's information objectives in concert with public interest (JP 3-61, 2016). The decision about the framing of information is often directly connected to the command's desire to develop or maintain a positive public perception of the organization.

Reputation

More than three decades ago, Marine Corps Gen. Charles C. Krulak coined a phrase that would become a mantra among Marines; "the United States does not *need* a Marine Corps. However, for good reasons that transcend cold logic, the United States *wants* a Marine Corps" (Krulak, 1984, p.XV). Krulak emphasized the Corps' well-established reputation to meet the public's "high- almost spiritual standards" (p. XV) as the basis for the nation's desire to continue to have a Marine Corps, during a time in history when its necessity was being called into question by political leadership.

For the Marine Corps to remain a successful and effective branch of the United States military, it is critical that their positive reputation endures - especially during periods of crisis or policy change. Research has shown that reputations are developed and maintained through

interactions and dialogue between organizations and their publics (Coombs & Holladay, 2006). "Integrity, ethics, and deeds constitute personal or organizational attributes that typically elicit judgement, and these characteristics collective comprise reputation" (Gibson et al., 2006, p. 16).

Reputation, arguably the most important asset of an organization, is based on the conduct (good or bad) of the organization or its individuals, and results from the company's stakeholders' assessment of those actions (Gibson et al., 2006). Public affairs officers have a role in building or maintaining the reputation of the Marine Corps through their communication with the news media and subsequently, the public. Establishing, maintaining, and occasionally repairing the military's reputation is critical to the American public's trust, which underpins military success (JP 3-61, 2016).

Credibility

One of the criterion people use to filter information is credibility of the source (Wathen & Burkell, 2002), making credibility an important factor to any organization, particularly when implementing policy change. Credibility is a judgement based on a host of factors including but not necessarily limited to believability, accuracy, fairness, and depth (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). Furthermore, credibility is not what the organization communicates, but rather - it is the image of the source, in the minds of receivers (Andersen & Clevenger, 1963). It is important to measure the public's perception Marine Corps' credibility during the gender integration process as potential future applicants' perceptions of the Marine Corps may be altered as a result of policy change.

Characteristics

The Marine Corps' image is an important variable that positively or negatively affects their retention and support efforts (Davis, Chun, Silva & Roper, 2004). Images and characteristics influence the perception of the effectiveness and readiness of the Marines Corps (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). Furthermore, prospective recruits use an organization's image, to make character judgments about it (Alvesson, 1990).

Corporate character, defined as how a stakeholder distinguishes an organization, expressed in terms of human characteristics, is a multidimensional construct (Davis et al, 2004). One way to assess an organization's characteristics is to adopt a personification metaphor: measuring the Marine Corps' human characteristics (Davis et al., 2004). These can include personality-centric adjectives such as attractive, qualified, sincere, and strong (Kaid, 2004). Personification traits can be used to describe the public's view of the Marine Corps personality (Fumham & Gunter 1993) or character (Goffee & Jones 1998).

Context of Experiment

More than 140 years have passed since women joined the ranks of the Marine Corps. Recently, the capture of an Army soldier, Jessica Lynch, sparked critical debate about women's proximity to the front lines of combat, drawing public criticism on the employment of women in service (Holland, 2006). Despite the controversy, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff announced the recension of the Direct Ground Combat Exclusion Rule, opening 237,000 combat-related positions to women across the services (Public Affairs Guidance, 2013).

This study uses one of the many articles that describes a woman officer's participation in the Marine Corps' Infantry Officer's Course (IOC), a 10-week period of instruction that all

Marine infantry officer candidates must successfully complete to serve as a platoon commander in an infantry platoon. As of this writing, IOC graduation rates for 2015 were 0% for women (out of 29 candidates) and 71% for men (out of 978 candidates) (Marine Corps Force Integration Plan, 2015).

Despite no woman being able to successfully complete IOC, it is important for Marine Corps PAOs and their leadership, to understand how the framing of this issue affects their audiences. To reinforce or combat perceptions of the Marine Corps by key stakeholders, PAOs must properly frame this topic. Based on the aforementioned research into framing and the effect it has on public perception, the following hypotheses and research questions are submitted:

Hypotheses and Research Questions

H1. Framing will impact the perception of the Marine Corps' reputation among recruit age citizens as it relates to the new gender integration policy.
H2. Framing will impact the perception of the Marine Corps' credibility among recruit age citizens as it relates to the new gender integration policy.
H3: Framing will impact the perception of the Marine Corps' characteristics among recruit age citizens as it relates to the new gender integration policy.
RQ1. How do the measures of reputation, credibility and characteristics relate to each other?

Method

This study employed a posttest-only experimental design with a control group ($N = 648$) to test whether there was a difference in participant response based on the framed article through which the military communicated. Institutional Review Board approval was complete on January 1, 2017 with the protocol identification number: HS-2016-0101.

Sample

For this study, the researchers strived to obtain participants within the ideal recruiting age for the Marine Corps, between the ages of 17-29 (Military.com, 2017). As such, a nationwide non-probability sample of participants was recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk, a participant database commonly used among PR scholars (Men & Tsai, 2014; Kim, Kiousis, & Molleda, 2015). This database houses an option for the researchers to only include participants within the desired age range. Because of this option, the participants of this study have a mean age of 29 years old ($M = 29.42$). Participants spent on average, approximately eight minutes to complete the online questionnaire and were paid $0.50 for their time.

Because this study is concerned with gender integration, the researchers chose to ask the gender of the participants as one of the demographics questions. Male participants accounted for the majority of those recruited (n = 340; 52.5%). Females followed closely representing 46.6% (n = 302) of the participants. One (0.2%) participant self-reported as Transgender. Only 5 participants (.8%) declined to respond to the gender demographic question.

Stimulus

The stimulus of this study was a news article similar in structure to one that was originally found in *Marine Corps Times*, an international weekly news publication. The article was selected because it covered gender integration and included direct quotes from the Commandant of the Marine Corps as well as a military spokesperson from the Pentagon, thereby increasing the experiment's external validity.

The article, titled 'Female Marine to Attempt Infantry Officer Course,' opens with a brief explanation describing how the 30th woman Marine candidate is scheduled to attempt the Corps'

IOC (Schogol, 2016). However, the article focuses on how women Marines have not been able to successfully complete IOC.

Design

The experiment was conducted in January 2017. For this study, researchers manipulated the frame of the *Marine Corps Times* news article. The stimulus was one of three articles. The article in the first cell was the positively framed stimuli. The positive frame was accomplished by titling the article, 'One out of every 10 female officers pass tough infantry course.' The positively framed news article also included the statement, "So far, one out of every 10 female officers who attempted the course have successfully graduated." The positively-framed stimuli also included the quote from a Marine general as follows. "We knew women would be able to pass without changing any standards," said Gen. Lewis W. Walt, commanding general, Training and Education Command. "This training program will succeed and you will see women qualified for serving in combat positions."

The second cell included the same *Marine Corps Times* news article, but with a negative frame. The negative frame was accomplished by changing the title of the article to 'Nine out of every 10 female officers fail tough infantry course.' The negative frame also included the statement, "So far, nine out of every 10 female officers who attempt the course, have failed to graduate." The negative stimuli also included a quote from the same military general as in the positive stimuli. However, the quote was reworded to have a negative connotation as follows. "We know women will not be able to pass without changing any standards," said Gen. Lewis W. Walt, commanding general, Training and Education Command. "This training program will fail and you will not see women qualified for serving in combat positions."

Participants in the control cell viewed a neutrally-framed article titled, 'Female Marine to attempt tough infantry course.' The neutral article did not include the initial success/fail statement nor did it include the quote from Gen. Lewis W. Walt.

The only information manipulated across all three cells was the negative, positive or absence of the statement and quote. The rest of the news article was identical among the cell stimulus. The experimental cells were manipulated as follows:

- *Positive* ($n = 215$)
- *Negative* ($n = 221$)
- *Control* ($n = 212$)

Prior to being exposed to the stimulus article, all participants read and accepted a consent form that explained the experiment. A statement on the consent form read; "You will be asked to view a news item related to women attempting to complete a rigorous military course that serves as prerequisite before being placed in a combat arms occupational specialty."

A manipulation check examined whether participants could accurately recall the experimental cell they were assigned. A chi-square showed that the manipulation worked in that participants noticed and understood the tone of the military news article used in the study whereby $X^2(6) = 394.19$, $p \leq .001$.

Instruments

All participants completed the posttest questionnaire, which included the same items, regardless of an individual's manipulation cell assignment. The independent variable in this study was the frame of the news articles discussing gender integration in combat occupational specialties within the Armed Forces. The dependent variable was the perception of study

participants.

 Researchers measured reputation using a Coombs & Holladay's organizational reputation scale (Coombs & Holladay, 2006). Measuring six items on a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*strongly agree*), the scale included items focused on organizational reputation based upon participant's perceptions of the organization's concern towards publics, as well as perceived honesty, believability, and truthfulness. The six items were summed into an index (M = 31.14; SD = 6.64, α = .86) which represented acceptable reliability scores.

 Due to the study's premise of exploring an audience's perceptions of the Marine Corps' credibility, researchers selected the scale used in Johnson and Kaye's 2014 study, 'Credibility of Social Network Sites for Political Information Among Politically Interested Internet Users.' The seven-point Likert scale (with 1= *strongly disagree* to 7= *strongly agree*) measured four items: believability, accuracy, fairness, and depth, summed into an index (M = 19.80; SD = 5.02, α = .91) that represented acceptable reliability scores.

 To measure respondents' perceptions of the Marine Corps' image and characteristics, this study used Kaid's (2004) *Measuring candidate images with semantic differentials*. Kaid's semantic differential scale consists of 12 side-by-side antonyms measured on a seven-point scale. Pairs include: honest and dishonest, weak and strong, calm and excitable, among others. The 12 items were summed into an index (M = 31.14; SD = 6.64, α = .86) which represented acceptable reliability scores.

Results

 This posttest-only experimental design with control (n = 212) exposed some participants to either an article about women successfully completing the Marine IOC (n = 215) or an article about women failing to complete the Marine IOC (n = 221).

Reputation

 Hypothesis one presupposed that participants who viewed the framed articles would differ in their perception of the Marines Corps' reputation based on the manipulated stimulus. This hypothesis was tested by examining the change in participant-reported level of perceived reputation of the Marine Corps based on the experimental cell. An initial ANOVA showed statistically significant differences were present among the three cells in regards to the measures of reputation: F(2,647) = 14.22, p ≤ .001. A follow-up Bonferroni post-hoc test was then conducted to determine the specific statistically significant differences between groups. Participants who were exposed to the positive frame had a 2.88 higher rating of reputation that those who were exposed to the negative frame (p ≤ .001). Participants who were exposed to the control frame had a significantly higher rating of reputation that those who were exposed to the negative frame (*M diff* = 2.87, p ≤ .001). Participants who were exposed to the negative frame reported the Marine Corps to have a lower reputation score than participants who were in either the control or positive frame. In examining the results surrounding H1, indeed there is a difference and it appears that a negative frame is detrimental reputation perception in regards to gender integration.

Credibility

 Statistically significant differences were present in credibility based in the framing cell after running an ANOVA procedure: F(2,647) = 12.96, p ≤ .001. To determine the statistically

significant differences between groups, a Bonferroni post-hoc test was conducted following the ANOVA. The post-hoc tested revealed that participants who were exposed to the positive cell reported perceiving the Marine Corps as more credible than those participants who were in the negative cell (*M diff* = 1.99, p ≤ .001). Moreover, participants who viewed the negatively framed article had a 2.51 lower credibility rating of the Marine Corps than those participants in the control cell (p ≤ .001). Hypothesis two is supported as framing does have an impact on the perceived credibility of the Marine Corps.

Characteristics

An ANOVA was conducted to determine the statistical differences among characteristic cell measures as well. Indeed, statistically significant differences were present $F(2,647) = 21.65$, p ≤ .001. Again, following the ANOVA, the researchers conducted a Bonferroni post-hoc test to determine where the statistical differences existed. The results indicated that participants who viewed the positively framed article perceived the Marine Corps as having a higher measure of positive characteristics when compared to participants who viewed the negatively framed article (*M diff* = 6.07, p ≤ .001). Similarly, when compared to participants in the negative cell, participants in the control cell perceived the Marine Corps as having more positive characteristics (*M diff* = 6.07, p ≤ .001) once again supporting the researcher hypothesis number three.

Additional Analysis

The research question for this study examines how reputation, credibility, and characteristics correlate. To test whether there is, in fact, a correlation between any of the discussed concepts, the researchers conducted a Pearson correlation coefficient linear dependence test. Results did indicate a statistically significant association for all three concepts. Credibility was significant and positively correlated with reputation ($r = .72$; $p < .001$) and characteristics ($r = .73$; $p < .001$). In addition, reputation positively correlated with characteristics ($r = .71$; $p < .001$). As such, research question one is answered in that there is a statistically significant positive correlational relationship between credibility and reputation, credibility and characteristics, and between reputation and characteristics.

Discussion

The study attempted to analyze the way framing certain issues affects the public's perception of the Marine Corps. The impact that a certain frame has on stakeholder perceptions can further influence the Marine Corps' ability to recruit and retain qualified service members. Public affairs officers can ethically support or combat these framed topics by releasing information in a way that provides more insight, background, and fact-based details to help a public more thoroughly understand a topic. In this case, the framing of an article on gender integration, indeed, significantly altered the reader's perception of the reputation, credibility, and overall characteristics of the Marine Corps.

Marine Corps PAOs need to continue the practice of providing accurate and timely information to their audiences; part of that responsibility is delivering ample background on a given issue. By framing their own command messages with accurate context, PAOs can help direct the widely-covered topic of gender integration in a way that informs their public of the measured approach that the Marine Corps is taking to successfully integrate women into combat jobs without degrading their, rigorous standards.

Limitations and Future Research

Various limitations were associated with this study. There were several constraints due to the design of the questionnaire as well as the stimulus presentation. First, the distribution of the questionnaire link through Amazon Mechanical Turk may have allowed for one participant to take part in the study more than once by using the same link. However, based on participant demographics, it appears unlikely that affected the results.

Additionally, this study may have been affected by current political events. There may have been an elevated public sensitivity on the issues of gender roles and equality following the recent Women's Marches and presidential election. If this study was conducted longitudinally or samples were drawn during a different political climate, there may be differing results.

This research into how the framing of a certain topic can affect the public's perception of the Marine Corps, thus affecting the Marine Corps' ability to grow and maintain its force, opens up new opportunities for public relations scholars and Marine Corps PAOs alike. More work needs to be done examining the effectiveness of PAOs' messaging efforts on the way the media frames a given issue, and how an audience responds to those framed topics. Future additional areas of study should also include to what extent negatively or positively framed topics would affect both recruitment and retention efforts, examining the perceptions of civilians and Marines alike.

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**Examining the Business Outcomes of Media Coverage in the General Motor Recall Crisis:
An Exploratory Study**

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PRIME Research

Abstract

This study applied the Vector-Auto Regression (VAR) model to explore the business impacts of media coverage in the 2014 General Motors (GM) recall crisis. Through a thorough discussion of the correlations between GM traditional and social media coverage, stock price, sales, and trading volume, a symbiotic relationship was found between agendas in new media posts and traditional news in a corporate crisis context. The media agenda, especially traditional media coverage played an important role in predicting business outcomes. Future public relations practitioners may consistently monitor both traditional and new media coverage and especially pay attention to the rise of social media in their crisis communication.

Key Words: Agenda-setting, Business outcomes, crisis, Time series, Public relations, Stock price

Introduction

Previous agenda-setting studies focused on the process in which the media leads the public to think what is important at a point in time (Zhu & Blood, 1997). The theoretical background was based on the examination of political elections, while the theoretical explanatory power in a corporate crisis context remained unknown and the potential financial impact of both traditional and new media agenda deserved further exploration as well.

This study was motivated as a theoretical reflection on the traditional paradigm of agenda-setting research in the context of an organizational crisis (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004; Kiousis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The recall crisis of General Motors (GM) was theoretically chosen since it was one of the largest recall crises in the history of the automotive industry (Wallace, 2014). GM in February 2014, announced its first recall of 778,000 small cars in North America due to the faulty ignition switches linked to the death of 13 people (Smith, 2014). Until August 2014, this company has recalled 16.5 million cars since the problematic engine in the car may shut off suddenly and prevent airbags to inflate in time (Ivory, 2014). As the US Attorney Kenneth Feinberg announced, 229 deaths and 1,986 injury claims had been made in December 2014; at least 36 people had died and 44 had been seriously injured in crashes due to problematic ignition switches (Guardian, 2014). Most importantly, this ignition fault was known to GM since 2001 (Ivory, 2014), but the company did not announce any relevant recalls until 2014 when several investigations were conducted. GM was blamed by the public for hiding the facts of ignition switches and delaying a product recall. GM's reputation quickly came into focus in 2014's large-scale and costly recall.

This study investigated the consequences of news coverage in the 2014 General Motors (GM) recall. To assess causality, a Vector-Auto Regression (VAR) model was applied to examine relationships between traditional and new media coverage on GM and financial indicators such as stock price, sales, and trade of volume. The ultimate goal of this study was to provide relevant theoretical and practical implications based on the following four dimensions: a) to extend the crisis communication field by exploring the effects of media coverage on the financial outcomes of organizations in a crisis, b) to engage a call of developing a more process-specific method to illuminate the interaction between traditional and social media agenda (Conway & Patterson, 2008; Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2010), this current study applied a longitudinal, 365-day timeframe to collect data and utilized Granger causality analysis to draw inferences about directional, time-order relationships between traditional and new media agenda, c) to enrich the growing literature on the role of the media on financial markets, and d) to offer corporate managers practical implications on the interplay among traditional media coverage, new media coverage, and financial indicators in a recall crisis.

Literature Review

Intermedia Agenda-Setting

Earlier, scholars on agenda-setting research focused on the political election contests in which the salience of issues or attributes of issues of media agenda could influence those in the public agenda (Kiousis & McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, & Llamas, 2000). In turn, this agenda-setting theory was applied in corporate communication as well (Carroll, 2011; Kiousis et al., 2007). Scholars found that the media agenda could raise public awareness in an organizational crisis context (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2013). Following the agenda-setting approach, scholars also posited the intermedia agenda-setting effects and studied the transfer of issues from leading media to other types of media (e.g.,

Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2013; McCombs, 2004). For example, studies examining political discussions between social and traditional media is generally reciprocal (Groshek & Groshek, 2010; Neuman, Guggenheim, Jang, & Bae, 2014). Groshek and Groshek (2013) found that Twitter was more likely to follow traditional media than the reverse. In contrast, when political candidates adopt blogs, websites, and social media to communicate with the public (Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005) or draw the attention of journalists, new media have become a new avenue for influence. Microblogging outlets such as Twitter and China's Sina Weibo also served as new places for citizens to report and discuss hot issues, in turn being cited by traditional media (Cheng, 2016a). In this study, we do not consider these findings contradictory (Conwey, Kenski, & Wang, 2015); instead, the relationship between traditional and new media coverage have demonstrated reciprocal relationships at different points in time. Therefore, I posited the following hypothesis and research question.

> *H1: The traditional media coverage could significantly predict the new media coverage.*
> *RQ1: Did new media coverage predict the traditional media agenda to a greater extent than the reverse?*

Stakeholder agenda setting

Besides examining the intermedia agenda-setting effects in corporate communication, scholars also proposed the concept of stakeholder agenda-setting (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2013) and tested the consequences of news coverage on corporate financial performance such as share price and sales volume. For example, Wu, Stevenson, Chen, and Guner (2002) found that there was no direct relationship between news coverage and financial markets. However, in the 2007 financial crisis, Kieinnjenhius, Schultz, Oregma, and Atteveldt (2013) found that negative media coverage could predict the decrease of share price among publicly traded banks. In the 2010 BP oil crisis, Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2013) also found that the increase of news amount had a negative effect on the share price.

In the field of public relations, the financial impacts of media coverage continue to be one of the hottest topics among scholars and practitioners (Carrol & McCombs, 2003; Duncane, 2009; Jeffrey, Michaelson, & Stacks, 2006; Kiousis et al., 2007). For example, Kiousis et al.'s (2007) research of 28 U.S. companies supported the positive relationship between the media coverages and corporate financial performance. Carroll and McCombs' study also supported the agenda-setting effects of business news on the corporate reputations among the public. Regarding the measurement and evaluation of the business outcomes, practitioners cooperated with scholars and proposed several dimensions such as the stock price, sales volume, and revenue (Duncane, 2009; Jeffrey et al., 2006; Likely, Rockland, & Weiner, 2007). For example, Duncane (2009) suggested that the online earned media coverage of public relations may help to increase the sales and lower recruitment costs and turnover rates. Jeffrey et al. (2006) also found the immediate impact of the surge of negative stories on cough syrup unit sales in a very short time period. Thus, we posited RQ2 to examine the potential impact of media coverage on some business outcomes.

> *RQ2: How can media coverage (i.e., media amount, visibility, and tonality) predict the business outcomes (i.e., stock price, sales, and trading volume)?*

To future differentiate the financial impacts of traditional and new media agenda on the business outcomes, two sets of hypotheses (i.e., H2$_{a, b, c}$ and H3$_{a, b, c}$) were posited to test the multiple relationships in the 2014 GM recall crisis.

> *H2a: The traditional media coverage could significantly predict the GM trading volume.*
> *H2b: The traditional media coverage could significantly predict the GM stock price.*
> *H2c: The traditional media coverage could significantly predict the GM sales volume.*
> *H3a: The new media coverage could significantly predict the GM trading volume.*
> *H3b: The new media coverage could significantly predict the GM stock price.*
> *H3c: The new media coverage could significantly predict the GM sales volume.*

To recap, it was expected that this research would yield contributions to a more detailed understanding of the consequences of media news coverage and broaden the scope of agenda-setting approaches in a corporate crisis context. The research model, shown in Figure 1 was designed to assess the intermedia agenda-setting effects between the traditional and new media agenda in H1, and test the stakeholder agenda-setting effects between traditional and new media coverage and financial outcomes in H2$_{a, b, c}$ and H3$_{a, b, c}$.

[Figure 1 here]

Method

Concerning how agenda-setting and building theories could be applied to a crisis context, this paper used a case study approach to investigate how traditional and new media coverage, the trading volume, GM stock price, and sales volume interrelated. Data were collected through January 1 to December 31, 2014 that spanned over 365 days from two searchable database including sales, trading volume, and share price on Yahoo Finance and media coverage from *Factiva.*

Data Collection and Measures

Business outcomes of GM. Based on the daily data of GM on Yahoo Finance (2015), this study collected the data of GM's financial indicators such as daily trading volume of GM stock, stock price at the close of each trading day, and the monthly sales volume[1].

News coverage[2]. Data on the news about GM were collected from *Factiva*, with "GM" or "General motors" as the keywords for research. To include all relevant news on GM and its products published by **traditional media** in the year of 2014, we opt for 6,707 news items originating in 102 examples of print media (i.e., national and regional dailies, car magazines, industry magazines, news magazines, and business magazines) such as *USA Today, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Car and Driver,* and *Forbes*; 4,496 news items originating in 54 examples of TV programming (i.e., cable networks, newscasts, and news magazines car shows) such as *ABC, BBC America*, and *CNN*. For the data collection of **new media** agenda, 68

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[1] By dividing the monthly sales volume by the days of each month in 2014, I applied the average daily sales for the final data analysis.

[2] Data were available from PRIME Research, which was one of global leading companies in media analysis since 1987 (PRIME, 2015).

different types of new media such as *USAToday.com/Money/Autos, AP.org, ABCNews.com*, and *AutoBlog.com* were selected as the sample. A total of 13,193 news items originating in online outlets, online only sites, portals, and social media/blogs were finally collected and being analyzed. In sum, a total of 24,391 media articles from 224 media were collected for final data analysis.

To code the media tonality, a seven-point scale from -3 (*very negative*) to +3 (*very positive*), with 0 indicating neutral statement was applied. Through specially trained human coding rather than software or automated content analysis, the reliability from PRIME coders was as high as .96 (Lee, 2012). We also generated the media visibility for both corporate and product coverage by weighting the following variables such as the reach of each medium, the position, size and prominence of each news article.

Data Analysis. To analyze the casual relationships among GM traditional and new media coverage, trading volume, stock price and sales volume in this crisis, the vector auto regression (VAR) model (Freeman, William, & Lin, 1989; Sims, 1980) was applied for data analysis, which have been widely applied in time series analysis of agenda-setting research (Soroka, 2002). In a VAR model, a measure y is regressed against its lagged values as well as the lagged values of all other variables in one equation. If the measure y can be better predicted from past values of measures x and y together than the past values of y alone, then x is said to have Granger causality for y (Freeman, 1983). In the current study, GM's stock price was regressed against its lagged values as well as the lagged values of all other measures. The same was done with other variables in the VAR model such as sales and trading volume. Thus, there are five simultaneous equations, with each measure serving as the dependent variable in one equation. When the relationship between each pair of variables was considered, the VAR model also helped to constrain the influence of other variables included in this model. Besides building the VAR model, Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analyses were also used for testing the relationships between total media amount, tonality, and visibility and business outcomes (i.e., corporate stock price, sales, and trading volume).

Regarding the optimal effect span or number of lags in the VAR model, previous research had different findings depending on different types of media and publics. For example, Wanta and Hu (1994) found that the time lags varied among newscasts: for national network newscasts, the time lag was one week; for local newscasts, it could take two weeks for issues of salience in the media to be fully transmitted to the public agenda. Winter and Eyal (1981) suggested that around 4-6 weeks, media might have the most influence on the public agenda. For the relationship between traditional news media agenda and online public opinion, Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002) found that the time lags could be shorter. In this current study, the time series analysis examined each variable with time lags ranging from one day to seven days.

Findings

Figure 2 examines the development of the five major time series over the entire course of the GM recall crisis. Some major features are readily notable. First, all the five variables demonstrated large peaks at some moments. The trading volume of GM stock reached its highest point on January 15th, while the traditional and new media attention for GM in the crisis already peaked on January 13th. The trading volume could never sustain its peak (89,207,600) in January and dropped to the lowest point (4,496,000) in December with a 95% decrease. Figure 2 also demonstrates that the stock change rate of GM almost halved during the recall, dropping from 40.95 on January 2 to 29.79 on October 13.

[Figure 2 here]

RQ2 asks how the media coverage (i.e., media amount, visibility, and tonality) could help predict business outcomes such as stock price, sales, and trading volume. After conducting Pearson's correlation analyses in SPSS 20, Table 1 showed that only media amount ($r = .19$, $p < .01$) was significantly and positively related with the stock price, while tonality ($r = .10$, $p > .05$) and visibility ($r = .11$, $p > .05$) are not significantly correlated with the stock price. Data from the multiple regression analyses also indicated that among the three dimensions of media coverage, only media amount ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$) could significantly predict the stock price. In predicting the trading volume, I applied the regression analysis again. Data showed that both media tonality ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$) and visibility ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$) were significantly related with the trading volume. In predicting the trading volume of GM, all the three dimensions of media coverage such as media amount ($\beta = -.26$, $p < .001$), tonality ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$), and visibility ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors. In sum, we found that media coverage of GM in the recall crisis could partially predict business outcomes.

[Table 1 here]

H1 and RQ1 tested the intermedia agenda-setting effects between the traditional media and new media agenda. Table 2 shows that in the recall crisis, the amount of traditional media coverage did lead the increase of new media amount ($\chi^2 = 69.40$, $p < .001$). Reversely, the amount of new media coverage on GM ($\chi^2 = 35.72$, $p < .001$) could also significantly increase the amount of traditional media coverage. Thus, H1 was supported. The intermedia agenda-setting effects existed and the traditional and new media coverage of GM did influence each other in the recall crisis. Furthermore, we also found that strength of influence was often greater among traditional media such as newspapers and TV, suggesting traditional media did most of the leading and the new media coverage did not overpower the influence of traditional media coverage.

[Table 2 here]

H2 examined the stakeholder agenda-setting effects between the traditional media coverage and the business outcomes (i.e., stock price, sales, and trading volume). Results from Table 2 showed significant predications from traditional media coverage to trading volume ($\chi^2 = 61.02$, $p < .001$), stock price ($\chi^2 = 18.04$, $p = .01$) and sales volume ($\chi^2 = 15.09$, $p = .05$). Thus, H2a, H2b, and H2c were all supported. In other words, the amount of traditional media agenda could significantly influence the three dimensions of business outcomes, which included trading volume, stock price, and sales volume.

Finally, H3 tested the stakeholder agenda-setting effects between the new media coverage and the three dimensions of business outcomes. Results only supported the significant causal relationship between new media coverage and trading volume ($\chi^2 = 19.02$, $p = .01$). In contrast, no significantly relationships existed between new media agenda, stock price, and sales volume. Thus, only H3a was supported.

Discussion and Conclusion

Through theoretical sampling, the current study adopted VAR modeling of case-study research in a corporate crisis context, which allowed for discussion of multiple relationships among traditional and new media coverage, trading volume, GM stock price, and sales volume

over an extended timeframe. Results revealed that within the context of the GM recall crisis, a symbiotic relationship existed between agendas in new media posts and traditional news in a corporate crisis context. The media agenda, especially traditional media coverage played an important role in predicting business outcomes. Theoretical and practical implications of the results are as follows.

First, data supported the stakeholder agenda-setting effects between media coverage and business outcomes in a corporate crisis context (Carroll & McCombs, 2003). Results showed that the increasing amount of negative news coverage on GM significantly predict the decrease of GM stock trading and sales volume. In other words, the negative media publicity could significantly reduce the financial benefits of corporations in the crisis context (Jeffrey et al., 2006). From another perspective, this results also supported the argument of adopting effective public relations in the crisis management (Cheng, 2016b). As what Solomon (2012) stated, investor relations firms could generate more media coverage of positive press releases than negative ones and causally affect business returns.

Second, this study found that increased visibility of a corporation may attract new investors and help increase both sales and trading volume (Gervais, Kaniel, & Mingelgrin, 2001). As Odean (1999) mentioned, investors may hardly make choices among thousands of possible stock purchases; instead they limit their search to stocks that have recently caught their attention.

Last but not least, this paper contributes to the growing literature (Engelberg & Parsons, 2011; Gurun & Butler, 2012) on the role of the media on financial markets by differentiating the financial impacts of traditional and new media. In particular, traditional media amount in the GM recall crisis was found to help predict share price, trading, and sales volume. In contrast, new media amount could only predict the trading volume of GM stock. The differences between traditional and new media could be explained by the level of media credibility. As what Cheng (2016a) said, information credibility still remains as a major problem among current new media platforms. Instead, traditional media such as TV and newspapers contain a high level of credibility and could attract more attention from investors, which may further influence the purchasing volume of investors and the stock price of firms (Guldikena, Tupperb, Nairc, & Yuc, 2017).

Practical implications. As the above mentioned, the intermedia and stakeholder agenda-setting theories can be applied to understand the consequences of media on the financial performance of organizations. It provides practical suggestions for public relations activities in helping manage both traditional and new media agenda in a crisis setting. On the one hand, as shown in the GM recall crisis, traditional media coverage can help predict the three dimensions of business outcomes such as stock price, trading, and sales volume. Maintaining good relations with credible media organizations is crucial to corporations in influencing the financial markets. On the other hand, the online media agenda deserves corporations' attention specifically. If GM could monitor the new media coverage and respond to the public agenda in a timely, direct, and responsive manner in this event, then the large amount of negative news coverage may not be generated before GM's official responses (Business Insider, 2015).

Directions for Future Research

Due to the time constrains, this study only covered some online media tools such as blogs and websites. Some popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are not in consideration, while their amount, visibility, and tonality of GM crisis deserve future exploration. Also the study only covered a comparatively short time range (i.e., 365 days) within

the long period of GM's recalls since 2001. Future research could include a longer time-span for analysis of relationship between the media coverage and business outcomes. Last but not least, as this research only focuses on one case study, future research may conduct a multiple-case design to examine the financial outcomes of media coverage in crises.

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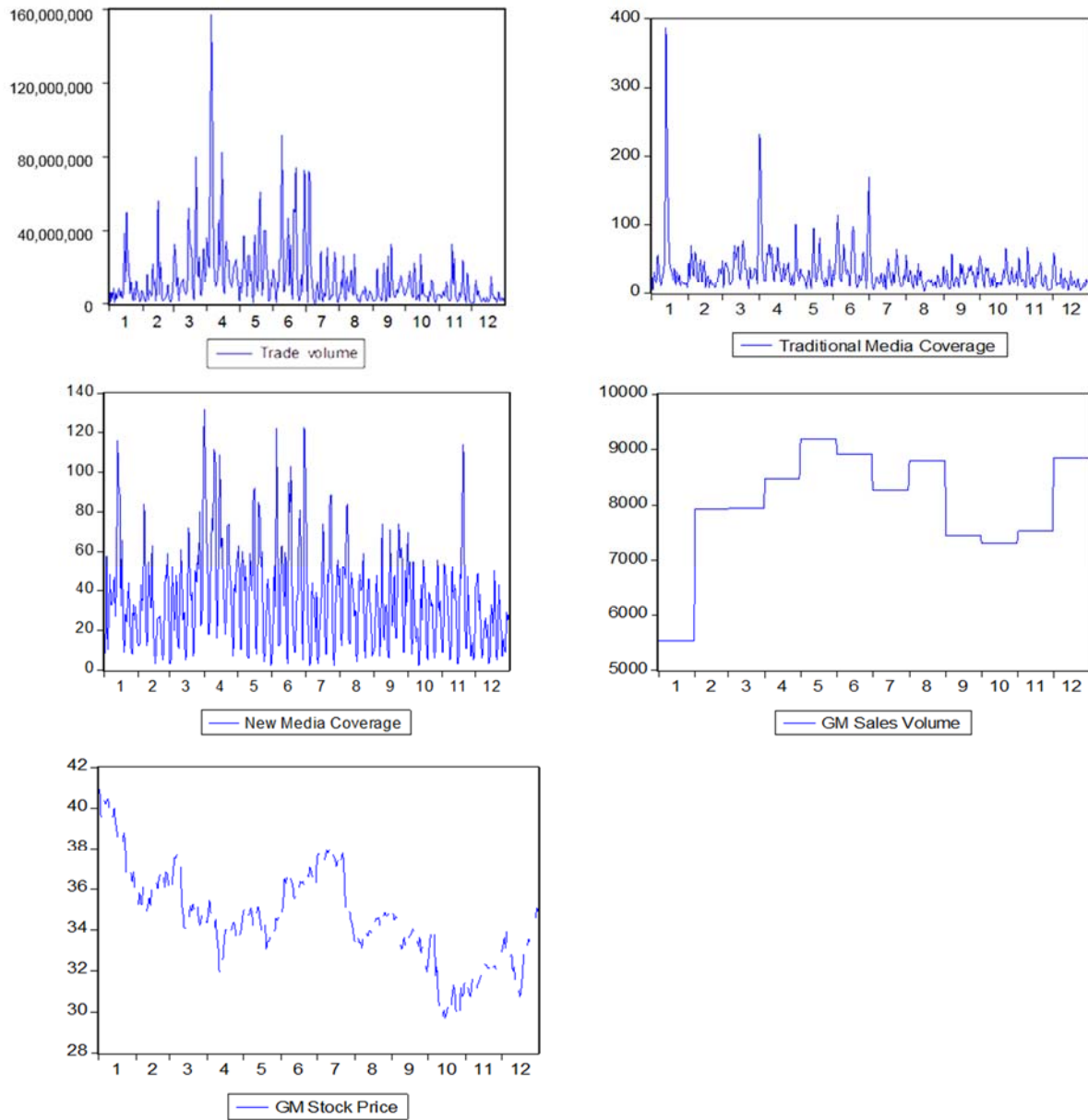
Figure 1: Daily counts for GM's traditional and new media coverage, trading volume, stock price, and sales time series (January 1-December 31, 2014).
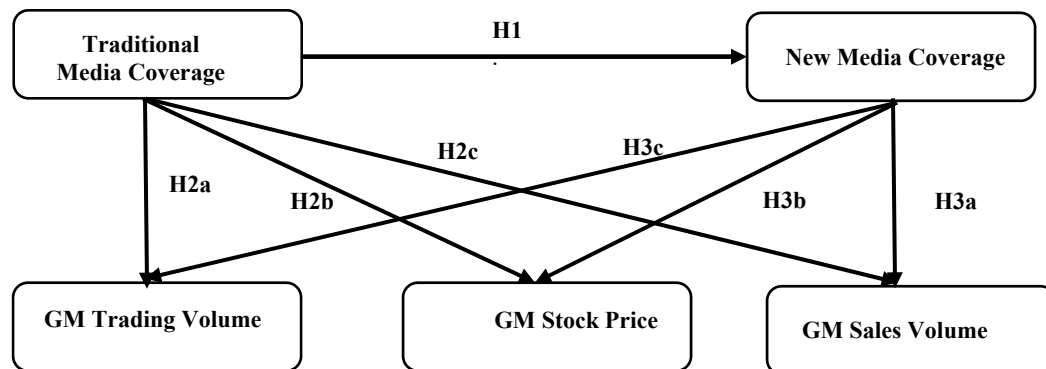
Figure 2.   The Research Model of the General Motors (GM) Recall

Table 1. Multiple regression analyses of the business outcomes of media coverage

| Media Coverage | *Business Outcomes* | | | | | |
| | Stock Price | | Trading Volume | | Sales Volume | |
	r	β	r	β	r	β
Amount	.19**	.19*	.06	-.13	-.01	-.26***
Tonality	.10	.13	.24**	.17**	.39**	.33***
Visibility	.11	.17	.18**	.21*	.20**	.27***

Note: Figures are Pearson's r and standardized beta-coefficient. Beta weights are from the regression equation in the model. N = 365. ***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$

Table 2. VAR Granger Causality Tests Results.

Dependent variable		Coefficient Block	Chi-square	*p*-value
Traditional media coverage	←	New media coverage	69.40	.00
New media coverage	←	Traditional media coverage	35.72	.00
GM trading volume	←	New media coverage	19.02	.01
	←	Traditional media coverage	61.02	.00
GM stock price		New media coverage	9.48	.22
	←	Traditional media coverage	18.04	.01
GM sales volume		New media coverage	11.35	.12
	←	Traditional media coverage	15.09	.05

Note: Arrows indicate Granger causality from coefficient block to the dependent variable. Seven lags of each independent variable are included in the model. VAR results satisfy stability test; all variables after root transformation are normally distributed; model residuals are white noise. N = 365. Analyses were done using EViews 5.

Businesses Under Close Watch:
Examining the Factors That Affect Reputation Repair

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Abstract

Through in-depth interviews, content analysis, and survey, results of this study suggest that reputation management is a top priority amongst Canadian organizations. Majority of survey participants and interviewees use multiple tools to monitor and measure reputation. Interview results demonstrated that communications teams had representation at the executive level.

Introduction

A strong and positive reputation is essential to the success of any organization that engages with the public. Companies with strong reputations are more attractive to investors, customers, suppliers and employees (Reuber & Fischer, 2007), and can more easily sell their products at higher price points (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007).

Corporate reputation has entered what many believe to be a critical period, where it has gained significant importance amongst groups including chief executive officers, board members, and academics alike (Flynn, 2006). Watson (2010) and Bracey (2012) both assert reputation has, and is increasing in importance. Cravens and Oliver (2006) articulate reputation is one of the few assets that affects the entire company and has the potential to generate long-term benefits.

Reputation damaging events have become an unfortunate but prevalent trend. Diermeirer (2011) explains that reputation-damaging events make headlines at least once per month, and the Weber Shandwick (2007) report, *Safeguarding Reputation*, notes the number reputation-damaging events is on the rise. The same Weber Shandwick (2007) report found that 66 percent of business executives believe that it is harder to recover from a reputation-damaging event than it is to build and maintain reputation. Likewise, research done by Tonello (2007) also reported that building and maintaining reputation was easier than recovering from a reputation-damaging event.

Research Problem

There is a growing amount of literature that focuses on the importance of corporate reputation (Fombrun, 2012). In the corporate sector, reputation is widely recognized as critically important as it is one of the few assets that affects the entire company and has the potential to generate long-term benefits (Cravens & Oliver, 2006). Many scholars have recognized that a good reputation can add significant value to any company (Diermeier, 2011; Gibson et al., 2006; Reuber & Fischer, 2007; Bracey, 2012).

While a large volume of case studies exists on reputation repair, the focus remains on short-term crisis/issue containment, and short-term solutions (Ruth & York, 2004). There is a lack of case studies that highlight reputation repair strategies in the aftermath of a crisis (Carroll, 2009). While the number of reputation-damaging events are on the rise (Weber Shandwick, 2007; Sims, 2009), it is surprising to see little academic literature or research that looks at the best methods to repair reputation, the most effective ways to repair reputation and the most efficient ways to repair reputation.

Research Questions

Based on this research problem, this research project examined three core questions:

RQ1: What are the most effective tactics and strategies used to repair corporate reputation?
RQ2: How do organizations communicate their efforts of reputation repair?
RQ3: What are the greatest challenges companies in Canada have to overcome to repair their reputation?

Literature Review

The literature review revealed little to no scholarly work that advised how to repair reputation, although there has been some research done through case studies.

Defining Corporate Reputation

Cornelissen (2008) defines corporate reputation as "a person's collective experiences and engagements with an organization that is established over time" (Cornelissen, 2008, p. 70). Gotsi and Wilson (2001) propose a similar definition to Cornelissen's (2008), and explain that corporate

reputation is a person's overall evaluation of a company over time, and is often based on direct experiences with the organization.

Evidence suggests corporations can have multiple reputations that vary by stakeholder group, as each group evaluates the corporation differently (Walker, 2010). While reputation can differ from one stakeholder group to the other, it can also vary by issue. According to Walker (2010), a firm's reputation can vary by profitability, environmental responsibility, social responsibility, treatment of employees and product quality. Another important point to consider is that reputations can also vary by industry. Roberts and Dowling (2002) explain that firms in the advertising, marketing and pharmaceutical industries typically receive much higher reputation ratings than companies in the banking and insurance industry.

Defining Issues and Crises

While people refer to issues and crises interchangeably, it is important to define and distinguish the two terms. According to Crable and Vibbert (1985), an issue is created when stakeholders attach significance to a situation, or perceive a problem. Heugens et al. (2004) explain issues are caused by gaps between the stakeholders' perceptions of the organization and stakeholders' expectations. On the other hand, a crisis is anything that interrupts the normal flow of business (Fearn-Banks, 2002), and can range from events that leave minimal damage in terms of profit and reputation, to events that have significant effects on the organization, the industry, the stakeholders, and threaten the survival of the firm (Carroll, 2009).

The Importance and Benefits of Reputation

Building a strong and positive reputation is a key goal for many organizations as it provides a wide variety of benefits to the firm. Rhee and Kim (2012) explain companies that are successful at building and maintaining good reputations enjoy various advantages. Fombrun (1996) emphasizes that a good reputation has the ability to increase both the firm's credibility and customer confidence.

While firms with strong reputations enjoy a variety of benefits, they also experience advantages on stock exchanges. Fombrun and van Riel (2003) assert firms with better reputations typically experience less market volatility than companies with weaker reputations. Similarly, Gregory (1998), found that market values of companies with high reputations were less affected by market crashes than those of companies with lower reputations. Fombrun and van Riel (2003) have an explanation for this; the authors propose that better-regarded firms are likely to experience less financial volatility as they are perceived to be more authentic (Fombrun & van Riel, 2003).

Reputation Repair

Scholarly work in the area of reputation repair is very much underdeveloped and in an infancy state (Rhee & Hadwick, 2011; Coombs, 1995). While Rhee and Kim (2012) explain there have been many case studies on reputation repair, the authors note there are no specific models or guides that would aid an organization in repairing its reputation. Hagan (2007) asserts public relations scholars offer more of a prescriptive approach to handling post-crisis situations.

Gaines-Ross (2008) advises that reputation recovery is a long and ongoing process that does not end after a quick moment of success. The author suggests many companies appear to recover, but stumble again shortly afterwards (Gaines-Ross, 2008). From a stakeholder's perspective, Gaines-Ross (2008) notes that recovery is not certain until a successful track record has been in place for sometime. Several scholars agree that reputation recovery takes

approximately three-and-a-half years (Gaines-Ross, 2008; Weber Shandwick, 2007; Tonello, 2007). The report, *Safeguarding Reputation*, done by Weber Shandwick (2007) found that crisis-ridden companies need at least seven positive quarters before declaring that a turnaround is approaching.

The same report indicates that financial performance is necessary, but not the only factor in sustaining reputation (Weber Shandwick, 2007). The Weber Shandwick (2007) report surveyed global business executives and asked them to rate the strategies that work best after a crisis strikes. The report found that nearly three-quarters of respondents noted the best steps to beginning the reputation recovery process were: "announcing specific actions the company was taking to fix the issue, creating early warning systems to prevent the problem from recurring, and creating new procedures and policies for the company to follow" (Weber Shandwick, 2007, p. 5).

Coombs and Holladay (2005) note that communication about the actions the firm has taken since the issue or crisis can contribute to the repairing of reputation. An article by Andrews (2014) references a study co-authored by Ed deHaan and the Stanford Graduate School of Business. The research indicates that shareholders care about the actions a company takes to recover its reputation (Andrews, 2014). The results of the study demonstrate that repairing reputation is a top priority for shareholders and investors (Andrews, 2014). Andrews' (2014) article notes the study examined close to 10,000 media releases, and found the companies sharply increased the number of reputation repairing actions, including announcements aimed at investors and lenders. The study found that approximately half, 51 percent, of the reputation repair efforts were not targeted at investors and lenders (Andrews, 2014).

The Importance of Addressing Root Problems

Properly addressing the root of the problem, which caused the issue or crisis, is imperative to the company's future. Rhee and Kim (2012) believe one of the most effective ways to repair reputation is by changing the organization's behaviour. According to Sitkin (1992) and Winter (2000), a crisis can be seen as a catalyst that is likely to motivate and enhance reputation repair. Likewise, Carley and Harrald (1997) assert that a crisis creates an opportunity for organizational changes to occur that may not happen otherwise.

Rhee and Kim (2012) view reputation repair as a process of problem solving, consisting of three steps: problem recognition, search for solutions and implementation of the solutions.   In order to begin the process, the organization must recognize that there is a problem (Rhee & Kim, 2012). If an organization perceives the problem can immediately be solved, the cause of the damaging event will never be examined and therefore never properly acknowledged (Rhee & Kim, 2012).

While a crisis can occur almost instantaneously, the literature explains that issues tend to evolve relatively slowly, which allows an organization to engage in the learning process and make the necessary changes (Heugens, et al., 2004; Zollo & Winter, 2002). Therefore Rhee and Kim (2012) argue issues supply the organization with enough time and resources to create change and repair reputation. Heugens et al. (2004) assert crises and issues have different implications for the search and learning process, as well as for the reputation repair process. Therefore, crises and issues may not be solved in the same way, and can call for different processes all together.

Rhee and Hadwick (2011) assert the process of repairing an organization's damaged reputation is not independent of the process of restoring the stakeholders trust in the organization. Levinthal (1997) notes since one of the main issues of a reputation loss is the stakeholders' negative reactions, many organizations search for solutions that will directly change the

stakeholders' perceptions of the company, rather than removing the root causes and searching for a solution.

Simms (2009) notes that the firms have to undergo significant changes to ensure such an event does not happen again. In their research, D'Aveni and MacMillan (1990) found the surviving firms focused on "the real, long-term sources of the problem" (p. 651). In their work, both Rhee and Kim (2012) and Argyris and Schon (1978) assert that addressing the root causes to the problem, and changing underlying policies and procedures are the only ways to repair reputation.

The Importance of Monitoring and Measuring Reputation

While reputation most certainly has value, it is often difficult, if not nearly impossible to measure (Omar & Williams, 2006). Fombrun and van Riel (2003) stress that reputation management must begin with an audit of stakeholders' perceptions. According to Fombrun and van Riel (2003), reputational audits and communication audits are different. Fombrun and van Riel (2003), explain that a communications audit is an analysis of what the company is announcing to stakeholders, and examines how well the company is communicating those messages. On the other hand, a reputational audit assesses how the messages are being interpreted and received by the stakeholders (Fombrun & van Riel, 2003).

A company trying to improve its reputation needs to properly document and assess its efforts and then to benchmark them against the competition (Bonini, et al., 2009). Hannington (2004) believes that a company can measure its reputation by surveying various groups of stakeholders. Dukerich and Carter (2000) would agree with Hannington (2004), and recommend continuously monitoring the opinions of stakeholders, conducting both formal and informal surveys of key stakeholder groups such as customers, employees and suppliers. Dukerich and Carter (2000) note there are other ways to gauge stakeholders' opinions of the firm such as examining purchasing behaviour and conducting opinion polls.

Rayner (2003) references the fourth Corporate Watch survey, done by Hill and Knowlton (2002), which found more than 75 percent of international companies measure their corporate reputation, either formally or informally. The same survey found the most favoured measurement methods are word of mouth at just over 70 percent, and customer research at 50 percent (Hill & Knowlton, 2002).

Who Owns Reputation Management?

A common questions that is debated among professionals and scholars alike, is who owns reputation management. Tonello (2007) reports that most chief executive officers lack coordination with respect to who owns reputation management and the responsibilities associated with it. A survey conducted by Murray and White (2004) found that the majority of chief executive officers believe they own reputation management with the help of chairmen and board members.

Methodology

In-depth Interviews with Senior Communications Managers

One-on-one interviews were used to gauge interviewee's perceptions of reputation repair. A series of five in-depth interviews were conducted. All of the interviewees were involved in both issues management and reputation repair at their respective companies.

The interviews followed a semi-structured approach with predetermined questions for all of the interviewees. Each interviewee was asked ten open-ended questions. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviewees represented five firms and five different sectors.

These interviewees and their companies are reported in the study anonymously i.e. interviewee #1, company #1.

Survey of Canadian Communicators and Practitioners

The survey was designed by the author and was sent out as a blog post on the International Association of Business Communicators' website.   The survey was administered as a web-based instrument using the Fluid Surveys online service. The survey contained twenty-five questions, of which twenty-four were close-ended and the one was open-ended. To encourage the greatest number of participants, the researcher allowed the survey to be done from the perspective of the respondent's current or former workplace. The first and second questions asked participants if their current or former workplaces had experienced an issue or crisis.

The researcher used close-ended questions to make the survey quick and easy for the respondents, as a way of getting higher completion rate (Dillman et al., 2009). The survey participants came from a variety of sectors including education, health care, agency, non-profit, finance and insurance. More than two-thirds of respondents had 15 years or more of work experience. 80 percent of respondents worked at Canadian companies, whereas 10.6 percent worked for an international organization with offices in Canada. The remaining 9.4 percent noted they were self-employed.

Content Analyses of Canadian Firms

Content analysis was used as the third method as a way to analyze how firms communicated with their stakeholders about reputation repair. The content analysis examined press releases and newspaper articles from nine companies, looking at coverage up to three years after the issue/crisis. The nine companies examined were intended to match the companies of the interviewees, however, some interviewees declined to participate. Only five companies analyzed match the five interviewees.

Results

The following are the findings from the interviews, and survey. In the discussion section, the author has examined these results and compared them to previous studies and conclusions.

In-depth Interviews with Senior Communications Managers

The first question posed to the interviewees was "*What do you think are the most effective tactics and strategies for repairing corporate reputations?*" The participants noted the most effective tactics and strategies were honesty and transparency, apologizing to stakeholders, recognizing and addressing the issue, admitting fault, providing stakeholders with updates, and explaining how the firm will move forward post-issue or post-crisis.

Next participants were asked "*What was the role of the CEO and senior management in your company's reputation repair efforts*?" Participants #2, #3, #4 and #5 responded that their organizational leaders were on the front lines. The same four participants noted their organizational leaders were the spokespersons and participated in the majority, if not all of the media interviews.

The participants were then asked "*Do you feel the outcome of the company's repair efforts would have been different if someone in communications/public relations was part of the senior management team?*" The participants were divided on this question. Participants #1 and #5 believed having representation on the senior management team would have made a difference, whereas Participants #3 and #4 explained their communications teams had representation at the vice president level.

The next question posed to participants was "*Do you feel your organization addressed the root causes of the problem?*" The majority of participants, #2, #3, #4 and #5, concurred and stated that their organizations addressed the root causes of the problem.

The next question participants were asked was "*How did your organization monitor and measure reputation recovery?*" The participants noted surveys, market analyses, measuring sales, media and social media monitoring, and conversations with government and business leaders.

Survey of Canadian Communicators and Practitioners

A total of 55 participants completed the survey. The online survey was open to Canadian public relations practitioners and communicators. The survey ended early for those respondents who had indicated they had not experienced an issue or crisis at either their current or former workplaces.

In the first question respondents were asked if their current/former organizations viewed reputation management as a top priority. Over half of those surveyed agreed, 53.2% (n=25), while more than one-third strongly agreed, 36.2% (n=17).

The next question delved into a deeper topic, and examined the length of reputation repair. The largest group of participants, 27.7% (n=13), noted other. The majority of those who selected other stated that the issue or crisis was still ongoing at 12.8% (n=6). Of the additional participants who selected other 6.4% (n=3) stated the issue still remains in the memory of their customers/clients and 2.1% (n=1) noted their firm closed.

Next, participants were asked about tools used for reputation repair. As participants were allowed to select more than one tool, percentages will not add to 100. The top five tools overall, from most prevalent to least prevalent were transparent reporting at 85.1% (n=40), addressing root causes at 80.9% (n=38), corporate social responsibility at 57.4% (n=27), improving product or service quality at 51.1% (n=24), and legislation/policy reform at 31.9% (n=15).

The next question delved deeper and asked participants if c-suite executives were available during reputation repair. The top four answers from most frequently selected to less frequently selected included strongly agree at 29.8% (n=14), agree at 23.4% (n=11), neither agree nor disagree at 21.3% (n=10) and disagree at 19.1% (n=9). Similarly, participants asked if they felt their chief executive officer played an active role in reputation repair. The largest group of respondents, 38.3% (n=18) strongly agreed, while 31.9% (n=15) agreed.

The next question was sought to determine whether or not practitioners felt having a communicator as part of the senior management team would have yielded better reputation repair results. The largest group of respondents, 29.8% (n=14), selected strongly agree, followed by agree at 27.7% (n=13) and not applicable at 27.7% (n=13).

The researcher then examined the participants' belief that their firm made the necessary changes to prevent the issue or crisis from recurring. The two largest groups were agree at 34.0% (n=16) and neither agree nor disagree at 31.9% (n=15).

Lastly, the participants were asked about the methods they used to measure reputation repair. As participants were allowed to select more than one method, percentages will not add to 100. The top five scores overall, from most prevalent to least prevalent, were monitoring traditional and online news at 63.8% (n=30), surveying stakeholders at 55.3% (n=26), monitoring social media at 48.9% (n=23), measuring sales at 25.5% (n=12), and measuring stocks at 12.8% (n=6).

Discussion

Based on evidence gathered from the interviews, surveys, and content analyses, it has been

determined that the findings from the literature review were sufficiently conclusive. While the majority of the findings did match the literature review, a few inconsistencies did arise.

The survey results indicated that participants believed reputation was a top priority at their organizations; more than half of the participants agreed reputation was a top priority while one-third strongly agreed. These findings are contradictory to the report, *Safeguarding Reputation*, written by Weber Shandwick (2007), which found that 29 percent of chief communications officers conveyed reputation management was their top priority. This seems to suggest that reputation is increasing in importance amongst communication leaders.

The results of the content analyses did not align with a study done by Ed deHaan and the Stanford Graduate School of Business (Andrews, 2014). The study is referenced in an article written by Andrews (2014) and found the companies sharply increased the number of reputation repairing actions following an issue or crisis. Seven of the nine firms analyzed showed that less than three percent of their overall media coverage focused on reputation repairing efforts and actions.

Gaines-Ross (2008) advises that reputation recovery is a long and ongoing process that does not end after a quick moment of success. When asked about the length of reputation repair, approximately 13 percent of survey respondents claimed their issue or crisis repair was still on going.

Levinthal (1997) argues many organizations search for solutions that will directly change the stakeholders' perceptions of the company, rather than removing the root causes and searching for a solution. The majority of interviewees disagreed with Levinthal's (1997) assertion, stating that their respective organizations addressed the root causes of the problems. Half of the survey respondents also disagreed with Levinthal's (1997) assertion, as they indicated a belief that their firm had addressed the root causes. Similarly, when survey participants were asked if their firms had made the necessary changes to prevent the issue or crisis from recurring, more than half of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed.

The fourth Corporate Watch survey, conducted by Hill and Knowlton (2002), found that more than 75 percent of international companies measure their corporate reputation. Both the interview and survey results did align with Hill and Knowlton's (2002) findings.

Previously published literature by Murray and White (2004) found that the majority of chief executive officers believe they own reputation management with the help of chairmen and board members. Both of the interview and survey results aligned with the findings of Murray and White (2004). The interview results indicated that the majority of chief executive officers took a central role in their firm's reputation repair efforts. The survey results mirrored the interview results, and found that majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their chief executive officer played an active role in reputation repair. Likewise, the same survey results showed that just over half of the respondents indicated that their c-suite executives were also available during reputation repair.

The survey results illustrated that participants believed having a communications/public relations practitioner as part of the senior management team would have yielded better reputation repair results; more than half of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. These findings are contradictory to the interview results, which found that the majority, three of five interviewees, already had representation at the senior management level.

The majority of interviewees noted their respective communications teams had representation at the vice president level. These findings did not align with a study done by Hagan (2007), which found that public relations staff were absent at the senior management level.

Limitations

While understanding reputation repair amongst Canadian corporations and companies head-quartered in Canada is a critical first step, it must be acknowledged that this report faced several limitations. Both the number of interview participants and number of survey respondents were small; a larger sample would have provided more robust statistics. As there were a limited number of interview participants, this paper may account for some conclusions, which may not be reflective of all Canadian communications professionals with regard to reputation repair.

Further Research

Since the sample for the report was small, it means that the study can only be considered exploratory. Therefore, the topic of this research, rebuilding corporate reputation, warrants further investigation.

Conclusion

Based on the results gathered in this report, it is clear that the majority of interviewees and survey participants understand the critical importance of reputation repair. For the most part, the research found that Canadian communicators and public relations practitioners understood the importance of addressing root causes to ensure that a similar issue or crisis did not recur. Based on the evidence gathered and analyzed from both the surveys and interviews, it is clear that the majority of participants believed their respective organizations addressed the root causes.

Reputation repair remains an important area of study as the Weber Shandwick (2007) report, *Safeguarding Reputation*, states the number reputation-damaging events is on the rise. It is hoped that this study will prompt further research to be conducted in an area of the field, which contains a very small body of academic work.

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Kap takes a knee: A media framing analysis of Colin Kaepernick's anthem protest

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Abstract

Media frame analysis of Colin Kaepernick's anthem protest revealed Virality, Power and Influence, Individual Action, and Deflection and Distraction. This study has substantial implications for corporate public relations professionals because media frames inform reputation. Anthem protest coverage could lead to a strategic shift in the NFL's response approach.

Introduction

It all started with a slightly blurry photograph, shot from the stands. A member of the Niners Nation had noticed San Francisco 49ers back-up quarterback Colin Kaepernick sitting while the rest of the team and its staff stood for the "Star-Spangled Banner," the national anthem of the United States of America, during a National Football League's pre-season game on August 26, 2016. Kaepernick had not announced his action, and most were unaware; in fact, this was the third week during the competition that he had opted out of standing and instead stayed on the bench while the anthem played. Once the picture was tweeted out, however, it caught fire. Going viral almost immediately, the national media picked up the story and a controversy was born. When asked after the game to explain his refusal to stand during the anthem, Kaepernick explained he sat "because of the oppression of people of color and ongoing issues with police brutality" (Sandritter, November 6, 2016).

Kaepernick's initial decision to sit during the anthem sparked immediate backlash. After lengthy discussions with Nate Boyer, a former Green Beret and NFL player, and teammate Eric Reid, Kaepernick revised his approach to taking a knee while the anthem played in hopes of refocusing the conversation. According to Kaepernick:

> We were talking to him about how we can get the message back on track and not take away from the military, not take away from pride in our country but keep the focus where the issues really are. As we talked about it, we came up with taking a knee because there are issues that still need to be addressed and there was also a way to show more respect for the men and women that fight for this country. (Vasilogambros, 2016)

This did little to abate critics. Kaepernick's jerseys were burned, and he found himself at the center of a firestorm. Not everyone was opposed to Kaepernick's actions, however. While some opted to destroy his jersey, others embraced it; just over a week into his protest, Kaepernick's jersey was the third-highest seller among players on NFL.com, and three of the top six jerseys in the 49ers online shop were ones related to him (Brinson, 2016). Clearly, the public felt strongly about Kaepernick's protest, whether they agreed with him or not.

When athletes choose to take public stands on controversial issues, including police shootings, social justice, and racial equality, they take on considerable risk. Athletes of Kaepernick's stature often have substantial endorsement deals that can be cut due to backlash. Teams often shy away from players who seem to court controversy, and the NFL historically has worked hard to shut down any action that is not in line with their pro-American brand. As such, Kaepernick's decision to visibly protest the national anthem during games is both notable and somewhat unusual.

This research was designed to examine how Kaepernick's actions were framed, beginning with his initial decision to sit out the anthem through the end of the next month. In our analysis of major sports media outlets—both print and digital—indicates six frames were primarily used: Virality, Power & Influence, Individual Action, Professional Risk, Kaepernick Himself, and Deflection & Distraction. By understanding these frames, we can begin to develop a better understanding of how individual actors can use their platforms to raise awareness and spark discussions around important issues, using their celebrity to amplify voices that otherwise might go unheard.

Literature Review

Frames were initially posited by Goffman (1974) as primary frameworks into which individuals organize experiences. According to Entman (1993), "To frame is to select some

aspect of a perceived reality and to make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). He asserted that frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies.

In communication literature, frames have come to be associated with conceptual categorization of media messages. By emphasizing some issues and not others, journalists are essentially interpreting news through their coverage, rendering news a socially created product that does not reflect any objective reality. They overlap, reinforce, and sometime contradict. Shared language, keywords, and metaphors help build frames.

Frames and Public Relations

Frames affect salience and selection of news stories, so public relations professionals find frames especially valuable. Hallahan (1999) identified seven different public relations-relevant techniques in an analysis of framing literature: Framing of situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibility, and news. Construction of reality was a dominant frame in a meta-analysis of public relations framing research (Lim & Jones, 2010). Researchers compare public relations messages with news coverage, and also analyze public relations messages.

Media are powerful purveyors of public opinion, framing meaning for readers by leaving out mention of problematic viewpoints. Social issues can be presented as moral appeals through framing. According to Lipari (1996) the media are especially powerful with sociopolitical discourse. Social movements need media attention to develop. "Media discourse is not only vital in terms of framing social issues and problems for the attentive public, but it is also a place of ideological and ideational struggle for various social movements, state actors, and institutions" (Boykoff, 2006).

Frames and Social Movements

Social movements must have shared understanding in order to mobilize action, according to framing research specific to social movements and collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000). Media frames must clearly define social issues as well as potential solutions for target publics; present key actor credibility via cultural resonance, and reframe issue meaning as necessary. Media frames must clearly define social issues as well as potential solutions for target publics; present key actor credibility via cultural resonance, and reframe issue meaning as necessary;

In 1992, McLeod and Hertog posited the *protest paradigm*: "a routinized template for creating protest stories that has been naturalized through the process of journalistic socialization…They are comprised of news frames, reliance on official sources, the invocation of public opinion, de-legitimization, and demonization." Even in covering social issues, though, media are guided by professional norms, rules, and values.

Although framing literature is expansive in the social sciences, much of the social movement scholarship is positivistic, in which scholars use quantitative methodologies (e.g., Boyle et al., 2005; Boyle et al., 2012; Detender et al., 2007; McCloud & Detender, 1999; McCluskey et al., 2009; Rauch et al., 2007; Weaver & Scacco, 2013). In order to adequately explore the phenomenon of study, the authors established an interpretivist philosophical worldview for study parameters. They found that scholars have employed qualitative and critical methodologies to investigate media frames of social issue protests.

Framing Race

Race plays a significant role in how media report about athletes. Scholars have noted the brain-brawn dichotomy, whereby White athletes' abilities are attributed to mental acuity, and Black athletes abilities are attributed to their physical acumen. Black athleticism was a recurring theme in Buffington's (2005) media frame analysis of the rise in the number of Black quarterbacks: "These labels override other accomplishments on the field by shifting emphasis away from the intellectual, management, and emotional tools of Black quarterbacks—the very skills that have the most potential to challenge dominant ideas about race" (p. 33). Reporters acknowledged the historical lack of African American players in the position, but also presented increasing number as evidence that race was now a non-issue. Scholarship suggests otherwise, however.

Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt (2000) proposed a "Televised Sport Manhood Formula" based on mixed-methods textual analysis of media sports framing. They found that White men were the voices of authority in news and advertisements, situating Black athletes in lower-status roles. Recent research supports their findings. News and social media analysis of Erin Andrews's interview with Richard Sherman following a game-winning play revealed stereotypical framing of the football player as the "other" (Page et. al, 2016). The scholars noted that references to his physicality, presented in sharp contrast to the White female reporter, presented Sherman as an outsized brute in performance mode. Textual analysis of NFL Draft media coverage revealed a similar racialized dichotomy. According to Oates and Durham (2004), media reinforced the status differences of mostly White team owners and non-White players by classifying players according to numerical dimensions.

Media and Protest

Scholarship reviewed for the present study indicates that media regularly present protesters outside the mainstream lacking commonly held values (e.g., Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad,1998; Boykoff, 2006; Entman & Rojecki, 1993; Guzman, 2016; McLeod & Hertog, 1992). Conversely, media present public officials as subject matter experts by regularly including them in social movement stories (e.g., Entman & Rojecki, 1993; McLeod & Hertog, 1992). The necessity of protests is questioned regularly in media coverage of social movements (e.g., Elena, 2016; Guzman, 2016). Many media employ criticism of logistical issues as a negative protest frame (e.g., Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad,1998; McLeod & Hertog,1992). Positive media frames were rare and context-specific (e.g., Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad,1998; McLeod, 2007; McLeod and Hertog, 1992).

Based on findings from the literature, this study investigated the following two research questions:
RQ1: How did the media frame the protest itself?
RQ2: How did the media frame Colin Kaepernick as an individual?

Methods

Data Collection

To explore how Colin Kaepernick was framed by the media for his decision to kneel during the national anthem, press articles were obtained from sports news websites, local news websites, and national news websites. The online articles were initially chosen from the top 15 sports news websites by estimated unique monthly viewers, as complied by Sports Business Daily in August 2016, and was narrowed down to include ESPN.com and BleacherReport.com based on ability to compile a complete list of articles during desired timeframe. The authors also

included the top local online coverage of Kaepernick, which was SFGate.com, and two national news sources: NYTimes.com and WashingtonPost.com. A search for articles within all of these websites was done for "Colin Kaepernick." The time frame chosen was August 27, 2016 (the date Kaepernick's protest was initially recognized by media coverage) through September 27, 2016 (one month later). The end date was chosen to ensure that adequate time was given for media outlets to cover Kaepernick's continued protest, the reaction, and the impact it had in protests by others.

Sample

The data collection process led to a sample size of 499 online articles. Articles were then removed from the sample if they were duplicates or not relevant to the study. The result was a final sample total of 390 articles. The breakdown by online news site was Bleacher Report (n=39), ESPN (n=129), New York Times (n=25), SFGate (n=90), and Washington Post (n=107).

Data Analysis

For this study, a textual analysis was performed to uncover frames from the sample. In order to develop frames, one researchers used a random number generator to split the initial sample into five sections – four equal sized sections for each researcher to analyze and review for emergent themes, and one section that was 10 percent of the sample for all researchers to analyze and review for emergent themes so that there was consistency in interpretation. After looking for themes in their respective sections, the four researchers met to discuss the themes that had emerged, and this process led to five frames that were agreed upon by all researchers.

Findings

Through our investigation, we identified six relevant frames: virality; power and influence; individual action; professional risk; Kaepernick himself; and deflection and distraction. Each frame was found across all media sources. Please note that all tweets presented in this section are verbatim (as presented in the sourced articles) and have not been edited to correct for grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors.

Virality. One of the most striking elements of coverage of Kaepernick's protest was the virality of his actions. A number of current and former NFL players provided at least tacit support through participating in similar gestures, such as raising fists in the air during the anthem:

> Kaepernick's initial protest has inspired players from the 49ers and multiple NFL teams to take a stand. Three Philadelphia Eagles players raised their right fist in the Black power salute prior to the team's game against the Chicago Bears on *Monday Night Football*. (Wells, 2016b)

On September 11th, 2016, Kansas City cornerback Marcus Peters raised his right first during the national anthem in support of Kaepernick (Young, 2016). Later in the day, four players from the Miami Dolphins elected to take a knee during the national anthem. Clearly, Kaepernick's action had gone viral.

This virality extended outside of the NFL. Prominent sports stars from other professional leagues followed in Kaepernick's path, and athletes across the spectrum—including high school students and college teams—were inspired to take action. Even those who opted out of actively

protesting during the anthem became part of the conversation, particularly as athletes were asked to comment on Kaepernick's decision and to speculate about who else would join in. Basketball superstar Stephen Curry told CNBC that he applauds Kaepernick for standing up for what he believes in (Wells, 2016a), and his teammate Kevin Durant added,

> I'm behind anyone who stands up for what they believe in. [Kaepernick] is standing up for what he believes in. That's what makes our country so great, right? You have the luxury to do so. He was unapologetic about it and, in his defense, I don't think he was trying to disrespect anyone (Wells, 2016a, p. 1).

Perhaps the most strongest and visible support of Kaepernick's protest came from one of the United States's most recognizable soccer stars, Megan Rapinoe. Best known as a midfielder for the U.S. women's national soccer team, Rapinoe decided to take a knee during the national anthem before a National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) match in Chicago in September of 2016. To explain her decision to join Kaepernick's protest, she tweeted, "It's the least I can do. Keep the conversation going" (Goff, 2016). As one of the few prominent White athletes to take an active stance in support of Kaepernick. Rapinoe's decision to kneel during the anthem generated considerable attention, and her specific and vocal support of Kaepernick extended his message to include other marginalized groups:

> I am disgusted with the way he has been treated and the fans and the hatred he has received in all this. It is overtly racist: "Stay in your place, Black man." Just doesn't feel right to me. We need a more substantive conversation around race relations and the way people of color are treated. … And quite honestly, being gay, I have stood with my hand over my heart during the national anthem and felt like I haven't had my liberties protected, so I can absolutely sympathize with that feeling. (ESPN.com, 2016)

Kaepernick's protest even gained traction outside of professional sports. An entire group of youth football players from Texas, aging from 11 to 12 years old, also took part in the protest. Before a youth football game, the entire Beumont Bulls took a knee during the national anthem (Teitz, 2016). While this gesture sparked both positive and negative feedback from the public, it shows that Kaepernick's protest indeed went viral, and those young and old took part.

Power and influence. While Kaepernick protested, many others chimed in, and their voices carried different levels of influence based on factors such as race, job, and societal status. Individuals with more "power" were quoted on Kaepernick's protest, while other voices were eliminated. An excerpt from the *Washington Post* read:

> Also taking issue with the players' actions was Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts. "Generations of men and women have died to give them that right to protest," Ricketts said Monday during his weekly radio call-in show (via the Omaha World Herald). "I think the way they chose to protest was disgraceful and disrespectful." (Bieler, 2016c)

That "power," though, typically belonged to White individuals. It was only in special circumstances that a Black non-athlete was asked to voice his or her opinion on the matter, as was the case for President Barack Obama. An article in the *New York Times* included, "President

Obama said Monday that Colin Kaepernick, the San Francisco 49ers quarterback, was 'exercising his constitutional right' by refusing to stand during the national anthem, a decision that has fostered considerable controversy since he first took the action on Aug. 26.

When it was not the authority figure speaking, it was the athlete, and there was a divide between White and Black athletes in which the White athlete carried more power. From *USA Today*:

> Last week, race became a topic of discussion in the sport again after Adam Jones told USA Today that major league players aren't kneeling during the national anthem in Colin Kaepernick's footsteps like other professional athletes because "baseball is a white man's sport" and it is too risky for an African American player to take such a stance. (Castillo, 2016)

Kaepernick's protest would not be legitimized until he had "White allies." When support was given by White football player Chris Long, Kaepernick said, "I think it was huge that Chris stood up and took that stand. I don't know if he realizes how much that means to this movement and trying to get things changed" (Wagoner, 2016a). It was the White athlete or the authority figure's job to speak – not the job of the Black athlete. For instance, "While he's not inspired to follow Kaepernick, Jenkins is encouraged to see Black athletes increasingly being willing to take a stand on social issues, even at the risk of inspiring negative reaction" (Branch, 2016a).

Individual action. Rather than contextualizing Kaepernick's kneeling (or similar actions from other players) as part of a movement, articles that employed the "Individual Action" frame treated these protests as individual and isolated. They were more likely to talk about the actions in terms of isolation, disconnected from the Kaepernick's intended message of protesting police brutality and racial injustice. This often was in the context of other athletes who declared they would never engage in this type of protest, even if they respected Kaepernick's right to do so. For example, former NBA star Shaquille O'Neal was quoted as saying: "I don't know Colin, but to each his own. I really don't have a say on it, but I would never do that. … Just, you know—other ways to get your point across" (Bieler, 2016).

In addition to framing protest actions as limited to certain athletes, his frame reinforced perceptions that athletes are, at their core, entertainers—and as such, they should, as the saying goes, shut up and play. This was framed both as an absolute rejection of players protesting during the national anthem as well as a betrayal of team trust. This perspective was expressed by Carolina Panthers' wide receiver Ted Ginn during an interview with ESPN. When asked about the likelihood of Panthers players protesting, Ginn replied:

> We haven't [so far]. I don't think that's going to change. Whoever has whatever opinion on the situation, they're keeping it to themselves and basically doing what's right for their team and being a man within the team by holding onto whatever opinion they have. I commend every man in this locker room so we can move forward. We are putting the two aside and playing football. (Newton, 2016)

This sentiment was clearly at play in the wake of NWSL star Rapinoe's decision to kneel in support of Kaepernick's protest. The first match after she kneeled, the owner of the host team opted to play the national anthem before players walked out in order to prevent Rapinoe from kneeling and, more specifically, "rather than subject our fans and friends to the disrespect we

feel such an act would represent" (Goff, September 7, 2016). The statement from the Spirit explained, "…we respectfully disagree with method of hijacking our organization's event to draw attention to what is ultimately a personal—albeit worthy—cause" (Goff, 2016). By characterizing protest actions as individual actions, the overarching goal of the movement is dismissed.

Professional risk. Much of the discussion around players' willingness to protest focused on the risk that was associated with taking a stand, particularly in articles more sympathetic to Kaepernick's actions and the message he was trying to convey. Professional athletes noted that there could be consequences for taking action, particularly in sports where minority athletes had less sway:

> [Major League Baseball] Orioles star Adam Jones offered an answer Monday to USA Today. "Baseball is a white man's sport," he said. "We already have two strikes against us already," said Jones, not to be confused with the [NFL] Bengals' Adam Jones, who also recently spoke out on the topic), "so you might as well not kick yourself out of the game. In football, you can't kick them out. You need those players. In baseball, they don't need us" (Bieler, 2016b, paras 3-4).

For Kaepernick himself, pundits questioned whether or not he would be able to continue his career in the wake of these protests, noting that he was now labeled a troublemaker and would be considered toxic to front office decision-makers.

Beyond opportunities to play in professional leagues, athletes who protested also risked losing lucrative sponsorships. When Kaepernick's actions started to go viral, Senator Ted Cruz from Texas spoke out in favor of a boycott of products promoted by the "rich spoiled athletes" who joined in (Heil, 2016, para 1). For Denver Broncos linebacker Brandon Marshall, this risk became reality when he lost two sponsorship deals over decision to kneel during the anthem in support of Kaepernick's protest.

Kaepernick himself. While Kaepernick was explicit and consistent in his explanations about why he was protesting and what he stood for, the media often framed the situation around his identity, his method, and his safety, instead of the movement he was attempting to start. The quarterback had to defend his reasoning for kneeling during the national anthem. In a New York Times piece, Michael Powell describes the barrage of questions Kaepernick faced in a post-game locker room presser:

> Are you proud of your role in stirring players around the N.F.L — several knelt or raised fists Sunday during the various anthems — to take a role in protesting police brutality? He shook his head. He is a new emigrant to this land of political activism, and he refuses to take on airs. No, no, he said. This movement wasn't for me. As I've researched these things, as I've seen more and more, it's not right.
>
> He spoke of social media and its immediacy, and how it put so many deaths of black people at the hands of the police so insistently in his face. "You see things instantly, day after day, and it's hard," he told us. "For me, I couldn't see another hashtag Sandra Bland, hashtag Tamir Rice, hashtag Walter Scott."
> His eyes narrowed. "At what point do we take a stand?" (2016, paras 9-12).

While Kaepernick made efforts to frame discussion about his protest in terms of the movement and issue, others kept bringing it back to him as an athlete and a man. For example, former NFL Pro Bowler Rodney Harrison posited "he's not Black" when asked about Kaepernick refusing to stand for the national anthem in order to protest the treatment of people of color (Boren, 2016). Harrison eventually issued a correction and apology. This comment was an attack on Kaepernick's identity as opposed to a response to the quarterback's message and brought into question whether or not he had legitimate grounds to protest: After all, if he isn't Black, why is he doing this?

This questioning of Kaepernick's legitimacy as a messenger was a strong theme in this frame, along with assumptions about his intentions and the specific action he took—first sitting, then kneeling during the anthem. Even after Kaepernick made the explicit decision to kneel during the anthem in response to discussions with former NFL kicker and Green Beret Boyer, others insisted that his protest was an attack on the military rather than a protest of police brutality. These criticisms came from a number of sources, including coaches, other players, football commentators, and politicians. John Harbaugh, Kaepernick's former head coach in San Francisco, initially said that he didn't respect the "motivation or the action" of Kaepernick's stance. Harbaugh quickly backtracked, saying, "To clarify, I support Colin's motivation" (Branch, 2016, p. 1).

The emphasis on Kaepernick and his kneeling in coverage framed it in ways that undermined his intended message, making it instead about him and his method. Chris Ault, Kaepernick's former head coach at the University of Nevada, was quoted in saying, "Kap using an NFL game as his platform to show the importance of his cause was selfish. Not standing up for an American treasure such as the National Anthem is disrespectful" (Branch, 2016, p. 1). Donald Trump agreed with these criticisms, saying that Kaepernick's refusal to stand during the National Anthem was a "terrible thing." Trump went on to say, "Maybe he should find a country that works better for him. Let him try, it's not going to happen" (Branch, 2016).

Not all commentators were critical of Kaepernick, but even those in support reframed the discussion around Kaepernick and his methods rather than the intended purpose. Jim Brown, a former hall of fame running back in the NFL and legendary athlete-activist, responded to the critics questioning Kaepernick's method by saying, "He's within his rights and he's telling the truth as he sees it. I am with him 100 percent. People are talking about the methodology, but every young man is not a professor" (Branch, 2016, p. 1).

While Kaepernick's identity, right to protest, and method were points of discussion that the media focused on, conversation about his safety also kept people from talking about his

message. According to Moyle, "Kaepernick hears and sees it all-- malicious slurs, odious remarks harkening back to Jim Crow, people questioning his right to protest" (2016). This was not a surprise, since Kaepernick anticipated racial backlash when he decided to stand up for something he believed in (Moyle, 2016).

Deflection and distraction. Although Kaepernick's protest generated media attention, part of that coverage deflected the reader away from issues of police brutality and towards issues unrelated to Kaepernick's focus. Instead, the motivation or method behind Kaepernick's protests were discussed. Most specifically, this included discussions on whether he should kneel or not during the national anthem, for instance, "What began as a gesture to protest police brutality and social injustice had careened into a national debate on everything but that" (Witz, 2016). That

decision became connected to the military and patriotism, thus putting the focus on those issues and deflecting them from police brutality. Instances of imposing military-related conversation included, "Kaepernick has touched off a national debate by sitting during the anthem in the 49ers' first three preseason games. He has been widely criticized for disrespecting the military, an issue he addressed Sunday" (Branch, 2016b). When other athletes and coaches offered commentary on Kaepernick's protest—whether positive or negative—their quotes often were coupled with declarations of their military associations; in these instances, parents, cousins, aunts or uncles who had served in the military seemed to confer credibility.

Articles employing this frame often included discussion of what it means to be a patriot and, more specifically, considerations of Kaepernick's patriotism. This debate was pushed to the forefront, while police brutality—the stated reason for Kaepernick's protest—was an afterthought or forgotten entirely. This included, "The cover of the Oct. 3 issue of Time reads "The Perilous Fight" followed by "National anthem protests led by Colin Kaepernick are fueling a debate about privilege, pride and patriotism" (Wagoner, 2016b). The discussion evolved into a debate over the First Amendment. In a *Washington Post* article, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives president Perry Tarrant said, "Whether it's the right way or otherwise, the conduct by Colin Kaepernick is a First Amendment right" (Jackson, 2016). The conversation was not about police brutality – it was about whether Kaepernick was right or wrong for what he was doing. For instance, "The Santa Clara Police Officers' Association called Kaepernick's criticism of police and his decision to sit during the national anthem in pre-season games 'inappropriate workplace behavior,' according to a letter the union sent to the 49ers" (Veklerov, 2016).

Discussion

Kaepernick's decision to protest the national anthem engaged critics and supporters in a public discussion, even if it wasn't always the on Kaepernick wanted. Debates over the rights and privileges of athletes—including their right to protest—were foregrounded in a way we often don't see. Claims that they should "shut up and play," as discussed in our Individual Action frame, were hotly contested by both Kaepernick and other athletes who followed him in protest. Rather than taking his paycheck home, Kaepernick opted to put his money on the line, donating $1 million to charities specifically picked to because of their connections to the issues he raised. He joined high school athletes on the field who had protested during the anthem, offering them continued support and encouragement.

It is important to note that Kaepernick's leadership on this issue is one that he opted to take on. Black athletes often find themselves in the midst of the proverbial rock and a hard place: If they speak out about issues related to injustice, they are told to shut up and play; if they don't, they are criticized for not being strong enough advocates for (and defenders of) their communities. In this instance, Kaepernick and other athletes took this responsibility to heart, but it was clear that they did not expect all Black athletes to join in. Likewise, it was notable that there was a call for more White athletes to join in the protests, although those calls largely went unmet. The notable exception, soccer star Megan Rapinoe, was quickly marginalized in her sport, with the owner of the first team she played after beginning to take a knee opting to play the anthem before the players came out in order to avoid controversy.

Interestingly, the lone league that had widespread and frequent action in support of the issues raised by Kaepernick—the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA)—is one of the few top-tier professional sporting organizations to have a specific rule requiring players

stand during the playing of the national anthem. In defiance of this codified expectation of behavior, women knelt and locked arms, sometimes among the entire team, in order to demonstrate their support for the protest started by Kaepernick. The WNBA actually was a month ahead of Kaepernick, beginning their protests earlier that summer when players from two teams wore t-shirts in reaction to police shootings. Despite these clear and regular actions, almost all led by women of color, their protests were not nearly as prevalent in coverage of athlete protests as those by men either actively in-season (football), in training (basketball), or those of a White woman (Rapinoe).

Conclusion

At the height of Kaepernick's protest, multiple media outlets claimed he was ruining team unity and that the locker room was against him. Reporters and pundits questioned the wisdom of publicly putting himself on the line, insisting that Kaepernick was hurting his team through his actions. These claims were proven false at the end of the season, however, when the 49ers team voted to celebrate Kaepernick with the Len Eshmont award, described on the 49ers website as the team's "most prestigious annual honor, (given to) the 49ers player who best exemplifies the 'inspirational and courageous play' of Len Eshmont" (San Francisco 49ers, accessed December 2016). Even after regaining the starting position in week six of the season, Kaepernick continued to kneel during the anthem. Despite the controversy, this "award would seem to quash any doubt regarding his support within the locker room, after he opted to kneel during the national anthem all season in protest of police brutality and racial inequalities in the United States" (SI Wire, 2016). From a public relations perspective, Kaepernick's high-risk approach to his protest could have been a disaster; indeed, some would probably characterize it as such. But despite the pushback, the burned jerseys, and the controversies that have ensued, Kaepernick himself has expressed no regrets for the path he blazed, nor do the other athletes who joined him in support.

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The Evolution of Online Activism and Corporate Social Responsibility: In-Depth Interviews with the Experts

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Abstract

Society has come to expect that corporations behave responsibly – an evolution that started four decades ago with the activist movement. Online activists continue to prompt organizations to be good corporate citizens. This study explores the role of online activism and the ways companies are engaging in – or are pressured into – corporate social responsibility (CSR) by online activists. A qualitative survey of five PR professionals who have served in CSR roles was conducted to provide context for how activists may affect change within organizations, and influence approaches to CSR and organizational policy. The results showed that CSR professionals did not view online activists differently from offline activists as these activists are looking to create a dialogue with the corporation about engaging in some form of policy change. Activism also creates a checks and balances system for CSR and often prompts organizational changes if it is legitimate and aligned with organizational goals. Findings also indicated that it is important for organizations to listen, engage and be open-minded when speaking with activists. CSR is a strategic business function and organizations must realize that it should be a core part of their business strategy. Practical implications for organizations and public relations practitioners are discussed.

Keywords: activism, online activism, corporate social responsibility, CSR, CSR professionals

During the Activist Era of the 1960s-1970s, companies were pressured to engage in increased ethics and good corporate citizenship – or they would be subjected to government regulation brought on by grassroots activist demands. Clark (2000) explained, "Nuclear power, civil rights abuses, regulation of business activities, the consumer rights movement, and the women's movement were just a few key developments that contributed to the tension between business and society" (p. 365). Of 35 major health, safety, and environmental laws passed between 1877-1982, 26 were legislated in the 1960s and 1970s (Heath & Palenchar, 2009).

Researchers have called today's social media environment the most powerful shift since the Industrial Revolution. An era defined by an Internet and media landscape that permeates nearly every facet of our daily lives, activist methods have similarly experienced revolutionary change. Today, online activism has the potential to raise awareness about issues, as well as apply pressure to companies to engage in greater social responsibility. For example, in 2012, online public outcry surrounding "pink slime" (finely textured beef) resulted in the massive relabeling of beef products and varied responses from both fast-food companies (McDonald's, Wendy's) and government organizations (USDA). Likewise, following millions of vehicle recalls in 2014, General Motors was pressured by car owners to provide loaner vehicles.

Similarly, public expectations about the responsibilities of business to society have evolved. The Edelman (2016) Trust Barometer perhaps speaks to the modern evolution of corporate responsibilities to society. Edelman (2016) reported that trust in business today has increased or remained steady, especially in comparison to government. The annual Edelman study confirmed that societal expectations of corporate responsibility are consistently increasing. "Whereas 59 percent believe that it is the role of government to regulate, 80 percent say that it's the responsibility of business to lead and solve problems. Specifically, eight in 10 individuals believe that a company can take specific actions that both increase profits and improve the economic and social conditions in the community where it operates" (p. 10).

Despite what appears to be an interesting relationship, research has not explored the role of online activism with regard to the ways companies are engaging in (or are pressured into) socially responsible behaviors (CSR) by online activists. The current research provides a substantial contribution to gaps in existing knowledge by: (1) adding context and detail to a body of largely empirical findings; and (2) offering a greater understanding of how CSR has evolved in more recent history, as well as predictions for the future. The qualitative approach of this study will address the "why" among expert informants and provide a foundation for the relationship between online activism and CSR in the Digital Era.

This research provides context and detail for how activists may affect change within organizations and influence organizational approaches to CSR, as well as organizational policy. By understanding the relationship between online activism and CSR, PR professionals can work to create two-way communication between organizations and activist publics. This research will also highlight predictions for the future of CSR and its implications for PR practitioners.

Literature Review

Activists continue to prompt organizations to be good corporate citizens (Heath & Palenchar, 2009; Doh & Guay, 2006). Social media has provided a modern stage for individuals to engage in activism due to the connective nature of this new media and how quickly messages can be amplified (McCafferty, 2011). With the changing attitudes of consumers, CSR is becoming more important now more than ever before. Activists may use their strong network of connections to provoke organizations to change their policies using petitions, or worse, initiate a

boycott of the organization all together. This indicates that online actions (taking place on social media) can cause reactive actions offline, significantly impacting corporations. Activists, in essence, may be pushing organizations to act more responsibly.

Online Activism

Grunig (1992) defines the activist public as a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics. New media technologies such as social media have created a new platform for activists to engage with organizations. Online activism is a movement which relies on the Internet and it includes proactive actions to achieve a common goal or reactive actions against certain controls and the imposing authorities (Vegh, 2003; McCaughey & Ayers, 2013).

Online activism can be proactive to achieve a common goal or reactive against certain controls and imposing authorities such as an organization acting irresponsibly. According to McCaughey and Ayers, (2013) there are three types of Internet activism: (1) awareness/advocacy; (2) organization/mobilization; (3) action/reaction. Awareness is created when relevant information about an issue becomes public. In online communities, it is easier to organize and mobilize groups or use the Internet as a platform for action against an organizational policy or issue.

According to Postmes and Brunsting (2002), collective action is possible online as individuals rely on group memberships and social identities. Online activists promote collective action using platforms like social media to drive organizational change. Den Hond and De Bakker (2007) explored how activism influences corporate social change activities and found that activist groups gradually challenge firms to take up these issues. In essence, activist groups are seeking to influence and bring about ground-level change. These groups use social media as their soap box to highlight these issues to the public.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been used as a business strategy to nurture positive stakeholder relationships. CSR is perceived as an important ethical fit for a company and can aid in effective reputation management (Kim & Park, 2011). Using qualitative responses from 173 PR practitioners, Kim and Reber (2008) identified five roles for public relations in CSR including significant management, philanthropic, value-driven, communication, and none. CSR is a management function that creates a positive image and reputation for a corporation but it must take the organization's goals into account.

Fitzpatrick and Gauthier (2011), examined the roles of a PR practitioner as a professional, an institutional advocate, and the public conscience of institutions served and proposed that PR professionals have obligations to serve client organizations as well as the public interest. But, doesn't this stretch the role of the PR professional too thinly? May (2008) argues that rather than reducing ethical challenges for PR, iterations of CSR, like strategic CSR, complicates the roles and responsibilities of PR practitioners toward a greater range of stakeholders. Therefore, practitioners should focus less on external stakeholder groups and more on internal factors such as employees, dialogic communication and transparency (May, 2008).

Using a sample of 289 practitioners, Kim and Reber (2009) explored how PR practitioners' professionalism was associated with their attitudes toward CSR and found that practitioners with high professionalism have more positive attitudes toward CSR, women have more positive attitudes toward CSR than men, and older practitioners have more positive

attitudes toward CSR than younger practitioners. As a result of this research, PR practitioners can develop more proactive communication strategies and can also better address issues or risks that activists may present for an organization and mitigate them. Thus, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1a: How, if at all, are online activists affecting approaches to corporate social responsibility?
RQ1b: In what ways, if at all, are online activists affecting approaches to organizational policy?
RQ2: Is there a relationship between online activism and corporate social responsibility?

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study were a purposive sample of public relations professionals from the U.S. who had served in CSR roles for a minimum of 10 years (Facebook emerged 12 years ago; Twitter emerged 10 years ago; Instagram emerged six years ago). A total of 10 professionals were invited to participate in this research study and 5 conducted interviews with the researcher. Of the sample, 4 (80%) were women and 1 (20%) was a man. Participants represented experienced CSR professionals (M = 10.8 years' experience) who had an average age of 38. Job titles of the CSR professionals included CEO, VP of Corporate Responsibility Strategy, International Commercial Business Development Manager, Associate Director, and Marketing Communication Executive.

Qualitative Method and Instrument Used

The researchers used in-depth phone interviews to acquire qualitative data for this research study. In-depth interviews allowed the researchers to learn about the CSR professionals' experience and perspectives through stories, accounts and explanations of online activism and CSR (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). These interviews also allowed the researchers to obtain open-ended responses on what role online activism plays in an organization's CSR. This research study used an interview guide (Appendix A) including questions about online activism, CSR and the relation between the two.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine in essences the "why" of online activism and CSR. The researchers conducted a qualitative analysis of data collected through in-depth interviews. The data were analyzed to identify recurring themes and in support of our research questions.

Research question 1a dealt with how online activists are affecting approaches to corporate social responsibility. A qualitative analysis of the data uncovered the first theme: Not viewing online activists differently from offline activists. Overall, participants did not categorize online activists differently from offline activists when it came to CSR strategy. Participants noted that activists are looking to have a dialogue with companies in order to invoke change. Some participants believed that online activists are using technology to share their opinion about a cause in an online platform.

> *I don't even know if I even categorize them differently online versus just an activist in general. I typically think of an activist from an organizational standpoint on organizations that are focused on ensuring that businesses act in a responsible fashion whether that be from a social, or environmental or even business perspective. They typically often have pretty specific and clear desire in terms of what their outcome would be. Certainly, it then*

boils down to individuals but typically what we see is that it starts at sort of an organizational level focused really on trying to move forward agendas around specific issues that they have a vested interest in that are also material to our client's business. **Female, VP of Corporate Responsibility Strategy, Age 33**

I think that activism by nature is something that anyone who works with clients is going to feel. It's going to be something you run up against. Activism…is someone who is trying to create behavior change by an individual or an entity and who is trying to create momentum and enlist the support of others to do the same…there was one time where the Million Moms Group had gotten behind the animal cruelty issue that has plagued the Barnum & Baileys circus for a number of years around their inhumane or perceived inhuman treatment of animals. We urged a client to no longer sponsor the service and as a result the client did cancel the contract. **Male, CEO, Age 48**

Research question 1b asked in what ways, if at all, online activists are affecting approaches to organizational policy. An analysis of the interviews uncovered the second theme: Activism creates a checks and balances system for CSR. There was consensus among the participants in this study that activism has certainly prompted changes in an organization's CSR programs. Participants felt that activism was an important part of CSR as it kept organizations focused on key initiatives such as social, environmental and economic implications with regard to CSR strategy. CSR was described as activist-oriented and the two concepts had a reciprocal relationship. Participants also agreed that activists can now capitalize on the power of social media to broaden the reach of their message, and online activism was an area organizations must pay close attention to in order to mitigate any risks they may present for the organization to achieve its goals.

Activism has definitely prompted organizations to think very seriously about how they give and who they give to. [Activists] makes sure that they don't take a lazy approach to CSR so it's part of the corporate values. They go and spend a lot of time and energy, especially with the new millennial workforce coming up knowing that our impact on the world as a corporation is a big selling point for millennials. [Activism] is also making noise about issues that don't necessarily get the type of attention that you would imagine. **Female, International Commercial Business Development Manager, Age 33**

[Activism] is probably a critical part in many ways. I think activism is one of the things that keeps clients honest, focused and reminded of the importance of some of these issues and the importance of the decisions that they make within their organization and the impact that they have on the world at large. Activism is a positive and there's a lot that can come from it. I think that it's good to have people and individuals that are helping to decrease negative impacts and strengthen the world overall. **Female, VP of Corporate Responsibility Strategy, Age 33**

Participants also agreed that activists can create organizational changes if they have valid concerns which uncovered the third theme in this study: Activism prompts organizational changes, if it is legitimate. Participants noted that activists had the power to propel organizational changes if there concerns aligned with organizational goals. They also highlighted that not all

activism behaviors required changes to organizational activities or policy – especially if the organization had binding reasons to do so – but that activists should not be ignored.

> *A lot of times activists are bellwethers...usually it's a wakeup call for organizations if they're not already ready or if they decided not to address an issue that they knew eventually would come on the rise...whether you perpetuate or sort of acquiesce to an activist's wishes is not always a necessary or recommended course of action. Because at the end of the day it could just be that the activist sort of feels that you should do certain things as a business and you may have legitimate reasons why you do things in other ways and it may just be an exercise of being transparent around why you've made your decision as a business owner or an entity the way you did.* **Male, CEO, Age 48**

> *I was at a screening for 'Dolores'...there's no better activist or example of activism than her...she prompted a boycott of products until there were certain [agricultural] labor requirements that were met. So, definitely, companies are terrified of that and so they pay attention. They know that consumers are plugged into these types of communities and if they don't take it seriously, they have a huge risk of losing market share.* **Female, International Commercial Business Development Manager, Age 33**

Research question 2 dealt with whether a relationship between online activism and corporate social responsibility existed. An analysis of the data uncovered that participants felt that a relationship existed between the two and in order for organizations to be successful, theme four should be applied: Organizational best practices are to listen, engage and be open-minded. Every participant agreed that the worst approach an organization could take is to ignore an activist. By not listening and engaging with activists, organizations can face tremendous public backlash. It's also important to ensure that organizations are proactive in identifying what the issues activists are highlighting are and creating solutions to address them. Organizations also have to ensure that they are keeping messaging consistent with organizational goals when addressing these activist issues. Participants believed that it is paramount to keep an open mind when listening to activists even if there are disagreements between the activists and the organization. By employing these best practices, practitioners have an opportunity to be better prepared for the risks that activists might present while creating an ongoing dialogue.

> *I think they can listen. That's something that often organizations are quite good at listening and monitoring. It's hard to take it to the next stage of actual engagement.... it's risky and unpredictable. And often, particularly for corporations, they might feel that they have more to lose than an online activist does or an activist community [as] they receive a different level of scrutiny than the community they might be meeting with.* **Female, Associate Director, Age 28**

> *[Activists] have changed an awareness of monitoring and staying on top of social media because the positive stuff is great and easy, but when there is [anything] negative, and there can be...you have to be on top of that so you can be responding to the activist. You should be appreciating to the activists that share your vision but responding professionally to the ones that don't. If you're going to be on social media and engaging with the public, it's a responsibility that you have to be prepared for.* **Female, Marketing Communication**

Executive, Age 46

In this study, participants also highlighted theme five: CSR as a strategic business function. Participants said that often a major mistake corporations make is not realizing that CSR is a core part of an organization's overall business strategy. CSR is a necessity for organizations as there is a certain responsibility that comes with operating a business, and corporations have an obligation to act as good corporate citizens. As CSR needs to be a more integrated function, practitioners must work toward this goal for organizations to operate in clear, transparent ways.

In general, I think CSR is like any program where you have to continue to revisit your goals and your results and continue to improve and strengthen your program and then with that measure and communicate…we have to assess, respond and react. For companies that are not currently structured in social responsibility and are dabbling in it…they should just get started…it needs to be a strategic part of your business. **Female, Marketing Communication Executive, Age 46**

I think in an ideal world CSR actually wouldn't exist. I see it more as a bridging function as the nature to keep profit-driven organizations socially responsible. I don't think it is necessary for corporations but it is necessary for society until we ever get to a place where companies sort of naturally act in ways that are socially responsible. [CSR] makes organizations see themselves as responsible corporate citizens and it will ensure that corporations are forced to be transparent in their actions and their supply chain…they will scrutinize themselves more. **Female, Associate Director, Age 28**

Discussion

Activists continue to contribute and redefine the role of CSR by ensuring that organizations understand it is their fiduciary responsibility to act as good corporate citizens. Activists in essence begin to speak out when they believe a business is not operating responsibly and seek to create a discourse with organizations. This dialogue often begins online and can be taken offline if the organization believes that the request from the activist group is aligned with the organization's goal and mission.

Activism is viewed a progressive part of CSR. Often, activists groups can pinpoint issues that the organization was unaware of to begin with. So, it's important that organizations are listening to activists and addressing their concerns. While not all issues may require the organization to initiate policy changes, organizations should never ignore activists. It's necessary that organizations always engage in two-way communication with activists so they understand that their message is being heard and action is being taken if necessary.

Organizations do a good job of monitoring for activist concerns, however, taking it to the level of engagement may prove difficult. Therefore, PR practitioners have to develop sufficient protocol for responding to and addressing activist concerns – especially in an online public forum like social media. If an organization ignores an activist, they can face major backlash if the issue becomes highly publicized or viral on various media platforms.

Today's consumers have an expectation that organizations must be socially-responsible and are increasing supporting brands that are solving the world's problems. For example, every time a consumer purchases a pair of shoes from TOMS Shoes, one pair of shoes is provided to someone in need. This company is now worth more than $300 million according to Forbes

(2014). On the other hand, companies also push activists forward from a social, environmental and business perspective. If activists want to formalize, they need the support of corporations and when corporations engage in corporate activism, they are aiding in the creation of these groups. For instance, if an activist wants to become a philanthropist or social entrepreneur/leader they need corporations to support the funding flow for these types of organizations.

CSR will continue to become a critical part of the business function and more integrated within an organization. The function has already moved away from a 'nice to do' to a 'must do' for organizations. As CSR progresses, more organizations need to make it more organic and part of the brand's identity. If an organization tries to 'fake' a CSR initiative as part of a public stunt to win good favor or build brand reputation, often is portrayed an inauthentic and disingenuous and can backfire on the organization.

CSR provides an avenue to humanize a company by showing that an organization cares about things outside the realm of business. CSR prompts organizations to scrutinize themselves and operate as responsible corporate citizens for the greater good. A companies engagement in CSR initiatives can also impact recruitment as today's booming workforce – millennials – are often drawn to working for organizations that are socially responsible. With CSR, it's important that organizations diversity their CSR initiatives and invest in not just causes, but people as well. The startup sector for example provides a wide array of early and mid-stage businesses that organizations can get involved with and really make a difference.

Practical Implications

This study lays the foundation for CSR as an integrated function for organizations. In the last decade, CSR has made great strides. The function has gone from being utilized by a select group of companies to part of the business strategy for organizations so it is no longer a key differentiator among competitors. CSR is also no longer just for major corporations so in the future, we'll see a stronger move of small and medium businesses also making CSR a core part of the business.

Companies are getting smart by using CSR to shift initiatives from their bottom lines to more social and environmental policies. CSR is still primarily synonymous with sustainability. For manufacturing and distribution, there was a need for sustainability initiatives given issues like climate change. However, CSR encompasses more social impact initiatives and has gone from purely philanthropic to highly strategic.

CSR will continue to evolve as part of an organization's brand or DNA to address its vision and purpose. CSR is a significant to bridging social and ethical questions for organizations and it is important that PR professionals continue to show its importance and make it a pillar of business strategy. As CSR progresses, it will be applied differently to various organizations as it is activist-oriented. There are more blurred lines between corporations and non-profits when it comes to CSR and its implementation so PR professionals have to understand develop an effective plan to address this impending future of CSR.

By recognizing CSR as a necessary business function that all organizations must employ, PR practitioners can work toward making CSR a part of a brand's identity. Activists will continue to propel organizations to act responsibly and serve as amplifiers to highlight issues corporations should be aware of. As CSR continues to evolve, it is more important than ever that PR professionals recognize how CSR relies on activism and vice versa. It is only then that professionals can work to create more ongoing dialogue with activists and adequately address their concerns before these groups begin hurting their bottom lines.

Limitations

        The current study had a few limitations as it relates to participants interviewed. The small sample size was highly skewed female. As Kim and Reber (2009) found, women generally have more positive attitudes toward CSR than men. The media age of the participants was 38 and only one representative in this study was under the age of 30 which could also have impacted responses as older practitioners have more positive attitudes toward CSR than younger practitioners (Kim & Reber, 2009).

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

A. Introduction and Instructions

Hello. I'm Sasha Dookhoo and I'm a conducting a research study on online activism and corporate social responsibility. Today I'm talking with you about your experience in CSR and how activists may affect approaches taken by the organization in regards to CSR and organizational policy. The purpose is to assist in academic learning and research.

This interview will be more like an informal discussion. There are no right or wrong answers. Just your own opinions and stories of your work in CSR. I want to hear these in your own words and in as much detail as you can. I'm also interested in hearing as many experiences as possible. Be candid. Say whatever you want. I'm here to learn from you.

The session is being audio recorded. Everything you say will be kept confidential. The recordings will not be used except for analytical purposes so that I can more carefully evaluate the results. The session will last about an hour. Are you ready? Okay.

B. Most Recent Activist Experience

Have you ever dealt with an activist (supportive or non-supportive) while working with an organization? Please tell me about the parts of that experience that stand out in your mind.

C. Views on CSR and Online Activism

First, I'd like to learn more about your background in CSR.

      1. How were you first introduced to CSR?
           a. And, when?
           b. What sparked your interest in this field?

      2. What are your favorite and least favorite parts about working in CSR?
      3. Describe your current role. Give me an idea of your day-to-day.

Next, I'd like to learn more about your experiences with activism.

      4. Do you deal with activists/activist groups on an ongoing basis?
           a. If yes, why do you think that is the case? Tell me about it.
             i. When was the last time you dealt with an activist?
             ii. What type of activist was it?
           b. If no, why do you think that is not the case?
      5. How would you describe an online activist?
           a. What types of behaviors would an online activist engage in?
      6. How would you describe the relationship between CSR and activism?
      7. Have activist actions prompted changes in your organization/clients CSR program?
           a. If so, how?
      8. Do you think activists can prompt organizational changes?
           a. If so, how? Toward activities? Policy?
           b. If not, why not?
      9. Do you think most organizations you've worked with do a good job of mitigating the risks online activists presents?
      10. Do you think there is anything these organizations can do better?

11. What is the worst thing these organizations do when dealing with online activists?
12. What advice or best practices can you provide?
13. What does the future of CSR and activism look like?

D. Influence of CSR
Alright. Now, if you'll please reflect over the years...
    1. How has CSR evolved in the last decade?
    2. Where do you see CSR in 5 years? 10 years?
    3. Is CSR a necessity? Explain.
    4. What impact will CSR continue to have on organizations?
    5. What impact will CSR continue to have on activists?

E: Demographics
    E1. Age
- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- Over 64 years old

    E2. Gender
- Male
- Female

    E3. Race/Ethnicity
- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- American Indian / Alaska Native
- Other

    E4: Current Occupation
    E5: Years worked in CSR

- 10-15
- 16-21
- 22-27
- 27+

F. Closing and Debriefing
    F1. Are there things about CSR and online activism we haven't talked about that you
      think I should hear?
    F2. Do you have any questions about the interview or research process?
    F3. Well, thank you for participating in this research project. I really appreciate your time
      and help.

From Cluster Tweets to Retweets: A Big Data, Rhetorical Exploration of Digital Social Advocacy in the Context of the Charlotte Protests on Twitter

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Abstract

This study harnesses the power of a big data approach to analyzing the tweets posted to the hashtags used during the Charlotte protests while capitalizing on the advantage of a rhetorical lens for a deep examination of interesting data that emerged from the quantitative analysis. This study involved an analysis of 1.3 million tweets sourced through a proprietary Twitter firehose (Gnip Historical PowerTrack API). The quantitative analysis resulted in our focus on three organizations that engaged in a tactic we refer to as *cluster tweets.* We used both a big data analysis and rhetorical analysis to obtain insights about cluster tweets and the other tweets used by the three organizations. Where possible, we reported results-oriented information to provide insights and research-based interpretations of the results of public relations strategies and tactics. In addition, we examined hashtag names for the Charlotte protests to contribute to science-based knowledge about hashtag creation and popularity that could apply to similar situations.

Keywords: Cluster tweets, Twitter, activism, advocacy, social media, Charlotte protests

Similar to Broom, Casey, and Ritchey's (1997) relationship framework for organizing public relations knowledge via relationship antecedents, the relationship itself, and the consequences of relationships, Hon (2015) proposed a digital social advocacy framework consisting of three categories: antecedents that inspire social advocacy; digital strategies and tactics; and the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral results of the advocacy. The primary purpose of this study is to contribute insight into the digital strategies and tactics portion of this digital social advocacy framework. To some extent, this study also explores data regarding Hon's third category, which is the results of particular strategies and tactics.

The context for this study is the tweets posted to the Twitter hashtags during the Charlotte protests. Six days of protest erupted following the shooting of Keith Lamont Scott, which was initially prompted by officers' observation that he was using marijuana in his car and brandishing a gun. The following two research questions guided our analysis:

RQ1: What insights can be gathered from the tweets of some of the activist groups that participated in the Charlotte protest hashtags?

RQ2: Which hashtag names attracted the most tweets to the Charlotte protest hashtags over the six-day period?

A full review of the literature can be found in the extended version of this study. Due to space limitations, we have focused the paper on the method, results, and discussion. The most critical references in the extended version's literature review can be found in the commentary of the Results and Discussion section.

Method

We used the Gnip Historical PowerTrack API to pull every tweet during the six days of the protest (September 20-26, 2016) that was posted to any of the following hashtags: #charlotteprotest, #charlotteriots, #charlotteuprising, #justincarr, #keithscott, #keithlamontscott, and #prayersforcharlotte. We identified these hashtags through a two-step process. First, we found that #charlotteprotest, #charlotteriot, #keithscott and #keithlamontscott were the most popular trending hashtags during the protests by exploring Twitter's web page during the days of the protests. Next, we used Twitter's public API to pull a sample of 2,000 tweets that included one of these hashtags. Using that sample, we searched for additional protest-related hashtags that co-occurred with our initial three hashtags. From this analysis, we identified three additional hashtags: #charlotteuprising, #justincarr and #prayersforcharlotte. Table 1 shows the number of tweets by the top 20 hashtags in the dataset. The data set includes all 1,358,469 tweets, of which 1.17 million (86%) are retweets. Messages were counted multiple times when posted to multiple hashtags. This data set is better than data samples pulled from the public API, which represent a 1% sampling of tweets (Bohannon, 2014).

To investigate the first research question involving insights from some of the activist groups that participated in the Charlotte protest hashtags, we adopted an organic approach to selecting which groups to analyze instead of a conventional approach of choosing the organization(s) to study prior to the data analysis. We studied all activist groups that had identical/nearly identical tweets posted by more than one user (sometimes with a few original words added), without the preceding RT abbreviation, to any of the Charlotte protest hashtags during the six-day period. We did this with the intent of choosing groups that were successful enough to compel activists to copy, paste, and post at least one of the group's messages about the protests into their Twitter feeds. However, there is a possibility that these groups hired Twitter users to allow them to post to their feeds without transparency in the advertising, which would be

illegal.

We detected the identical and nearly identical tweets by using automated text analysis. Specifically, we used latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA), a machine learning algorithm for text data that detects clusters of words that co-occur together (see Blei, 2012). These clusters can be interpreted as topics and can help researchers summarize the content in a large collection of documents, or, as in our case, a large collection of tweets. During our analysis, we identified several cases of clusters of tweets with nearly identical content that provided action links to activist organizations.

Next, we traced the links found within the identical and nearly identical messages to three organizations: the ACLU, Color of Change, and MomsRising. This finding led us to sign up for each organization's email lists to discover additional insight about the behind-the-scenes coordination of the tweets. Then, we engaged in an analysis of the five tweets that contained the identical and nearly identical messages to identify persuasive features of the content. We engaged in line-by-line analysis by inductively classifying each sentence into a category based on what each sentence accomplished. We then compared each category to our knowledge of rhetorical techniques. We also analyzed the tweets' images and inductively connected the persuasive aspects of the images with our knowledge of rhetorical strategies. Finally, we examined the content of all of the tweets posted to the Charlotte protest hashtags by the three organizations within the six-day period of the protests. Specifically, we examined the number of original posts, retweets of original posts, and conversations each organization engaged in. We also intended to examine the content of the most retweeted original post from each organization; however, we only examined one post because the other two organizations lacked retweets of their original content.

Results and Discussion

RQ1: What insights can be gathered from the tweets of some of the activist groups that participated in the Charlotte protest hashtags?

This analysis begins with an examination of *cluster tweets,* which refer to prewritten Twitter content that users are invited to post to their feeds as original posts (without the preceding "RT" abbreviation and not necessarily with any attribution to the original source). We examine the facilitation of cluster tweets behind the scenes, the effectiveness of cluster tweets in increasing visibility, the possible coordination of the timing of the cluster tweets among the organizations, the persuasive devices within the tweets, including the text and visuals, and the URLs that end the tweets. Following the exploration of cluster tweets, aspects of the other tweets (i.e., the non-cluster tweets) sent by the ACLU, Color of Change, and Moms Rising are examined.

Cluster tweets. After subscribing to the listservs of the organizations that sent cluster tweets (i.e., the ACLU, Color of Change, and Moms Rising), we discovered that behind-the-scenes coordination occurs via email. Activist organizations use email alerts to invite followers to post the organizations' messages via Twitter (as well as Facebook and email). Within an emailed alert, supporters can click a button to populate their Twitter feeds with the desired content. The content does not include an attribution such as "via MomsRising." Next, supporters have the opportunity to edit the message and add their own words to the message if desired before posting it. To further explore this ability, we conducted a Google search for a service that allows organizations to send cluster tweets via email. We found a video on Clicktotweet's (2017) home page that explains this type of service, including its tracking ability.

To speculate about whether we thought any of the activist organizations supplemented the action emails with under-the-table payment for tweets, we created word clouds based on the most commonly used words in the profiles of each group's followers that had posted the Twitter cluster content (see Table 2). Two-thirds of the Twitter cluster tweeters included profile descriptions. We primarily observed profile words that fit with each organization, which could suggest that the organizations are not paying tweeters to carry their messages or they are choosing paid tweeters whose profiles fit their missions. Some words fit easily, such as "rights" for the ACLU. Many words were ambiguous, which precluded us from speculating either way, leaving readers to judge for themselves based on the Table 2. For example, "retired" was the largest word in the profiles of the Color of Change cluster tweeters, which could point to retired activists as a key public, it could suggest that there are retired people who are finding a way through Twitter to earn extra money, or people could fit both categories. Regardless, the process of examining the words in followers' profiles through word clouds is a visual way to learn more about the characteristics of actively engaged publics.

To gain additional understanding of the people who posted the activist organizations' cluster tweets, we conducted an analysis of their friending behavior and followers on Twitter, as shown in Table 3. A user exhibits *friending behavior* when following back an account that follows the user. A user also has *followers*, defined as people who follow the user, but the user does not reciprocate by following back. As shown in Table 3, the MomsRising followers who posted the Twitter cluster content have more followers, as compared with the followers of the other two organizations who posted the other organizations' Twitter cluster content. MomsRising also has a higher rate of friending behavior than the other two organizations.

Organizations such as MomsRising might look far less influential than an organization such as the ACLU based on the vanity metric of Twitter followers. MomsRising has an overall Twitter follower count of approximately 49,600 followers versus the overall Twitter follower count of approximately 431,000 followers of the ACLU. However, MomsRising has more influence than the vanity metric of followers reveals. A deeper examination reveals the strength in the types of followers MomsRising attracts: people who have large networks. The power of the types of followers that post MomsRising's cluster tweets might help explain why it nearly performed as well as the ACLU in retweets of Twitter cluster content and why it outperformed Color of Change in retweets of Twitter cluster content. Specifically, MomsRising had a total of 103 retweets (out of 481 unique users posting its cluster content). The ACLU achieved 135 retweets of its cluster tweet content (out of its base of 557 unique users posting its cluster content), and Color of Change had a combined total of 98 retweets of its cluster tweet content (out of 790 unique users posting its cluster content). Whereas MomsRising's followers have large networks, Color of Change's advantage is in the number of people it has who tweet its cluster content rather than the friends and followers the organization's supporters have.

As shown in the previous paragraph, there was not an accompanying high number of retweets for the Twitter cluster content, which suggests an inverse of the relationship between original tweets of any kind posted to the Charlotte hashtags and the number of retweets to the Charlotte protest hashtags. As noted in the Method section, 86% of the Twitter posts to the Charlotte protest hashtags were retweets. However, in the context of the Twitter cluster content, the three organizations combined have a total of 1,828 unique users posting their cluster Twitter content, which received a collective 336 retweets. Thus, approximately 85% of the Twitter cluster tweets came from the original posts by the organizations' followers, whereas approximately 15% of the tweets with the cluster content came from retweets.

The cluster tweets of the organizations first appeared from activists on separate days, which raises the possibility of turn-taking coordination behind the scenes among the three groups to avoid overwhelming activists with multiple Twitter post requests. The ACLU's initial cluster tweet first appeared on September 21. MomsRising's first cluster tweet appeared the next day on September 22. Color of Change's three cluster tweets first appeared on the following day, September 23. Due to the possibility of coordination, we sought additional evidence from the organizations' websites to see if we could find evidence of a relationship.

We found that all three organizations had prior ties with one another. We discovered a list of organizations that are aligned with MomsRising (2017) on the MomsRising website, which included Color of Change. Since the date of the alignment list was 2017, we also conducted a Google search of "MomsRising and Color of Change" and found a coalition effort that included both organizations that predated the Charlotte protests (Color of Change, 2015). Although the ACLU was not listed as an organization that had applied to MomsRising to be an "aligned organization," we found evidence of collaboration prior to the protests by Googling "ACLU and MomsRising." For example, there is a blog post about the ACLU fighting for breastfeeding rights on MomsRising's (2016a) blog, which was cross posted to the ACLU's blog. In addition, there was a MomsRising (2016b) Twitter chat that featured an ACLU attorney. We also found evidence of ties between the ACLU and Color of Change. We found news coverage of a coalition involving both organizations to oppose "predictive policing," which involves the use of data to predict the location of future crimes in attempt to increase police staffing in those areas (Lartey, 2016).

Furthermore, two of the organizations (the ACLU and Color of Change) share a commonality of receiving substantial funding from George Soros' Open Society Foundations (see Eckholm, 2014, for the ACLU; Riddell, 2016a, for Color of Change). Although we did not find evidence of a funding tie between MomsRising and Open Society Foundations, the co-founder of MomsRising, Joan Blades, is also the co-founder of MoveOn.org (MomsRising, 2017b), which is funded by the Open Society Foundation (Riddell, 2016b). MomsRising was also mentioned in an Open Society U.S. Programs Board Meeting program two years prior to the Charlotte protests as among a list of four "key actors we are not currently funding from which we could learn" (Open Society Foundations, 2014, p. 120). Thus, there is a possibility that the organizations' staff have strong relationships with one another in the real world and might have coordinated their cluster tweet launches behind the scenes.

Based on our rhetorical analysis, the content of the cluster tweets follows a similar formula. The first sentence builds exigence by pointing to injustice (see Bitzer, 1968). The initial sentence of the ACLU cluster tweet is #TerenceCrutcher, #KeithLamontScott…the violence must stop" (So-Tear-Oh, 2016). The first sentence of the MomsRising cluster tweet also builds exigence: "Demand justice after police shootings now!" (Ladish, 2016). The opening line from a cluster tweet by Color of Change is "North Carolina police shouldn't be able to hide the footage of #KeithLamontScott's murder" (Benjamin, 2016). The second sentence issues a call to action. ACLU's middle sentence is "Tell Congress to act," followed by a colon (So-Tear-Oh, 2016). The middle line from MomsRising is "Sign!" The second line from a cluster tweet by Color of change is "Take action," followed by a colon. The tweets end in an action link.

The ACLU uses a generic link that does not appear to have the capability of tracking clicks; however, Color of Change and MomsRising assign trackable URLs that are unique to each user for the cluster tweets. It is possible that these trackable URLs provide insight into not only the effectiveness of the cluster tweet/the email it is packaged in but also the identities of the

organizations' most important influencers based on the number of conversions (i.e., clickthroughs) the influencers have achieved for the organizations.

Another important feature regarding the cluster tweets is the visuals. The ACLU and Color of Change had more attention-grabbing cluster tweets than the one by MomsRising by including a preview of the petition headline, introduction, and accompanying image. Color of Change's bolded petition headlines in the three cluster tweet previews were "Charlotte Police Don't Want Us to Know…" and "Charlotte Police Are Still Hiding The Full Foo…" (the latter headline preview was included in two of its cluster tweets). Both headlines create a knowledge gap about what the police might be hiding, which can increase people's interest in following the link (see C. Heath & D. Heath, 2007). ACLU's bolded petition headline called out to followers to "End the Culture of Warrior Policing." The warrior metaphor casts police officers as aggressors who look for opportunities to engage in violence rather than protectors who thoughtfully use physical means as a last resort.

With regard to the preview images accompanying the link, both Color of Change and the ACLU used attention-grabbing images. Color of Change used a headshot of Keith Scott with a slight smile, which has the potential to personalize the appeal and build consubstantiality, particularly with African-American activists (male and female), male activists (of all races), and especially African-American male activists through the commonality of identity markers (see Burke, 1969, 1989). He has his head propped up with his index finger, a contemplative positioning. Car windows appear at the right edge of the image, along with an African-American girl in the backseat, who has a curled hand in front of her mouth as she looks out the window in a thoughtful way. Her inclusion in the image positions Keith Scott as a family man. The absence of status symbols and the casualness of the photo positions Keith Scott in an accessible way as a common person, someone without material privilege.

For the ACLU's cluster tweet, it used an artistic image of a series of vidcaps (i.e., stationary images that appear to be taken from film) that appear to be taken from time stamped surveillance footage. The time stamp reads 2015 07:2, suggesting July 2, 2015. A Google search for this date and "protest" resulted in news stories about "anti-racism and police brutality protesters" who fled from pro-flag advocates after incinerating a Confederate battle flag and an American flag in a park (Alcorn & Tracy, 2015). For people who notice the time stamp and know of what happened on that day, the image of the vidcaps rhetorically locate the Keith Lamont Scott shooting in the larger context of racism and police brutality.

Only one image can be seen fully in the vid caps; the other images are cut off. In the main image, police cars line both sides of the streets in the image's background. The foreground of the image features a dark-colored man; the race is impossible to discern but is arguably intended to signify an African-American, given the context of Keith Scott's race and the time stamp of the prior protest, which was in part inspired by the massacre at the S.C. Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina (Alcorn & Tracy, 2015). The dark-colored man is wearing a light-colored sweatshirt, dark pants, and white shoes, projecting a casual image. He is walking slightly ahead of a Caucasian police officer in an urban landscape who wears a full police uniform, including a hat. The badge on the uniform and hat can be seen in the picture, despite the somewhat blurry resolution that is typical of vidcaps. The dark-colored man is looking over his right shoulder at the Caucasian police officer, whose head is turned to meet the man's eyes. The dark-colored man is walking on the sidewalk; the Caucasian police officer is walking down the side of the street (in the area where oncoming traffic would be), which shows an exertion of power.   The man appears to be walking faster than the police officer, as signified by a larger

stride in the image; however, the police officer's arm placement is considerably behind his body, suggesting purposeful movement. All of the vidcaps are colored darkly, a postmodern nod to the era of film negatives that also cast a symbolically dystopian tone. The two cluster tweets work well in tandem as a Burkean ratio, one emphasizing the issue in terms of the *agent* – a persecuted African-American – and the other locates the agent within the *act* itself of "Warrior policing," as described by the headline (see Burke, 1969, 1989). The Appendix includes a version of all of the cluster tweets.

Future research can explore the ethicality of cluster tweets. Our preliminary position is that these tweets are not ethically troublesome because to us, their content makes them sound as if they were copied and pasted from an organization's website, particularly given the link to the original organization. Thus, in the absence of audience research, we tentatively speculate for now that large-scale audience deception is not occurring. Another encouraging sign of good moral intentions is the retweets of the identical Twitter cluster content by the ACLU and MomsRising, which shows on their own feeds the evidence of duplicate tweets promoting the organization's agenda. These organizations' retweets of the Twitter cluster content suggest that the organizations are not trying to pretend that people came up with the Twitter cluster content themselves. Ideally, a two-letter abbreviation will eventually be created to label Twitter cluster content transparently.

The other protest tweets posted by the organizations using cluster tweets. To deepen our study of the organizations who used cluster tweets, we also examined the rest of the organizations' tweets in the ecosystem of the Charlotte protest hashtags. The ACLU posted 22 tweets, The Color of Change had 13 tweets, and MomsRising published 4 tweets to the Charlotte protest hashtags over the six-day period. None of the organizations' original tweets came close to earning a spot on the top 100 most retweeted tweets, which suggests a missed opportunity for heightened visibility. In fact, the organizations' original Twitter content performed poorly when measured by the number of retweets. None of the ACLU's original tweets to the Charlotte protest hashtags were retweeted. Its best retweet of its state-level organization, however, achieved 112 retweets. The message was "RT @ACLU_NC: Protestors in #Charlotte: Know Your Rights: https://t.co/r12fmMQKO6 #KeithLamontScott," representing a traditional communications approach of focusing on WIIFM (i.e., what's in it for me) by supplying useful information (C. Heath & D. Heath, 2007). None of the other two organizations (Color of Change nor MomsRising) had their original Twitter content retweeted. Future research can explore the characteristics of the most retweeted tweets to the Charlotte protest hashtags.

At an initial glance, what was immediately striking about the first two organizations was their heavy use of retweets. The ACLU posted 19 retweets and 3 original posts, and Color of Change published 9 retweets and 4 original posts. However, a closer examination reveals a narrow range of users that were retweeted. Of the ACLU's 19 retweets, 12 were from that ACLU's North Carolina state organization. This was a wise move by the national ACLU because the local North Carolina organization had the most legitimacy to demand the mayor's and police department's attention because it is staffed by and represents state citizens (see Rawlins, 2006). Of the 9 retweets by Color of Change, 5 were of @guatemalia's content, whose profile identifies her as an employee of the Media Democracy Fund. This retweeting emphasis could be part of a strategic effort to cultivate personal influence with a potential or existing donor.

MomsRising did not invest significant effort in its tweets during the protest period. It tweeted three times in the middle of the protest period (on Sept. 23) and once on the last day (Sept. 26). Three of the tweets were promotions of its cluster tweet content, and the initial tweet

framed the event from a family perspective: "#KeithScott, Charlotte,NC, waiting in car for son to arrive home from school, shot dead by police. https://t.co/wi0xtD39qS #BlackLivesMatter." The link drives users to a blog post that is also framed in family terms, with the headline "Two Black Fathers Shot Dead for Nothing," which then included a petition link that was also the focus of the Twitter cluster content. Thus, MomsRising was far more interested in what it had to say itself about the situation rather than retweeting others' original Twitter posts, in contrast with the other two organizations. There is a possibility that MomsRising is missing opportunities to grow its friends and followers by communicating in such an insular way. Experimental research is needed to explore this speculation in a scientific manner.

We conducted additional research in light of the Excellence model's guidance for organizations to first use symmetrical communication prior to resorting to asymmetrical communication when objecting to other organizations' behavior (Grunig, 1992, 2001). Consequently, we also looked for evidence of the activist organizations engaging in direct conversations with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department and other local authorities via Twitter. Only one of the organizations' tweets to the Charlotte protest hashtags was addressed to someone in a position of power. The ACLU of North Carolina sent the following tweet: "Attn: @CLTMayor Roberts and Police Chief Putney : Release the video https://t.co/tWy9GsvENu. #KeithLamontScott #releasethetape." The link was tied to the organization's petition, which was addressed to Mayor Roberts and Police Chief Putney. This appeared to be a logical step to help ensure that the petition caught the attention of at least the mayor (given that no police handle was used to get Putney's attention). One possible explanation for the absence of symmetrical outreach was that such outreach might have occurred through private, offline channels rather than the public stage of Twitter. Qualitative research is needed to examine whether the activist organizations and the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department attempted to reach out to one another behind the scenes.

We also searched for conversational efforts to engage the activist organizations by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department and found that the local police Twitter handle did not post to any of the Charlotte protest hashtags during the six-day protest period. Thus, if they did engage with the activist organizations via Twitter, it was via direct message or without the dominant protest hashtags. One explanation for this finding could be that the police did not want to acknowledge the validity of the hashtags, perhaps given the amount of confusion swirling about the facts of the case (e.g., Officer Blue, 2016; Price, 2016). The police department appeared to adhere to the medium of press conferences, where its voice would not be drowned out by the chorus of tweeters. Future research could reveal the police department's rationale for not focusing on the zeitgeist of the social media uproar by posting to the hashtags.

RQ2: Which hashtag names attracted the most tweets to the Charlotte protest hashtags over the six-day period?

As shown in Table 1, three hashtags accounted for approximately 69% of the content: #KeithLamontScott (32.2% of the tweets), #CharlotteProtest (26.5% of the tweets), and #KeithScott (10.2% of the tweets). The larger context of #BlackLivesMatter and #BLM only appeared to attract a combined total of 7.2% of the Twitter hashtag traffic. A possible implication is for activist organizations to use a person's name when creating a hashtag about the injustice someone suffered rather than an overall contextual hashtag in situations when character limitations prevent the inclusion of multiple hashtags.

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Table 1

The Number of Tweets by the Top 20 Hashtags in the Dataset

Rank	Hashtag (Case Insensitive)	Count	% of Dataset
1	#keithlamontscott	436,769	32.2%
2	#charlotteprotest	359,551	26.5%
3	#keithscott	138,852	10.2%
4	#charlotteriots	115,248	8.5%
5	#charlotte	92,750	6.8%
6	#blacklivesmatter	75,811	5.6%
7	#terencecrutcher	47,788	3.5%
8	#charlotteuprising	32,218	2.4%
9	#blm	22,202	1.6%
10	#charlotteriot	15,605	1.1%
11	#breaking	14,909	1.1%
12	#cmpd	9,496	0.7%
13	#charlotteprotests	8,840	0.7%
14	#justincarr	8,533	0.6%
15	#uncc	7,461	0.5%
16	#youweresaying	7,336	0.5%
17	#terrencecrutcher	6,731	0.5%
18	#kaepernick	6,473	0.5%
19	#clt	5,952	0.4%
20	#wccb	4,509	0.3%

Table 2

Profile Summaries of Followers Who Posted Cluster Tweets and Had Profile Descriptions
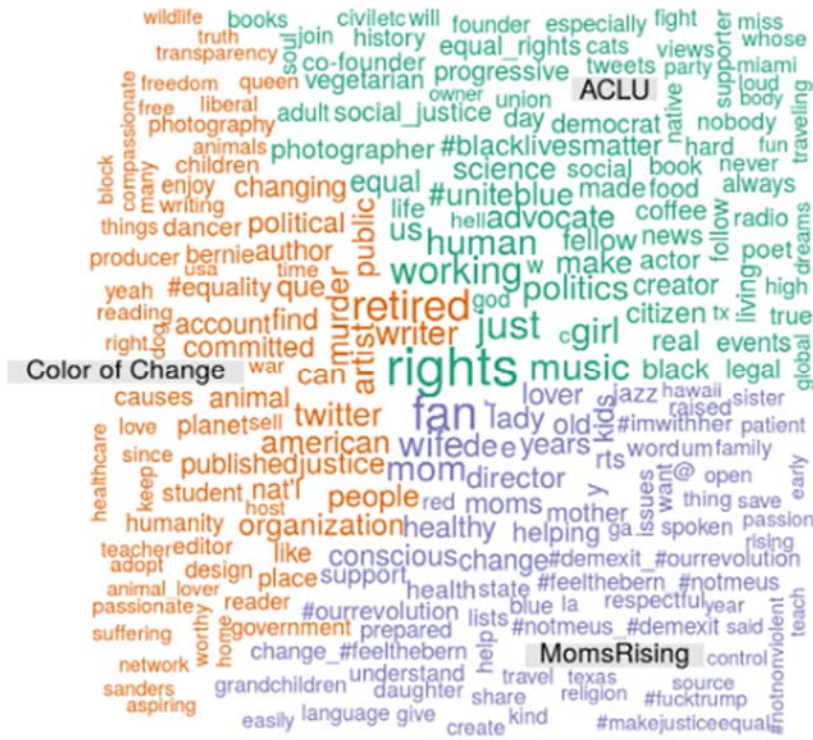
Table 3

The Following Behavior and Followers of the Activist Organizations' Supporters Who Use Cluster Tweets
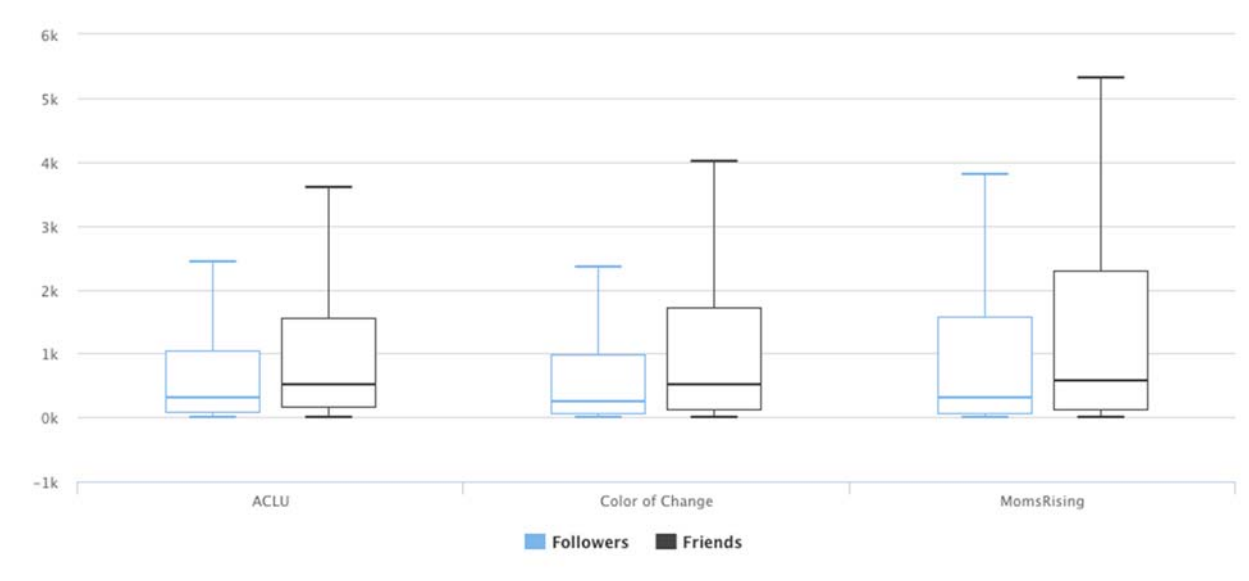
Appendix: Cluster Tweets Posted to the Charlotte Protest Hashtags

J'Ulene M. LaQue
@JuleneLaque

Follow

#TerenceCrutcher, #KeithLamontScott...the violence must stop. Tell Congress to act: aclu.org/preventtragedi...

4:17 PM - 21 Sep 2016

End the Culture of Warrior Policing
It's time to change policing practices to make policing about community safety. Pass the Preventing Tragedies Between Police
action.aclu.org

Semper
@Semperfelix

Follow

Demand justice after police shootings now! #KeithLamontScott #TerenceCrutcher Sign! action.momsrising.org/sign/scott-cru...

6:31 PM - 22 Sep 2016

FoggyBottomGal
@foggybottomgal

Follow

North Carolina police shouldn't be able to hide the footage of #KeithLamontScott's murder. Take action: ln.is/colorofchange....

11:10 AM - 24 Sep 2016

Charlotte Police Don't Want Us To Know ...
Charlotte police shouldn't be able to hide body cam footage. Demand the Department of Justice hold them
act.colorofchange.org

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hapjoyfre
@hapjoyfre

Follow

.@CMPD is hiding the truth about #KeithScott. Tell @TheJusticeDept fight for transparency in North Carolina. d.shpg.org/232250456t?ref...-

6:20 PM - 23 Sep 2016

Charlotte Police Are Still Hiding The Full Foo...
Charlotte police shouldn't be able to hide body cam footage. Demand the Department of Justice hold them accountable.
act.colorofchange.org

W. Glenn Smith
@Ecoanthro

Follow

A new law could mean we will never see the footage of #KeithLamontScott's murder. Take action: ln.is/colorofchange....

12:34 PM - 24 Sep 2016

Charlotte Police Are Still Hiding The Fu...
Charlotte police shouldn't be able to hide body cam footage. Demand the Department of Justice hold them
act.colorofchange.org

Digital Literacy, Media Planning and Storytelling: An Interdependent Relationship

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Robert Morris University

Abstract

Student attainment of digital literacy was studied using media planning and storytelling through a mixed methods interpretive approach. The findings suggest: (1) technical attainment or how to use technology or develop skills to capture images and sound and manipulate content, but struggle with the cognitive component or understanding when and how to use and evaluate messages they have created; (2) creating and adapting content to diverse audiences was achieved in the storyboarding phase but not translated in actual finished productions. Thus, the complexity of storytelling and media planning is linked to cognition and technical skills associated with digital literacy. Future public relations practitioners' ability to demonstrate and maintain currency with digital literacy proficiency requires curricular adjustments in media planning, storytelling and technology use.

Keywords: digital literacy, media planning, storytelling, engaged learning, social media

Introduction

"One in two jobs today will no longer exist by 2025 and many of today's jobs did not exist 10 years ago" (De Meyer, 2015). The role and scope of the public relations practitioner has evolved with innovations in technology. Many traditional occupations are being replaced. New jobs are evolving where communicators with an understanding for social media practices are hired at better salaries. Social media executives can earn $73,000.00 while an engagement coordinator earns $49,000.00 and the field continues to evolve (PR Newswire, 2012). Distribution outlets that once defined our profession have proliferated with the commercialization of the internet and web. Thus, social media strategists, content creators and information designers are a priority in the marketplace.

Digitalization and telecommunications delivered modes of access to targets where dialogue could shift from one-way to two-way and ultimately, mutual interaction (Walters & Williams, 2011). Kent & Taylor (1998) provided a framework for on-line relationship building while Waters and Williams (2011) posit social media aids engagement and strategy development. The incorporation of visual and aural storytelling components in both traditional and new media environments has infiltrated audiences' expectations of how information is presented, consumed, interpreted and distributed (Schultz, 2006). Audiences evolving expectations must be met, which demands public relations curricula and seasoned public relations practitioners maintain currency in the design, development, use and placement of messages involving media that utilize new technologies.

This research is one component of a larger study and focuses on the method designed to identify mastery of the components of digital literacy and explore the relationship between digital literacy, storytelling and media planning. The paper provides an overview of digital literacy, media planning and storytelling as the foundation for next-generation practitioners. A mixed methods study design with undergraduate students from three sections of a 400-level public relations and social media class at a private university in western Pennsylvania provided data for analysis. The class was a service learning experience or a class designed to link social and community action with reflection components (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Three stages of development define service learning: (1) orientation to the process, (2) meaningful service, and, (3) structured reflection (Trethewey, 1999). Two populations served as our service partners: local, privately owned restaurants participating in a library fundraiser and non-profits. Few community partners understood media planning, social media and most didn't have a communication budget, per se. In years 2 and 3, non-profit entities served as clients. The course also featured experiential learning or the ability to apply theory to practice. The results and discussion provide a rationale for digital literacy, media planning and storytelling as interdependent activities.

Review of the Literature

The millennial generation is the first generation to grow up with a cell phone and access to the World Wide Web. While this generation is technology-dependent for life functions, there is no research on potential public relations practitioners and their digital literacy attainment with respect to media planning and storytelling in social media. This situation exists because access to technology, experiential learning and service learning in one course is seldom incorporated with media planning and digital storytelling concurrently. Public relations resources are general or specific to one area of the discipline. Humphreys (2016) text provides a comprehensive review of approximately 1,400 research studies on social media. Freberg (2016) developed a text to aid educators with the instruction of social media use in the college classroom. There is an

assignment about incorporating photos in a Twitter and Instagram post (p.60), but no discussion about storytelling with photographic images. Paine (2011) developed course materials, webinars and a text to aid educators with measurement. The ability to translate clients' strategically designed stories through digital media outlets involves skills associated with digital literacy (visual aesthetics and production techniques).

Social media has diffused and "everyone is doing it" in ways that incorporate images and words. Public relations curricula does not require course work in photography, television/radio production or editing; although, some programs offer course work in these areas through media arts and journalism programs. Social media provides a plethora of interesting professional and amateur produced digital essays, promotions, human interest stories, entertainment, etc. posted on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and other distribution outlets. However, as practitioners, the best use of digital storytelling involves myriad components that can be subsumed under digital literacy.

Digital Literacy

Literacy focuses on skills related to numeracy, listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking (Combes, 2010). DeCastell & Luke (1983) define literacy as "mastery over the processes by means of which culturally significant information is encoded" (p.374). While this definition makes no reference to technology, it provides for the evolution of the term "literacy" with respect to digital literacy and the impact on our society today. "Digital literacy and the associated skills are becoming the basic and essential skill set of any employer that wishes to survive in a highly competitive world" (Phuapan, Viriyavejakul & Pimdee, 2016). Bhatt (2012) was a contributor to the New Literacy Studies movement which posits "language as dialogic, socially constructed and subject to contextual forces" and "performing social acts of meaning mediated by the creation of texts, which subsequently vary according to contexts" (p.290) and distribution vehicles. Digital literacy is an integrated component of education (Benson and Kolsaker, 2015) encompassing cognition and technical application of context-driven communications (Twitter, FaceBook, Snapchat, etc.). Elementary and secondary education promotes digital literacy with pedagogic strategies designed to enhance learning in mediated environments, such as, communicating with electronic communication, participating in class activities through learning management systems, reading e-books or e-journals, taking on-line quizzes, and commenting on course content through online discussion forums (Jones, Ramanau, Cross, & Healing, 2010).

Digital literacy is "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills" (Visser, 2012, para. 2). The skills associated with digital literacy are use (technical fluency), understand (comprehend, contextualize and critically evaluate digital media) and create (produce content and adapt for audience and contexts (Price-Dennis, Homes and Smith, 2015). Cognition of target and distribution vehicles linked to strategic goals and tactics is a complex undertaking. Public Relations practitioners' skills sets are growing daily to include competency in digital literacy. Digital Literacy subsumes information literacy and encompasses multiple literacies (Warschauer, 2004). Table 1 describes how the components of digital literacy were satisfied by the participants in this study. Multi-media literacy, one component of digital literacy, necessitated further exploration to determine level of achievement by this population.

Table 1

Digital literacy components	*Evidence from coursework*
Alpha-numeric literacy – ability to read and write in a language.	Achieved entrance to University and participated in course.
Information literacy – ability to effectively search for, access, understand, and archive digital information.	Research for Situational analysis, competitive analysis, reports and course assignments.
Computer literacy – ability to use a computer or other digital device.	Electronic communication for assignments, cellular photos, research findings.
Computer mediated communication (CMC) literacy – ability to read, write, and interpret communication from others' online.	Critical component of course. CMC interaction with team, professor and client regarding course assignments.
Multi-media literacy – ability to create digital objects (text, audio and video).	i-Movies produced by G1: team with production training; G2: team with no production training; G3: no i-Movie.

Kent's (2001) work focused on technology usage in public relations. He argued that public relations curricula should include technology and established mediated communication competence or understanding how technology is, can and should be used. Public relations practices have evolved more than 15 years and Kent's views laid the foundation for instruction about technology use in public relations and evolved to the multi-media literacy component of digital literacy.

> While creativity and the ability to write well are still important for students, students must also understand how (and why) messages vary by medium, how the various new technologies work, and how technology can make an organization's messages stronger and lead to better organization-public relationships (Kent, 2001, p.68).

Thus, the first question this study sought to answer was: RQ1: What stage describes students' digital literacy? To answer this question, an assignment focused on multi-media literacy was important. Student performance on the assignment would be evaluated as: novice (limited ability), intermediate/proficient (acceptable storytelling, shot composition, editing), expert (engaging storytelling, shot composition, editing). The next component of the research effort dealt with media planning components and the use of diverse media to communicate with targets across platforms. If a practitioner does not know how to collect research to synthesize target, message design and accurately decipher message placement, digital literacy is not achieved.

Media Planning

Media planning is the selection of the channels an audience utilizes to reach audiences and drive media planning (Makienko, 2011). It involves a series of decisions that impact strategy and defines selected media, frequency, engagement and target impact. For the public relations/marketing practitioner, relationship development and engagement is a critical focus in media planning. Krajcovic, (2015) suggests media planning decisions include five areas: (1) Assessing the media environment – market structure/ conditions/ source as information,

education and/or entertainment. (2) Defining the target audience – primary and secondary targets and personas. (3) Setting the media objectives – linked to organizational objectives and communication objectives. (4). Determining geographical and time frame of the campaign. (5). Purchasing Media space. Thus, social media, traditional media, or a combination of these media serve as the foundation in media planning.   Schultz (2006) explains that new media distribution methodologies (digital, electronic, wireless, mobile) are planned, implemented and measured separately which creates a silo effect in the media planning process.   He participated in a research effort (Simultaneous Media Studies, SIMM) in which over 100,000 participants responded to a survey in waves about their media usage and media habits.   The results identified "foreground" (prime form) and "background" media or two forms of media being consumed simultaneously where one is primary and the other is in the background. This shift in the message distribution model to a media consumption model (where, what, how, why, etc.) altered how media planning is taught and conducted. Thus, another research question guiding this study was: RQ2: What media do students identify for client media plans? (traditional, social, mixed)

Storytelling

"Storytelling has been a part of human activity for thousands of years. Stories have the power to inform, persuade, elicit emotional responses, build support for coalitions and initiatives, and build society" (Kent, 2015, p.480).   Storytelling was used to instill values and morals, demonstrate consequences for behaviors and pass on rites and rituals related to a specific culture (Weick, 1995).   Humans are storytellers by nature. When audiences trust the storyteller the information conveyed is believed. Professionals have compiled a list of heuristics which oversimplify the use of storytelling. Kent argues storytelling can be learned and taught but there must be an awareness of the rhetorical situation (Kent, 2015). The recent research findings by Kent (2015), details 20 master plots or "interrelated and coherent events" (p.484) identified to guide teaching and learning of storytelling. Waters & Jones (2011) suggest vocal, verbal and visual messages build the brand, put a human face on an organization and provide a presence. Stories follow the form of beginning, middle and end, and "require creating a convincing character, utilizing enticing and enthralling plotlines and understanding one's audience" (Kent, 2015, p.84). Thus, RQ3: What level of achievement with digital storytelling is evident in student productions?   (Response options include: basic: has beginning, middle and/or end; average: beginning, middle, end and story with semi-continuous plotline; advanced: beginning, middle, end and story with plotline, including character; and prepared for target audience).

A final question that explores the relationship between digital literacy, storytelling and media planning was crafted: RQ4: What relationship, if any, exists between digital literacy, storytelling and media planning?   Media planning positions the story and the target. Storytelling allows for confirmation of story and target application from media planning research. The digital story can then be analyzed for coherence and visualization and decoded by the viewer.

Method

This exploratory study used an interpretive approach to identify and understand what, if any, interdependence existed between digital literacy, media planning and storytelling. The research was conducted using a mixed methods approach which is explained below and displayed in Table 2 below.

Seventy-two student inventories provided information about career aspirations, perceived

strengths and weaknesses, internship experiences and coursework. Phase two involved completion of a pre-course assessment designed to track how students' understanding of storytelling, social media, media planning and client-student relationships evolved over the 15 week semester.

Table 2

Sequential data collection components

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
Student Inventory	Pre-test	Weekly journal entry	Media Plans Qualitative Thematic Analysis	Experimental Design G1 w/prod.; G2 no i-Movie; G3 w/out video units.	i-Movies Quantitative Content Analysis	Post-test	Reflec -tion

The third effort was a qualitative analysis of weekly journal submissions for emerging themes focused on team work, client-team relations, research findings from analyses, storytelling abilities and more. The fourth component was thematic analysis of the groups' media plans which entailed identification of the proper components, selected media and messaging. The fifth data point was to review each of the groups work to decipher similarities and difference across media plans and i-Movie scripts. The sixth component was student written and produced I-Movies were content analyzed for the relationship of storyboards to storytelling components, shot composition, background music and scripting. The seventh data point involved completion of a post-course assessment designed to ascertain how students' understanding of storytelling, social media, media planning and client-student relationships evolved over the 15 week semester. The last data point was a course reflection designed to describe perceptions about working with a client, working with a team, complexity of assignments, and suggestions for course revision.

Course Background

Coursework from a 400-level public relations elective, Social Media and Public Relations, served as the laboratory to answer the research questions designed for the study. As an experiential learning experience course content was applied to creating media plans and artifacts for local restaurants supporting a fundraising effort for the local library and non-profits. The service component entailed site work at nonprofits or working at the library fundraiser and assisting community partners with media planning. Students teamed in groups of four completed situational analyses, media audits of the organizations, six units on media planning featuring examples and components provided the framework to design a media plan that incorporated both traditional and social media. Contingent upon group assignment, one component of the media plan included i-Movie concept development for a promotional piece about the restaurant/local non-profit. Three units on storytelling and examples of storyboarding and scripting. The i-Movie teams were required to complete storyboards and scripts and approval from the community

partner before the piece was shot. The ability to satisfy three components of digital literacy: multi-media, computer mediated communication and information literacy was achieved by offering one team exposure to video production skills. Group one received course content on video aesthetics, shooting protocols and production. Group 3 received no exposure to video aesthetics, shooting protocols and production but were required to produce an i-Movie for a client. The final product was approved by the client before posted to YouTube.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 describes the combined results for this study. Seventy two students participated over a three year period and completed similar assignments with the exception of the i-Movie.

Table 3

Combined results

Year	Teams/Mbrs.		Task/Deliverable	Exposure	Media Plan/Deliverable
2014	G1:6	18	Restaur. i-Movie	Production	Mixed: local print/ FaceBook
2015	G2:0	18	Nonprofit	None	Mixed: local print/ FaceBook, Twitter
	G3:11	36	Nonprofit/i-Movie		
2016				No product.	
					Mixed: Web/Social: website, FB, Twitter, Cell Instagram

The seventeen teams comprised of 54 students executed components of their media plans with the control group (G2) producing no digital stories and no team work.

Digital literacy evaluation: RQ1: What stage describes students' digital literacy?

Based on numerous data points, it was determined that students' digital literacy can be classified as intermediate to proficient. i-Movie production was linked to multi-media literacy in the digital literacy schema. The following findings were identified from the review of i-Movies: (1) Concept: the majority of concepts were linked to clients' specific needs and were moderately engaging and creative. (2) Storyboarding with script: A difference between exposed vs. non-exposed production techniques was observed with shot composition and transition shots between the 6 movies produced in G1 and the 11 movies produced by G3. Teaching and observing production techniques, such as shot composition, cover shots, lighting, etc. altered the quality of moves produced. Storyboarding was effective for both groups but not translated when actual production occurred. "Yikes! We got on-location and there was so much more to shoot and use in our story. Ah, we almost didn't follow the storyboard at all after that point. Mistake." [G1:1] Students demonstrated proficiency in the development of storylines, visualization and scripting in the storyboarding phase. (3) Technology: Student work demonstrated comprehension of how to use technology, capture images and sound, and manipulate content. The context was problematic with client persona not translated visually.   Both groups utilized a "you are there" experience with i-Movie production.   There were limited differences with respect to sound production techniques linked to visualization observed.

Both groups were required to have client approval before posting to YouTube. All 17 movies were cleared for posting despite the instructor-identified limitations of some projects. Clients were satisfied to very satisfied with the media plans and the i-Movies. Many clients indicated they would never have the funds to do any of the creative work the students prepared for them. "We were so excited to have a presence. Of course, there were little problems, but nothing that would stop us from using this great work." C-G3:2] The strengths of the YouTube products were strong copy, interesting plotlines and presence. The weaknesses were noted in shot composition, background noise, clutter and language use via testimonials.

The major themes in the reflection essays included: (1) Commitment: "It takes a long time to produce an i-Movie that is for a client. A lot more pre-production than I anticipated."[G1:5] (2) Vision: "I will never look through a lens in the same way again. When you're making a movie for someone else, everything matters from what you say, how you say it and why you say it to what you show."[G3: 2] (3) Communication skills: "I realized that no matter what we did with this class or in this class and with our clients, everything was about some aspect of communication: visual, oral, conflict, negotiation, team. This class made it all come together for me." [G1:6]

Media Planning: RQ2: What media do students identify for client media plans?

All media plans used mixed media as distribution outlets for their messages to targets. However, the traditional media utilized was print and electronic community billboards while social started with FaceBook and evolved to Twitter, Instagram and finally mobile. Digital literacy drives students' abilities to craft media plans that utilize diverse channels related to audiences' multiple platform simultaneous consumption patterns and generate content that engages the audience. It is an interdependent relationship. The 35 media plans relied less on traditional media and more on social media culminating in 2016 with mobile considered a distribution media. Limited media relations were observed across three years' plans as students tended to select limited local media and contact persons at each media. More than half of the plans focused on word-of-mouth reach and centered on frequency of messaging. Six plans included transmedia storytelling. Referencing experience on one channel and continuing storylines through different media was observed but more cross promotion was utilized than actual transmedia storytelling. An area for more pedagogic inclusion is public relations for cellular applications. The majority of teams utilized the traditional press release   and some storyboarded video news releases (VNR) for the electronic newsroom. The VNR scripts were casual, relaxed "in their space" presentations. Personal associations with chefs, spokespersons, or patrons were also included. Reflection on the media planning assignments were thematically analyzed. The themes relate to the following: (1) intricacy of planning: "There's so many options but so little that don't charge money.   I learned a lot about how budgeting is critical to any strategy." [G1:4] (2) Target-to-media correlation: "Media planning is math. Social media analytics were more difficult to read and interpret than I thought they would be. I don't want to be a media planner but I know I want to be on the creative side." [G3:8] (3) Significance of research: "When you apply the research to media selection, the real importance of understanding the target becomes real. My team and I went back and did more research because we didn't have sufficient data to support our decisions."[G1:1] and, (4) Options: "When you don't have a budget, you have to be creative and think of every possible option to attract attention. I understand why the dude dressed as a bagel is on the corner holding a sign about morning

specials.   He's different. I see why Twitter must captivate and attract. It all makes sense when you implement the plan." [G3:11]

Media plans analyses also included the following critiques: (1) Messaging: Strong ability to differentiate what needed to be communicated and creative use of how to communicate. The placement of messages needed additional work as sometimes the message design appeared to trendy for the outlet. Overall, the outlet selected was safe and there was minimal selection. (2) Market Niche: Clients wanted students to stay on and execute plans so they have a more sustained media presence; majority of clients' web presence was underdeveloped, not designed to build and maintain relationships and not engaging customers with coupons, recipes, chef's specials, etc. hours of operation, location, still photos of inside property.   Students were flattered with the invitations to serve in a consultant capacity and encouraged to consider the offers seriously as the development of a professional portfolio that demonstrates the ability to execute media plans is desirable.

Storytelling: RQ3: What level of achievement with digital storytelling is evident in student productions?

Seventeen i-Movies were screened using the following assessment protocol: The first observation of the movie was to determine if the components of a story existed: beginning, middle and end. The second observation focused on evidence that "creating a convincing character, utilizing enticing and enthralling plotlines and understanding one's audience" (Kent, 2015, p.84). The assessment scheme include: Basic: has beginning, middle and/or end; Average: beginning, middle, end and story with semi-continuous plotline; Advanced: beginning, middle, end and story with plotline, including character; and prepared for target audience. The ability to translate information from the situation analysis to strategy and tactics was acceptable. The results support storytelling in the media products was observable and acceptable across all years with 34% (6) identified as basic. Many (58%) were average with minor flaws with target correlation or plotlines that needed a bit more development. There were two productions that were identified as advanced because they had it all.   Less than 25% of the plans really capitalized on clients' stories and didn't help to reposition their brands. Thus, plotlines were weak across all groups. Production values were strong in the G1 movies. Storylines were sometimes distracting due to the acting expertise of the talent. All the productions used some form of background music with four of the seventeen groups using original soundtracks that either they or a friend wrote for the production. "I loved this assignment. We held casting calls, scored original music, rehearsed and treated our community partner like family.   We wanted to do amazing things for the organization and for our own portfolios. It was so exciting at the screening to see all the concept work, scripting and storyboarding come alive." [G1:9]

The visual component of storytelling is generational or very much akin to what current students experience with media.   They seldom "see" what else in being communicated in the visual message when compared to professional production values. This difference may be important when the client is a corporate entity. The organizations in this study were local restaurants and non-profits. Production values in public relations courses should be an area for curriculum development as with the state of media, we all will play the role of storyteller, photographer, editor and writer.   Not every product seen on a distribution outlet needs to be picture perfect, but images and words reflect the organization.

Relationship: RQ4: What relationship, if any, exists between digital literacy, storytelling and media planning?

The relationship between digital literacy, storytelling and media planning is interdependent for myriad reasons that will be discussed. This study helps us to understand that unless one is alpha numerically literate or able to read and write in a language then no assignment for the course could be completed. If one is not information literate, the ability to search for appropriate information about an organization, synthesize the critical components necessary to design a media plan would be difficult. Computer literacy empowers the student to search for information, store information and make sense of such information. Thus, the situation analysis and media plan were dependent on this skill. Computer mediated communication and the other literacies are the foundation of multi-media literacy or the ability to create digital objects such as audio and video stories. We've all studied some form of general systems theory which posits the sum of the parts is greater than the whole. Digital literacy is the sum of five individual literacies that when achieved enable targeted media planning and storytelling. Thus, there is an interdependent relationship between media planning, storytelling and digital literacy. The students participating in this study demonstrated they could design media plans with efficiency and modest accuracy. Further, students with or without exposure to media production fundamentals told stories that had beginning, middles and ends. However, the production values of the six projects where the producers were exposed to content designed to evoke sensitivity to production values produced a majority of strong technical and content sound stories. Conversely, of the 11 projects produced by producers without exposure to production values, 6 demonstrated awareness of production fundamentals. Students reflected on the movie experience and communicated in the last reflection that group composition has a lot to do with the quality of movie produced. Student teams suffer if membership isn't diverse: creative, technical, visual and analytical. "I know our group had the right people because we all had different strengths that we relied on consciously. There were other groups where no one in the group had creative or technical talent and it showed during the showcase. They had stories that needed different visuals to support them." [G1:12]

Conclusion

This research effort attempted to understand the relationship of digital literacy, media planning and storytelling. A review of the literature identified the importance of acquiring digital literacy skills as they are a foundation for career success and encompass multiple literacies. While scholarship in the field of public relations has promoted media competency, there is limited research on public relations practices and digital literacy. Results of the study support future public relations practitioners' ability to demonstrate and maintain currency with digital literacy proficiency requires curricular adjustments in media planning, storytelling and technology use.

Journal themes surrounding this service-learning and experiential learning experience revealed themes related to career connections, sense of purpose, career clarification and theory to practice connections. These results are similar to findings from Munter (2003) and O'Hara (2001). Students discussed applying components of their media plans to a bona fide production make things click for them. Digital literacy drives students' abilities to craft media plans that utilize diverse channels related to audiences' multiple platform simultaneous consumption patterns and generate content that engages the audience. It is an interdependent relationship.

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Applying the Public's Perception of Temporal Distance into Crisis Communication: An Extended Concept of Threat

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Abstract

Crisis communication research has produced tons of findings that help crisis managers identify and understand factors impacting crisis response effectiveness. Threat, as one of the situational factors, has been studied as one of the most impactful influencers in crisis management process. However, the concept of threat itself has been formed from the perspective of an organization. Given that threat is directly related to the public's response to a potential or actual crisis, threat needs to be further conceptualized from the publics' perspective. To address the missing links in existing research, this article proposes to build an extended concept of threat by applying perceived temporal distance posited by construal level theory. The extended concept of threat would provide valuable implications for unearthing the public's response such as perceived organizational reputation, affect (e.g., sympathy, anger) toward an organization, and behavioral intention toward an organization (e.g., purchase intention, word of mouth). In addition, it would be beneficial in building an effective message strategy for crisis management. Future research directions and their potential contributions in the area of crisis communication are discussed.

Keywords: threat, temporal distance, construal level theory

In the area of crisis communication management, an extensive body of research has elucidated the factors to lead to crisis response effectiveness among the public (Coombs, 2010). Scholars have demonstrated that situational factors may play a key role in determining how organizations communicate with the public based on their stances on an issue (Jin & Cameron, 2007). Threat has been known to be one of the most critical factors in crisis management process (Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2006). In contingency theory of conflict management in public relations, threat, which is perceived by public relations or crisis practitioners based on threat dimensionality, determines where the organization's stance exist on a continuum of pure advocacy and pure accommodation (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2012).

The approach indicated that threat is an important concept because it is related to the kinds of crisis. For instance, the threat type is associated with crisis origin, whether crisis comes from within or outside a given organization (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2005). In addition, from the audience view, it is connected to crisis responsibility, which is posited by situational crisis communication theory (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). The public perceive crisis with an internal origin as more controllable, thus an organization is regarded as responsible for it. Yet, the concept of threat used in this approach was based on the viewpoint of an organization. Considering that threat can be a basis for the public's response in actual crisis situations, further conceptualization of threat by switching the gear to the audience perspective is needed.

In terms of a novel approach to discerning threat, temporal distance posited by construal level can provide a corroborating wrinkle to developing the extended concept of threat. The theory posits that individuals have distinct psychological associations with events based on their perceived temporal distance (Liberman & Trope, 1998). It was found that people may have a brighter view toward an event in the distant future than the near future (Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007). In applying this into the area of crisis communication, the public may respond more positively to the threat with the chance of realization in the distant future than the near future. This paper thus proposes inclusion of temporal distance as an additional dimension of threat beyond the existing the 3-tier conceptualization of threat.

The extended concept of threat will provide valuable implications for unearthing the public's response such as perceived organizational reputation, affect (e.g., sympathy, anger) toward an organization, and behavioral intention toward an organization (e.g., purchase intention, word or mouth) (Coombs & Holladay, 2007). In addition, it would be beneficial in building an effective message strategy in different stages of crisis communication. This review provides a roadmap for future research which may contribute to developing effective crisis communication processes in diverse sectors such as corporation communication, health public relations, and government relations.

Explication of Threat

Threat Defined

Threat has been extensively explored as a pivotal concept in understanding an organizational crisis, which is defined as "a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization" (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 2). Another definition of crisis reveals a clearer connection with threat: "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, 2007a, pp. 2–3). Threat, in the context of crisis communication, is defined as "potentially negative situation involving publics" (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999, p. 184). Occurrence of crisis is tightly involved with the threat,

which "has been used to describe the state of seizure a nation, organization, or individual, is in during a crisis" (Jin et al., 2005, p. 1). In this light, threat has been a key factor to understanding crisis situations, organizations' crisis responses, and audiences' responses.

Threat in Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management

According to the contingency theory of strategic conflict management, an organization's stances with the public may be switched based on the continuum of pure advocacy and pure accommodation, which indicates how an organization is willing to show higher or lower levels of accommodation of the public by making concessions or giving trade-offs (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997; Cancel et al., 1999). The stances practiced by an organization can be changed on the continuum, based on circumstances accordingly; thus, the factors to determine an organization's response to the public were proposed (Cancel et al., 1997). Threat was theorized as a 86 contingency factors to determine the level of advocacy and/or accommodation in the context of crisis (Cancel et al., 1997). It was argued that "greater threat a public presents to an organization, the faster the organization will respond to the public and the more accommodating the organization will be to the public" (Cancel et al., 1999, p. 184). In the original mix of the factors, threat had two dimensions: internal and external (Cancel et al., 1997). Internal threats include economic loss or gain from implementing various stances, marring of employees' or stockholders' perception of the company, and marring of the personal reputation of the company decision makers (image in employees' perceptions and general public's perception). External threats include litigation, government regulation, potentially damaging publicity, scarring of company's reputation in business community and in the general public, and legitimizing activists' claims.

Dimensions of Threat

Scholars further explicated threats in their threat appraisal model by proposing a 3-tier dimensionality of threat: threat type (internal vs. external), threat duration (short-term vs. long-term), and threat level (high vs. low) (Jin et al., 2005). Their denomination of threat by three dimensions was supported by prior scholars' efforts to elucidate the perception of threat. The variation of threat was operationalized in a study examining its effects on group-based behaviors (Lanzetta, Haefner, Langham, & Axelrod, 1954). The operationalized variation has several dimensions, including nature and/or intensity, locus in time, locus in "psychological" space, and target, and threat was also manipulated as internal and external in their experimental study. In a similar vein, Carver (1977) focused on the source of threats, arguing that threats may be derived from external agents or self-imposed. In a marketing literature, three threat types were presented (i.e., physical/social, second/third party, immediate/delayed threats) (Strong, Anderson, & Dubas, 1993). This categorization provided an insight with which threat can be further explicated. Immediate/delayed threat dimension can be associated with the public's responses because individuals may perceive future consequences less intimidating (Strong et al., 1993). In this sense, the notion of immediate/delayed threat type may be connected to whether threats are perceived as short-term or long-term from the longitudinal view (i.e., threat duration) and perceived intensity of threats (i.e., threat level) (Jin et al., 2012). The concept of second/third party threats, which helped to reveal the aspect of whether threats are directed to primary or secondary recipients, may also enable to discern whether threats may exist inside of an organization or come from the outside. (Jin et al., 2012). The approach to identifying the threats was based on public relations perspective, Jin et al. (2012) thus focused on how social threats are

appraised in the communication management process with the public, especially in the context of crisis situations.

Dimensionality of threat has served as a framework to reveal how threat is closely associated with crisis with regard to perception and response of crisis. For instance, Rosenthal and Kouzmin (1997) explained the connection between threat and crisis in three aspects: 1) the types of crisis are different according to the threat; 2) the geographical terms can represent the domain of threat (e.g., within an organization); 3) the threat can either be "endogenous or exogenous to the system affected" in terms of its origins (p.285). In this light, crisis origin, which represent whether crisis comes from within or without, is tightly associated with the threat type of internal and external (Jin et al., 2012). Conceptually, crisis origin may provide a cue for discerning crisis responsibility from the perspective of attribution and locus of control, that is, how much publics perceive an organization is responsible for a crisis (Coombs, 1998). Publics likely perceive an organization to be more responsible for a crisis with an internal origin because they recognize that a crisis derived from the inside of an organization is more controllable than the one from the outside (Coombs, 2007b; Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Considering the connection between crisis origin and threat type, an internal threat that is perceived as more controllable likely leads to higher levels of crisis responsibility assigned to an organization, whereas an external threat that is perceived as less controllable may be related to less blame to an organization in terms of crisis responsibility (Jin et al., 2012).

The threat dimensions have been studied in regard to which stance an organization likely takes and which crisis response strategies are most effective to the public in the context of crisis communication. An experimental study examined the influences of threat type (internal vs. external) and duration (short-term vs. long-term) on cognitive appraisal of threats, affective responses to threats among crisis management practitioners, and the stances taken by them in crisis situations with existing threats (Jin & Cameron, 2007). Research findings indicated that threat type and duration significantly influenced cognitive threat appraisal, emotional arousal, and the degree of accommodations. In addition, the practitioners in the condition of external and long-term threats showed the most intensive negativity and chose to take more accommodative stances for their organizations. Threat type was also researched with regard to its effects on the public's crisis responses. Threat dimensionality was also examined to understand the general publics' crisis responses. A study using the case of North Korea nuclear crisis found that external threats as a situational factor was a stronger predictor for the general public's estimation about the organization's stance than predisposing factors (e.g., dominant coalition characteristics) (Hwang & Cameron, 2008).

Perception of threat based on threat dimensionality has helped to understand how crisis can be formed and how to respond to the crisis. However, the current approach to conceptualize threats may have missing parts which need a further consideration. The threat appraisal model with threat dimensionality explicated threat as a factor of contingency factors from the perspective of organizations (Jin et al., 2012). Thus, previous research based on the organization-centric concept of threat focused on exploring how organizations' threat appraisal, crisis responses, and stances in the context of crisis would differ according to different dimension of threat (Hwang & Cameron, 2008; Jin & Cameron, 2007). However, in crisis communication, consideration of audience perspective with regard to threat would be an essential step toward obtaining a more holistic picture of threat. Indeed, how individuals perceive crisis, which affects their response to the organization, is tightly associated with the nature of crisis (Coombs, 2010). 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 the audiences' perception of it. The connection between threat and crisis indicates that explicating the nature of threat from the audience perspective may enhance the understanding of crisis, and by extension, the public's crisis responses.

As an audience centered approach to understanding threat, time can be incorporated into threat dimensionality as an additional factor could be proposed. The existing 3-tier conceptualization includes duration of threat (long-term vs. short-term) as a threat dimension (Jin et al., 2005). However, this dimension of threat illuminates how long threat itself exists, but may lack the aspect of the process where threat becomes crisis. Even though threat may lead to crisis, not all threating situations are defined as crisis (Jin & Cameron, 2007). Conceptually, the occurrence of crisis "threatens the existence of the organization" (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 2) and "disrupts and interferes with the organization's ability to function, its ability to deliver its products and services, its financial stability, its relationship with its publics, and its image and reputation" (Jin & Cameron, 2007, p. 257). Therefore, it was argued that only a certain level of threat can lead to crisis (Jin & Cameron, 2007). In this spirit, the concept of temporal distance can be applied in the context of crisis communication in order to extend the scope of threat dimensionality and explain how individuals perceive when threat becomes crisis, and ultimately their crisis responses.

Theory on Temporal Distance of Threats

Construal Level Theory

The application of temporal distance in understanding the concept of threat from the audience perspective can be corroborated by construal level theory (Liberman & Trope, 1998). According to the theory, abstract mental construal of events or objects is based on psychological distance, which is "a subjective experience that something is close or far away from the self, here, and now" (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 440). In this sense, four distance dimensions (i.e, temporal distance, spatial distance, social distance, and hypotheticality) are constructed based on how an object is removed from the reference point (i.e., self, here and now) (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Construal levels, which refers to "the processes that give rise to the representation of the event itself" are tightly associated with an object's inherent properties (Trope & Liberman, 2010, p. 443). In regard to how psychological distance is related to construal level, distant objects are construed as more abstract, structured, and high-level, whereas proximal ones form a more concrete, unstructured, and low-level representation (Trope et al., 2007). Psychological distance serves as expanding and contracting individuals' mental horizon as an egocentric factor (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Construal level theory posits that individuals' psychological associations with events and objects are distinct based on perceived temporal distance (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Temporal distance is known to influence individuals' reaction to future events by systematically changing individuals' construal representations of the events (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003). In line with the general connection between psychological distance and construal levels, it was argued that a temporally distal object is evaluated as more abstract and simple, high-level than a temporally proximal object (Trope & Liberman, 2003). According to a review to clarify the relationship between temporal distance and construal level of the future, when the temporal distance from a future event is greater, the event is more likely represented in an abstract way (Trope & Liberman, 2003). In this regard, the abstract representation of a temporally distant future event is associated with general features with essence of the event,

while the concrete representation of a temporally proximal future event is based on more incidental details of the event. The future events at a longer distance are placed into few broad categories, whereas the events at a shorter distance are classified into more numbers of narrow categories. This may be because high-level construal is characterized by a general, simple, decontextualized representation of a future object, which is concerned with an essence extracted from the available information, rather than a specific, subordinate, and contextualized representation (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003).

Most importantly, temporal distance is a vital factor in understanding individuals' decision making involved with the future events (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Construal levels about an event may influence people's judgments, attitudes, and ultimately behaviors (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008). The decision-making process is also relevant to the way in which the future events are construed by individuals' construal mental models in a different way. Decisions people made about distant-future events pertain to central and abstract features of the events, whereas decisions regarding near-future events are likely to underlie incidental and concreate features of them with a simple and coherent structure (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003).

Temporal Distance and Threat

The influences of temporal distance on individuals' responses to future events may hint at how temporal distance can be applied to extending the concept of threat in the context of crisis communication. The concept of temporal distance has not been used to explicate threat in crisis situations. However, previous risk communication research may provide an insight of how different levels of temporal distance regarding future threats affects the public's responses.

This expectation stems from the idea that temporal distance is a determining factor of perceived relevance of an event (Chandran & Menon, 2004). According to prior research, distant-future risk events are likely to be perceived as less relevant, while near-future risk events are perceived as more relevant (Zwickle & Wilson, 2013). For instance, a study demonstrated that the issue of climate change was perceived temporally proximal among the U.K. survey participants, which led them to be more concerned with the issue (Spence, Poortinga, & Pidgeon, 2012). In this sense, threat in the situation of crisis happening can be understood in a similar way. When individuals perceive threat as temporally proximal in the crisis situation, people might feel greater relevance to it as a response. Given that involvement is a significant factor in predicting crisis responses (e.g., crisis emotions, perceived crisis responsibility) (Choi & Lin, 2009), temporal distance toward a threat ultimately is closely related to the public's reaction to the crisis cases and organizations.

Turning to particular direction of the public's responses in the situation of crisis, it should be noted that temporal distance may be connected to the valence of an evaluation toward an event. Specifically, the concept of temporal discounting or time discounting may enable to explain how individuals' actions and/or decision making (Trope & Liberman, 2011). Individuals tend to place greater value on immediate events, outcomes, and situations than distant future ones (Trope & Liberman, 2011). Construal level theory can provide a broader understanding of how high or low-level temporal construal may differently influence evaluations in terms of positivity toward an object or event. In connection with temporal construal, the value people put on high-level construal is more pronounced as temporal distance toward an object is greater and the value on low-level construal is more conspicuous with the proximal future (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Indeed, when a distant future event is evaluated, high-level construal is used,

whereas low-level construal is observed in evaluation of a proximal future event. Reflecting this on the valence of an object evaluation in connection with temporal construal, it needs to be argued that an abstract, high-level construal of an object likely stimulate more positive evaluation than a concreate, low-level construal of an object. Therefore, individuals were likely to disclose more positive view toward distant future, for which high-level construal is used, than toward temporally proximal future, thus temporal distance may augment positivity of temporally distal event, object, and situation (Trope et al., 2007). This may be due to time discounting and augmenting effects, by which address that the increase of temporal distance discounts value related to low-level construal and enhances the value connected to high-level construal (Trope & Liberman, 2003). In all respects, the attractiveness of an object can be augmented with a longer temporal distance when the value associated with high-construal is greater, and that of an object is discounted with an increase in temporal distance when low-construal is more valuable (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2011).

In a similar vein, temporal construal toward near- and distant-future may be a cue for understanding individuals' confidence in predicting future events (Trope & Liberman, 2003; Trope et al., 2007). According to construal level theory, an evaluation concerning distant-future events should be based on high-level construal, which represent being abstract and decontextualized, rather than low-level construal, which is concrete and contextualized (Trope & Liberman, 2010). In this spirit, the process of evaluating a temporally distant event is based on overconfidence. In general, people tend to have less information and are likely to predict the distant future less accurately (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Yet, in regard to temporal construal level, a contextualized feature in low-level construal may lessen their confidence in prediction of a future object, therefore, high-level construal with a decontextualized feature enables individuals to hold more confidence for evaluating future objects (Griffin, Dunning, & Ross, 1990; Sherman, 1980). In this regard, evaluation of distant future events based on high-level temporal construal is made with greater confidence than evaluation for proximal future events, which can be associated with individuals' tendency to demonstrate more positive view on distant future than nearer future. Individuals' confidence in evaluating distant future with a more positive perspective can be applied into the area of crisis response, suggesting that different level and direction of evaluation toward distant future events compared to temporally proximal ones may lead to differentiated crisis responses.

Future Research Recommendations

Conceptualization of threat has been studied in many directions, centering on the organization's response to a crisis situation (Jin et al., 2012). In previous research findings, organizations' decision of stances to crisis issues with the public based on threat dimensions and their crisis responses to the public have been explicated (Jin & Cameron, 2007). Indeed, this review has pinpointed that the concept of threat needs to be extended to the audience perspective. The concept of temporal distance would be a key spot to examine for further developing the threat dimensions. Conceptually, temporal distance can characterize individuals' perceived distance from now and the time point when a threat becomes an actual crisis and/or when a threat begins to negatively affect objects (e.g., an organization, a whole society, the public). Considering the definition of threat (i.e., "potentially negative situation involving publics"), conceptualization of threat is based on perception toward future events. Following this avenue, this study theorizes a threat in organizational crisis context as temporally proximal future event

or distal one. With this approach built on theories reviewed in this article, future research directions are presented here.

Crisis Outcomes

Because temporal distance is proposed an additional dimension of threat, there is no specific research about how people temporally perceive distance toward a threat and their crisis responses. As presented above, temporal distance is a cue to understanding the extent to which individuals express their positivity toward threats with a potential to negatively influence an organization (Trope & Liberman, 2011). Thus, perceived temporal distance toward a threat likely determines the direction and intensity of crisis communication outcomes presented among the public. Better crisis responses can be observed from more distant future threat events due to their greater positivity toward distant future than near future. The crisis outcomes do not limit to individuals' responses toward a threat itself, but include their reactions toward an organization (Coombs, 2010). The organization's reputation, crisis emotions (e.g., anger, sympathy), and behavioral intention (e.g., purchase intention and negative word-of-mouth) can be investigated as possible outcomes as a consequence of different level of perceived temporal distance toward a threat.

This approach of research may bring about valuable implications in crisis management at different phase of crisis communication. In pre-crisis phase, it was argued that threat should be evaluated in terms of its damage on an organization, the level of control over the situation, the options an organization can take (González-Herrero & Pratt, 1996). Crisis preparedness is an essential stage for lessening damages from the actual crisis (Heath, 2004), but it has been understood in the perspective of an organization. In this sense, application of temporal distance into the view toward threat among the public may provide a broadening angle for communication management at the pre-crisis phase. This may also be applied in crisis response phase. Crisis by itself serve as a threat to an organization's reputation (Dowling, 2002). In addition, a continuing threat may be embedded even in a crisis situation, which persistently has a negative influence on an organization and/or likely causes more severe damages on it. Thus, crisis outcomes that the public shows crisis toward an organization based on perceived temporal distance toward threat may provide hints for effective crisis response strategies.

Effective Message Strategies

In line with the research direction for investigating crisis outcomes, effective message strategies connected to perceived temporal distance. For instance, temporal frame can be used to examine the effectiveness of organization's message released to the audiences. According to construal level theory, a simple adjustment of temporal frame of a message can lead people to differently perceive an object (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Indeed, same information can be evaluated based on a high-level construal when the information contains temporally distant future events rather than near future events (Trope & Liberman, 2003). The future events with greater temporal distance are likely represented as being abstract, conveying simplified essence of events, and having coherent structure rather than as being concise, conveying incidental details of events, and having incoherent structure (Trope & Liberman, 2003). It was argued important to distinguish threat as a stimulus and the message audience's cognitive and emotional reactions to the stimulus (Strong et al., 1993). The outcomes individuals may express to the threat message include perceived threat, beliefs, emotions, attitudes toward threat, which ultimately lead to behavioral intentions and behaviors. Thus, future research may answer how

the public responds to the organization's message in the context of different levels of temporal distance toward threat, suggesting that distant future threat versus near future emphasized in the message should lead to distinct responses.

Existing Approach of Threat Appraisal and Temporal Distance

Application of temporal distance into extended concept of threat can be valuable in that it does not exclude the existing threat dimensions (i.e., threat type, duration, and level); instead it broadens the dimensionality. This approach of appraisal is conceptualized as threat perceived by the organization's crisis management professionals. However, the existing dimensions can also be used by threat appraisal of the audience. In terms of operationalization of threat, it may have different and mixed layers. In this sense, how perceived temporal distance has an interacting effects with the existing dimensions of threats on diverse crisis outcomes can be a venue for future research. In addition, current 3-tier threat dimensionality was proposed as a part of threat appraisal model. In the current threat appraisal model, threat has been evaluated based on situational demands (i.e., danger, uncertainty, and required efforts) and resources (i.e., knowledge, skill, time, finance, and support from the dominant coalition) (Jin et al., 2012). The threat dimensions have been investigated in line with the estimation of situational demands and resources (Jin & Cameron, 2007; Jin et al., 2012; Pang et al., 2006). These factors can also be assessed from the perspective of audiences. How individuals perceive the situational demands and resources an organization have is likely to affect perceived levels of threat, emotional and cognitive responses to threat and/or an organization. In all, threat dimensions of existing three and an addition of perceived temporal distance need to be investigated based on audiences' evaluation of an organization's situational demands and resources.

Conclusion

Threat has been a pivotal factor in understanding crisis communication processes. Threat helps an organization to determine their stances with the public on an issue and determine their crisis responses (Cancel et al., 1997; Coombs, 2010; Jin et al., 2012). However, this approach limits to the perspective of an organization and has rarely paid attention to how audiences perceive organizational threat. This review attempts to identify a gap in the current literatures and provide a novel way to conceptualize threat. This paper reviews how threat has been conceptualized and studied in the area of organizational crisis communication and propose to extend the threat dimensionality to reflect on the view of audiences. In this sprit, the concept of temporal distance is proposed as an additional dimension of threat. Threat, which can be conceptualized as temporally distal future events versus proximal future events, may not only widen the scope of threat based on the audience perspective but provide novel implications for understanding the public's responses to threat with differently perceived temporal distances. The future research directions suggested in this paper would offer a starting point for reaping valuable implications in terms of how perceive temporal distance toward threat can influence crisis-related outcomes and an organizations react to managing threat with different temporal distance to lessen the potential damages to the organization. Additional future research can demonstrate valuable implications in better discerning crisis communication management with regard to audience perspective in diverse sectors such as corporation communication, health public relations, and government relations.

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Explicating Authenticity in Public Relations

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Abstract

This study aims to explicate the concept of authenticity in the theory and practice of public relations.   Many public relations researchers have pointed out the importance of authenticity. However, the definition and construct of authenticity has yet to be thoroughly studied in public relations.   Without a clear conceptual definition, it is impossible to derive valid and reliable measures as well as empirical observations.   Grounded in multidisciplinary literature studying authenticity, including human communication, online communication, leadership management, brand communication, and tourism, this study explores fundamental attributes and constructs of authenticity in those fields.   The study then proposes the explicated definition of authenticity in public relations with two core constructs: true-self awareness and genuineness.   Thus, it is expected to contribute clarity to the confusion surrounding the nature and use of authenticity in public relations research and making clear what construct should be emphasized in measuring the concept of authenticity.

Keywords: Authenticity, True-self Awareness, Genuineness, Public Relations

A symmetrical and ethical communication within the organization-public relationship is connected with the sufficiently high level of authenticity (Henderson & Bowley, 2010; Pearson, 1989).   It became critical for the public to know whether an organization is willing to be authentic, open, or transparent when they communicate (Molleda, 2010).   In such an environment, the importance of authenticity has been also emphasized through previous research regarding the concept (Beverland, 2005; Knudsen, Rickly & Vidon, 2016; Lim, Nicholson, Yang, & Kim, 2015; Wickham, Williamson, Beard, Kobayashi, & Hirst, 2016).

Several recent studies of authenticity in public relations provide a good starting point to explicate the definition of authenticity in public relations and to develop the scale in measuring the perceived authenticity concerning the communications or behaviors of organizations (Lim et al., 2015; Molleda, 2010; Molleda & Jain, 2011).   Highlighting the importance of authenticity concept and need for studying in public relations, the research results point out the characteristic of the perceived authenticity, which is subjective and contextual, so necessary to be distinguished from similar concepts—trust and credibility.   Those studies suggest in common that authenticity is perceived by two different perspectives at the same time.   One perspective is from the object, such as an individual or an organization, which is the matter of whether its communication or behavior is authentic.   Another perspective refers to the view of a receiver or an evaluator of the communication and behavior, such as its publics.

However, it seems necessary to clarify the confusion and limitation surrounding the nature and use of authenticity in public relations.   Without the thorough explication of constructs, the definitions of authenticity in previous studies tended to be technically operationalized without thoroughly explicated constructs and clear distinction between similar terms and authenticity (Kim, Kiousis, & Molleda, 2015).   Even though it can be said that the constructs and dimensions of authenticity in public relations were discussed at some extents, it still appears insufficient to directly demonstrate the effectiveness of specific messages or actions compared with the perceived authenticity of its publics (Lim et al, 2015; Molleda & Jain, 2011).

It is important in two ways to examine how authenticity has been defined and which attributes or constructs of it have been emphasized in other academic fields.   First, this work will be a guide to define authenticity in public relations research and practice.   Outside of public relations research, it is possible to understand which common constructs are included in the definition of authenticity.   By learning about the core attribute of authenticity through other related studies, it can be expected to figure out which one would be underlined in public relations context.   Second, it is likely to make clear to measure the perceived authenticity in terms of communications and behaviors in public relations by understanding the inherent attribute of authenticity.   Through other related studies, it would be feasible to know about an approach to deal with the nature of authenticity.   The degree of abstract and subjective aspects of the concept can be determined only by looking at the lexical meaning of authenticity.[3]   It is argued in research that authenticity should be able to be distinguished from other similar concepts because some constructs are likely to be overlapped with other similar terms, but the constructs are not exactly identical with them (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2014).   Thus, understanding the unique characteristics of authenticity can make it possible to develop the scale items of perceived authenticity and to measure the level of the perceived authenticity exclusively.   In turn, studying authenticity in other fields reflects that the explication of

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[3] The definition of Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication (Chandler & Munday, 2011) is that authenticity is the quality of being genuine, original, natural, real, and true to oneself in relation to human character, a feature of an artifact, and a style of communications.

authenticity is a prerequisite for applying, developing, and measuring the concept as a variable in public relations research and practice.

Accordingly, this study explores the concept of authenticity in the theory and practice of public relations.   The study starts with finding out how authenticity is constituted by exploring its definitions and constructs that many researchers have defined so far in various disciplines. On the basis of this work, the current study proposes several observations to support the explicated definition in public relations.   Consequently, the result of the study will suggest two main constructs to measure the perceived authenticity in the future study.

Defining Authenticity: Explication

There has been considerable discussion in public relations regarding authenticity derived from various social science fields.   However, such discussion still needs to be more developed and examined because common definitions and measures are hardly seen in any piece of work in public relations research.   It is possible only with clearly explicated concepts to construct a meaningful theory and facilitate empirical observations (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997).

According to Chaffee (1991), if communication researchers can evaluate what the measures are intended to measure, they would not become stuck at the conceptual level when working out the relations between the meanings of concepts.   Since a process of explication helps researchers know about the extent to which they are falling short of studying what they actually intend and suggest attributes that distinguish the concept from other objects, the explication of authenticity will be necessary to improve the weak point.   This study explicates authenticity following Chaffee's (1991) iterative process of concept explication, mainly consisting of focal concept, literature review, meaning analysis, review of the tentative definition, and modified definition.   Many fields other than public relations also use authenticity as an essential concept. In particular, human communication, online communication, leadership management, brand communication, and tourism are the representative dominant areas of theory and practice that have developed the concept of authenticity.   Therefore, this study firstly tries to examine how several main works in these fields have defined authenticity.

Theoretical Framework

Perspectives from Human Communication

In human communication, on the basis of psychology, most of the perspectives on authenticity fundamentally stress the extent to which one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors reflect one's true self (Handler, 1986; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wang, 2016).   The concept of true-self is more likely to be treated as the person-centered conception.   Also, their construct of authenticity is mainly based on how authenticity reflects a person's true-self.

Kernis and Goldman (2006) break authenticity down into four separate but interrelated components in the psychological perspective: awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, and relational orientation.   The first two components appear more related to the true-self. "Awareness" refers to the knowledge of and trust in one's motives, feelings, desires, and self-relevant cognitions, involving one's knowledge and acceptance of multifaceted and potentially contradictory self-aspects.   Also, "Unbiased processing" reflects "objectivity concerning one's positive and negative self-aspects, emotions, and other internal experiences, information, and private knowledge" (Kernis & Goldman, 2006, p.296).   It is understandable that it enables one to find an accurate sense of self, which can be one's true-self.   As for the behavioral output of the first two components, "Behavior" corresponds with "one's values, preferences, and needs as

opposed to acting falsely merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments" (Kernis & Goldman, 2006, p.298).   "Relational orientation" involves "valuing and striving for openness, sincerity, and truthfulness in one's close relationships" (Kernis & Goldman, 2006, p.300).   In short, it is likely that inauthentic behavior is oriented toward glorification and reverence by others or even oneself whereas authentic behavior reflects understanding one's true self.   Relational authenticity involves being genuine and honest rather than fake in actions and relationships with others.

Similarly, Barrett-Lennard defined authenticity as a tripartite construct as involving "consistency between the three levels of (a) a person's primary experience, (b) their symbolized awareness, and (c) their outward behavior and communication (as cited in Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008, p. 386)."   It is important in this definition that the researcher pointed out the consistencies between these three constructs to explicate authenticity.

Based on the interactions between the three constructs in the person-centered viewpoint, Wood et al.'s definition (2008) also consists of three constructs—self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influence.   "Self-alienation" involves in the discrepancy between conscious awareness and actual experience—that is, being aware of true-self.   "Authentic living" is a way to live in accordance with one's values and beliefs and be true to oneself in most situations.   This construct seems similar to one of authenticity components defined by Kernis and Goldman, "Behavior."   Lastly, "Accepting external influence" involves the degree of accepting the influences from other people and the expectations of others.   As Lim et al. (2015) argued, the first two concepts can be all included in the consciousness of one's true self, whereas the last one can be understood as the expression of one's true-self.

Perspectives from Online Communication

The definitions of authenticity in online communication literature primarily focus on true-self.   Since the constructs of the perspectives cover behaviors that are rooted in self-understanding, defining authenticity in this area tends to pay attention to both psychological and social aspects at the same time.

As Lim and his colleagues (2015) looked into the theoretical background of online authenticity, they divided the construct of authenticity by trait authenticity and state authenticity. While the former reflects self-understanding, the latter is a behavior that is based on self-knowledge.   To measure authenticity in their study, they operationalized authenticity in a microblogging environment as comprising two aspects—"the Sense of the Real Me" and "the Expression of Real Me."   "Real Me" in this aspects is more concerned with one's ability to express one's true-self within social interaction in online settings than one's true-self constrained by psychological pressure or expectations from others.   In essence, the aspects of authenticity are more likely in line with Kernis and Goldman's "Awareness" and "Unbiased processing."

Also, Henderson and Bowley (2010 define authenticity as "Real."   The construct emphasizes social interaction between real people through interviews with spokespersons in figuring out the role of authenticity in the authentic dialogue which occurred by the use of social media.   In this context, being real means being authentic.   It is likely that the primary industry organization committed to ensuring its campaign remained authentic by using real spokespeople:

"It is authentic, … because they are actually speaking direct to people who are working there. They are not some actor, you know. They are *real* people working in Primary industry" (p.245).

Unlike the constructs of blog communication studies already mentioned, Kim and her colleagues (2015) manipulate authenticity as the perceived uniqueness, originality, or genuineness of an object, a person, an organization, or an idea. These constructs were operationalized at the viewpoint of publics, evaluating how much the communication was understood as authentic regarding the public relations outcomes.

In summary, researchers commonly point out the constructs to define authenticity including the way in which a user is aware of one's true-self and expresses the true-self online. From this, it is also important that the construct of authenticity encompasses the way in which the perceived true-self can be understood originally or genuinely to the public through public relations messages in online communication.

Perspectives from Leadership Management

Throughout the discussions of authentic leadership reviewed in the public relations setting, self-awareness is an essential construct for defining authenticity (Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011; Men, 2014; Men & Stacks, 2014). Self-awareness of leadership is a process in which a leader continually comes to understand his or her unique abilities, sense of purpose, core values, and desires (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Intensifying self-awareness is critical for authentic leadership because being authentic, one construct of authentic leadership, requires a heightened self-awareness (Men, 2014).

Luthans and Avolio defined authentic leadership as "a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development" (as cited in Men, 2014, p. 257). Men (2014) defines authentic leaders as being profoundly aware of values, beliefs, emotions, self-identities, and abilities. She argues that the leaders who stay true to themselves have a clear knowledge of who they are and what they believe in.

Also, Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005) named four components of authentic leadership: self-awareness, balanced information processing, authentic behavior, and relational transparency. It seems that these components are quite analogous to the four components of human communication presented by Kernis and Goldman (2006).

In the later study, Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008) define authentic leadership with four dimensions: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective. Among these, "self-awareness" refers to the way in which the leaders understand the multifaceted nature of the self, including their strengths and weaknesses, and set their views of the world. "Relational transparency" means the presentation of one's true self to others, and "balanced processing" refers to the leader's objective analysis of relevant data. Finally, "internalized moral perspective" means the leaders' self-regulations founded on their moral values and external pressures. It can be assumed that relational transparency and balanced processing likely start with being aware of the true self first. This is because it is possible to show the true-self to others transparently and objectively analyze the data only after understanding the true selves of leaders by establishing the standard to compare which one would be transparent or objective.

In short, when it comes to determining whether leaders are authentic or not, true-self awareness is considered to be a core construct. Also, it is appealing that self-awareness is regarded as a process, not just a status, in some works of defining authentic leadership. Furthermore, Men and Stacks (2014) paid attention to the consistency between understanding the

true self and the actual behaviors of leaders as the key factors for the authenticity of leadership. Thus, if being aware of true self and its behaviors based on the awareness are not static points, leadership would appear authentic to the public or internal employees when consistently processing.

Perspectives from Brand Communication

The constructs in aforementioned areas focused on true-self and the awareness. However, the discussion about authenticity hereafter also deals with uniqueness, exclusiveness, or originality as what is being authentic, which are derived from discerning true-self.

Beverland (2005; 2006) studies the authenticity of commercial luxury wine. Authenticity in luxury wines industry is essential to make luxury wines distinctive and unique. Beverland (2005) defines authenticity as a "story that balances industrial—production, distribution and marketing—and rhetorical attributes to project sincerity through the avowal of commitments to traditions including production methods, product styling, firm values, and/or location, passion for craft and production excellence, and the public disavowal of the role of modern industrial attributes and commercial motivations" (p.1008). Also, he identifies seven attributes to create the image of authenticity: (1) protecting status, (2) real commitments to quality, (3) the ability to demonstrate historical quality and price performance, (4) using place as referent, (5) using traditional production methods, (6) stylistic consistency, (7) history and culture as referents. In his later study of authenticity in luxury wine brands, Beverland (2006) narrows authenticity down to six attributes: (1) heritage and pedigree, (2) stylistic consistency, (3) quality commitments, (4) relationship to place, (5) method of production, and (6) downplaying commercial considerations. In essence, all of the attributes of authenticity represented both objective and subjective sources of authenticity and were real but stylized versions of brand authenticity. It is also found that sincerity was achieved through fulfilling these several attributes of authenticity.

Morhart, Malär, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann (2015) define authenticity in the realm of brand marketing as "the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true toward itself and its consumers, and to support consumers being true to themselves" (p.202).

Schallehn, Burmann, and Riley (2014) defined brand authenticity from a socio-psychological perspective as the degree to which personal identity is linked to individual behavior. Furthermore, they stressed the antecedents of authenticity in brand communication—individuality, consistency, and continuity—thereby reaching the conclusion that brand attributes should be reflected in their individually, consistently, and continuously authentic brand behavior. In turn, it is important that consumers are likely to determine whether or not the brand is perceived as authentic.

Perspectives from Tourism

In tourism, the underlying ground of the concept of authenticity is considerably analogous with brand communication. The definition of authenticity in tourism narrows down to originality and uniqueness. Wang (1999) defined the authenticity in terms of three viewpoints—objective, constructive, and existential. According to the theoretical research, objective authenticity refers to originality. Constructive authenticity is "the historical verisimilitude of representation, originals opposed to a copy, and genuine, historically accurate, and immaculate simulation." Also, existential authenticity means "a special state of being in which one is true to oneself in public roles and public spheres." Considering existential authenticity is grounded in

postmodernism, the definition is related to the self rather than an external entity and involves the notion that authenticity means being true to one's self (Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006). When it comes to the definition of tourism, Wang (1999) put more weight on the definition of an existential perspective, pointing it out as a justifiable alternative source for authentic tourism experiences.

Taylor (2001) described authenticity as "traditional," which can be concerned with originality.   This is because authentic tourism projects attempt to figure out an original and unique value through the application of the distance between viewing subjects such as tourists and consumable objects, such as tourism.

Defining Authenticity in Public Relations

This study aims to figure out how authenticity can be explicated in the context of public relations and what construct of authenticity needs to be emphasized in public relations.   By investigating the constructs and components of the definition of authenticity in multidisciplinary literature, the various perspectives on authenticity lead to several observations.

First, many studies about the definition of authenticity begin with being aware of true-self when they define the specific constructs of authenticity.   As for one of the important construct of authenticity, it is necessary to focus on how an individual or entity is aware of one's true self.

Second, it is essential to distinguish a viewpoint regarding how to look at the relationship between oneself and the true-self.   It is possible to determine authenticity from not only internal perspectives but also external perspectives.   For example, if one thinks that himself or herself is authentic after perceiving one's true-self and determining whether the expressed words or behaviors are based on his or her true-self, it can be said that it is founded on the internal view. The external view indicates the case where others judge the words or behaviors, which become the grounds for internally determining authenticity.   Thus, this study designated the two different viewpoints as "inside" and "outside" perspectives in regard to the object.   Table 1 illustrates the relationships in accordance with the objects in the various perspectives.

Each object in the different fields can be specified according to the classification of two perspectives.   For instance, oneself respectively indicates an individual, a user of media, and a leader with an inside perspective on human communication, online communication, and leadership management.   Others and other users can be those who determine the authenticity of a message or behavior in the outside perspective.   In leadership management, others can be divided into two sides—employees of the internal organization and the public.   Brand management and tourism have no oneself as a human being, so what constitutes true-self of a brand and tourism can be a brand itself or a tour project or product itself.   For example, heritage, history, legend, production methods, or a sense of place are considered a brand-self in luxury wine industry (Beverland, 2005; 2006), and historical and cultural assets, place, and remains have become the objects of the judgment of authenticity in tourism (Wang, 1999).

Third, many studies suppose the difference between oneself and true-self.   Moreover, if there is a huge difference between two, it is scarcely possible to consider that a certain individual or entity is authentic.   Oneself is likely seen as an actual being which is existing or emerging in reality. In other words, it should be able to become an object making it possible to determine whether or not it is authentic.   On the contrary, true-self can be a true or genuine characteristic or image of the object.   Accordingly, the meaning of being authentic is that the object tries to behave as it is without a significant discrepancy between those two.   Although true-self may or

may not be reflected truly or genuinely to oneself, it would not be considered authentic if it is not reflected truly or genuinely.

Fourth, the discrepancy can be perceived differently from the outside viewpoint, such as others or the public, regardless of the extent to which oneself is genuinely aware of one's true-self. For example, when people outside evaluate authenticity, they compare the gap or discrepancy between the expressed self and what is supposed to be oneself in their view. Consequently, it is likely that the expressed one, such as a certain message or behavior, can be a standard for deciding whether or not it is authentic. In short, authenticity can be determined depending on the extent to which a certain message or behavior is authentic.

Fifth, the differences between the constructs are associated with the inherently different characteristics of objects that are considered to be authentic in various areas. In other words, the objects of brand and tourism have no oneself as human being, so what constitutes true-self of a brand and tourism can be themselves, whereas authentic or inauthentic objects are human beings or leaders in human communication and leadership management. Thus, it can be assumed that the brand self or tourism-self needs something to be its roots for true-self. A certain component, such as history, tradition, or place, can play the role of the identity and the true-self of authenticity in brand communication (Beverland, 2005).

Finally, throughout literature above, the core constructs of the definition of authenticity are summarized as following: the awareness of true-self, originality, uniqueness, and sincerity. As shown in Table 2, some constructs, such as relational orientation, accepting external influence, the expression of real me, which are in the column of the outside perspective, need to have a relationship with others' thought which can influence on whether a behavior or a product is authentic. It is interesting that the awareness of true-self in Wang (1999) may happen regardless of the way in which tourists view the tourism.

Tentative Conclusions

In conclusion, this study proposes the tentative definition of authenticity in public relations. Above all, based on the two perspectives—"inside" and "outside", an organization and key stakeholder publics are two different objects that become the standard for determining whether a communication or a behavior of an organization is authentic in public relations. It is a more precise term that inside and outside perspectives refer to "organization perspective" and "public perspective" in the context of public relations. As seen in Table 3, the object of what is being authentic involves key stakeholder publics. Based on the four linkages of Grunig and Hunter (1984)—functional, enabling, diffused, and normative linkages—, every public related to the linkages is possible to become the objects which can determine authenticity in public relations.

True-self awareness and genuineness can be the essential construct of authenticity in public relations (Figure 1). Firstly, as discussed in various articles, the most important point to understand authenticity is whether oneself is aware of true-self. As such, true-self awareness also can be the critical factor to measure the level of authenticity regarding the outcome of public relations strategies. Moreover, it should be also considered how the perceived true-self express in a certain form of communications in the context of public relations. If it is considerably different to the true-self, it is hardly to be considered authentic.

Accordingly, this point would be another construct, "genuineness." In some extents, sincerity, which means "honest, pure, and marked by genuineness", might be used interchangeably, but the lexical meaning of genuineness is more proper to describe the definition of authenticity: actual, true, sincerely and honestly felt or experienced ("Sincere," n.d.;

"Genuine," n.d.).   Genuineness involves how to understand and express authenticity.   Thus, it is related to both organization and public perspectives and according to the perspectives the extent of being authentic may vary.   In the case of genuineness, consistency between being one's true-self and its expression to the public becomes an important aspect to assess whether a certain communication is authentic (Men & Stacks, 2014; Schallehn et al., 2014).

The proposed definition of authenticity in this study should be further developed and tested to validate the assessment of the public's perceptions on the level of authenticity in the organizations and public relationships.   In particular, the common or different aspects between authenticity and its similar and related concepts, such as openness, honesty, credibility are necessarily developed.   This would be essential because it will help understanding authenticity by explicating what element is correlated with the concept when a certain communication refers to be authentic.

In future research, it is needed to deal with much more constructs and attributes in various academic fields.   Authenticity is rooted in philosophy.   Thus, philosophical approach to defining authenticity will be discussed to examine the definition further and elicit constructs more properly in public relations.   Considering some pieces about the constructs of authenticity in tourism and communication studies (Henderson & Bowley, 2010; Molleda, 2010; Wang, 1999), a critical culture perspective could also contribute to a more thorough understanding of nature of the concept, authenticity.

Also, a discussion on the specific variables should be needed to empirically measure authenticity in the public relations research. A testable hypothesis based on the sufficiently developed explication of authenticity could be conducted to evaluate what the measures are intended to measure.   For example, one of the hypotheses involves how much the perceived level of authenticity will differ in terms of the same message. As for another hypothesis, it is possible to examine how much differently an apology message provided by leaderships can lead to the perceived level of authenticity, and which construct of authenticity shows a bigger difference in terms of the degree of authenticity in the message.

As Chaffee (1991) states that explication can last a lifetime for scholars, rarely does it end with the completion of a single study.   Hence, in future research about authenticity, it is more expected to contribute clarity to the confusion surrounding the nature and definition of authenticity in public relations.

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Appendix

Table 1. The Objects of Authenticity by Two Perspectives

	Inside		Outside
	True-Self	*Oneself*	*Others*
Human Communication	Individual's True-self	Individual	Others in relationships
Online Communication	User's True-self	User	Other users in online
Leadership Management	Leader's True-self	Leader	Public / Employee
Brand Communication	Brand's True-self	Brand	Consumers
Tourism	Tourism's True-self	Tourism	Tourists

Table 2. The Constructs of Authenticity in Various Fields

	Inside		Outside
	True-Self	*Oneself*	*Others*
Kernis & Golman (2006)	Awareness, Unbiased processing, Behavior		Relational orientation
Wood et al. (2008)	Self-alienation, Authentic living		Accepting external influence
Lim et al. (2015)	The sense of real me		The expression of real me
Gardner et al. (2005)	Self-awareness, Balanced information processing, Authentic behavior		Relational transparency
Walumbwa et al. (2008)	Self-awareness, Balanced processing, Internal moral perspective		Relational transparency
Beverland (2005; 2006)	Originality, Uniqueness		Sincerity
Wang (1999)	Originality, Awareness of true-self		
Taylor (2001)	Tradition		

Table 3. The Objects of Authenticity in Public Relations

Organization Perspective		Public Perspective
True-self of an organization	Organization	Key stakeholder publics
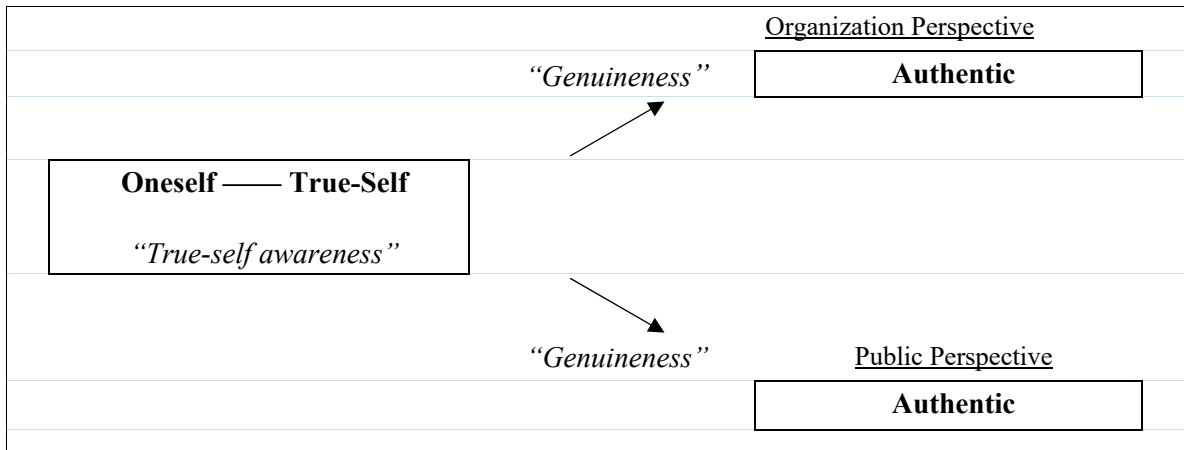
Figure 1. The Tentative Conceptualization of Authenticity in Public Relations

Communicating Employee Wellness Plans to Employees:
The Effects of Gain-Loss Framing and Message Source on Intentions to Enroll

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Abstract

This study examines message design strategies companies can use to encourage employees to join wellness programs. Such programs have been shown to reduce absenteeism, improve productivity, and reduce healthcare costs (Berry, Mirabito, & Baun, 2010).   Results from a 2 (message framing) x 2 (image) x control experiment suggests gain-framed messages increased enrollment intentions.

Fortune magazine publishes its list of the "100 Best Companies to Work For," and its ranking formula for evaluating companies includes measures of "…overall job satisfaction," as well as and evaluation of company "pay and benefits programs" (Fortune, n.d.). At many companies, a tangible benefit includes making employee wellness programs available to improve employee health. One problem with such programs, however, is that they may suffer from low enrollment when employers do not communicate effectively about the program and fail to provide support for their programs (Cook, 2016). The current study examines one aspect of these programs -- how companies can optimally design messages to encourage employees to participate in company wellness programs. These programs do not only benefit employees, but they can improve employee productivity and raise a company's reputation. Prior research about employee wellness programs indicates that programs improve employee health and reduce corporate costs (Berry, Mirabito, & Baun, 2010). For instance, Johnson & Johnson reported it saved nearly $250 million, and the return was $2.71 for every dollar it invested on employee health (Berry et al., 2010). Therefore, employee wellness programs can benefit employees as well as improve the corporate bottom line.

One way employers may communicate wellness plan information is to offer wellness programs as a strategic choice for health gains (benefits) or suggest that not participating would lead to health risks (losses). Prior research on gain- and loss-framing suggests that gain framing is more persuasive in getting people to accept and take steps for health preventive measures, especially when a credible message source is used (Jones, Sinclair & Courneya, 2003). Gains and losses can also be gauged, and often are, by financial incentives offered to employees for enrolling.   Thus, our study design accounts for financial incentives in gain and loss framing.

A second variable present in the communications is message source. Message sources, and particularly the appearance of the health status of the source, may influence how wellness (nutrition and physical activity) information is received. In our study we examine either a fellow employee as the source who looks like a professional model (thin), or an employee that looks more like an everyday person (slightly overweight). Portrayals may suggest whether the employee has been successful or unsuccessful.

Because health insurance is a large expense for corporations and individuals (Elan, 2006), and maintaining one's health not only leads to a more productive workforce and happier employees (Anderko et al., 2012)*,* it is important to examine how public relations practitioners can engage in employee communication to incentivize employees to participate in corporate wellness programs. While there are studies in public relations that reference the role of employee communications in supporting wellness programs, this is one of the first studies to examine message framing and source type. What follows is a review of the relevant literature on message framing, source type and employee wellness programs.

Literature Review

Message Framing

Developing messages is a common job responsibility of those in charge of employee communications. Unfortunately, this strategic role within corporations is underappreciated even while it serves a "vitally significant" role in empowering employees and meeting company goals (Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, & Toth, p. 218). When it comes to healthful living, there are many factors that affect people's attitudes and the likelihood they will engage in specific health behaviors. For instance, research shows that the type of job and industry affects whether employees will participate, as well as whether line managers support the program (Anderko et al., 2012). One approach to examining health messages is to investigate whether the way in which the message is posed to individuals affects their willingness and motivations to engage in the health behavior.

There is much to be learned about developing messages concerning health issues from the field of psychology, where message framing has been a subject of research for some time. Derived from

Tversky and Kahneman's (1981) prospect theory, psychologists have built a body of knowledge about how individuals respond to health messages when they are framed in terms of gains versus losses (Rothman, Bartels, Wlaschin, & Salovey, 2006). As proposed by prospect theory and framing, gain-framed messages are thought to work best in motivating individuals to take safe, less risky outcomes, and loss-framed messages work best in motivating individuals to choose uncertain, probabilistic, or risky outcomes while cognitively processing the framed messages under the conditions of uncertainty (Gray & Harrington, 2011; Salovey, Schneider, & Apanovitch, 2002). Additionally, gain-framed messages strategically emphasize the gaining of benefits or a reduction in achieving undesirable consequences if individuals perform the advocated behavior (Arora, Stoner, & Arora, 2006). On the other hand, loss-framed messages emphasize the harmful effects of not taking action, as well as an increase in undesirable consequences (Arora et al., 2006). From a health behavior perspective, a meta-analysis of this research (Rothman et al., 2006) concludes that when communicators advocate that individuals engage in health prevention behaviors (safe, not risky behaviors, e.g., applying sunscreen, see Detweiler, Bedell, Salovey, Pronin & Rothman, 1999) gain-framed messages are more effective. On the other hand, the researchers determined that individuals respond to loss-framed messaging (e.g., risk is increased if you do nothing) best when communicators hope to get people to act for health detection behaviors (e.g., mammography screenings, see Schneider at al., 2001).

Gains and losses refer to potential health outcomes, but, in the particular case of employee wellness programs, the message framing can also be presented in terms of gaining or failing to gain a monetary incentive (e.g., losing money). Nearly three-quarters of wellness plans offer some form of economic incentive (Anderko et al., 2012). In terms of how economic incentives could add to message framing, studies show that when it comes to monetary gains and losses, gain-framed messages work best when discussing small amounts of money, but that loss-framed messages are more effective when referencing large amounts of money (Harnick, van Dijk, Van Beest, & Mersmann, 2007). The authors explain this by citing the "hedonic principle" whereby they note that people try to avoid losses and increase pleasure in their decision-making, and thus individuals will be more profoundly influenced by large potential losses than by gains (Harnick et al., 2007). For employee wellness programs, this may mean that small incentives will work when discussing gains, but that larger incentives will work when the programs are presented as losses.

Other research has examined individual factors involved in health decision-making, and perceived risk is one of those factors. In our study risk can be attached to a perceived risk of engaging in the health behavior (e.g., is there risk to making/not making healthy goals?) and risk is also related to income (e.g., will I lose out on a couple hundred dollars a year?). Significantly, there is also a risk associated with the employee feeling that the employer might penalize him or her somehow for not enrolling. Research examining the effects of fear and anger on gain- and loss-framed messaging for eating fruits and vegetables showed that loss-framed messages significantly increased fruit and vegetable intake when fear was induced (Gerend, & Maner, 2011). The authors suggest that being fearful makes one risk-averse, thus making the loss-framed message more effective. We use fear of being penalized as a covariate in this study, as we expect it to be related to the dependent variable.

Source Type

Message source credibility has a long history in communication studies (McCroskey & Young, 1981), and has recently been more seriously studied in public relations (Callison, 2001; Haigh & Brubaker, 2010). A common concern about credibility for public relations scholars is whether spokesperson characteristics affect how the audience interacts with the message. The characteristic can be job title (Haigh & Brubaker, 2010) or race (Hong & Len-Ríos, 2015). In this study, we are interested to see whether the perceived health status of the employee who writes about her involvement in the wellness program will be seen as more or less credible based on whether she is visually portrayed as

resembling a model (i.e., thin) or an everyday person (i.e., somewhat overweight). While spokesperson weight has not, to our knowledge, been studied in the public relations literature, weight stigma has been studied elsewhere.

Exemplification theory (Zillmann, 2006) predicts that visual images and individual stories may more strongly affect audience reactions to messages compared with presenting data or offering statistical averages. In the context of this study it suggests that contrasting images of a professional model or an everyday person might affect behavioral intentions more strongly than message framing. Furthermore, the theory suggests that if the image evokes an affective response and increased feelings of risk, that it will be encoded more strongly in the audience's memory. There is reason to believe that images of the average American, who tends to be overweight, may affect behavioral intentions. For instance, Young, Subramanian and Hinnant (2016) studied how images affected people's attitudes toward health promotion messages that included images of an overweight person and text versus images of fast food and text. While weight status of participants did not lead to differences in attitudes toward the images, the images of the overweight person influenced normal-weight people to say that they had greater intentions to engage in healthy behaviors. Thus, seeing a person who is overweight may have triggered the perception that there is a greater risk to not participating in the wellness program. However, it may be that seeing someone who is overweight who is participating in the program, as is the case here, may serve as a deterrent because it is not an aspirational visual image. Therefore, it is unclear whether the image, as an exemplar, will affect perceptions above and beyond financial motivations, intrinsic motivations, and message framing.

Employee Wellness Programs

Communication about employer-based health insurance programs is a significant topic to investigate because employers provide the largest number of Americans ages 65 and under with health insurance. Even after the 2010 passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and the increasing rates of insurance, employer-based insurance offerings have remained steady at about 60 percent for nearly a decade (Fronstin, 2015). With the ACA, also called Obamacare, the focus has turned to disease prevention, and the Prevention and Public Health Fund provision of the ACA included funding for worksite wellness programs (Anderko et al., 2012).

Numerous large employers, including Chevron, DuPont, and Proctor & Gamble, have implemented wellness programs. A meta-analysis of research on these types of programs, including weight loss and fitness, smoking cessation, and multiple factors, shows that the programs added cost-savings and reduced absenteeism (Baicker, Cutler, & Song, 2010). Other research about employee wellness programs found that these programs have improved not only employee's health by decreasing the number of employees having high blood pressure, but also strengthened the organization's strategic imperative (Berry et al., 2010). A successful wellness program includes corporate culture reflecting employee trust, motivation, and commitment toward the organization (Taylor, 2009). After implementing its employee wellness program, Johnson & Johnson saved about $250 million in total, and the return was $2.71 for every dollar spent (Berry et al., 2010; Goetzel et al., 2002). In the long term, investing in employee wellness programs, if implemented correctly, can save employers an enormous amount of health care costs (Berry et al., 2010).

With more organizations annually adopting employee wellness programs, several effective ways to promote employee participation are suggested. One is to provide financial incentives for participating. In 2009-2010, about 70 percent of U.S. men and women were identified as overweight or obese (Flegal, Carroll, Kit, & Ogden, 2012). Even though more than half of the overweight or obese population try to lose weight, most individuals gain back the weight to baseline in three to five years (Crawford, Jeffery, & French, 2000). One reason suggested by research for why people fail in their weight loss goal, is that there is no salient benefit (Cawley & Price, 2013). Therefore, financial incentives for encouraging

weight loss in wellness programs could be a solution (Cawley & Price, 2013). Cawley and Price (2013) found that employees having the "Deposit Contract with Lump Sum Repayment and Deposit with Continuous Repayment incentive schedules" were more likely to lose weight by the end of the year. Additionally, employees in the deposit contract with lump sum repayment group lost 7.7lbs more than the control group (Cawley & Price, 2013). In prior research, it was discovered that for employees earning "a portion of the maximum eligible discount (up to nearly 20%) off their health insurance premium contribution," employees who participated in the wellness program with incentives improved their biometrics, including body mass index, blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose and nicotine, within 3-5 years (Fu, Bradley, Viswanathan, Chan, & Stampfer, 2016).

Hypothesis and Research Questions

The research on health framing theory (Rothman et al., 2006) suggests that health prevention behaviors will lead to greater intention to engage in health promotion behaviors when they are gain-framed. On the other hand, research on monetary gains and losses suggest that losses will loom larger than gains. Furthermore, research suggests that a person's worry about losses and perceptions of monetary gains may affect their health decisions. Therefore, we will pose a nondirectional hypothesis predicting that framing will have an effect, but we are unsure of the direction of that effect. In addition, we will control for participants' potential motivations of (a.) gaining monetarily and (b.) fearing loss. This reasoning leads to H1: Message Framing will have an effect on participants' intentions to enroll in the company's employee wellness program, controlling for financial and intrinsic motivations.

Next, we will examine the effect of the message source. Research shows that more credible message sources will more likely influence message effectiveness. In this context, we are unsure whether a fellow employee who looks like a professional model or an employee that looks like an everyday person might be considered more persuasive. The professional model (i.e., thin) represents the outcome of engaging in healthful behaviors, yet the model that looks like an everyday person (i.e., somewhat overweight) may be more relatable. Here we also pose RQ1: Will Source Type have an effect on participants' intentions to enroll in the company's employee wellness program, controlling for financial and intrinsic motivations?

Lastly, we are interested in whether there is an interaction between Message Framing and Source Type on intentions to enroll in the employee wellness program controlling for motivations. In other words, we look at the combinations of image and source type and whether they affect behavioral intentions. Thus, we present RQ2: Will Message Framing and Source Type interact to affect participants' intentions to enroll in the company's employee wellness program, controlling for financial and intrinsic motivations?

Methodology

To test whether message source and message framing affects the motivation for employees to join the company's wellness program, we used a two-factor experiment: *message framing* (gain v. loss) x *source image* (professional model v. everyday person) with a *control condition* (mixed framing and no image) ($N = 204$).

Participants and Procedures

In April 2016, a total of 204 college undergraduate students participated in the experiment through a participant pool system administered by a faculty member at a large university in the South. Participants averaged 20.5 ($SD = 1.09$) years old, and 81.4% reported they were female ($n = 166$), making the sample more female than male. Their self-reported Body Mass Index (BMI) was 23.04 ($SD = 4.20$), which puts the participants in the category for being a healthy weight (CDC, 2016).

The study was conducted in-person in a university campus building. Participants, typically in groups of 10, chose a convenient time from the schedule to participate. As participants arrived, they

were assigned to one of the five conditions. Subsequently, participants were given information on informed consent, completed a pre-test questionnaire, read the employee health newsletter story for their condition and then completed a follow-up questionnaire. Upon completion, the group was debriefed and offered the option to remove their data (no one did).

To foster consistency, all the health newsletter stories (i.e., stimuli) had the same heading "Employee Matters, March 2016-Newletter," and except for the framing (see Appendix A) all the rest of the newsletter material, in full color, was held constant across conditions. To increase participants' self-efficacy, and to match best practices for successful wellness programs (Cook, 2016), participants were told to evaluate the stories. The stories noted that employees would set their own goals for nutrition and exercise with their health providers.

Independent Variables

Message framing. For the gain-framed condition, the text read: "The program is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you set up an appointment with your primary health care provider and, together, you set personal health goals for the year in terms of nutrition and exercise. For each quarter as you make progress toward your goals, Carlisle Cos. will provide you with a $50 reward, and will pay out a possible total of $200 by the end of the year if you achieve all of your goals."

Loss-framed messages offered the same financial gains, but presented the message in terms of potential losses: "Carlisle Cos. is offering a $50 incentive if you reach your goals. For each quarter you miss your goal, you must try to earn it the next quarter. So there is incentive not to lose out on a possible extra $200 at the end of the year."

Lastly, the control condition "mixed message" provided a combination of the gain and loss language in a "mixed" message, "Carlisle Cos. is offering a $50 incentive if you reach your goals. For each quarter you miss your goal, you can try to earn it the next quarter. So there is an incentive to earn a possible extra $200 at the end of the year." The control condition was not crossed and did not contain an image.

Source type. The independent variable source type was manipulated by the images (or no image) representing the female employee in the news story (professional model vs. everyday person see Appendix A). To identify which images to use in the study, pre-test survey conducted with a different independent sample of female college students (N=26) not participating in this study was conducted. It asked participants to rate 10 photos of women exercising in workout clothing according to the prompt "On a scale from 1-5, rate whether you think this person looks like an everyday person or a professional model." Participants rated the photos where 1(*everyday person*) to 5 (*professional model*). Results of a repeated measure ANOVA with Bonferroni adjustments and its pairwise comparisons showed that the woman chosen for the *everyday person* condition ($M = 1.31$; $SD = .62$) was rated statistically differently ($p < .05$) as an *everyday person* compared with the woman selected to represent the *professional model* condition ($M = 3.73$; $SD = 1.0$).

Thus, having identified the two images for the conditions, the newsletter story stimuli were written. The text that accompanied the images remained the same. To strengthen the exemplar of "Janice," supposedly featured in the image, as an employee who was participating in the wellness program, she was identified in the story and in the newsletter caption. Providing the image of the employee with a name was to personalize the employee and increase ecological validity (i.e., make it seem real). Hence, the main difference between source type conditions was the image.

Covariates

The two covariates for this study are related to motivations for enrollment in the wellness plan. Intrinsic motivation, in terms of activity enjoyment, was a variable comprising six items regarding engaging in health activity. We borrowed and adapted this measure from Ryan, Frederick, Lepes, Rubio

and Sheldon (1997) who used seven items to identify enjoyment in physic activity. Our question stem was, "After reading the story, I felt like I want to participate in the program…' and it included items like, "Because I like to do this activity." Responses represented intrinsic motivations and were recorded on a Likert-type scale with 1(*strongly disagree*) to 5(*strongly agree*) *with* (*M*= 3.23; *SD*= 0.97).

The second covariate relates to motivations that may be derived from perceptions of risk for not enrolling in the program. Participants could perceive that not taking part in the program might hurt their standing in the company. Therefore, we asked participants whether *fear of penalty* affected their participation. We asked participants their level of agreement with the statement, "Because I am afraid that if I don't participate, the company may penalize me in some way" (*M*= 1.58; *SD*= .94).

Dependent variable

The dependent variable of interest is intention to enroll in the employee wellness program. We used a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1(*strongly disagree)* and 5(*strongly agree). Behavioral intentions* gauged participant agreement with the statement: "Overall, I would enroll in Carlisle Cos. health and wellness initiative" (*M*= 3.98; *SD*= 1.08).

Findings

The analysis of a two-way ANCOVA using two between-group factors was conducted. Hypothesis 1 predicted that message framing (gain vs. loss vs. mixed) would have an effect on participants' intention to enroll in the company's employee wellness program controlling for financial incentives and intrinsic motivations with no direction specified. According to our data, there is a significant effect of message framing on participant intentions to enroll in the wellness program after controlling for financial and intrinsic motivations, $F(1, 202) = 5.21$, $p < .05$. Pairwise comparisons show that the loss-frame (*M*=3.80, *SE* =.10) was significantly lower than the gain-framed (*M*=4.13, *SE* =.10) condition $p < .05$, but not the mixed framed condition (*M* = 4.01, *SE* = .15). This means that the loss-frame message was significantly lower than the gain-framed messages in increasing behavioral intention.

The first research question asked whether the source type would affect intentions to enroll. Source Type failed to significantly predict enrollment intention when controlling for financial incentives and intrinsic motivations, $F(1, 202) = 0.07$, $p < .79$. The second research question asked whether there would be an interaction effect between message framing and source type on enrollment intention controlling for financial incentives and intrinsic motivations. The interaction approached significance, $F(1, 202) = 3.71$, $p < .055$, but did not reach a level of significance.

The results of the ANCOVA test accounted for 27.7% (R^2=27.7) of the variance in enrollment intentions, with intrinsic motivations accounting for the largest proportion of variance. Financial motivations played a bigger role than did message framing.

Discussion

The significance of this study is that it can contribute to how employers more effectively communicate with their employees and incentivize them to participate in company wellness programs. Our focus is on the communication message. The experiment we present here is theoretically supported by message framing theory (Rothman et al., 2006) and exemplification theory (Zillmann, 2006). By manipulating the exemplar of source type and the message framing, we set out to determine how messaging would affect participants' intentions to enroll in an employee wellness program. Our results found that, controlling for intrinsic motivations and fear of being penalized for nonparticipation, that gain-framed messages were more effective in increasing behavioral intentions than were loss-framed messages. This is consistent with research using message framing, which suggests that gain-framed messages work best for incentivizing health promotion behaviors. It is unclear how our findings align with the financial risk literature as we do not know how our participants perceived $50.

Nevertheless, our result would align with the idea that earning small gains is better than big losses. Further, the incentive was paid over time and tied to health goals. Further research should see how varied incentives may affect behavioral intentions, and, perhaps, more importantly, actual health outcomes.

Interestingly, we did not find that the image or the interaction of frame and image had an effect. While exemplars are expected to create a stronger affective response than are messages presented in text, it may be that messages about potential personal financial gains have an equal or even stronger effect on a person's emotions than does an image. This would be an interesting question to explore in the future. Additionally, while we did pretest for the effects of the image, it could be the image had less of an effect because participants did not identify as closely with the women due to their age or because personal health gains and money were more important.

The results of our study are useful because they show that framing employee participation in wellness programs by pointing out the potential gains of participation may have an effect above that of getting those to participate in the program who already have intrinsic motivation to do so. Effective employee communication plays a crucial part in helping companies increase health care cost savings, by increasing employee wellness program enrollment (Cook, 2016). Of course, health care costs must be contained also by involving payers (insurers) and providers (doctors, hospitals and clinics) (see McDonald, Mecklenburg, & Martin, 2015). Nevertheless, emphasizing disease prevention is a critical component for employers who insure the vast majority of Americans (Fronstin, 2015).

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APPENDIX A

Everyday woman image + Gain-Framed Condition

Janice R. Wells (pictured on left), program analyst at Carlisle Cos. corporate headquarters, says "I plan to join the program to maintain my health, and getting paid for it is even better. Exercising helps me keep a clear mind and focus even when I'm doing other things." Wells is shown exercising near the company's main campus before work hours.

Photo source: British newspaper.

Professional model image + Loss-Frame Condition

Janice R. Wells (pictured on left), program analyst at Carlisle Cos. corporate headquarters, says "I know the threat of losing money will keep me motivated to take care of my health and that's why I plan to join the program. Exercising helps me keep a clear mind and focus even when I'm doing other things." Wells is shown exercising near the company's main campus before work hours.

Photo source: Athleta catalog.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Communication in Japan:
A Case Study of Green Advertisements in the Magazine "Nikkei Ecology"

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Abstract

In recent years, towards the development of a sustainable society, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been regarded as more and more important inside and outside of companies. As part of CSR communication between companies and stakeholders, environmental advertisement is a very important communication channel for sharing information about companies' environmental measures with their stakeholders.

This study focuses on two representational elements of advertisements: visual elements such as photographs and illustrations, and verbal elements such as text. The content analysis made use of 124 environment advertisements that were published in the magazine "Nikkei Ecology," which is the most popular magazine for disseminating information about "environmental business" in Japan. This study conducts an exploratory analysis of the way in which green advertisements use "images" and discourse on environmental responsibility. The environmental responsibilities of companies are presented as features of advertisement representation in a wide range of advertisement contents in green advertisements.

The results show that almost all environmental advertisements from Japanese companies focus on companies' use of resources. It was found that very similar representations of nature and colors were used in the non-verbal expressions of advertisements for all advertisement types. However, there were only a few visual elements in advertisements that directly related to the use of resources. Meanwhile, depending on the contents of the advertisement, the proposed environmental measures were different. Specifically, the environmental measures included proposing energy-efficient products and technologies, introducing environmentally friendly technologies through companies and factories, and reporting on ecological conservation activities such as afforestation.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing demand for corporate social responsibility (CSR) towards a more sustainable society. In particular, the ISO 26000 standard was launched by the International Organization for Global Standardization in 2010 following five years of negotiations between many different stakeholders across the world. Since then, many Japanese companies have begun to rearrange their previous or ongoing CSR efforts to conform to the ISO 26000 standard and revise their CSR reports from 2012 (Tanimoto, 2013). The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry calculated the proportion of companies that conformed to ISO 26000 in each country. The rate in Japan was found to be as high as 70% (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry Report, 2014, p. 5).

The social responsibility mentioned in ISO 26000 aims to realize the sustainable development of society. Furthermore, it proposed that CSR involves three different responsibilities; first, it involves economic responsibility in relation to the creation of employment and economic circulation through consumption and production; second, it involves social responsibility in relation to low birthrates, poverty, human rights, and security; and third, it involves environmental responsibility in relation to environmental problems such as pollution, climate change, and biodiversity. Beyond fulfilling these three responsibilities, companies are also expected to take additional responsibility for information disclosure and accountability to stakeholders (ISO 26000, 2011).

The impact of ISO 26000 on Japanese companies has been enormous. The traditional concept of social responsibility was a parochial definition, which referred to only nonprofit activities like philanthropy and volunteering. In contrast, in order to deal with the above problems, the definition of CSR in ISO 26000 is broad in wide scope. Corporations need to make effort towards achieving a society of sustainable development through their core businesses or the activities connected with their business. These actions are pursued for the synergistic and sustainable development of relationships between corporations and societies. The corporations are also asked to take fairness and ethics into consideration while undertaking the activities. (Liu, 2016, p. 38-41).

For this reason, this research applied the definition of CSR in accordance with ISO 26000. CSR includes activities within business or related to business that aim to achieve sustainable development of the environment, society, and economy. It also includes appropriate explanations and disclosure of information about the activities related to the business to stakeholders.

The environmental responsibility aspect of CSR is a key topic for Japanese companies. The environmental measures of companies have focused on this since 2010. The environmental measures are various and include environmentally conscious manufacturing, the development of technologies to reduce companies' environmental burden, and afforestation for ecosystem protection. It is required that enterprises communicate information about specific environmental countermeasures that they take and their corporate philosophy on environmental responsibility. According to Sekiya, who conducted research about green advertisements from the strategy of the advertiser and the psychology of receivers, green advertisements are regarded as the most important communication method for companies when their communication objective is to reach general consumers and customers (Sekiya, 2009, p. 101). In the communication of environmental responsibility, green advertisements are also considered an important media channel.

Japanese green advertisements started just after Japanese companies began implementing full-scale environmental measures in the 1990s (Sekiya, 2009). These environmental measures were taken as a result of the discussion of environmental problems in the international community. In the international political and economic system of the 20th century, the awareness that the global environment cannot be sustainably maintained became widely accepted globally (Takamura and Kameyama, 2002; Ohta and Mori, 2003). Environmental countermeasures can also be important factors in corporate branding (Sekiya, 2009). Therefore, the characteristics of environmental advertisements include a wide range of contents, such as appealing products or technology, the process of manufacturing, corporate philosophy,

or corporate imagery (Banerjee and Iyer et al, 1995; Wakita, 1997).

This research examines the relationship between advertisements representation and environmental advertisements, including widely varied contents of advertisements by Japanese companies. In addition, this study conducts an exploratory analysis of the way in which green advertisements use "image" and discourse on environmental responsibility. The characteristics of communication about the environmental responsibility of Japanese companies will be verified. The term "environmental advertisement" refers to advertisements that include the any content relating to corporate environmental responsibility.

Literature Review

Some research has been carried out on the advertisement expression of environmental advertisements in various countries. These studies focused mainly on content analyses of the language used in advertising texts. For example, Carlson et al (1993) conducted an analysis of the credibility of companies' environmental claims. The results implied that the environmental claims of products linked to commerciality, or vague images, could be accepted skeptically by recipients. Banerjee and Iyer (1995) analyzed the degrees of environmental appeal that could be shown as deep, intermediate, and shallow within the truth of environmental claims. As for their findings, the content of advertisements included the image of environmental consciousness, but few contents referred to specific products and services. Their research pointed out that the degree of environmental expression in environmental advertisements is mainly intermediate and shallow. Meanwhile, Kanbara (1998) and Ohashi (2002) indicated the problem of green advertisements in Japan in terms of advertisement representations with ambiguous expressions such as "eco-friendly." Matsumura et al (2002) showed that the advertisement content of image appeal is multiple. These research results showed the characteristics and problems of linguistic expression among the advertisement expressions of environmental advertisements.

There are few studies that focus on both kinds of representational elements in environmental advertisements. Leonidos et al (2011) focused on language expressions and some non-verbal expressions of environmental advertisements. They focused on linguistic representations and several visual representations of environmental advertisements. The research used content analysis to study advertisement representations of environmental advertisements from international companies from 1988 to 2007. The characteristics of advertisement representations and their changing patterns throughout the period were clarified.

Until now, the relationship between different advertisement contents and advertisement representations of environmental advertisements has not been studied. However, it is very important to consider this relationship. Advertisements are visual or linguistic representations, determined by their contents, which reflect the purpose of advertiser (Shimomura, 2008, p. 264). It is necessary to research how environmental responsibility could be presented in the contents of advertisements, such as environmental advertisements that include information about a company's products and corporate image.

Furthermore, since ISO 26000 was specified as an international standard in 2010, the current state of advertisement expression of companies' environmental advertisements has not yet been studied in Japan. In other words, there are few studies that focus on advertisement representations of green advertisements or certify how Japanese companies try to communicate with their stakeholders through presenting images and statements about their environmental responsibility.

This research analyzes the different contents of environmental advertisements. First, it focuses on two elements of advertisement representations, visual and linguistic elements, in green advertisements and analyzes their contents. Next, the relationship between the contents of the advertisements and the advertisement expressions is examined. Finally, the communication contents of environmental responsibility between Japanese companies and stakeholders are analyzed.

Methodology

Sampling environmental advertisements

The sampling of advertisements in this study focuses on environmental advertisements printed in "Nikkei Ecology[4]" over a three-year period from January 2013 to December 2015. The environmental advertisements of Japanese companies were chosen as the research target. Eventually, excluding repeated advertisements, a total of 124 different environmental advertisements were selected for analysis.

Analysis of advertisement expression by content analysis and quantitative text analysis

The method of content analysis has been widely used in various fields of the social sciences. It is one of the representative methods of empirical research (Arima, 2010, p. 1) and is useful as a research method to clarify the contents of communication between senders and receivers. This study focuses on visual and linguistic communication elements in environmental advertisements and employs a content analysis of both elements.

Based on the core factor of visual representations of environmental advertisements used in Banerjee and Iyer (1995), Matsumura et al (2002), and Leonidos et al (2011), coding rules of contents analysis were established. Firstly, they were coded according to three different target audiences: Business to Business, Business to Customer, or Both. These will be referred to as "B to B," "B to C," and "Both" in the following discussion. The business types of the advertisers were coded as manufacturing industry, wholesale business, and services. The characters used in advertisements included celebrities, employees, civilians, and children. The level of greenness was divided into shallow, moderate, and deep. Referring to the classification of the advertisement contents used by Shimomura (2001), a code was designed to classify the contents of three different kinds of environmental advertisements. The first is product advertisements including core business information, such as information about products and technology. The second is corporate advertisements including non-profit information, such as corporate identity and some images. The third is a combination of product advertisement and corporate advertisement including information about both (referred to as Product Ads, Corporate Ads, and Eclectic Ads respectively). In addition, the representation of nature and the main color used in the advertisements was also coded.

Two graduate students majoring in media studies were enlisted to carry out the coding. The concordance rate of each item was confirmed to be 91% or more. To examine the characteristics of the advertisement representation of advertisement contents, statistical analyses such as the chi-squared test were conducted. Next, content analysis of the linguistic representation was conducted using quantitate text software (KH Coder[5]). First, the results were extracted from the total of 19,464 words used in the environmental advertisements. Secondly, a total of 2,177 words were analyzed as final linguistic data after no meaning words had been excluded. Finally, frequently used words were identified from the entire set of environmental advertisements and their contents. After that, co-occurrence network analysis[6] and

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[4] The magazine "Nikkei Ecology" has been published by the Nikkei BP Company since 1999. It is a monthly business magazine specializing in the environment. It mainly targets business people, administrative officials, and local government officers related to environmental management. For example, companies can provide comprehensive information on environmental trends such as new eco-products and environmental information, which serves as a guide for environmental businesses. Many environmental advertisements by companies and other advertisers are found in each issue and environmental advertisements are intensively distributed throughout the magazine.

[5] This software was created using the R programming language to conduct a multivariate analysis after analyzing terms used in sentences word by word. (Li, 2016)

[6] In the entire set of environmental advertisements, the relationship has a strong co-occurrence between the analysis targeting words connected by a line. The software used is able to analyze stronger

correspondence analysis[7] were carried out and the characteristic elements of the discourse of the environment measures were extracted.

Results

Regarding the broad advertisement content, of the 124 environmental advertisements used for the analysis, 27% were product advertisements, 43% were both product advertisements and corporate advertisements, and 31% were corporate advertisements. The characteristics of the advertisement contents were identified through the content analysis focusing on the visual representations of the target audience, the business type of the advertiser, Characters, the representations of nature, the main color used in advertisements, and the level of greenness[8] (see Table 1). In addition, through the content analysis of the linguistic representations, the network of frequently-used words among the entire set of environmental advertisements (see Figure 1), the relationship distribution between frequently-used words and advertisement types (see Figure 2), and the discourses of the environmental responsibility in each of advertisement contents (see Table 2) were each investigated.

Target audience

More than three-fifths (60.5%) of green advertisements targeted business buyers (B to B), 21% focused on both (business to business and business to the consumer), and only 18.5% of green advertisements were for consumers (B to C). The results are shown in Table 1. About a half of the advertisement contents which related to businesses such as goods and technology were addressed to the consumer. The combination of product and corporate advertisements (eclectic ads), while showing the products and technologies related to the advertised business but also mentioning corporate ideas and corporate philosophy, showed nearly 70% on the business-to-business target type. The corporate advertisements with only the corporate philosophy are similarly over 70% for being targeted to business sector. However, 15.8% of corporate advertisements also focused on consumers.

Business type of advertiser

Overall, the manufacturing advertiser is the largest group, accounting for 71% of the total. Typical contents included automotive parts and chemical products. In addition, the advertisers in the manufacturing industry accounted for a higher percentage of advertisement contents. The advertisers in the manufacturing industry also accounted for a higher percentage in each type of contents of the advertisement. In the advertisement contents including products and corporate philosophy, 28.3% of advertisers belong to the service industry and the rate follows the manufacturing industry. Typical examples were electric and gas companies. The wholesale industry advertisers occupied 18.4% of corporate advertisements, which is the highest proportion among the three types of advertisement contents. The activities of ecosystem conservation were made mainly by trading companies. The above results are shown in Table 1.

Characters

Overall, almost all of the environmental advertisements used no characters (71%) at all. Among the advertisements with characters, there were those featuring employees (7.3%) who appeared to work for the company judging from their uniforms, and children (10.5%) which relate the advertisements to the

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relationship among the words. For analysis of the co-occurrence relation, in this research the Jacquard coefficient was set to be 0.2 or more.

[7] It is expressed not only as a distribution of the frequently appearing words, but also as a scatter diagram of the words characteristically appearing on different contents of advertisements.

[8] The analyzed range for the level of greenness are set as on the whole of advertisement representation, based on Matsumura et al's (2002) criteria. Therefore, the examining process includes verbal element as well.

next generation. These characters appeared more pronounced in advertisements related to corporate philosophy. It can be inferred that such characters are used as a metaphor for the realization of a sustainably developed society and the shared nature of companies and their stakeholders. Many celebrities appeared in product advertisements with the ratio of 24.2%. This result shows that the method of using celebrities, which is common in general product advertising, also applies to environmental advertisements. The above results are shown in Table 1.

Nature representations
About three quarters of environmental advertisements used representations of nature (74.2 %). This proportion was no significant difference in each type of contents of advertisements. It was commonly found in each type of contents of advertisements that advertisers used images of nature familiar to the audience, such as trees and leaves, as the most typical representations of nature. For example, trees are used around a house, street, and offices. Surprisingly, there were not so many representations of large-scale nature such as forests and oceans to be found in the advertisements. The proportion of images of planet Earth used in the corporate advertisements including corporate philosophy is remarkable because most of the Earth images showed the Earth as mainly blue, which presents the image of a healthy original Earth. The above results are shown in Table 1.

Main color used in the advertisements
The most frequently used color was white with the ratio of 41.9%. Next, blue accounted for 25%, and many images showed the Earth and blue sky. This result is almost the same for all of the different advertisement contents. It could be inferred that white is helpful for displaying the text and illustrations of environmental advertisements more prominently. In addition, in general business communication, the formal color in Japan is white. The use of this color could thus be explained as showing indirectly the sincere and explanatory attitude of the corporations. The above results are shown in Table 1.

Level of greenness
The level of moderate greenness in most environmental advertisements is used to describe environmental measures, and the ratio is 48.4%. The level of shallow, which refers to the advertisements that are image-oriented and have no specific environmental measures and in which no environmental problems are mentioned, is 41.9%. The level of deep, which includes environmental problems, is just 9.7%. However, in the advertisement contents related to business such as product advertisements or both product and corporate advertisements, the level of moderate occupies a high percentage. This reflected the ideas of CSR, which is an effort related to the project of ISO 26000. In contrast, the level of shallow is frequently used in corporate advertisements not related to business. The above results are shown in Table 1.

Discourse characteristics of all sampled environmental advertisements
The company's name is shown as a large circle in the center of Figure 1, which shows the relationship among frequently-used words in the entire set of environmental advertisements. Under this large circle, the environment circle is closely connected to the technology circle and the contribution circle, which shows a strong relationship between them. In addition, the environment circle and the technology circle are strongly related to the product circle, which is located diagonally below. Meanwhile, the circle of the company name is linked to the resource circle, the development circle, the realization circle, and also the energy circle, the reduction circle, and the usage circle. This network shows a strong relationship with the product circle. For environmental advertisements of Japanese companies, the following sentences could be understood from the relationships between words: in order to make a "contribution" to the "environment" and the "future," Japanese firms will take action on "resources" and "energy" through

related "business" such as the "development" of "products" and "technologies."

Discourse characteristics of environmental measures in each type of advertisement content

As a result of the correspondence analysis, the words used in each type of content of advertisements were shown separately. This clearly signifies that the discourse in different contents of advertisements has distinctive characteristics (see Figure 2). In product advertisements, companies' environmental measures are shown by "product name" to stakeholders, such as using "solar light" linking with "system," "production," "electricity," "house," and "energy." However, in the product advertisements and corporate advertisements related to businesses, the environmental measures indicating production processes with environmental considerations included linking terms such as "resources," "development," "possibility," and "maintenance." In the corporate advertisements not related to business, the environmental measures are societal activities related to forest conservation, such as linkages like "forest," "raising," "reproduce," "rich," "region," "protect," and "country."

Discourse characteristics of environmental responsibility in advertisement content

Among the four tasks towards environmental responsibility that are stipulated in ISO 26000, "use of resources" (80.6%) had the highest frequency of use (see Table 2). This high proportion was similar to each advertisement content. The second highest environmental task is biodiversity (32.2%). There was a comparatively low percentage of environmental responsibility against the environmental task of "pollution" (29.8%) and "climate change" (12.1%) due to hazardous substances abandoned by companies. On the other hand, in corporate advertisements not related to the business, "biodiversity" (44.7%) had a high percentage, followed by "the use of resources" (55.3 %).

Discussion

The advertisement contents related to business are normally for advertisements targeting consumers. However, in environmental advertisements, the environmental responsibility aspect of CSR could become an appealing material for brand formation. Therefore, the contents of advertisements might contain something unrelated to business, even though the target audience of the advertisement is customers. This point is also confirmed by this study through the data in the target audience section, business to customer.

The business type of advertisers such as the manufacturer is shown as a high percentage in all contents of advertisements. According to Leonidos et al (2011), the utilization of resources by the manufacturing industry has the highest environmental impact. This could explain why the manufacturing industry occupies a high ratio for advertisers of environmental advertisements in this study as well.

Regarding characters used in environmental advertisements, characters did not appear in most of the environmental advertisements' contents. However, celebrities appeared in some product advertisements. This can be explained by the advertisement content related to the business of the product advertisement. Meanwhile, it was confirmed that advertisement contents including corporate identity such as corporate advertisements and the combination advertisement of product and corporate identity featured children and people who are considered employees of the company. Nature in environmental advertisements is represented as familiar to the audience in terms such as trees and leaves rather than more large-scale nature such as forests and oceans. All of these advertisements seem to reflect the idea of realizing a sustainably developed society, which is one of the goals of CSR. Also, the color white, used mainly in environmental advertisements, could be viewed as a metaphor to explain advertisers' perspectives about CSR.

The level of greenness of environmental measures in the advertisement contents related to business is moderate, though the advertisement contents not related to business were more image-oriented and shallow. In the case of product advertisements, the behavior of consuming environmentally friendly products and technologies has considerable appeal as a specific environmental measure. In contrast, environmental measures in the content of advertisements including corporate identity such as corporate

advertisements or the combination of product and corporate advertisements show an environmentally friendly production process and environmental conservation activities from the viewpoint of the advertiser.

The problem here is the relationship between image and discourse, which is a problem of environmental responsibility. Usage of resources is confirmed as the main discourse of the environmental responsibility in each type of advertisement.

As a country with a high degree of dependence on energy resources overseas, it is natural for Japan to regard resource utilization as an important environmental task. According to a report released by the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in 2016, Japan's energy self-sufficiency rate is at its lowest level since the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

However, few images related to the use of resources were found in the visual representations of advertisements. In addition, a deep level of greenness mentioned in environmental problems was rarely found. Therefore, whether advertisements can be interpreted by the advertising company's use of resources in environmental advertisements by Japanese companies is highly dependent on viewers' interpretations. The ambiguity of advertisements and the interpretation of various contents by viewers facilitate the polysemy of advertisements. The difference between visual representations and linguistic representations could be a problem in environmental advertisements.

Conclusion

In this study, the green advertisements of Japanese companies were analyzed from the viewpoint of one particular aspect of CSR, environmental responsibility, which has not been given attention in previous research. In addition, the contents of green advertisements were classified from the perspectives of the business and non-business nature of advertisements, a technique that has also not been previously employed, through the use of advertiser objective classification criteria according to conventional advertisement investigations. Through this method, this study investigated the representation features of images and discourses on each the contents of advertisements. Based on the results of the analysis, the content of communication on corporate environmental responsibility in green advertisements was clarified.

In the green advertisements of Japanese companies, environmental responsibility for the use of resources was mainly mentioned in different contents of advertisements. Representations of nature and the main colors used as visual elements were similar in almost all advertisements. However, there were only a few visual elements that directly represented the use of resources. Meanwhile, depending on the contents of the advertisements, the proposed environmental countermeasures were different. Specifically, in each type of advertisement, there were the following environmental countermeasures: proposing the consumption and usage of energy-efficient products and technologies to stakeholders, introducing environmentally friendly technologies in companies and factories, and reporting on ecological conservation activities through afforestation and other activities.

In this study, we have examined the characteristics of representations in different contents of green advertisement from business and nonbusiness organizations. Through content analysis, this study identified the characteristic images of nature used by green advertisements and discourses on environmental measures and environmental responsibility. This clarified the contents of communication about environmental responsibility carried out between Japanese companies and stakeholders. However, it is necessary to consider further how Japanese companies communicate these contents, and also whether such communication is accurate and credible. By further examining green advertisements, a more detailed analysis will be possible for communication concerning environmental responsibility in environmental advertisements by Japanese companies. In future research, a critical discourse analysis will be conducted to investigate how Japanese companies communicate these contents on environmental responsibility.

Table.1 The Classification of advertisement types and detailed analysis results of those advertisement representations

Advertisement types / advertisement representations		Product advertisement	Product advertisement + Corporate advertisement (business)	Corporate advertisement (non-business)	x^2	p-value
		%	%	%	%	
(Total)		100(N=124)	27(N=33)	43(N=53)	31(N=38)	
Target audience[***]						26.22	0.000
	B to B	60.5	36.4	67.9	71.1		
	B to C[***]	18.5	45.5	3.8	15.8		
	Both	21.0	18.2	28.3	13.2		
Business type of advertiser[*]						10.11	0.039
	Manufacturing industry	71.0	84.8	64.2	68.4		
	Wholesale trade	11.3	9.1	7.5	18.4		
	Service[*]	17.7	6.1	28.3	13.2		
Characters[**]						16.57	0.002
	Celebrity[**]	8.9	24.2	1.9	5.3		
	Employee	7.3	3.0	9.4	7.9		
	Common man	8.1	15.2	3.8	7.9		
	Child	10.5	6.1	9.4	15.8		
	None	71.0	57.6	79.2	71.1		
Nature representation						19.34	0.371
	The earth	11.3	-	17.0	13.2		
	Forest	6.5	3.0	3.8	13.2		
	Mountain	5.6	6.1	3.8	7.9		
	Ocean	2.4	-	3.8	2.6		
	Water・Ice	3.2	3.0	3.8	2.6		
	Blue sky・Starry sky	8..9	15.2	7.5	5.3		
	Sunset・Morning glow	2.4	-	1.9	5.3		
	Tree・Leaf	42.7	54.5	41.5	34.2		
	Other	0.8	-	-	2.6		
	None	25.8	27.3	24.5	26.3		
Main color used in advertisements						14.39	0.276
	White system	41.9	45.5	32.1	52.6		
	Blue series	25.0	21.2	30.2	21.1		
	Green series	8.1	9.1	3.8	13.2		
	Orange type	11.3	9.1	13.2	7.9		
	Brown type	2.4	-	5.7	2.6		
	Black series	9.7	15.2	11.3	2.6		
	Other	1.6	-	3.8	-		
Level of greenness[***]						25.42	0.000
	Shallow[**]	41.9	21.2	32.1	73.7		
	Moderate[*]	48.4	68.7	52.8	23.7		
	Deep	9.7	9.1	15.1	2.6		

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

Table.2 The Cross-analysis of coding results on environmental task in each contents of environmentalg advertisements

Advertisement types		Product advertisement	Product advertisement + Corporate advertisement (business)	Corporate advertisement (non-business)	x^2	p-value
	%	%	%	%		
(Total)	100(N=124)	27(N=33)	43(N=53)	31(N=38)		
Environmental tasks[*]					15.64	0.016
Pollution[*]	29.8	24.2	43.4	15.8		
Use of resources[**]	80.6	90.9	92.5	55.3		
Climate change	12.1	9.1	18.9	5.3		
Biodiversity[**]	32.2	9.1	37.7	44.7		

$^* = p < .05, \quad ^{**} = p < .01$

Figure1 Network of frequently used words based on all sampled environmental advertisements

①Product advertisement

②Product advertisement + Corporate advertisement

③Corporate advertisement

Figure2 Distribution figure of relationship between words and advertisement type

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When Love Becomes Hate: The Dark Side of
Consumer-Brand Relationship in Crisis Communication

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Abstract

This study questioned a well-accepted proposition of buffering effects of positive organization-public relationships (OPRs) in crisis communication research. It re-conceptualized OPRs in non-identifying relationship and identifying relationship and examined the possible interaction effects between OPRs and crises on consumer attitudes and emotions, which then influence behavioral intentions. A pilot study and the main study were conducted on Amazon Mechanical-Turk website. Nearly 500 Apple consumers and 400 Whole Foods consumers ($N = 868$) provided usable questionnaires in the main study. Although non-identifying relationships offer the buffering effects, the identifying relationships primarily offer the love-becomes-hate effects. Other findings and implications were discussed.

Consumers' reactions to brand crises are far from uniform. Activists have criticized Nike for its sweatshops in low-wage countries since 1996 (Nisen, 2013). Yet, Nike's sales have still grown in the last decade (Statista, 2015). Alternatively, Martha Stewart's insider trading scandal made her company lose millions of dollars in revenue (Sutel, 2004). Different consumer responses are partly because of the organization-public relationship (OPR) (Coombs, 2007).

Researchers have examined how OPRs influence crisis communication (Brown & White, 2011; Coombs, 2007; Einwiller, Fedorikhin, Johnson, & Kamins, 2006; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Park & Reber, 2011). The findings, however, are mixed. On the one hand, positive and last-lasting OPRs are demonstrated to mitigate threats posed to public attitudes toward organizations, also called *the buffering effect* (Brown & White, 2011; Coombs, 2007; Einwiller et al., 2006; Park & Reber, 2011). On the other hand, sometimes publics who have good relationships with organizations are the organizations' most outspoken antagonists (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire, Tripp, & Legoux, 2009; Johnson, Matear, & Thomson, 2011), also called the *love-becomes-hate* effect (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006, p. 31). The love-becomes-hate effect raises the question whether organizations can rely on strong OPRs to carry them through crises.

The mixed findings may be because different types of OPRs interact with crises to influence publics' reactions. In other words, whether it is buffering effects or love-becomes-hate effects depends on the types of OPRs as well as crises. To explore this possibility, this study brought in marketing literature (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006; Johnson et al., 2011; Lisjak, Lee, & Gardner, 2012) and conceptualized consumer-brand relationships into *non-identifying relationships* and *identifying relationships*. While non-identifying relationships are primarily built on the functional use of the branded products, identifying relationships establish when consumers and a brand share some self-defining attributes (Einwiller et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2011). A crisis can undermine a brand's self-defining attribute(s) (Greyser, 2009). This study proposed that when the brand's self-defining attribute(s) is undermined, identifying relationships offer the love-becomes-hate effects[9] on consumer attitudes and emotions, and behaviors. On the contrary, identifying relationships offer buffering effects when the brand's self-defining attribute is not undermined. The non-identifying relationship offer the buffering effects, regardless of whether the brand's self-defining attribute is undermined in a crisis.

This study contributed to public relations and crisis communication research and practices in multiple ways. First, relationship research has been the identity of public relations research (Coombs & Holladay, 2015). This study advances the theory of OPRs by clarifying when OPRs protect or work against organizations. Second, few studies (Grappi & Romani, 2015) have examined how OPRs influence public emotions in crises. This study forwards our understanding of how OPRs influence consumers' anger, sympathy, and disappointment, which have been found to influence consumer behaviors (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Grappi & Romani, 2015; Xie & Heung, 2012; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). In addition, this study advances our knowledge on consumers with a more precise operationalization of the concept of consumer. The participants of consumer research in public relations often include those who are and are not consumers of an organization's products (Grappi & Romani, 2015; Lee, 2005). This current operationalization of consumer may be problematic because those participants who are not consumers of a brand do not have relationships with the brand an they may respond to a crisis differently than consumers. To overcome this methodological limitation, this study only recruited participants who purchased and used products of a brand.

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[9] This love-becomes-hate effect should be more obvious in preventable crises (Coombs, 2007) when the organization voluntarily conducts a misdeed, compared to when the organization is involuntarily involved in a crisis. Therefore, this study only examined preventable crises.

Consumer-brand Relationships

Consumer-brand relationships can be non-identifying and/or identifying (Johnson et al., 2011[10]), depending on how brands fulfill consumers' needs. Non-identifying relationships establish when consumers purchase products of a brand because of their functional use. Identifying relationships establish when consumers purchase products because the brands help consumers build their self-concept (Bhat & Reddy, 1998).

Non-identifying relationship. According to the marketing literature, a non-identifying relationship includes three dimensions: satisfaction, trust, and commitment (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2011). Hon and Grunig (1999) defined OPR as a four-dimensional concept including satisfaction, trust, commitment, and control mutuality. This OPR definition in public relations is very similar to the non-identifying relationship. A consumer can trust, feel satisfied with, and commit to his/her relationship with the brand, but this does not mean that the relationship helps consumers build their self-concept (Johnson et al., 2011).

Identifying relationship. An identifying relationship, or identification with a brand (Lisjak et al., 2012), is based on self-defining attributes shared between a consumer and a brand (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994): the consumer's "self-concept has many of the same characteristics he or she believes define" the brand, and these characteristics are "distinctive, central, and enduring" (Dutton et al.,1994, p. 239). (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 239).   For example, Harley-Davison's consumers pursue "safe rebellion," which is the defining attribute of this brand according to Baskin (2013, para. 2). A brand represents *who I am* for a consumer when the identifying relationship exists (Johnson et al., 2011). Identifying relationships help consumers build their self-concepts in multiple ways (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Park & John; 2010). For example, college students on Facebook used brands to manage others' perceptions of them (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012).

Identifying Relationships and Crises

A crisis can undermine a brand's defining attributes (Greyser, 2009). For example, a motto of Harvard University is "Veritas" (truth), and truth can be considered as the defining attribute of Harvard. Harvard involved in questionable real estate acquisition practices (Greyser, 2009), but this accusation did not undermine "truth". A crisis that undermines "truth" would be if some Harvard faculties were found to fabricate research findings (Greyser, 2009).

A identifying relationship is built on the defining attributes shared between a consumer and a brand (hereafter refers to as shared attributes). Therefore, a crisis that threatens the brand's defining attributes undermines the identifying relationship. For example, suppose that a consumer has an identifying relationship with a luxury brand because it represents the consumer's economic status. A crisis that would undermine the defining attribute would be that the brand is made with cheap materials and low-wage labor, but is advertised as using expensive materials and experts to hand-craft the products. The issue of cheap manufacturing threatens the brand luxury attribute, and therefore this crisis would threaten the identifying relationship. On the other hand, a crisis that would not undermine the defining attribute would be that the brand pollutes the environment. The issue of pollution has nothing to do with the brand luxury attribute, and therefore this crisis would not threaten the identifying relationship.

Effects of the Consumer-Brand Relationships on Attitudes

Effects of non-identifying relationships on attitudes. A public's interpretation of the crisis and

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[10] Johnson et al. (2011) used the terms *self-neutral* and *self-relevant* to describe these two types of relationships. I suggest that the terms non-identifying and identifying relationships make clearer the differences between these two types of relationships.

its evaluation of the organization are shaped by past interactions with the organization (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Therefore, a "favorable relationship history becomes a bank account of goodwill" that an organization can draw upon in a crisis (Coombs & Holladay, 2001, p. 324). Several studies support the OPR buffering effects on attitudes (e.g.: Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Park & Reber, 2011). For example, Park and Reber (2011) found that publics with positive OPRs perceive an organization as more trustworthy after a crisis than publics with negative OPRs, even when both groups hold the organization accountable.

Despite all the informative research regarding buffering effects of non-identifying relationships, it is unknown whether undermining the shared attributes affects the buffering effects of non-identifying relationships on consumer attitudes. This study argued that such buffering effects occur, regardless of whether a crisis undermines shared attributes. Non-identifying relationships are not built on the shared attributes, therefore non-identifying relationships are not threatened regardless of undermining the shared attributes.

H1: The stronger a non-identifying relationship a consumer has with a brand, the more positive his/her brand attitudes are, regardless of whether the crisis undermines shared attributes.

Effects of identifying relationships on attitudes. The buffering effects of identifying relationships have also been supported empirically (Einwiller et al., 2006; Einwiller & Johar, 2013; Lisjak et al., 2012). For example, when a consumer identifies with a brand, his/her attitudes toward the brand are not affected by an accusation of wrongdoing against the brand, regardless of how the brand responds (Einwiller & Johar, 2013). Despite this empirical support, this study proposed that the buffering effects of identifying relationships only occur when a crisis does not undermine the shared attributes and therefore does not threaten the identifying relationships. A consumer who strongly identifies with a brand may choose to defend the brand and protect his/her self-concept. Consequently, s/he may hesitate to change his/her attitudes.

On the other hand, consumers with good consumer-brand relationships sometimes can become a brand's most outspoken antagonists when their expectations for the brand are not met (Grégoire et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2011). The stronger the identifying relationship was, the more likely a consumer would retaliate against a brand when s/he exited the relationship, including NWOM communication and complaining to a third party (Johnson et al., 2011). This study proposes that when a crisis undermines shared attributes, consumer identifying relationships may have the love-becomes-hate effect on consumer attitudes. This is because violations of shared attributes may destroy the foundations of identifying relationships (Einwiller et al., 2006).

H2: The stronger an identifying relationship a consumer has with a brand, (a) the more positive his/her brand attitudes are, when a crisis does not undermine shared attributes. (b) the more negative his/her brand attitudes are, when a crisis undermines shared attributes.

Effects of the Consumer-Brand Relationships on Emotions

Effects of the non-identifying relationships on emotions. *Anger.* Consumer non-identifying relationships may reduce anger. Anger is the primary emotion that consumers expressed during a preventable product recall crisis (Choi & Lin, 2009). Grappi and Romani (2015) found that brand reputation decreased consumer anger in a preventable crisis. Johnson et al. (2011) also found that non-identifying relationships reduced *hatred* toward brands, even when consumers exited from their relationships with the brands.

Sympathy. A consumer who has a strong non-identifying relationship with a brand may feel sympathetic toward the brand. Consumers are more sympathetic toward their favorite brand than a less

favorite brand, when the brand was victimized by a product tampering crisis (Stockmyer, 1996). Grappi and Romani (2015) also found that brand reputation increases consumer sympathy toward a brand in preventable crisis.

Disappointment. Non-identifying relationships may mitigate consumer disappointment. People felt disappointed at an agent when they held the agent responsible for an undesirable situation, and thought that the agent did something the agent should not have done (Van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2002). Xie and Heung (2012) found that consumers with high quality brand relationships expressed a lower amount of negative emotions, measured by a combination of disappointment, anger, and offense.

Non-identifying relationships are not built on the shared attributes, thus it is not threatened regardless of undermining the shared attributes. In this case, the consumer reservoir of goodwill based on non-identifying relationships may mitigate anger and disappointment and increase sympathy toward the brand.

H3: The stronger a non-identifying relationship a consumer has with a brand, the less anger s/he feels toward the brand in a crisis, regardless of whether the crisis undermines shared attributes.

H4: The stronger a non-identifying relationship a consumer has with a brand, the more sympathetic s/he feels toward the brand in a crisis, regardless of whether the crisis undermines shared attributes.

H5: The stronger a non-identifying relationship a consumer has with a brand, the less disappointed s/he feels with the brand in a crisis, regardless of whether the crisis undermines the shared attributes.

Effects of the identifying relationship on emotions. *Anger.* How the identifying relationships affect consumer anger may depend on whether a crisis undermines the shared attribute. Johnson et al. (2011) found that identifying relationships increase consumer hatred toward brands, even when consumers exited from their relationships with the brands. However, the crises may moderate this love-becomes-hate effect. When a crisis does not undermine shared attributes, identifying relationships may decrease consumer anger. Similar to how identifying relationships may influence brand attitudes, a consumer who has an identifying relationship with a brand may choose to defend the brand and protect his/her self-concept. Therefore, s/he may mitigate anger toward the brand in order to protect his/her self-concept.

When a crisis undermines shared attributes, a consumer who has an identifying relationship with the brand may feel the brand compromised the foundation of the identifying relationship (Einwiller et al., 2006) and violated the consumer expectations of the brand based on the identifying relationship. Stronger identifying relationships may indicate stronger expectations and therefore stronger violation, and this violation may lead to anger (Ward & Ostrom, 2006).

Sympathy. When the shared attributes are not undermined, identifying relationships are not threatened and therefore they should increase consumer sympathy toward the brand, just like reputation increases consumer sympathy (Grappi & Romani, 2015). Conversely, when a crisis undermines the shared attributes, a consumer with a strong identifying relationship may feel that the brand harms the identifying relationship. As a result, the consumer may think that the brand deserves the consequences. This may reduce his/her sympathy toward the brand.

Disappointment. The effects of the identifying relationship on disappointment may also be moderated by crises. When a crisis does not undermine shared attributes, identifying relationships may reduce consumer disappointment with a brand. Xie and Heung's (2012) findings that brand relationships decreased a combination of disappointment, anger, and offense indirectly support this possibility. On the contrary, when a crisis undermines shared attributes, consumers with strong identifying relationships

may feel the crisis revealed the true nature of the brand and feel abandoned by the brand, and therefore they may feel disappointed at the brand (Van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2002).

H6: The stronger an identifying relationship a consumer has with a brand, (a) the less anger s/he feels toward the brand, when a crisis does not undermine shared attributes. (b) the more anger s/he feels toward the brand, when a crisis undermines shared attributes.

H7: The stronger an identifying relationship a consumer has with a brand, (a) the more sympathetic s/he feels toward the brand, when a crisis does not undermine shared attributes; (b) the less sympathetic s/he feels toward the brand, when a crisis undermines shared attributes.

H8: The stronger an identifying relationship a consumer has with a brand, (a) the less disappointed s/he feels toward the brand, when a crisis does not undermine shared attributes; (b) the more disappointed s/he feels toward the brand, when a crisis undermines shared attributes.

Effects of Attitudes and Emotions on Consumer Behaviors

Attitudes. Consumer positive attitudes lead to their support to the brand (Lyon & Cameron, 2004; McDonald, Sparks, & Glendon, 2010). Consumer positive attitudes toward a company increased purchase intention even in crises that were caused by the company (Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Attitudes negatively predicted NWOM communication intention across different crises (McDonald et al., 2010). Hypothesis nine is proposed to replicate these results.

H9: The more positive attitudes a consumer has toward a brand, **(**a) the less NWOM intention s/he has; (b) the more purchase intention s/he has.

Emotions. The less anger a consumer feels, the less intention s/he has to engage in NWOM communication, and the more intention s/he has to buy the brand's products (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Grappi & Romani, 2015). The more sympathetic a consumer felt toward a brand, the less intention s/he has to engage in NWOM communication, the more purchase intention s/he has (Grappi & Romani, 2015; Stockmyer, 1996). The more disappointed consumers felt after their service experiences, the more NWOM communication they engaged in (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). Xie and Hueng (2012) found that a combination of disappointment, anger, and offense increased consumer NWOM intention and decreased their purchase intention. The following hypothese sought to replicate the findings on anger and sympathy and examine how disappointment influences behavioral intentions.

H10: The angrier a consumer feels toward a brand, (a) the more NWOM intention s/he has; (b) the less purchase intention s/he has.

H11: The more sympathetic a consumer feels toward a brand, (a) the less NWOM intention s/he has; (b) the more purchase intention s/he has.

H12: The more disappointed a consumer feels toward a brand, (a) the more NWOM intention s/he has; (b) the less purchase intention s/he has.

Please refer to Figure 1 for the proposed model. Attributed responsibility to a brand was included in the model as a control variable, because its effect on public evaluation of a crisis has been well supported in research (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Ma & Zhan, 2016).
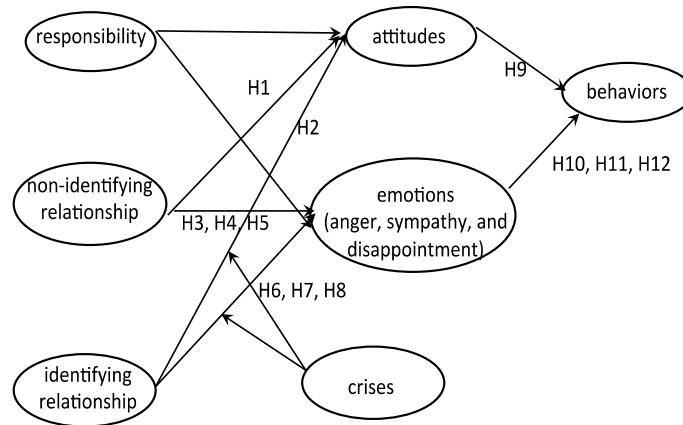
Figure 1. Mo   es

Method

Pilot Study

The purpose of the pilot study is to select two real brands for inclusion in the main study with which consumers have identifying relationships and clear shared attributes. Thirty-six participants were recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk website, including 18 males and 18 females. Apple and Whole Foods Market were selected. The self-defining attribute that participants shared with Apple was "innovativeness." The shared attribute of Whole Foods was "embracing of a healthy lifestyle."

Procedures

A 2 (brand type: Apple or Whole Foods) × 2 (crisis type: undermining or not undermining self-defining attribute) experiment was posted on Amazon M-Turk website. Participants' non-identifying and identifying relationships were first measured. Then, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two crisis conditions of one brand, depending whether the participant was an Apple or Whole Foods consumer. After reading about a crisis, participants answered close-ended questions regarding their attitudes, emotions, and behavioral intentions. All the questions was randomized to eliminate ordering effects. Participants' demographic data were also obtained.

Crisis type was manipulated in the context of a hypothetical news story. For Apple, the crisis undermining innovativeness was that Apple stole technology from another major technology company, and the crisis not undermining innovativeness was that Apple avoided tax. For Whole Foods, the crisis undermining embracing of a healthy lifestyle was that Whole Foods sold un-organic and unhealthy food for two weeks, and the crisis not undermining embracing of a healthy lifestyle was that Whole Foods opposed to its employees' unionization. The participants were debriefed that the crises were fictional before they exited the study.

Participants

Four hundred seventy-three Apple consumers provided useable questionnaires. About forty percent of the participants ($N = 187$) were males, and about 54% of the participants were females ($N = 255$). Most Apple consumer participants were Euro-American ($N = 315$, 66.6%), followed by Asian-American ($N = 41$, 8.7%), African-American ($N = 25$, 5.3%), Hispanic-American ($N = 18$, 3.8%), and other ($N = 43$, 9.1%). Thirty-one participants did not respond to the questions of gender and race. Three hundred ninety-five Whole Foods consumers provided usable questionnaires. Thirty-five percent of the participants ($N = 138$) were males, and 59% of the participants were females ($N = 233$). The majority were Euro-American ($N = 248$, 62.8%), followed by African-American ($N = 32$, 8.1%), Asian-American

($N = 27$, 6.8%), Hispanic-American ($N = 21$, 5.3%), and other ($N = 43$, 10.9%). Twenty-four participants did not respond to the questions of gender and race.

Manipulation Checks

The manipulations of both the Apple crises and the Whole Foods crises were effective.[11]

Measures

Relationships, attitudes, emotions, and behavioral intentions were all measured on an eleven-point scale. Non-identifying relationships, including satisfaction, trust, and commitment, were measured by ten items (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006, 2008). The identifying relationship was measured by seven items (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Brand attitude was measured by four items (Grappi & Romani, 2015). Anger was measured by four items (Jin, 2010). Participants responded to a three-item scale of sympathy adapted from previous research (Grappi & Romani, 2015; Jin, 2010; Ma, 2015). Consumers' disappointment was measured by three items (Yi & Baumgartner, 2004; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). NWOM intention was measured by a five-item scale (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Grappi & Romani, 2015). Purchase intention was measured by a three-item scale (Currás-Pérez, Bigné-Alcañiz, & Alvarado-Herrera, 2009). All the scales were reliable.[12]

Results

SEM Model Fit

The proposed moderation effect of crisis situations were examined by conducting a multiple-group structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis where multiple-group was the two crises. A three-step multiple-group SEM was performed in *Mplus* software.

Apple. After adding four modifications that made theoretical sense, the model fit fairly well into the data according to four model fit indices suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999) when all the path coefficients were constrained to be equal across two crises: normed $\chi^2 = 2.00$ (($\chi^2(36) = 71.83$ ($p < .001$)), $SRMR = .05 < .09$, $CFI = .98 > .96$, although one criterion was still not met: $RMSEA = .08 > .06$. This indicated that there is no moderation of the crises. The model explained a good amount of the variance of the outcome variables, with R^2 ranging from .71 to .78.

Whole Foods. After adding four modifications that made theoretical sense and that are identical to the ones that added to the model tested in the Apple data, the model fit fairly well into the data when all the path coefficients were constrained to be equal across the two crises: normed $\chi^2 = 1.53$ (($\chi^2(36) = 54.89$ ($p = .002$)), $SRMR = .05 < .09$, $CFI = .98 > .96$, although RMSEA was slightly above .06: $RMSEA = .07 > .06$. This indicated that there is no moderation of the crises. The model explained a good amount of the variance of the outcome variables, with R^2 ranging from .68 to .75.

Hypothesis Testing

H1 was supported. The path coefficient[13] from the non-identifying relationship to attitudes was $\beta = .41$ ($p < .001$) for Apple consumers and $\beta = .39$ ($p < .001$) for the Whole Foods consumers, both indicating a large effect of the non-identifying relationship on attitudes, holding attributed responsibility and identifying relationship constant. This effect of non-identifying relationship on attitudes held cross both crises for both brands.

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[11] The t-test statistics were available upon request due to space limit.

[12] Reliability statisitcs are available upon request.

[13] Standardized path coefficients were reported. According to Keith (2006), a standardized coefficient below .05 is too small to be meaningful; a coefficient between .05-.10 is a small effect; a coefficient between .10-.25 is a moderate effect; a coefficient above .25 is a large effect.

H2(a) was partially supported. For the Apple consumers: the path coefficient from the identifying relationship to attitudes was small but statistically significant at the significance level of .10: $\beta = 0.10$ ($p = .06$) in the context of tax avoidance crisis. For the Whole Foods consumers, the path coefficient was not significant: $\beta = -0.06$ ($p = .29$) in the context of anti-unionization crisis. Because the path coefficients held the same across both crises for each brand, H2b was not supported.

H3 was supported. For Apple, the path coefficient from the non-identifying relationship to anger was $\beta = -0.17$ ($p = .003$) in both crisis conditions. For Whole Foods, the path coefficient was $\beta = -0.13$ ($p = .004$) in both crisis conditions. Both coefficients indicated a moderate effect.

H4 was not supported. The path coefficient from the non-identifying relationship to sympathy for Apple consumers was not statistically significant $\beta = -0.03$ ($p = .53$), so was for the Whole Foods consumers $\beta = 0.01$ ($p = .79$). Non-identifying relationship had no effects on sympathy across different crisis situations.

H5 was supported. For the Apple consumers, the path coefficient from the non-identifying relationship to disappointment was $\beta = -0.13$ ($p = .04$) in both crisis conditions. For the Whole Foods consumers, the path coefficient was $\beta = -0.11$ ($p = .03$) in both crisis conditions. Both coefficients indicated a moderate effect of the non-identifying relationships on disappointment.

H6a was not supported, but H6b was supported. The coefficient from the identifying relationship to anger was $\beta = 0.14$ ($p = .02$) for Apple consumers in both crisis conditions and $\beta = 0.16$ ($p = .003$) for Whole Foods consumers in both crisis conditions. There was a positive relation of moderate magnitude for both brands between these two constructs, regardless of the crises.

H7a was supported, but H7b was not supported. The identifying relationship had a positive relation with sympathy for the Apple consumers ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$) in both crisis conditions and for Whole Foods consumers ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < .001$) in both crisis conditions. The relation for both brands was of a large magnitude.

H8 was partially supported, as the identifying relationship had a positive effect of a moderate magnitude on disappointment for both brands, regardless of the crises. The path coefficient was $\beta = 0.18$ ($p = .005$) for the Apple consumers and $\beta = 0.19$ ($p = .001$) for Whole Foods consumers.

H9 was supported. Attitudes had a large negative effect on NWOM intentions for both Apple consumers ($\beta = -0.77$, $p < .001$) and Whole Foods consumers ($\beta = -0.61$, $p < .001$). Attitudes also had a large positive effect on purchase intentions for both Apple consumers ($\beta = 0.87$, $p < .001$) and Whole Foods consumers ($\beta = 0.87$, $p < .001$).

H10a was supported. Anger had a large positive effect on NWOM intentions for Apple consumers ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) and Whole Foods consumers ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$). H6b was partially supported: the path coefficient from anger to purchase intentions was of a moderate magnitude for Apple consumers: $\beta = -.19$ ($p = .001$). For the Whole Foods consumers, the path coefficient was not statistically significant $\beta = -.07$ ($p = .296$), indicating no effects from anger on purchase intentions.

H11 was not supported. The path coefficient from sympathy to NWOM intentions was positive for both Apple consumers ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < .001$) and the Whole Foods consumers ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = .007$), both indicating a moderate effect. The path coefficient from sympathy to purchase intentions was not statistically significant for either brand (Apple: $\beta = -0.02$, $p = .430$; Whole Foods: $\beta = -0.05$, $p = .170$), indicating that sympathy had no effects on purchase intentions.

H12a was not supported. The path coefficient from disappointment to NWOM intentions was not statistically significant for either brand (Apple: $\beta = -0.06$, $p = .366$; Whole Foods: $\beta = 0.09$, $p = .209$). Disappointment had not effects on NWOM intentions. H12b was not supported, either. The path coefficient from disappointment to purchase intentions derived from the Apple consumers was $\beta = 0.20$ ($p < .001$), which was a positive relation of moderate magnitude. The path coefficient for the Whole Foods consumers was not statistically significant: $\beta = 0.04$, $p = 0.57$, indicating no effects from

disappointment on purchase intentions.[14]

Discussions

The influences of non-identifying relationships and identifying relationships on crisis communication do not depend on the crises. However, these two types of OPRs influence consumer attitudes, emotions, and behaviors differently. The non-identifying relationships offer the buffering effects, while the identifying relationships primarily offer the love-becomes-hate effects.

The Buffering Effects of Non-Identifying Relationships

Strong non-identifying relationships lead to more positive attitudes, less anger, and less disappointment. The buffering effects of the non-identifying relationships were found in both the crisis that undermined the shared attributes and the one that did not. Non-identifying relationships had no effects on sympathy. A non-identifying relationship establishes when branded products fulfill consumer functional needs (Johnson et al., 2011). Consequently, the non-identifying relationship mitigates anger and disappointment, so that consumers can continue to meet their functional needs using the branded products. However, consumers do not need to feel sympathetic in order to continue using the brands. As a result, the non-identifying relationship does not influence sympathy.

The Buffering Effects of Identifying Relationships

The identifying relationship had small effects on attitudes for Apple consumers, but had no effects for Whole Foods consumers. In general, consumers that strongly identify with a brand may not perceive the brand more positively than those that don't or weakly identify with the brand. The identifying relationships offered a buffering effect in large magnitude for both brands on sympathy. Perceived similarity relates to sympathy (Westmaas & Silver, 2006). The shared self-defining attributes indicate the similarity between the brand and the consumers. As a result, the identifying relationship increases sympathy. However, the identifying relationships offered the love-becomes-hate effect on anger and disappointment.

The Love-Becomes-Hate Effects of Identifying Relationships

Consumers who strongly identify with a brand feel more anger. Consumers who have strong identifying relationships consider the brand connection as part of their self-concept (Dutton et al., 1994). The brands' wrongdoing may compromise consumer self-concept. Consequently, the consumers' psychological well-being is harmed and they feel angry at the brand. Meanwhile, consumers who have strong identifying relationships may feel betrayed, and this sense of betrayal may also lead to anger.

Identifying relationships also increase disappointment. People feel disappointed when others' behaviors fail relational expectations and the outcomes are out of their control (Frijda et al., 1989). Consumers who have strong identifying relationships may have higher expectations for the brands, and the discrepancy between consumer expectations and brand misbehaviors is more obvious for these consumers. Therefore, they feel more disappointed when the brand does something unethical. Meanwhile, consumers who have strong identifying relationships may feel betrayed and abandoned by the brand. Sense of abandonment then may lead to disappointment (Van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2002).

The love-becomes-hate effects of the identifying relationships questioned the proposition that strong OPRs always have buffering effects (Brown & White, 2011; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Park & Reber, 2011). By re-conceptualizing OPRs into non-identifying and identifying relationships, this study showed that whether strong OPRs protect or work against organizations depends on the types of OPRs. Although the non-identifying relationships offer buffering effects, the identifying relationships intensify

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[14] The SEM diagrams are available upon request.

the negative emotions of consumers. The love-becomes-hate effects of the identifying relationships also casts doubt on the marketing view that identification and positive expectations "are generally positive influences on reactions to a company" (Einwiller et al., 2006, p. 191).

The Effects of Attitudes and Emotions on Behavioral Intentions

Consumer attitudes have a strong negative relation with the NWOM intentions and a strong positive relation with the purchase intentions. These findings supported the previous findings (Lyon & Cameron, 2004; McDonald et al., 2010). Because the non-identifying relationships increase attitudes, the non-identifying relationships offered indirect buffering effects on behavioral intentions via the mediation of attitudes. Conversely, identifying relationships in general had no indirect effects on behavioral intentions via attitudes.

Consumer anger increased NWOM intentions for both brands, and these findings supported the previous findings (Coombs & Holladay, 2007; Grappi & Romani, 2015). However, anger only decreased purchase intentions of the Apple consumers, not of the Whole Foods consumers. This could be because compared to buying electronic products occasionally, buying groceries is a daily routine. Therefore, consumers of Whole Foods hesitate to change their daily life, even if they felt angry at the brand's actions. Because the non-identifying relationship tempered anger, the non-identifying relationship offered indirect buffering effect on behavioral intentions via decreasing anger. On the contrary, the identifying relationship had the indirect love-becomes-hate effect on behavioral intentions via increasing anger. In other words, consumers that strongly identify with a brand are more likely to engage in NWOM and are less likely to purchase its products in the future.

Consumer sympathy increased NWOM intentions but had no effect on purchase intention. When consumers feel sympathetic toward a brand, they may question its ability. Consequently, consumers may voice their doubt about the brand ability in their communication with other people. As for the indirect effects of the OPRs on consumer behavioral intentions via the mediation of sympathy, the identifying relationships offer indirect love-becomes-hate effects on NWOM intentions via increasing sympathy. Sympathy had no effect on purchase intentions. Although people who feel sympathetic toward others are more likely to help and support others (Weiner, 2004), consumers do not buy the products of a brand that they feel sorry for.

Consumer disappointment had no effect on NWOM intentions. When people get disappointed in someone, they tend to escape from the situation and avoid the disappointing people (Van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2002). Consumers who feel disappointed in the brand may choose to avoid mentioning it in their conservations with other people. Disappointment had no effects on purchase intentions of the Whole Foods consumers, and this can also be explained by the avoidance tendency of person-related disappointment (Van Dijk & Zeelenberg, 2002). Counter-intuitively, disappointment increased purchase intentions for Apple consumers. In this study, Apple consumer participants may feel disappointed at Apple for how the brand treated its business competitor or the government. However, the participants still perceive Apple more positively than its competitor or the government. Therefore, Apple consumers are more willing to give Apple a second chance. However, Whole Foods consumer participants may be connected to the victims in the crises who were other consumers or Whole Foods' employees. Therefore, these consumers feel reluctant to forgive Whole Foods.

Generally speaking, disappointment had limited effects on consumer behavioral intentions. Although the non-identifying relationships temper disappointment, this buffering effect on disappointment did not translate into behavioral intentions. Similarly, although the identifying relationships increased disappointment, this love-become-hate effect on disappointment did not influence consumer behavioral intentions.

Conclusion

The addition of the identifying relationship to the conceptualization of OPRs advanced our

understanding of the effects of OPRs in crisis communication. This reconceptualization of OPRs into non-identifying relationship and identifying relationship explains when the buffering effects happen and when the love-becomes-hate effects happen. The effects of strong OPRs depend on which type of OPRs are established and are prominent between consumers and brands. Generally speaking, the non-identifying relationships offer the buffering effects, while the identifying relationships offer the love-becomes-hate effects.

This study adds to emotion research by showing that besides attributed responsibility, consumer-brand relationships also affect emotions. Strong non-identifying relationships reduce negative emotions including anger and disappointment. However, the identifying relationships increase anger and disappointment. Some types of positive emotions can have negative influences on consumer behavioral intentions. Sympathy increases consumer NWOM intentions. In addition, some negative emotions, like disappointment, have limited effects on behavioral intentions. As a result, even if consumers feel disappointed at an organization, this disappointment does not change consumer behaviors.

Consumers are vital to organizations. With a precise operationalization of the concept of consumer, this study has results that are different from previous findings, such as the effect of sympathy on NWOM intentions. The operationalization of a key concept makes a difference on the findings.

Practical Implications

Organizations should build strong non-identifying relationships with their consumers prior to a crisis, as such relationships protect organizations by mitigating consumer negative reactions. Brands can rely on strong non-identifying relationships to carry them through difficult crisis times, even when their brand essence is damaged in the crisis. Because the non-identifying relationship is built more on consumer functional needs, companies should focus on the quality of their products and how their products can better meet consumer functional needs.

Organizations, however, should be aware of the possible negative consequences of strong identifying relationships. Although identifying relationships can increase consumer loyalty when no crisis happens, such relationships backfire against organizations when a crisis occurs. In their messages to consumers, companies should not stress that their products help consumers express their identity. In other words, companies should be cautious when they send out messages with meaning of "if you are this kind of person, you should use our products."

Organizations should not attempt to make their consumers sympathetic toward them. Sympathy may indicate that consumers question the ability of organizations. If consumers voice such doubt in their daily communication with others, this NWOM communication may affect how others perceive the brand and whether they will purchase its products in the future. In addition, organizations do not need to worry too much even if their consumers feel disappointed in them, as disappointment does not affect behavioral intentions very much.

Limitations and Future Research

This study had several theoretical or methodological limitations. It only focused on the preventable crises. It is possible that in victim and accidental crises, the examined relationships may function differently. For example, when an organization is the victim of a crisis, sympathy may still increase consumer support for the organization. Methodologically, the tested SEM model was a path model to keep the sample size manageable, and therefore the measurement error of the scales was neglected. The measurement error may attenuate the examined relationships. Moreover, the outcome constructs in this study were behavioral intentions instead of actual behaviors. The actual behaviors would be more convincing.

Crisis communication scholars can test the effects of the non-identifying relationships and the identifying relationships in victim and accidental crises. Moreover, the majority of the participants in

this study were Euro-Americans, and they were not representative of the racial-ethnic diversity of the U.S population. Future research might examine the hypothesized relationships with other brands whose consumers are more representative of the U.S. population.

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Public Relations Leadership Development Cycle: A Cross-cultural Perspective

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Abstract

Using 51 purposive in-depth interviews with PR practitioners and students across five countries, this exploratory study examined when public relations leadership dimensions appear/are learned and how they are manifested. Cross-cultural differences and commonalities are noted, as are implications for leadership development.

Although leadership development has been studied for 50 years (Day, 2000), no studies about how leadership evolves over time in public relations professionals is known to exist, despite previous research (Berger & Meng, 2014) that found developing future PR leaders is a top priority globally to help advance both organizations and the profession.

This study uses a model of excellent public relations leadership (Meng, Berger, Gower, & Heyman, 2012) to examine factors that shape leadership development across the professional lifespan in five countries: Brazil, China, India, Russia and the United States. The importance of this study lies in its anticipated theoretical and practical implications for public relations leadership development across cultures. In particular, the results contribute to a better understanding of what leadership behaviors emerge at what age/phase of development and what kinds of leadership interventions might be implemented to facilitate public relations leaders' growth.

Literature Review

Scholarly research on leadership has increased dramatically over the past two decades (Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden, & Hu, 2014), but despite this focus, scholarship still does not offer a unifying theory of leadership development (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). However, research has shown that early leadership experiences shape leadership behaviors later in life (e.g. Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella & Osteen, 2006; Murphy & Johnson, 2011).

Murphy (2011) summarized research on leadership tasks and developmental stages, suggesting that the development of leadership skills starts as early as the preschool years. The Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella & Osteen, 2006) also describes a continuum of leadership development over time: from childhood, when people are *dependent* on other leaders; to high school and beyond, when people evolve to become *independent* leaders; and then to the highest leadership stage, when they become *interdependent* leaders.

Based on a review of 25 years of research and theory, Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm and McKee (2014) defined leadership development as an interdependent process of enhancing individual leadership capabilities and expanding the collective capacity of organizations. To evolve to the highest levels of leadership, organizational practices such as 360-degree feedback, executive coaching, networking, new job assignments, and active learning are believed to be beneficial (Day, 2000). However, there is no solid scientific evidence of these practices' actual effectiveness. What is known is that "leadership is developed through the enactment of leadership" (Day, 2000, p. 605). In other words, leadership development is most meaningful in the context of actual work. The same philosophy can be applied to youth leadership, and particularly, to college and university programs. For instance, research by Erzikova & Berger (2012) found that student-led projects were among the pedagogies deemed by PR educators to be most useful in teaching leadership.

Overall, the effectiveness of leadership learning interventions in organizations largely depends on how leadership development is conceptualized. Most successful companies move beyond a traditional approach, where, for example, the leader is responsible for leadership functions, to a more contemporary approach, where all employees are expected to participate in leadership processes (Day, Zaccaro & Helpin, 2004). In these latter types of organizations, the growth of leaders is seen as a widespread, ongoing developmental process, not as a number of specific professional development trainings undertaken by a select few.

Although not every leadership development method is appropriate across all leader development stages (childhood, adolescence, adulthood), mentoring is a powerful approach that can be applied to every leadership development phase across the lifespan (Solansky, 2010; Eby et al., 2013). Similar to leader-follower relationships that imply "raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation" (Burns, 1978, p. 20), mentoring relationships can have a life-long impact on both mentee and mentor. In fact, a positive mentoring context (i.e., proximity between mentor and mentee, social and emotional connection, long-term goals, assessment immediacy) itself mirrors the development of transformational leadership (Middlebrooks & Haberkorn, 2009).

Youth mentoring entails a supportive relationship between a non-parental adult and a young person. Based on the apprenticeship model of education, *academic* mentorship implies that a teacher facilitates students' academic development both inside and outside of the classroom. Most common forms of education-based mentorship include academic support, psychosocial support, and role modeling (Gershenfeld, 2014). *Workplace* mentoring occurs in an organizational setting and aims to help novices adjust to their organizations and to facilitate their career advancement. In particular, within organizations, mentoring might focus on instrumental support (providing instruction and feedback) and/or psychosocial support (role modeling and encouragement) (Kram, 1985).

The aforementioned global study of leadership in public relations (Berger & Meng, 2014) revealed that participants learned more about excellent leadership from role models and/or mentors on the job than from university education or management development programs. Further, professionals with more than 20 years of experience rated the power of role models significantly higher than did less experienced professionals.

The model of excellent public relations leadership (Meng et al., 2012) comprises six interrelated personal dimensions and one structural/cultural dimension (see Figure 1). The personal dimensions are: self-dynamics (i.e. self-insights and vision), team leadership and collaboration capabilities, ethical orientation, relationship-building skills, strategic decision-making capability, and communication knowledge management and expertise. A seventh dimension, organizational structure and culture, influences the environment for, and practice of, leadership. A survey of nearly 4,500 public relations practitioners in 23 countries supported the universality of the seven dimensions in everyday public relations practice (Berger & Meng, 2014).
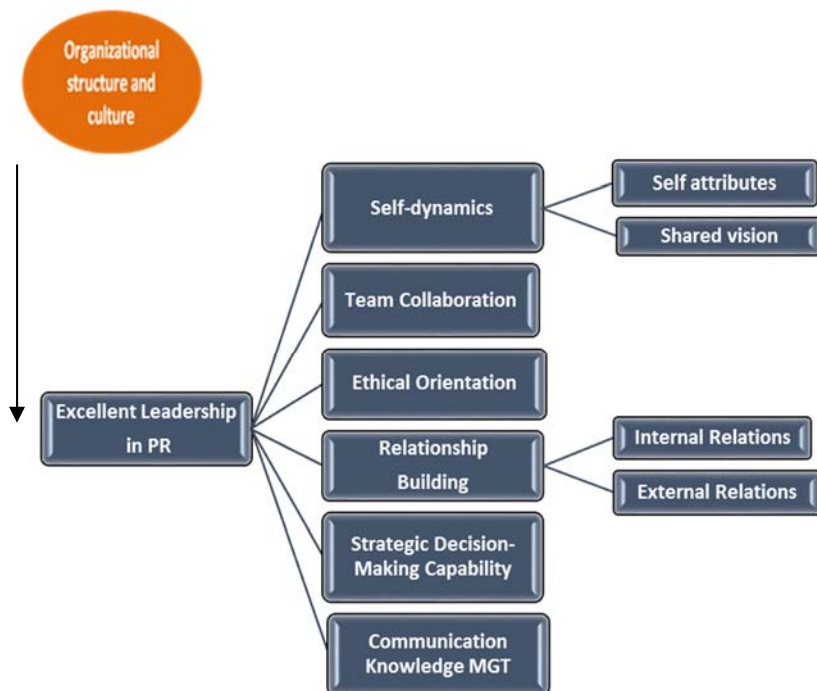
Figure 1. The model of excellent public relations leadership by Meng, Berger, Gower, and Heyman (2012) (reprinted with permission).

Based on the discussion above, the following exploratory research questions regarding leadership development over time were proposed to obtain qualitative data about the global leadership dimensions (Berger & Meng, 2014) to help glean insights about 1) when these dimensions appear/are learned and 2) how they are manifested:

RQ 1: What are public relations practitioners' perceptions of leadership development across the professional lifespan?

RQ 2: What are public relations students' perceptions of leadership development?

RQ 3: Are the development stages of leadership in public relations different from those of other fields or professions? If so, how?

RQ 4: How effective do people perceive formal educational activities (e.g. college curricula, professional seminars and workshops) and informal PR leadership education (e.g. mentoring, self-learning) to be in developing or eliciting leadership in public relations?

RQ 5: What is the role of mentors (e.g. parents, teachers, colleagues) and peer models in developing public relations leadership skills/abilities?

RQ 6: What are the effects of organizational (cultural) conditions on public relations leadership development?

Method

Purposive in-depth interviews with PR practitioners and students from five countries (Brazil, China, India, Russia and the U.S.) were conducted in person or by telephone by experienced scholars,[15] using an interview guide. The guide was piloted in the U.S., and then researchers in each of the countries translated it into their respective native languages, as

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[15] Participating scholars are native speakers of the countries in this study and have published research and hold academic rank at universities.

applicable. In each country, interviews were conducted with 1) five public relations practitioners of varied experience who were considered to be leaders based on their positions/titles and 2) at least five public relations students at varying stages of college study who were considered to be leaders by their professors and/or peers.

Overall, 51 participants were interviewed in person or by telephone: 25 practitioners (14 females and 11 males), who ranged in age from mid-20s to mid-60s and had a combined 430 years of public relations experience, and 26 students (10 males and 16 females), who were sophomore- through graduate-level (19 undergraduates and 7 graduate students). Interviews were transcribed in the native language by native speakers and summarized. Interviewees were asked to review the summaries to perform member checks (Creswell, 2014) to ensure the transcriptions accurately reflected their respective comments and views. The checked summaries, transcriptions and translations were divided and reviewed by the two study PIs, who then compared and contrasted them to identify common patterns and outlying perspectives. Miles & Huberman's (1994) three-step approach was used to analyze interview transcripts. During the data reduction/condensation phase, transcripts were carefully read to identify re-occurring themes to cluster and code them. To facilitate preliminary conclusion drawing, data were displayed by research question in the form of short blocks of texts to study patterns, and then preliminary conclusions were reviewed and verified by both PIs during the analysis process.

Findings

RQ 1: What are public relations practitioners' perceptions of leadership development across the lifespan? Across the five countries analyzed, the professionals interviewed believed they began learning leadership skills at an early age: most were in elementary school and began learning to be a leader as a result of family necessity (e.g. being the eldest child) or through sports teams or in their classrooms. A female PR leader from China mentioned she started learning leadership skills *"through all the school activities and the gymnastic training my parents threw me into."*

Brazilian and Indian professionals reported first joining a group/organization in their teens, while the majority of U.S. and Russian professionals joined in elementary school. U.S., Indian, Chinese, and Russian professionals tended to be group members in school/sports, while the majority of Brazilian practitioners were first members of church groups. A minority of respondents reported first learning leadership skills and serving as a leader in college or as a professional. In Russia, India, and the U.S., leadership was first exhibited most often through school (e.g. classroom "commanders," extra-curricular/sports activities and student council/government, respectively).

RQ2: What are public relations students' perceptions of leadership development stages in the public relations field? Similar to the professional respondents, the majority of student respondents from every country except Brazil believed they began learning leadership skills at an early age, while serving as class monitors or through sports during grade school, whereas four of the five interviewed students from Brazil reported learning leadership skills as teenagers. Two Brazilian students were first team leaders through church activities; another two, through high school/college work. All students from China mentioned that extracurricular activities in grade school and university provided them with opportunities to learn leadership skills. Two Chinese students reported learning leadership skills at elementary school after their teachers assigned them to be group leaders.

All students from India reported being in grade school when they first began learning these skills. The skills they reported learning were as follows: how to work with people, how to lead in an egalitarian manner, how to remain calm and in control during difficult times, and how to work selflessly for the welfare of the entire team. Four of the five Indian students were involved in leadership capacities for NGOs at the time of the interviews. An Indian undergraduate student said, *"In my life, I'm very fortunate to learn leadership skills at the age of 11 because I'm a trained Bharatnatyam dancer. For a dancer, leadership skills are very important because we have to synchronize and form a group from the very start of our learning."*

The majority of Russian students indicated they were 7 years old when they began learning leadership skills. Four of the five first served as class leaders in elementary school. The majority of U.S. students reported being 10 or younger when they began learning leadership skills. Most were first leaders on sports teams; two were leaders through Student Council.

RQ 3: Are the development stages of leadership in public relations different from those of other fields or professions? If so, how? The majority of Russian and Indian professionals, two practitioners from China and one U.S. practitioner believed there was no difference in PR and other fields' leadership development; however, the majority of Brazilian and U.S. practitioners said there was a difference. The Brazilian respondents believed that PR leadership development was hindered more than in other fields because of the nature of PR education (i.e. not enough emphasis on leadership or entrepreneurship in college to help facilitate and motivate future PR leaders). In contrast, some U.S., Indian, and Chinese professionals believed the complex nature of PR professionals' roles (i.e. internal/external listener/scanner/communicator, counselor) may help hasten—or at least set apart—leadership development in PR professionals.

There was consensus across practitioners that the six PR leadership qualities (Meng & Berger, 2013)—self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship-building skills, strategic decision-making capability and communication knowledge and expertise—were important leadership skills across all professions/fields. However, several participants indicated the amount of emphasis on these six characteristics could vary by profession.

Communication knowledge and expertise was viewed by interviewees as a must for PR leaders. For example, a study participant from India said, "*I think basic knowledge and expertise, as far as your own domain is concerned, is a basic whether you're a leader in PR or you're a leader in another field.*" A Brazilian practitioner stated, *"Perhaps leadership comes as a consequence of good work,"* even when not actively sought or pursued. Alluding to strategic decision-making capability, a Brazilian undergraduate student said, *"I think the public relations person ... should be in top management ... playing strategic roles, aligned to the goals of the organization...."* A U.S. practitioner said, *"Leadership is about taking calculated risks. And being confident and comfortable doing that...."* A U.S. practitioner in her 60s noted, *"A critical component of leadership is always being prepared for what's around the corner when you don't even know what's around the corner."*

The importance of "soft skills" (i.e. the "human touch"), which were also highlighted in the global study (Jin, 2014), was alluded to by at least one practitioner in every country. For example, an Indian practitioner said, *"First of all, you need to learn what soft skills are because ... being able to kind of catch the wavelength of every individual client and then connect with him, that's a bit of a tricky job. That is a little different from maybe a manufacturing or any technical discipline."*

Ethics, entrepreneurship, and collaboration were mentioned as particularly important for PR leaders by at least one responding practitioner in every country except Russia. Being visionary was mentioned by at least one practitioner in each country except India and China, while measurement/ evaluation was mentioned as a key leadership function only by some Indian and U.S. practitioners. Two Chinese practitioners emphasized the ability to respond quickly as being necessary for leaders.

Interviewees across countries noted the importance of both personal and professional growth in leadership development; many noted the following in particular: honing occupation-related skills, observing outstanding leaders' behaviors, learning by doing, and reflecting on mistakes.

A majority of Brazilian, Chinese, and Russian students believed there was no difference between PR leadership development and the development of leaders in other professional fields. However, a majority of U.S. students believed that leadership development was different for PR because of the profession's focus on relationships and communications across constituencies. In addition, a majority of Brazilian, Chinese, and Russian students, along with some U.S. students, believed, as did the professionals noted above, that the six PR leadership dimensions (Meng & Berger, 2013) were equally important for all fields, although the emphasis placed on these dimensions may vary by profession. As a female undergraduate from Brazil said, *"I think the qualities of the leader of PR have to be exactly the same as those of the other leaders, but the dimension [in which they operate] is different."* A majority of Indian students believed the qualities were important for PR leadership, but unsure as to whether they applied to leaders in all fields.

Only one Brazilian student thought there was a difference in the importance of the dimensions across professions because PR training does not necessarily prepare or get people to think about being leaders. One Chinese student believed the process of leadership development is unique and should not be tied to a particular occupation; instead, it should be driven by the need to develop specific abilities. One U.S. student noted the creative factor in PR might be different, and although the majority of Russian students and one Chinese student indicated they attended arts clubs when young (e.g. drawing, sculpting, music, theater), creativity was not mentioned as an important leadership component.

All of the U.S. students mentioned the importance of ethics to PR leadership, while a minority of students in each of the other countries did. Most of the U.S. and Indian students (and one Chinese student) mentioned the importance of relationships. Brazilian and Russian students said that leaders should inspire others, and a few U.S., Indian, and Brazilian students mentioned the importance for PR leaders in particular to be strategic and collaborative. Russian students were the only ones to mention assertiveness as a top leadership quality, and they indicated that leadership is about working for social good. One Brazilian and two U.S. students believed the whole of PR work involves leadership.

RQ 4: How effective do people perceive formal educational activities (e.g. college curricula, professional seminars and workshops) and informal PR leadership education (e.g. mentoring, self-learning) to be in developing or eliciting leadership in public relations? While largely available and accessible in the U.S., formal leadership training is not as institutionalized in the other countries represented in this study. All of the U.S. practitioners had taken formal leadership training: some as adults on the job or through PRSA; others, in college coursework or in high school through formal club or work activities. In contrast, professionals from China did not have any formal leadership training, although most indicated their companies have both

formal and informal mentorship and leadership programs, and they believed that success in public relations leadership is driven by a combination of both education and experience. No Indian professionals had taken any formal leadership training before beginning their careers, but they had some exposure through master's degree study (in business and economics) or through company/agency workshops. Brazilian professionals indicated formal leadership training only through college coursework, except for one who took advantage of an entrepreneurial leadership course that her company offered its engineers, and only one Russian professional had taken formal leadership development training (through her previous work at a news organization).

A female Russian practitioner represented the skepticism of some Russian interviewees when she said, *"My attitude toward leadership education is ironic and negative because this concept is used by all sorts of charlatans who call themselves trainers…. Leadership development is most and foremost professional development."* Most Indian practitioners believed that formal leadership training at an earlier stage in their development would have been useful for facing later career challenges, and they were open to such training in the future. They noted it was important to get away from the office and its routine to learn new perspectives; however, a U.S. practitioner noted the impracticality/difficulty of taking time away from the office to partake in training.

At least one practitioner from each country except China indicated that PR leadership should be part of a PR college curriculum, and most respondents across countries believed that, ideally, formal and informal leadership education complement each other, with formal instruction offering a foundation for experiential learning. However, informal training (e.g. mentorship, self-education, observation, experience) was more highly prized and practiced across practitioners/countries than was formal training, and most of the practitioners in Brazil, Russia, and the U.S. were currently involved in some type of informal leadership development. Specifically, the majority of Russian respondents indicated they were reading articles and books about leadership, while most of the U.S. practitioners indicated they were mentoring others.

As with the majority of professionals, the majority of Indian, Russian, and U.S. students believed informal leadership education was more effective than formal education, but Indian students believed that both formal and informal training inform each other, and they wished they had received more formal leadership education. Brazilian students were split between formal and informal leadership development being most effective, and only one student, who was Chinese, thought formal leadership education would be more effective than informal training.

No Chinese, Indian, or Russian student participants had any formal *public relations* leadership training, although a majority of students across countries except China reported formal generic leadership training through youth organizations or through school/college/internship workshops/panels. The majority of Chinese students believed they would benefit more from skill-specific training than from leadership training.

Indian students emphasized the value of informal learning through life experiences, while Russian and U.S. students mentioned more self-learning and mentoring activities, as had practitioners in those countries. A few students across countries indicated they were currently learning informally about leadership through work, and others said they were learning informally through class activities and student groups. Desired training topics mentioned by students more than once across cultures included crisis management and facilitating effective team work.

RQ 5: What is the role of mentors (e.g. parents, teachers, colleagues) and peer models in developing public relations leadership skills/abilities? Across cultures, all interviewed

professionals have or have had mentors, and all highly valued their mentors and the experience of mentoring others. In fact, they believed that leaders/mentors actually learn themselves while teaching others. In addition, the most common early mentors of respondents across countries were family members. All five of the Russian practitioners named their fathers (who were activists, community and organizational leaders) as influential early mentors in their lives. Behind family, teachers were the most common mentors mentioned by U.S. and Brazilian practitioners, who noted they served as role models and/or gave them confidence and opportunities to pursue leadership positions/activities.

Although the majority of professionals had mentors who were older and worked in public relations, not all were. A senior U.S. practitioner said, *"I take a little bit from everybody who comes in and out of my life and try to soak up whatever I can."* A 32-year-old U.S. practitioner said, *"You build a network of people who make you stronger, who stretch you in the right directions, and who provide a safe place for you to take risks…."* However, across cultures, respondents most often named previous or current bosses or colleagues as their current mentors. For example, a female Brazilian practitioner said, *"My current mentor is my manager and the first leader to convey it is OK to make mistakes."*

With the exception of Chinese professionals' responses, the most inspiring mentors tended to be family members, followed by former/current bosses, and in the U.S. and Brazil, teachers. In China, the most commonly named inspirational mentor was a former or current boss. A majority of practitioners across countries said they believed or hoped they were modeling their most inspiring mentors' approaches to leadership, life, and mentoring others.

As with the majority of practitioners, a majority of students across countries reported family members being mentors, and as with Russian practitioners, a majority of Russian students indicated their father was their most inspiring mentor. Chinese, U.S., Indian, and Brazilian students were nearly evenly split between family members and teachers/professors being their most inspiring mentors. For example, a male graduate student from India talked about how his father taught him *"there is either right or a wrong, and you can't keep the legs in both the boats in sail, so you have to be in one boat. I feel if you are ethical … you can … not compromise the principles for anything."*

RQ 6: What are the effects of organizational (cultural) conditions on public relations leadership development? This question was asked only of practitioners, and at least one from each country except Russia noted a boss's belief in others is part of an environment conducive to leadership development. Interestingly, at least one practitioner from Russia, India and Brazil said a negative, authoritative environment can make someone a better practitioner by necessity.

U.S., Chinese, and Indian practitioners mentioned that a PR agency's structure can help either foster or hinder leadership development. For example, the Indian practitioners said their agency environments taught them to be less individualistic and aggressive and to grow into more team-oriented and collaborative leaders. However, a U.S. practitioner indicated large agencies typically offer few leadership opportunities to young staffers, owing to their more formalized leadership structures, and two Chinese practitioners discussed leadership difficulties associated with balancing their agencies' profitability and communication priorities. Indian professionals noted a strong economy provides PR leadership opportunities that otherwise might not exist.

Several Russian and U.S. professionals emphasized the positive role that mentors had in creating a good work environment, and an Indian and U.S. professional each thought an organization's strong focus on employee learning facilitates leadership development. A male U.S. practitioner in his mid-50s said, *"There are places I've been where they want to grow*

leaders and keep leaders, and understand that people are important to the organization. Those companies that have long-range vision ... are the best places to work and to grow leadership, and the worst places are the ones that ... quite frankly, view [the workplace] as a factory...."

Russian and Brazilian practitioners both mentioned perfectionism as an expectation in the workplace; however, the former saw it as a positive motivator, while the latter saw it as unreasonable and rigid. All three female U.S. practitioners discussed gender as playing a role in leadership development, noting that women need support from and mentorship from other successful women; however, no other practitioners in the other countries mentioned gender as a potential workplace leadership hurdle, but two female Indian students noted that their families were not wholly supportive of their professional goals because of a different generational viewpoint regarding work.

Discussion

Scholars Berger & Reber (2006) argued that the future of public relations is "closely tied to what its leaders know and don't know, say and don't say, and do and don't do" (p. 236). This study suggests that the PR leadership dimensions identified by Meng & Berger (2013) mirror leadership in other fields. In addition, this study indicates that having strong technical skills (the *communication knowledge and expertise* dimension) is viewed as the main prerequisite to develop into a PR leader; thus, this dimension seems to be the critical first step for receiving PR leadership opportunities. In the global study (Berger & Meng, 2014), communication knowledge and expertise was also found to be "a critical leadership dimension" (p. 108), and it makes intuitive sense: One likely will not be given leadership opportunities if one's work is not of high quality. According to the interviews conducted for this study, communication knowledge and expertise can begin with public speaking and relationship maintenance at a relatively young age and is more formally learned and evolves through college and professional experience.

Other personal leadership dimensions found to be "seeded" (learned) early in life include:

- *self-dynamics*, which were first learned through family/peer interactions and through those of school/organizations/groups;
- *ethical orientation*, which were first learned from family/religious values;
- *team collaboration*, which were first learned through family, sports, church and school projects; and
- *relationship-building*, which were first learned through interactions with peers, teachers, family members, coaches.

However, *strategic decision making* capabilities seem to develop later in one's professional development, after one has both technical skill and professional experience upon which to draw. Thus, this dimension may be the highest-order leadership dimension, which can be successfully applied only after the other dimensions have been realized. In the global study (Berger & Meng, 2014), strategic decision making stood out as "the most significant leadership condition in various situations and geographic locations" (p. 108).

Overall, this study's PR leadership evolution findings align with generic leadership development, as delineated in the Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives et al., 2006). Specifically, the findings and model align as follows:

- PR leadership development began as early as kindergarten/elementary school. Supportive and encouraging teachers helped build confidence and provided leadership experiences.

- Parents and other family members (grandparents, siblings) were strong role models and mentors by instilling professional aspirations and strong personal values.
- Most interviewees joined groups and began to take on leadership roles as adolescents.
- Leaders continued to learn and grow while they simultaneously taught/inspired others. In fact, there was consensus on the value and importance of mentoring in furthering leadership development for both mentees and mentors.

Also, the findings can be viewed through the lens of Brungardt (1996), who discusses the general leadership development lifespan categories, as follows: 1) early childhood and adolescence 2) formal education 3) on-the-job experiences and 4) specialized leadership education. This study suggests that leadership education should be culturally/country-specific, as follows:

- *Brazil, India, and U.S.:* Leadership is often associated with egalitarianism; an ethical, collaborative approach; and giving back to society, particularly with millennials. Accordingly, training that focuses on leading an egalitarian-style company and offering meaningful work would resonate with PR students and practitioners in these countries. In addition, information about running consultancies and small business entrepreneurial models are desired in both college courses and professional training in these countries.
- *U.S. and India*: Special training for and about the unique challenges and perceptions of women and underrepresented practitioners is warranted. U.S. women practitioners seemed to be more aware of gender-related differences in workplace leadership styles and opportunities, while Indian female students seemed to be more aware of culturally based generational gender biases.
- *Russia:* Having access to prominent individuals from whom to learn and with whom to network is considered vital for established and emerging PR leaders. Accordingly, educational programs that include learning from and interacting with recognized authorities/experts would be most effective, and skill-specific training is most highly valued.
- *China*: Organizations that intend to develop an effective leadership training program should take into consideration that young PR practitioners appreciate clear direction from teachers and supervisors, but also want more autonomy over their learning. In addition, public relations students value skills-oriented training over more general leadership education.

Overall, these culturally diverse findings give additional credence to the global study's findings (Berger & Meng, 2014), which demonstrated relatively weak support for developing a "global education curriculum" (p. 116) as an approach to developing PR leaders. It also supported Berger & Meng's (2014) findings that formal leadership development opportunities are more widely available in the U.S. than in the other countries represented in this study. This study also found that practitioners across countries recognized that millennial PR practitioners seek transparent, collaborative (i.e. transformational) leadership styles and meaningful work environments, and that the majority of PR practitioners and students across cultures understand the need to continue to learn about and grow in PR leadership. In addition, experiential application of PR skills and knowledge through students' extracurricular activities, internships and hands-on coursework were noted as providing important opportunities to practice both

tactical and managerial skills, and informal activities (e.g. mentoring, observation, self-teaching through reading/online seminars) are more highly prized/valued across cultures than formal activities (e.g. courses, workshops, seminars). Still, formal college coursework that not only provides technical knowledge and skills but that also discusses and teaches fundamentals of leadership was seen as important by many participants to further the profession as a whole and those who work within it.

Limitations and future research

This exploratory qualitative study sought out patterns and outlier perspectives across public relations practitioners and students from five countries. The information gained from this limited number of selected interviewees are not generalizable and, thus, may or may not be reflective of other practitioners and students. However, distinct patterns and differences were observed across countries, and some findings were consistent with the quantitative international practitioner study of Berger & Meng (2014), thus lending further credence to them.

Based on this study's findings, an adapted model of Excellent PR Leadership might be proposed, e.g. Evolution of Excellent PR Leadership, which includes mentorship as an ongoing, intervening variable, to help spur future research and testing of the evolutionary stages of PR leadership development. Such findings could help further explore how the PR leadership development dimensions evolve and build on each other over time and how they begin to merge from personal into professional leadership characteristics. Self-assessment questionnaires ultimately might be developed to help educators, students, and perhaps even young professionals assess where they fall on the continuum, and plans/materials could be developed to help them progress.

In addition, using the indices already developed for each of the leadership dimensions by Meng and Berger (2013), researchers might identify when these dimensions first begin to appear and what challenges to each may be present (e.g. unstable home creates difficulty with relationships; shyness stifles confidence and risk-taking to embrace leadership opportunities; lack of self-awareness stymies self-dynamics).   Such work could then involve what researchers have described as a leadership development process comprised of "cultivating and leveraging strengths while understanding and minimizing weaknesses" (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 48). The research might also be expanded to include other psychological scales that could help identify common patterns among leaders, such as levels of tolerance for ambiguity and low communication avoidance, and could be used to help aid the development of specific leadership materials in these areas.

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Government-Public Relationship Cultivation in the Digital Era: The Impact of Public Engagement and Political Leadership Communication on Social Media

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Abstract

This study examines how Chinese publics' positive and negative social media (i.e. WeChat) discussion about the political leader, Xi Jinping, along with Xi's leadership communication styles of assertiveness, responsiveness, and authenticity on social media influence publics' evaluation of his leadership effectiveness, which in turn, influence public trust and satisfaction with the government. Through a quantitative online survey of 396 Chinese WeChat users randomly selected via an international sampling firm and a structural equation modeling analysis, the results show that Chinese publics' political discussions about Xi on social media significantly influences the perceived leadership effectiveness of the president. Specifically, the more the Chinese publics engage in positive discussion about the president on social media, the more they perceive him to be a better political leader, and vice-versa. The president's leadership communication characterized by responsiveness and authenticity strongly and positively influenced perceived leadership effectiveness and the quality of government-public relationship. Publics' evaluation of the president's leadership effectiveness directly contributed to public trust and satisfaction toward the government. The theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed.

Social media have experienced exponential growth in the past decade and reshaped how citizens define political and civic engagement, such that political discussions among peer social media users become an important manifestation of civic political engagement (David, 2013). A wide array of evolving social media tools has provided convenient platforms for publics to engage in political discussion and in the meantime, offered the government and political leaders an unprecedented opportunity to directly influence public opinion, better understand the netizens, and foster quality relationships (Hyun & Kim, 2015). Recent communication studies have examined publics' political social media engagement and its implications (Houston & Harding, 2014; Hyun & Kim, 2015). However, from a political public relations perspective, little is known regarding how publics' political social media engagement contributes to government-public relationships. Further, despite that a growing number of political leaders are striving to enhance their social media presence and utilizing digital platforms to communicate with and engage the publics, there is a lack of empirical evidence on what leadership communication styles or strategies work on social media and how they contribute to government-public relationship cultivation.

To fill the research gap, this study proposes and tests a conceptual model that links publics' political social media engagement, leadership communication on social media, publics' evaluation of the political leader, and government-public relationship outcomes in the context of China. China is chosen as the study context because of the prominent role social media plays in breaking the country's information monopoly, offering an unprecedented communication environment, and empowering the publics in political discourse and participation (Luo, 2014). Among the wide array of social media platforms available in China, the leading platform WeChat is selected to represent the digital sphere between Chinese government and publics, where both government public relations practitioners and netizens contribute to the content of political discourse. Benefited from a large active user base, corporations, non-profit organizations, and public administrations can effectively reach millions of Chinese netizens through managing "official accounts," a unique function of WeChat that allows communicators to send regular feeds to subscribed users (Gao & Zhang, 2013). Individual users can choose to share these feeds to their own "WeChat Moment", a similar interface with Facebook Homepage, which subsequently spark extensive discussions among WeChat peers. For example, during President Xi Jinping and First Lady Peng Liyuan's official state visit to the United States, a WeChat feed on "*China's First Lady Peng Liyuan Gives Speech on Education in English at U.N*" from the official account of the State-owned newspaper *People Daily* were reposted by 0.6 million WeChat users within less than 24 hours; and made a total of 44 million impressions in three days. Interestingly, a WeChat feed "*Uncle Xi and Auntie Peng: My tie matches your dress*" on the President and the First Lady's fashion styles rose to the hottest topic on Chinese social media. Other topics such as China's anti-corruption policies and foreign currency exchange policies under Xi administration were also extensively discussed on WeChat (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Given the strong influence of WeChat on Chinese publics' engagement in political discourse, the study examines how Chinese publics' positive and negative social media discussion about the political leader, Xi Jinping, along with Xi's leadership communication style on social media influence publics' evaluation of his leadership effectiveness, which in turn, influence public trust and satisfaction with the government.

Findings of this study add to the growing body of literature on social media political engagement, leadership communication, and government-public relationships. The study provides insights for political public relations practitioners and leaders regarding how to

capitalize on the features of social media to communicate, engage, and build relationship with digital savvy publics.

Literature Review

Government-public relationships

Strömbäck and Kiousis (2011) defined political public relations as "the management process which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals (p. 8). Thus, establishing and maintaining positive government-public relationships is the key to effective government public relations. Indeed, many scholars have adopted this perspective in political public relations research. For instance, Waymer (2013) analyzed the US Government's apology to Tuskegee Institute syphilis experiment survivors under President Clinton's administration and posited that government-public relationship management should consider publics' desire for a relationship with the government and different types of government-public relationships. Seltzer and Zhang (2011) employed a telephone survey of 508 voters after the 2008 presidential election to test a model of political organization-public relationships (POPRs), incorporating the interactions of political relationship antecedents, political parities' relationship cultivation strategies, perceived OPRs between voters and parties, and the outcomes of such relationships.

Early relationship management pioneers have structured this paradigm around three focal concept clusters: the antecedents of OPRs, the properties of OPRs, and the consequences of OPRs (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). Following this vein, research on the properties of OPRs is particularly fruitful. Ledingham and Bruning (1998) identified five dimensions of OPRs: trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. Among OPR frameworks, one of the most influential frameworks is proposed by Hon and Grunig (1999). The six elements in this framework are control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationship, and communal relationship. The dimensions of trust and satisfaction have attracted scholars' attention in government public relations research (Hong *et al.,* 2012; Kim, 2015).

In the OPR literature, *satisfaction* is defined as "the extent to which each party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 3). When government meets or exceeds publics' expectations towards government communications and responsibilities in the relationship, satisfactory government-public relationships are created. *Trust* is defined as "one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party" (Hon and Grunig, 1999, p. 3). It incorporates the dimensions of integrity, the belief that an organization is fair and just, dependability, the belief that an organization will do what it promises, and competence, the belief that an organization is capable of fulfilling its promises. In government public relations, public trust is particularly important, because it is closely related to government legitimacy (Inglehart, 1990), performance of democratic governance (Putnam, 1993), and public support for various aspects of government efforts (Rudolph, 2009; Rudolph & Evans, 2005; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Given that previous literature has identified satisfaction and trust as significant indicators of political public relations effectiveness, this study operationalizes government-public relationship outcomes as government trust and government satisfaction.

Government public relations in the era of social media

Governments have increasingly utilized social media to build relationships (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010). Scholars suggest that the adoption of e-government and social media can potentially advance public trust, promote openness, and fight against corruption (Bertot *et al.*, 2010; Lim *et al,* 2012). Starting with the earlier technologies, e-government was initially used as a one-way communication tool, a convenient channel for citizens to access service and retrieve information (Graham & Avery, 2013). Citizens' expectations and social media effectiveness have since influenced governments' adoption of social media. Subsequently, social media has promoted the co-creation of political content by both governments and publics. Linders (2012) discussed the role of social media in creating citizen co-production initiatives with governments. By using social media, Phoenix metropolitan government has seen promises of "increased citizen engagement, reaching citizens on a common platform, and allowing for citizen comments" (Hand & Ching, 2011, p.379). A national survey of Americans has shown a positive relationship between individuals' experience with government social media and their perceptions of relationships with their government, characterized by the public's trust in government (Hong, 2013). Similar effects are found for government outside of the United States. Taşkıran (2016) analyzed Turkish ministries' efforts of developing positive relationships using Facebook and Twitter. A survey of Korean publics also revealed that individuals had more favorable relationships with their governments when the Internet was used (Hong, 2014). Additionally, recent research has provided abundant evidence that political public relations efforts on social media have two major outcomes – public engagement in political discourse and public perceptions of a positive relationship with government (Hong, 2013; Lim *et al.,* 2012). Specifically, public political engagement on social media effectively advances government-public relationship building.

Public political engagement in the current study

Different from traditional political activities of rallying and writing letters, the expression of opinions with peers through ICTs characterizes a new way of public political engagement (David, 2013). In this study, public political engagement on social media is thus defined as political peer communication, which is the publicly visible peer interaction among social media users on the topic of political subjects and figures. Warren, Sulaiman, and Jaafar (2014) found that self-expression of political opinion on social media intensifies civic engagement, which further affects publics' tendency to trust institutions such as the government. It can be inferred that political peer communication on social media is a strong predictor of government-public relationships. In addition, Houston and Harding (2014) suggested that the public's perceptions of government representative figures, such as the president and major officers, reflect general attitudes towards government. Therefore, focusing on Chinese social media users' peer communication about President Xi, this study proposes:

H1: Positive peer communication about political leaders on social media positively influences government-public relationships.

H2: Negative peer communication about political leaders on social media negatively influences government-public relationships.

In addition to citizens' political engagement, this study also investigates the influence of another important component of political communication – political actors (McNair, 2011). The following section will review previous studies on political leadership communication.

Political leadership communication and effectiveness

Following Mayfield and Mayfield (2017), leadership communication in general is defined as the perceived articulation of the talk and actions exercised by leaders and recognized by others as "capable of progressing tasks or problems which are important to them" (Robinson, 2001, p. 93). In public relations, most research examining leadership communication is situated in organizational communication. Highlighted by organizational communication scholars, the wide adoption of social media by organizational leaders has also sparked the recent research trend dedicated to the effectiveness of leadership communication on social media (Men, 2015; Men & Tsai, 2016). However, scholars have paid less attention to the effectiveness of political leadership communication and its result on government-public relationship building.

In political communication, political leadership has been placed at the forefront of the political stage with the modernization processes of mass communication (Mazzoleni, 2000). The personalization thesis has shifted the focus of political communication from parties to party leaders (Wattenberg, 1994; Dalton & Mcallister, 2000; Karvonen, 2010). Effective political leadership communication has positive outcomes, such as promoting civic engagement (i.e. voting), voters' satisfaction, loyalty, and trust on political parties (Mazzoleni, 2000). In addition to political actor and public opinion, media is one of the three main components of political communication (McNair, 2011). Today, the public sphere enabled by social media not only provides a platform for political leadership communication, but also creates a space for forming public opinion (Habermas, 1991). Empirical evidence suggests that public opinion expressed on social media determines the perceived quality of political leadership communication, and subsequently affected the outcomes of political public relations campaigns (Jamilah *et al.*, 2016). Given the association between the quality of political leadership communication and public political engagement through peer political communication on social media, this study hypothesizes:

H3: Positive social media peer communication about political leaders positively influences perceived political leadership effectiveness.

H4: Negative social media peer communication about political leaders negatively influences perceived political leadership effectiveness.

In addition, an extensive body of literature suggests that the quality of leadership communication strongly affects employees' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational trust, organizational citizenship behavior, and other employee outcomes, such as efficiency and productivity (Baker & McCann, 2015). Based on this evidence, it can be inferred that political leadership communication effectiveness is also capable of influencing government-public relationships. Therefore, this study hypothesizes:

H5: Perceived political leadership effectiveness positively influences government-public relationships.

Leadership communication styles

As discussed above, McNair (2011) stated that there are three main components to political communication. Aside from public opinion and media, political actors are arguably the most important and determinant factor to the outcomes of political communication. Indeed, the political leaders' communication strategies, including communication style and rhetoric are key to appealing to publics.

In general, communication style, also referred as socio-communicative style (SCS), illustrates an individual's skills in "initiating, adapting, and responding to interpersonal communication" (Men, 2015, p. 3) and it represents others' perceptions of that individual based

on regular communication behavior patterns. The complicated social media environment requires political leaders to adapt to different communication styles to achieve communication effectiveness. According to Thomas *et al.* (1994), assertiveness and responsiveness are two core elements of communication styles, which respectively capture the masculine and feminine qualities of communication. In addition, due to the interactive and transparent nature of social media, to form meaningful relationships, communications on must be perceived as sincere and authentic (Slater, 2002). Given the transformation of political communication from party to party leaders, whether political leaders' authentic communication style contributes to government-public relationship building requires closer examination. Therefore, this study explores three political leadership communication styles – assertiveness, responsiveness, and authenticity on social media and examines the influence of these communication attributes on perceived political leadership effectiveness and government-public relationships.

Assertive and responsive communication

According to the Social Style Model (SSM), assertiveness and responsiveness capture the two fundamental dimensions of social behavior, thus consisting a two-dimensional framework of communication styles (Bolton & Bolton, 1984; Merill & Reid, 1981). Assertive communicators dominate conversations by initiating, maintain, and terminating communications (Thomas *et al.*, 1994). It represents the communicators' dominance, forcefulness, aggressiveness, competitiveness, and confidence, hence the masculine quality of communication. On the contrary, responsive communication style focuses on emotional reactions and relational task in communication (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996; Waldherr & Muck, 2011). Responsive communicators possess feminine quality, and are generally described as helpful, empathetic, compassionate, warm, and friendly (Richmond & McCroskey, 1990).

Men (2015) and Tsai and Men (2016) argued that assertive and responsive communication styles are not necessarily superior to one another. Rather, they co-exist and complement each other in leadership communication in different organizational settings. When properly executed, both styles can contribute to communication effectiveness. Indeed, a survey of 545 U.S. employees has demonstrated that both responsive and assertive communication styles improve the organization-publics relationships in terms of trust and satisfaction (Men, 2015). The same rationale may hold true in political leadership communication. Therefore, this study hypothesizes:

H6: Responsive leadership communication positively influences perceived leadership effectiveness (a) and government-public relationships (b).

H7: Assertive leadership communication positively influences perceived leadership effectiveness (a) and government-public relationships (b).

Authentic communication

Authenticity originally refers to being true to oneself and one's core values (Molleda, 2010). Scholars have established the association between organizational authenticity and reputation, organizational communication effectiveness, and quality organization-public relationships (Men & Tsai, 2016). In this context, authenticity entails truthfulness, transparency, and consistency (Shen & Kim, 2012). The three core dimensions of authenticity are correlated with the desired political leadership characteristics of integrity and consistency (Barisione, 2009), making the concept highly relevant here. Especially in the digital sphere, the relatively free and easily accessible environment as well as the social presence of individual political figures, have

contributed to political public discourse. Thus, for political leadership communication, authenticity of government figures is of vital importance, because, as pointed out by Gilpin, Palazzolo, and Brody (2010), "in participative democratic societies, governing efficacy relies on public trust, which can in turn only exist where citizens have faith in administrative agencies and institutions" (p. 258). Accordingly, this study hypothesizes:

H8: Authentic leadership communication positively influences perceived leadership effectiveness (a) and government-public relationships (b).

The hypothesis hereinbefore implies that perceived leadership effectiveness serves as the mediating factor for government-public relationship building in public political engagement and political leadership communication. To complete the conceptual model (Figure 1), this study proposes:

H9: Perceived leadership effectiveness mediates the effects of positive peer communication about political figures (a), negative peer communication about political figures (b), assertive leadership communication (c), responsive leadership communication (d), and authentic leadership communication (e) on government-public relationships.
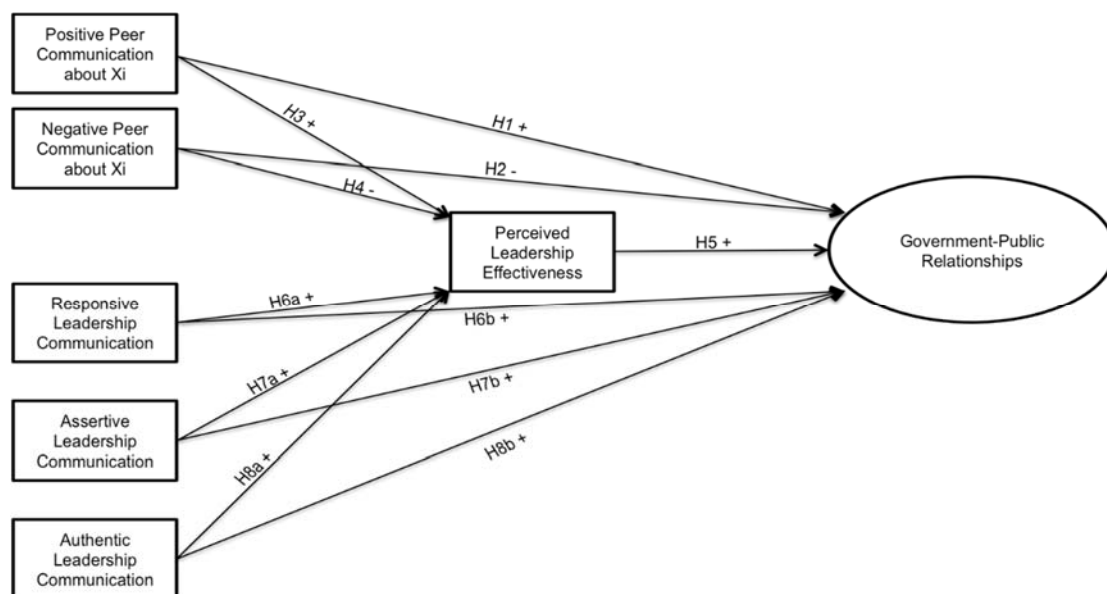
Figure 1. Conceptual model of the influence of political social media peer communication and political leadership communication on government-public relationships

Method

To test the hypothesized model, we conducted an Internet survey with a random sample drawn from online research panels in China through a premier global provider of survey services, Survey Sampling International (SSI) (http://www.surveysampling.com/). The population of the study was comprised of the adult WeChat users in China. Stratified and quota random sampling strategies were used to solicit respondents from different age groups, genders, incomes, and education levels.

The sample included 396 Chinese WeChat users with an average age of 38 years old (M=37.79, SD=11.85). Around 60% of the respondents were male and 40% were female, which was close to the actual gender ratio of Chinese WeChat users (Tencent, 2015). Approximately 92% of the respondents had at least "some college" as the highest level of education. About 73% of the respondents were from medium and high-income levels with annual incomes above

CNY 60,000. On average, the respondents used WeChat for two and a half years at the time of the survey (*M*=2.58, *SD*=1.06)

The survey questionnaire was first developed in English. Using the back translation method, a bilingual researcher who is a native Chinese speaker translated the questionnaire to Chinese. Before conducting the main study, we conducted a pretest with 100 randomly selected WeChat users recruited through SSI. Preliminary analysis of the reliability and validity of the measures showed satisfactory results. Therefore, all the measurement items on the key variables were retained for the formal survey.

Measures

All the measurements used in this study were adopted from previous literature and adapted to fit the current study context. A seven-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" was used to measure the following focal constructs. Specifically, to measure political peer communication about Xi on WeChat, six items were used adapted from previous literature (i.e., Campbell & Kwak, 2011). In particular, positive political peer communication about Xi was measured using three items, such as "I engage in positive discussions about Xi Jinping with my friends on WeChat" ($\alpha = .91$). Negative political peer communication was also measured utilizing three items, such as "I criticize Xi Jinping on WeChat" ($\alpha = .96$). Responsive and assertive leadership communication styles were measured with fifteen items adopted from Tsai and Men (2016) and Richmond and McCroskey (1990). Responsiveness political leadership communication was measured with nine items such as "sincere," "warm," "friendly," and "compassionate," ($\alpha= .96$) and six items were used to measure assertive political leadership communication as perceived by Chinese WeChat users such as "act as a leader," "dominant," "forceful," "aggressive," "competitive," and "has a strong personality" ($\alpha= .85$). Additionally, the measure of authentic political leadership communication was adapted from Men and Tsai (2016) and Shen and Kim (2012), which included 10 items such as "I believe that Xi Jinping's words are genuine" and "I believe that Xi Jinping's behavior matches his core values and beliefs" ($\alpha= .97$). Hon and J. Grunig's (1999) OPR scale was adopted to measure government-public relational trust, such as "The government can be relied on to keep its promises" ($\alpha = .96$), and satisfaction, such as "generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship the government has established with me" ($\alpha = .94$). Finally, a seven-point semantic differential scale with three items, such as "overall, my evaluation of Xi Jinping's political leadership was… positive/negative, good/bad, beneficial/harmful," was utilized to measure the perceived political leadership effectiveness ($\alpha = .96$).

For data analysis, descriptive analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted. Multiple criteria were used to evaluate the goodness-of-model fit, including the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) indices, which are a minimal set of fit indexes that should be reported and interpreted when reporting the results of SEM analyses (Kline, 2005).

Results

Preliminary analysis of the data showed that WeChat users in China more often engaged in positive (M=4.84, SD=1.64) rather than negative peer communication about Xi Jinping on WeChat (M=2.53, SD=1.69). Overall, Xi's leadership communication style was perceived to be responsive (M=5.89, SD=1.01), assertive (M=5.75, SD=.96), and authentic (M=5.83, SD=1.03). Respondents on average held a fairly positive view toward Xi's presidential leadership

effectiveness (M=6.41, SD= .96). Respondents also demonstrated relatively high level of trust (M=5.53, SD=1.31) and satisfaction (M=5.65, SD=1.30) toward the Chinese government.

Analysis of structural equation modeling

The analysis of the conceptual model involved a two-stage process: (a) an assessment of the construct validity of the measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis, and (b) an assessment of the structural model. The maximum likelihood method was employed for model estimation. The test results of the initial measurement model indicated satisfactory fit with the data: $\chi^2(5) = 13.73$, *p=.02*, $\chi^2/df = 2.75$, RMSEA = .06 (90% confidence interval: .02–.11), SRMR = .02, TLI = .98, and CFI = .99. Thus, it was retained as the final CFA model. The standardized factor loadings between indicators and latent variables ranged from .92 to .99, indicating high construct validity of the CFA model.

The multivariate normality assumption of SEM was evaluated in AMOS before the hypothesized model was estimated. Results indicated that the sample data showed a significant positive multivariate kurtosis. Therefore, bootstrapping ($N = 2,000$ samples) using the maximum likelihood method was performed to address the multivariate nonnormality of the data. The bootstrap parameter estimations did not deviate from those based on normal theory, indicating that the significant results in Figure 2 remained significant in the bootstrapping process. The hypothesized structural model displayed in Figure 2 demonstrated satisfactory fit to the data: $\chi^2(5) = 13.73$, *p=.000*, $\chi^2/df = 2.75$, RMSEA = .06 (90% confidence interval: .01–.11), SRMR = .02, TLI = .98, and CFI = .99. Seven structural paths demonstrated significant results.

Hypothesis testing

Results showed that positive peer communication about Xi on WeChat demonstrated significant positive effect on perceived political leadership effectiveness, $\beta = .12$, $p = .004$; negative peer communication about Xi demonstrated significant negative effect, $\beta = -.11$, $p = .005$. However, neither the direct effect of positive peer communication about Xi nor the direct effect of negative peer communication about Xi on government-public relationship outcomes was significant. Therefore, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were rejected and Hypotheses 3 and 4 were supported by the data. In other words, the more Chinese publics engaged in positive political discussion with their peers about Xi and his policies on social media, the more positive they tended to view Xi's political leadership, and vise versa. The publics' engagement in political peer communication about Xi, however, did not significantly influence government trust and satisfaction directly. Also, the data provided support to Hypothesis 5, which suggested strong association between perceived leadership effectiveness and government-public relational outcomes, $\beta = .26$, $p < .001$. Publics who perceived Xi to be an effective leader tended to report higher trust and satisfaction level toward the government.

Regarding the influence of political leadership communication style on perceived leadership effectiveness and government-public relations, the results showed that responsive leadership communication demonstrated strong positive effects on perceived political leadership effectiveness ($\beta = .40$, $p <.001$) and government trust and satisfaction ($\beta = .19$, $p =.04$), supporting hypotheses H6a and H6b. Publics who perceived Xi's communication to be friendly, warm, sincere, compassionate, , and show willingness to listen to the citizens tended to perceive Xi's leadership as more effective. They also tended to trust the government more and be more satisfied with their relationship with the government. However, contrary to the prediction, assertive political leadership communication did not show significant effects on perceived leadership effectiveness or government-public relational outcomes. Additionally, authentic

political leadership communication demonstrated strong positive effects on perceived leadership effectiveness ($\beta = .24$, $p = .02$) and government trust and satisfaction ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$), supporting hypotheses H8a and H8b. It indicates that when the political leaders' communication is perceived as genuine, truthful, consistent, and authentic, the political leadership will be perceived as more effective and the publics tend to develop better relationship with the government.

Finally, a formal test of indirect effects through a bootstrap procedure ($N = 2,000$) was conducted to test Hypothesis 9. Hypotheses H9a, H9b, H9d, and H9e were supported. The indirect effects on paths from responsive political leadership communication to government-public relationship outcomes through perceived political leadership effectiveness ($\beta = .10$, $p = .002$, 95% CI = .05– .21) and from authentic political leadership communication to government-public relationship outcomes through perceived political leadership effectiveness were significant ($\beta = .06$, $p = .02$, 95% CI = .02– .15). Thus, perceived political leadership effectiveness partially mediated the effects of responsive and authentic leadership communication on public trust and satisfaction toward the government. Moreover, the indirect effects on paths from positive political peer communication ($\beta = .03$, $p = .01$, 95% CI = .007– .08) and negative political peer communication ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .003$, 95% CI = -.06– -.012) to government-public relationship outcomes through perceived leadership effectiveness were significant. Given the insignificant direct effects of positive and negative political peer communication on government-public relationship outcomes, perceived leadership effectiveness fully mediated the effects of political peer communication about Xi on WeChat on government trust and satisfaction.
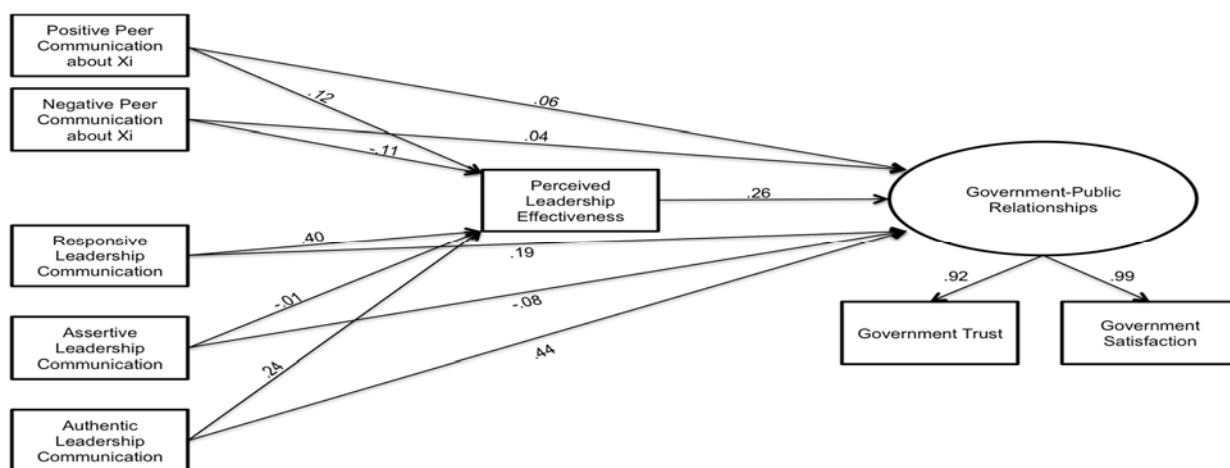
Figure 2. Results of the hypothesized model. Coefficients are standardized regression weights. Error terms of Indicators and disturbances of endogenous variables were omitted from the figure.

Discussion and Conclusions

Drawing from the literature in organizational communication, government public relations, and political communications, this study provides a holistic framework of the antecedents to effective government-public relationship cultivation in today's interactive digital public sphere. A few major findings emerged. First, Chinese publics' political communication about Xi on WeChat significantly influence the perceived leadership effectiveness of the president and the quality of government-public relationships. Second, the president's leadership

communication characterized by responsiveness and authenticity strongly and positively influence perceived leadership effectiveness and the quality of government-public relationship. Third, publics' evaluation of the president's leadership effectiveness serves as a mediating role between the antecedents of public political engagement and political leadership communication and the outcomes of trust and satisfaction toward the government.

Co-creation of public political discourse on social media: a holistic view

With social media enabling the co-creation of political discourse, political communication patterns have evolved from the old one-way approach of government to citizen, to the two-way communication between government and citizens, and even to the multi-way communication among peer citizens. As summarized by Linders (2012), in the era of social media, citizen co-production of political discourse can be classified into three types. In the first type of citizen-to-government "citizen sourcing," publics provide consultation and ideation for government on social media. The second type of government-to-citizen co-production addresses "government as platform", where government "equips citizens with data needed to make informed decisions." Lastly, the most democratic form is the self-organized citizen-to-citizen political communication, with little interference from the government (p. 449). Implications of this typology has been corroborated by the results of the present study in the sense that both citizen-to-citizen and government-to-citizen communications matter in providing a holistic picture of political communication on social media.

As mentioned before, political communication consists of three major components: political actors, public opinion, and media (McNair, 2011). In the realm of political public relations, all three factors must be considered to foster meaningful government-public relationships. This study completes the antecedent framework by incorporating both public opinion through peer political communication on social media and political leadership communication attributes displayed through social media. On the one hand, this study confirmed the strong influence of political conversations among social media peers on political outcomes. Previous literature has demonstrated the positive effects of social media political conversations on such outcomes as loyalty, advocacy, voting, and other offline political participation (Housholder & LaMarre, 2015; Hyun & Kim, 2015). This study extends the positive outcomes to perception of leadership and government-public relationship building, in terms of fostering trust and satisfaction towards government. The results further elaborate on how such effects take place by separately examining positive and negative peer political communications. Previous researchers suggest that positive political discussion enhances positive attitudes, whereas negative political discussion reinforces negative attitudes (Eveland & Hively, 2009). The findings of this study demonstrated that individuals who engaged in positive peer discussions about President Xi on WeChat tend to perceive Xi's leadership as more effective; and negative peer discussions about President Xi on WeChat will hinder individuals' perception of Xi's leadership effectiveness. Further, through influencing the perceived political leadership effectiveness, political social media peer communication indirectly affects public trust and satisfaction toward the government.

This study also affirms the importance of political communication, and highlights the shift of focus from political parties to leaders (Dalton & Mcallister, 2000; Karvonen, 2010; Mazzoleni, 2000). In this respect, the strong influences of leadership communication styles and the mediation effects of perceived leadership effectiveness both demonstrate the linkage between leading political figures and the government or political parties they represent. Specifically, the

findings support the positive effects of responsive and authentic leadership communications on perceived leadership effectiveness and government relational outcomes. However, the hypothesized positive influence of assertive leadership communication is rejected. A plausible explanation is that the responsive communication styles with a friendly, amiable, and compassionate tone better fit the personalized, informal, and interactive social media environment. Additionally, the transparent, consistent, and truthful nature of authentic leadership communication caters to social media users' expectation of political transparency driven by social media. Whereas, the intensity of dominance and forcefulness that assertive communication style delivers to social media users contradict their expectations for a more approachable political leader image on the unofficial communication channels (Tsai & Men, 2016).

Theoretical implications

To summarize, this study has several significant theoretical contributions. First, this study contributes to the relationship building perspective in political public relations and highlights government-public relationships as the focal construct of political public relations scholarship (Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2011). Second, this study depicts a holistic antecedent framework to successful government-public relationship cultivation in the context of social media, by incorporating both influential factors of public political conversations and political actors' communication attributes. Third, the study reveals a possible underlying mechanism for effective government-public relationship building. Specifically, by establishing perceived leadership effectiveness as a mediator, this study contributes to the literature on the personalization of political communication from parties to party leaders and confirms the effects of political leadership communication on positive government relational outcomes (Wattenberg, 1994; Dalton & Mcallister, 2000; Karvonen, 2010).

Practical Implications

The findings of the study provide important insights to guide future political public relations practice. The direct and indirect influence of peer political communication on perceived political leadership effectiveness and government-public relationships imply that government communicators must closely measure public opinion through monitoring peer communications on social media and strive to create an open and healthy digital environment for public engagement. In the era of social media, when netizens have more space to join political communicators to initiate conversations, especially in a political environment like China, simply suppressing negative peer communication becomes technically impossible and is likely to backfire on government-public relationship building.

Also, as government leadership coming to the forefront of political communication, public relations practitioners need to strategically craft their messages and deliver such messages in appropriate communication styles. The results of this study suggest that responsive and authentic leadership communication can strongly boost publics' evaluations of political figures and foster positive relationships. Especially on social media, government public relations practitioners can help political leaders reduce publics' psychological distance and change the traditionally distanced and intimidating political figure image to a more authentic and personal one by adopting a friendly, warm, empathetic, and responsive communication manner (Men & Tsai, 2016; Tsai & Men, 2016), contributing to effective government-public relationship building.

Limitations and future studies

Despite the original findings, the study encountered limitations that can be addressed in future research. Specifically, the study focused on the publics' perspective to examine their social media political engagement and the government-public relationships. To present a complete picture, the government's, political leaders' and government public relations practitioners' perspectives need to be incorporated. Also, although the survey research approach ensures the generalizability of the findings, there is a lack of in-depth perspectives and behind-the-scene explanations regarding how exactly public discourse in the digital sphere and political leadership communication efforts affect political attitudes and government-public relationships. Future research could utilize content analysis, in-depth interviews, or focus groups to provide richer data to fully understand how the model works. In a related vein, the cross-sectional survey design is limited in suggesting the order of effects. Despite the application of SEM to remedy the issue, to establish the true causal links between the constructs, longitudinal studies or experimental approaches should be utilized in future research.

Further, the study was conducted in the unique Chinese political context. The interpretation of the findings should be cautious when applied to the Western societies. Future research should replicate the study in various counties with different political ideologies and systems to cross-validate the findings.   Lastly, although the study provided a comprehensive theoretical framework to understand the interplay between public political social media engagement, political leadership, and government-public relationships, it did not exhaust the list of the antecedent, outcome, and mediating factors. Future research could explore other influencers from both the government and public perspectives (e.g., political attitudes, government social media communications, political leadership style) and consequences of digital political engagement at the behavioral level (e.g., public support, online/offline political participation). Exploring other potential mediators (e.g., political empowerment, communication satisfaction, and government transparency) could also enrich the theoretical understanding of the mechanisms underlying the relationships.

In conclusion, the practice of government-public relationship cultivation and political public relations has come to a new era powered by digital technologies with the evolved, new generations of political actors and publics.   Research should keep providing data-driven insights and guidance for best practices of government public relations and cultivating a more democratic, equal, transparent, and engaged political discourse and environment for a better society.

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Analyzing Facebook News Feed FYI series: Image maintenance strategies against fake news claims and for creating relevant content

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Abstract

The controversy over Facebook's news-feed system has been ongoing for few years. This research specifically discuss how the Facebook organization explain how the system work, what criteria it follows, and what responsibility the platform has for insuring accuracy, as opposed to users themselves. A rhetorical analysis was deployed to identify the major themes in the way Facebook maintains its image, and also the major values it emphasizes as distinctive for the newsfeed service. The research relied on Benoit's image-repair model (1988) to explain the strategies by which Facebook is preserving its image. A brief discerption on how the issue of false posts on Facebook emerged in news stories two years ago will be given. This paper will explain the procedures of collecting and analyzing data, the theories being used, and the expected findings. We would later address the implications this paper offers for the discussion on fake news and filter bubbles, and recommendations for Facebook's PR team.

Introduction

Although Facebook is the most popular platform among SNS users, it has had its share of trust issues. A majority of users do not trust Facebook handling of private information (Beres, 2016). This negative perception did not translate into a major reputation crisis. However, the social-network giant had its first remarkable image crisis when information about the emotion-manipulation experiment were revealed; people learned that Facebook purposefully showed sad stories to users, to collect their reactions in an experiment (Hill, 2014). This revelation opened the discussion on how exactly Facebook choses the content users see on their news-feeds. Notwithstanding, a new issue has risen regarding Facebook's use of an algorithm to personalize users' News-feed content. Two major concerns can be made regarding Facebook's news-feed curation system: While it serves mostly user-tailored content, it isolates users from diverse and counter-argumentative perspectives, because it selects contents that matches users' beliefs. The resulting sorting groups are what is dubbed as "filter bubbles" (Newton, 2016). Filter bubbles refer to the situation in which individuals are selectively exposed to stories that fit their beliefs and attitudes, while omitting a diversity of dissimilar opinions and challenging perspectives. The argument is that filter bubbles increase social fragmentation and ideological polarization (Liao & Fu, 2013) Secondly, since the news algorithm only works to show relative content, and that no true editorial team is curating them, it enables the spread and popularity of "fake news" or completely fabricated pieces of information, that gain acceptance only because of wide sharing. The problem for Facebook's curation system is that it does not operate as a traditional media-company, in which you have editors examining the quality of published stories. Facebook responsibility in this matter is still debated; Does the platform, Which is conceptually a neutral space, has some responsibility for the falsehoods that some of its users are posting and sharing? (Issac, 2016). Those two issues potentially affect users' experience, but also advertisers who chose Facebook platform because it allows for customized narrow targeting, and for matching ad content with relevant users (DeMers, 2016). Facebook nowadays is a major source of news for many people, but how can it maintain the trust of people in its news curation system? Will the controversy around fake news affect Facebook's relationship with the users?

This study addresses this issue, by looking at releases authored by the Facebook news-relations team. All of Facebook's posts regarding the News-feed updates are reported at Facebook's newsroom website http://newsroom.fb.com under the category of *News Feed FYI*. The author identified seven posts that addressed the two issues at hand. The posts represent Facebook discourse to stakeholders about how its news algorithm work for their benefits. Thet outline what steps the company has overtaken to address emerging problems such as spams and fake news. To analyze those, this research aims to identify what image-repair strategies Facebook has used to explain its news-feed, and how it is advantageous to users. Borrowing from Benoit's (1995) image repair theory – we believe this model can explain few things: How is Facebook amplifying its efforts and character, whom it thinks responsible for news accuracy, and whether the company is proposing any corrective measures. Using rehtorical analysis, this research will also examine how Facebook frame the issue of newsfeed values. It is important to outline the major themes Facebook is emphasizing when explaining the basis for newsfeed selection process.

This case study offers would offer practically new and scholarly significant implication. Studying how a social-media organization talks about its "news" section is novel in the field of Journalism or PR studies. Pervious case studies have examined how news organizations manage their reputation regarding the ethics of their news coverage or the integrity of the content. Having

a major tech company involved in news editorializing without a journalism department is a completely new phenomenon. Hence, it is very consequential for PR scholars and professionals to understand how Facebook is managing this peculiar situation. It is also interesting for journalism experts to know how Facebook is framing the news curation situation, so they know the proper responses, and the tools they can use to weed out fake news and widen the appeal of accurate and diverse stories. This study also open doors for future media scholars to analyze social media outlets as being news sources, which expand our horizon of what we consider news sources.

Data collection & procedure

A rhetorical analysis examined Facebook press releases regarding its news-feed changes. We searched Facebook's media relations website: https://newsroom.fb.com for all the posts that address the two issues directly or indirectly. The time-span covers posts from January 2015 (The first post about hoaxes) to January 2017 (unveiling new measures to counter fake news). The analysis precisely considered the following: One, if concerns about manipulating trending news algorithm for commercial purposes are discussed. Two, if Facebook think its news-filter is function and serving the public interest, and how it can filter out spams and hoaxes. Six posts were found that talked about these issues. After initially reading the content at hand, few image-repair techniques became noticeable: bolstering, minimization, Differentiation, and corrective action. The general strategy seems to be reducing offensiveness, coupled with corrective actions that do not entail accepting responsibility for wrong-doing. The second element was audience analysis; we considered what audience-group the posts is talking (users, advertisers, or both). The major themes of the analysis will be the four strategies: Minimization, bolstering, differentiation, and corrective action. A long-table method is being used to match elements of the scripts to each matching category. Any difference or commonality in terms of addressing each audience-group will be outlined and explained within each category. Following that, a comparison between audience-directed posts and advertiser-directed posts, to look for different messages. Since this is not a quantitative content analysis, this paper is not concerned by the frequency or the weight of each deployed strategy. Rather, the analysis would show how by Facebook used each technique to serve its strategic goals, and how they whether there are significant differences in how they address multiple publics.

Background

Many controversies marked the 2016 election season, among them was the issue of fake news. Fake news are simply fabricated stories created by unconfirmed outlets on the web. One can say fake news is an extension of yellow journalism (Soll,2016 December), but the digital environment allowed false information to become widespread and viral across social network sites. One of the reasons many actors were involved in fake news was gin up reactions on Facebook — and to make a quick buck on ads when people click through to the site" (Kantrowitz, 2016, April). Meaning, there is a financial incentive to drive up the click-through rates of some shady sites, which would attract advertisers. There have been many reports that some fake news posts were the most popular stories in Facebook during election season. A reported at BuzzFeed ranked the most popular ones, and found one story that received 2,177,000 shares, reactions and comments, and the fifth one having 56,000 impressions (Silverman, 2012 December). These staggering number may suggest that Facebook is a welcoming habitat for fake news outlets. As a matter of a fact, Facebook since 2015 has declared many steps to stop the

wave of hoaxes, but with no avail (Solon 2016, August). Facebook claims that its algorithm can work better in detecting false posts while insuring neutrality at the same time. However, this particular claim was criticized when Facebook fired all of its human editorial team, making all posts go through algorithmic filters (Solon 2016, August).

Filter bubbles are also associated with social network sites in a negative way. Filter bubbles refer to the notion that customization tools "isolated us from opposing viewpoints" which made us leave into polar-opposite realities (Newton, 2016 November). The idea is that since a majority of people get their news from social media (Curry 2016, October) people will have limited exposure to a variety of news and viewpoints. This trend would further inflame polarization and disregard for different perspectives. This sorting system is facilitated by Facebook's (and other networks' oo) algorithms, that detect the patterns in the sources one likes, and allow users to only see posts from people they like and share the same opinions with (Baer, 2016 November)

Conceptual Framework

Image-maintenance theory

Organizations and important people in visible positions often pay attention onto managing their public image (Hambrick et al., 2015). A public image might not only be restored upon hitting a crisis, but it requires contentious image-maintenance strategies to minimize any potential damage to reputation (Pang, 2012). One of the strongest assets of any brand is its reputation, which refers to its track record that accumulatively form the image (Gray & Balmer, 1998), along with other factors. In case of social-media organizations, the dimensions of the brand image will be mostly about efficiency, credibility, transparency, and competence in terms of delivering its promised services. Consequently, when new controversies are raised about a relevant social phenomenon that might affect the SNS reputation, some strategies would be employed to mitigate the accused from complacency in wrongdoing (Benoit, 2006). Considering the fake-news phenomenon, Facebook did not actually experience a crisis in terms of its daily operations, but it was certainly a controversial issue that Facebook's leadership had to address (Kosoff, 2016). For an issue to be considered a crisis, it must become a media hype (Vasterman, 2015): receiving media attention, a rapid rise and a gradual fall of news coverage, the prominence of news coverage and its intensity, and mutual interactions between the corporate actors and the media. In the case of Trending Facebook news, it demonstrably became an interesting issue for the media, but it did not receive the level of prominence, intensity, and social pressure that makes it a pressing crisis. However, for pre-emptive image management, organizations ought to respond to issues when crisis trigger-points are noticed (Pang, 2006). Fake news on Facebook at this stage constitute a looming issue, which requires he company to reassure its stakeholders of how it is managing the issue. It can also be argued that in fact Facebook entered the first steps of the reactive phase, because publics are already worried about the implications of the issue on their trust of and use of Facebook. When corporate reputation is threatened, image defense is necessarily deployed to either justify, rationalize, or apologize for the controversial behavior (Brinson & Benoit, 1996)

According to Benoit Image restoration model (1995), there are two components of complaints targeting a company: First, unfavorable impression only emerges if the company is accused of holding responsibility for the act. That means audiences think the company is the one causing the issue, regardless if the company did it or not. Second, audiences think this act offensive and harmful, regardless of whether it affected them or not. In both conditions, we can speak of multiple audiences with multiple and diverse interests (Benoit, 1997). The strategies for

image-maintenance must then work to solve these two components; explaining responsibility and the seriousness of the act. Hence, Benoit offered five major strategies for image restoration: *Denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, corrective action, and mortification*. From reading Facebook's posts, the company never denied that spams are one serious issue, and it did not escape from assuming some level of responsibility to fix the problem. The relevant sub-strategies of reducing offensiveness of event are defined here (Brinson & Benoit, 1999) with hypothetical claims from Facebook:

Technique	Definition	Example
Defeasibility	We lack control over the subject.	Trending topics are merely based on what people share.
Bolstering	Stress Good traits	Facebook always love to improve your experience.
Minimization	Issue is not serious	Your business will not be affected
Differentiation	Act is not offensive	The algorithm helps you find relevant stories; not to isolate you
Transcendence	There are more serious issues	Despite few missteps, our priority is still to give everyone a voice
Corrective action	Working to solve the problem	We are introducing new measures to report fake news

It must be noted that the company is preemptively defending its image, before being accused directly in a large fashion. There is no particular accuser to defend against, which means this is still a manageable issue. Assessing Facebook's Strategic goals, the model predicts that the firm will emphasis: misconceptions about its responsibility for whatever content being posted by others. Second, the importance of the situation is less significant that the other thing the News-feed system provides. publics about the reliability of its news-curation process. For users, it will how Facebook is an agenda-free social network site, with a purpose of giving equal voice for everyone. For advertisers, it will reassure them that changes to news algorithms won't affect their businesses negatively, or isolate them from potential customers.

There are other variations for the image-repair model. Coombs (1998) offers alternate strategies for the crisis communication. The ones that might be helpful to our research are: Excuse (minimizing responsibility), justification (minimizing perception of damage), ingratiation (explaining how the action are beneficial) and corrective action. The unique thing about this model is that it offered strategies in an *accommodative-defensive continuum* (Coombs, 1988) be which we can say that excuse is a defensive strategy, while corrective action is more accommodative, while still short of full apology. This means that if Facebook offers corrective action, does not necessarily reflects an apology, but more of an accommodation. The analysis will follow this theoretical framework in determining the themes, to ensure the findings are relevant to the scholarly literature.

Method

A thematic/rhetorical analysis was conducted based on the theoretical framework of image-restoration theory. This approach helps the research answer some basic questions about

the approach of Facebook's explanatory rhetoric about the issues at hand, and outline the main patterns that reoccur in the news-feed FYI posts. Since this case study is first of its kind to delve into the effects of fake news and filter bubbles on Facebook's image, the research involved overall reading of the posts, and conducting essential semantic interpretations of the data. Thematic analysis can achieve those two functions. Previous cases of Image Restoration Theory used rhetorical analysis to illustrate how data exerts fit the model. My analysis will partially include rhetorical analysis, in addition to identifying commonalities within type of repair strategies (minimization, bolstering…) to identify the common themes. The followed specifc steps to insure the reliability of findings, and explain the steps other that researchers may follow. Borrowing from (Braun & Clarke, 2006) Those steps are: 1) All extracts will be illustrative of the general theme, and the identified strategy. 2) The themes were extracted from the theory, and from rigorous analytical work. 3) The themes are consistent, coherent, and mutually exclusives, so they explain all instances of image-repair techniques. 4) the report demonstrates consistency between the extracts and the analytic claims, which mean the interpretation reflect the true meaning of the extracts. 5) It explains the theoretical framework, to show the match between the themes and Image repair theory.

Choosing one theory as a frame of analysis will anchor the thematic/rhetorical analysis, in the sense that it will not consider all patterns in the data set, but only the patterns that relate to the theoretical propositions. The research started with reading all the posts collected, and worked to find meanings and repeated patterns. Codes identify a feature of the data that refer to the most basic element or information that can be assessed from the raw data regarding the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1988). The coding was narrowed to identify particular parts of the data, limited to the scope of the research objectives. Based on codes, potential themes were identified. For example, claims about Facebook corrected actions were sorted into two categories that explain what techniques Facebook is raising.

1. **Developing themes:** The themes include the image repair strategies mentioned earlier, and also other themes or sub-themes that emerged from the data. Emphasizing core-values was a major theme the research found, without being mentioned in the data. The research validity depends on whether the themes exhaustively reflect all possible variations. Hence, the themes captured all possible techniques that deal with image-defense strategies. Some techniques could not fit into the theoretical model of image-restoration.

2. **Refining:** All themes clearly defined and briefly explained, to reflect why they are helpful to understand Facebook's strategy, and to understand the concepts (fake news, filters, algorithm) the extracts are referring to.

The report provides a coherent and intensive narrative of the data, coupled with demonstrative examples. The extracts won't be random or exhaustive, but they will show how each strategy was used, and what pattern did they follow. The thematic framework will make it easier to identify the major elements in Facebook strategy, and also in putting the extracts into a meaningful context.

Research questions
RQ1: How does Facebook describe its responsibility in editing and curating news?
RQ2: Are Facebook explanations clear on how the newsfeed system select stories?
RQ3: According to Facebook, what do users benefit from the newsfeed system?
RQ4: What are the tools Facebook provided to users to report spam and hoaxes in the news-feed?

RQ5: What are the core-values of Facebook newsfeed? What does the system prioritize?
RQ6: What is the major source for identifying spam and false posts? Users or Facebook team?
RQ7: Does the system addresses the issue of filter-bubble? Or does is it contribute to it?

Findings

Based on the research questions above, the analysis looked specifically for the measures and updates Facebook is taking to enhance the newsfeed, and what level of responsibility it carries to insure accuracy. Following a double coding of the materials, these major themes were identified:

a. Core-values: The most prevalent theme was how Facebook reiterated the idea of values in almost every article. Interestingly, the way Facebook ranked its core-values for the newsfeed can explain why it became suitable for false stories and filter bubbles. The core values were:

1. Relevance: It was the most emphasized concept in the core values, for the code appeared 21 times in the data set. Relevance value according to Facebook consists of "ranking stories so that's what most important to each person shows up highest in their News Feeds" (Peysakhovich, 2016 August). This level of importance is not based objective standards; the news feed is completely "subjective, personal, and unique" (Mosseri, 2016 June). Interestingly enough, Facebook identifies another core value as "*informativeness*"; However, it definition of what is informative is not that different of what is relevant. What is informative is described as being subjective: "Something that one person finds informative may be different from what another person finds informative" (Xu, Lada, & Kant, 2016 August). What Facebook gained from the Feed Quality program is that "…people find stories informative if they are related to their interests, if they engage people in broader discussions and if they contain news about the world around them. That could be anything from recipes, to local issues, to global current events" (Xu, Lada, & Kant, 2016 August). Hence with this definition, Facebook newsfeed does not differentiate between a "post about a current event, a story about your favorite celebrity, a piece of local news, or a recipe" for they are all equally "informative" based on the person's interests (Mosseri, 2016 June).

2. Connectedness: This refers to the priority of keeping users connected with family and freiends. "Facebook" one post explains "was built on the idea of connecting people with their friends and family… that is still the driving principle of News Feed today" (Backstrom. 2016 June). Based on that, News Feed will rank posts from family members and friends higher, and would always show their posts no matter what, but as user "you just have to scroll down" (Mosseri, 2016 June). Things posted by friends would come up first, which supposedly, make them more prominent than pages a user follows. However, this also means that posts that are being referred to by one's circles of friends, and are attracting comments and likes, will have will have higher ranking in one's newsfeed, Based on that, Facebook would "…encourage Pages to post things that their audience are likely to share with their friends" (Backstrom. 2016 June).

3. Neutrality and inclusiveness: Although this value was only mentioned in one article, it is strikingly illustrative of Facebook's philosophy. Facebook team claims that "We are not in the business of picking which issues the world should read about" (Mosseri, 2016 June).

This relates to the value of being value-neutral when it comes to information, in which the weight of a story does not depend on whether it is a global current event or a celebrity-related story. Based on this value, News Feed does not "…favor specific kinds of sources – or ideas" and one reason for taking this approach is that "it's good for our business" (Mosseri, 2016 June). In that sense, the source of news was not considered to judge the accuracy of reporting, as it is not relevant to the business values of Facebook's News Feed.

4. (in)authenticity: The value of authenticity did not show up in the articles before August 2016, despite having Newsfeed FYI blog posting many explanatory stories since 2014. Facebook team started to hear feedback regarding authentic stories. The creteria of judging authenticity was not identified, but it would be deduced from knowing "what kinds of stories people find misleading, sensational and spammy" (Mosseri, 2016 June). It appears that at the time, Facebook had no definition of authenticity, as it was still working "…to understand what type of stories and posts people consider genuine, so we can show more of them in News Feed" (Peysakhovich, 2016 August). It was only in December 2016 that Facebook unveiled steps to address fake news. It started a partnership with some fact-checking news organizations that would examine the stories reported by users or signaled by the system, to judge their accuracy (Mosseri, 2016 December). What is interesting is that relevance was always the most emphasized value, and that authenticity never appeared as a value in the earlier posts.

5. Shared responsibility: Facebook position is very clear in that it is not responsible for insuring accuracy of news circulating in the platform. Instead, the major theme is identifying "shared responsibility" and Community cooperation, wherein users are more responsible in reporting false posts and not sharing or posting false articles. As one post said: "We believe in giving people a voice and that we cannot become arbiters of truth ourselves…" (Mosseri, 2016 June) As many posts emphasized that what people see is based on what they like, it is then users responsibility too to report the spammy content they encounter (Owens & Turitzin, 2014 April). The News Feed improvement is based primarily on people's feedback (Peysakhovich, 2016 August). That is also linked to the idea that Facebook prefers to give tools for users to sort out news instead of taking a proactive role. The issue of spam is created by "A smaller set of publishers who are frequently and intentionally creating feed spam…" (Owens & Turitzin, 2014 April). Nonetheless, Facebook proposes that it will disrupt the fake news businesses "…by doing several things to reduce the financial incentives" (Mosseri, 2016 December). That is saying Facebook will do its part, but users' have some responsibilities as well.

b. *Corrective actions*: Facebook is not neglecting the fact that fake news exist in the system, and it has been proposing measures to counter them (Lada, Lee & Ding, 2017). Facebook's main category theme was that the system is being constantly updated and development is in-progress. There were many updates made to the system that tried to address the issue of spams, fake news, and click-baits. One criterion Facebook uses to identify false posts was the level of shares; if people who read an article are less likely to share it, the more likely this is a sign that this is article is misleading (Mosseri, December 2016). This technique can arguably be not effective enough, because not sharing a story does not necessarily mean it is false. The initial

test results showed that this update increases the clicking of external likes by 5%, which is taken as a good sign that the story was found as reliable by the user (Owens & Turitzin, April 2014). One counterargument can be that people may not share a story because it was less engaging or entertaining, but not necessarily false. As for dealing with click-baits, Facebook explained new system updates that well make it able to: identify pages with repeated click-bait posts, read headlines for click-bait key words, and weed out posts with explicit calls for likes or shares (Blank & Xu, 2016). If people come back quickly to Facebook after viewing the story, that will also be taken as an indication of dissatisfaction with the story content (Blank & Xu, 2016).

The other type of corrective measures is what relies on users' reporting. The platform offered updates to report a hoax, or to flag a story (Mosseri, December 2016). In addition, Facebook relied on its *Feed Quality Panel, which is asking a sample of users to rate* stories they read on a five-star scale (Zhang & Chen, February 2016). All the proposed measures are based on Facebooks core-values of people's responsibility and prioritizing relevance, hence they do not include editorial oversight. As for filter bubbles, the analysis could not find any related corrective measures.

The major feature in Facebook's corrective action was the concept of constant updating or always having work in-progress. Facebook would learn from changes and "will continue to work on reducing clickbait (Peysakhovich, 2016 August) and repeatedly remind users that "we learn from you and adopt over time"(Mosseri, 2016 June).

   c.   Minimization: Whenever Facebook proposes new major updates, it will discuss how it might affect the users' pages. For instance, when announcing steps to counter click-baits, Facebook announces that "most pages won't see any significant changes to their distribution in News Feed as a result of this change" (Peysakhovich, 2016 August). When making updates to the Feed Quality Prgram, there was a clarification that "most pages won't see any significant changes… [But] some pages might see minor decreases" (Blank & Xu, 2016 April). The News Feed team then used minimization a technique to limit the perception of its corrective actions, and not as a way to minimize the problem itself.

Discussion
Filter-bubbles situation as a byproduct of Newsfeed's values

It becomes clear after reading and analyzing News Feed core values that filter bubbles would naturally emerge from this ecosystem. If informativeness is subjectively determined, and that personal relevance is more important than national relevance, then the newsfeed will be structured around a small sub-set of issues that relate to the person and the close circle of like-minded friends and followers. Moreover, since likes and shares are taken as indication of authenticity, stories that people are more likely to disagree with won't be apparent in someone's newsfeed. The system is designed to show posts that are more likely to have one's likes and comments. The system indeed is not working to create filter bubbles along political lines, but mostly around interests. Some people might not see political content at all because they prefer recipes or celebrity gossips. However, it is because News Feed does not examine the type of content, political filter bubbles well be created because it will be based on sources of interest, and not necessarily bias. It is still arguable whether Facebook should be concerned about this, since users can still choose to engage with contrarian content. But judging from the way the system was explained, News Feed facilitates the creation of filter bubbles.

Fake news, spam and click-baits

Facebook had abstained from never used the phrase "fake news", before the 2016 general elections. It rather talked about hoaxes and spams (Owens & Weinsberg, 2015). Spams were mostly referring to posts with inaccurate descriptions in the posts. However, the cases of creating news websites based on fabrications, then linking to them via Facebook was not considered in the early days of News Feed. As one of Facebook's core value is neutrality and being inclusive "We believe [in Facebook] in giving people a voice and that we cannot become arbiters of truth ourselves" (Mosseri, 2016 December), it was unforeseeable that giving voice to false information might have grave consequences. What Facebook learned that creating fake news can be a profitable business, which made it realize that it must stop spammers' financial incentives (Mosseri, 2016 December). The major issue that is still persistent is that reporting fake news is still largely based on users' feedback. That means as long as fake news find popularity with sub-sects of the Facebook community, these falsehoods will find their way through the system. Having active users who report immediately is the key to stop that.

Conclusion

The analysis found that Facebook has tried to maintain its image be constantly providing corrective action to the system. However, these updates were following -for the most part- the values of relevance and neutrality, which made authenticity and accuracy minor concerns. The responsibility to counter the wave of spam and hoaxes were mainly based on people's feedback, and by providing better tools for reporting them. The posts kept emphasizing that the system is still learning based on what Facebook hears from people, and collecting signals from users' behavior of shares, comments, likes and click-throughs. It became clear that for the most part Facebook emphasized having relevance as a priority, and it has messaged that repeatedly to readers. Recent changes around fake news has awaken the team to the potential of spamming people for financial purposes, which means it will produce negative user experience for many people.

The lesson or public relation professional is that an organization's corrective actions must address the issue at hand directly and solve the consequences. When the corrective measures do not solve the root of the problem, the controversy would keep growing, and most likely; the credibility of the company would diminish. Future research should look into how can SNSs creates a system that tests authenticity, aside from depending on users' self-reports. That will be an interesting topic for Journalism, PR, and media information scholars.

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Silent & Unprepared:
Most Millennial Practitioners yet to Embrace Role as Ethical Conscience

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Abstract

Millennial practitioners do not feel prepared to offer ethics counsel and do not expect to face ethical dilemmas at work.   Through survey research, significant differences were found regarding perceptions of readiness to offer ethics counsel based on availability of mentors and ethics training in college or at work.

As the oldest members of the Millennial generation are beginning to take on managerial and other key decision making roles, there is a need to expand our understanding of this generation's attitudes toward ethical decision making in the workplace. Most scholars identify Millennials, also known as Generation Y, as those born between 1981 or 1982 through 2000 (Gallicano, Curtin & Matthews, 2012; VanMeter, Grisaffe, Chonko & Roberts, 2013). Much of the current literature focuses on this generation's actions and ethical perceptions related to academic environments (Auger, 2013; VanMeter et al., 2013), and their views on questionable decisions made by others (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2016; Gallicano et al., 2012).

One of the few studies published on Millennials and public relations ethics found that while students at one university were aware of the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) code of ethics, it did not influence their behavior when it came to academic integrity, as almost 80% admitted to cheating (Auger, 2013). In another study, Millennials expressed concern about unethical business practices in public relations agencies related to client billing, media relations and client presentations; however, the authors pointed out that the Millennials did not provide any suggestions on how to address these issues, which may indicate "they felt they lacked any power to change them" (Gallicano et al., 2012, p. 239). In a third study, scholars found when Millennials were presented with three ethical dilemmas, they preferred "to avoid an issue rather than taking a stand" by simply referring the issue to a superior (53.5%) or ignoring a request (69.5%), or choosing to follow the boss' orders with the responses ranging from 22.1% to 52% (Curtin, Gallicano & Matthews, 2011, p. 13). Despite these insights, scholars have decried the lack of empirical search regarding "Millennials' perspectives on work and ethics, particularly in public relations" (Curtin et al. 2011, p. 1).

Millennials are expected to comprise 75% of the workforce by 2025 (Deloitte, 2014), and they will shift from being the "doer" to the "decider." In addition, their ethical compass will set the course for the following generation of public relations professionals, Generation Z. As such, this study seeks to identify the types and sources of ethics training Millennials have received, what ethical issues they are facing, and determine whether or not they view ethics counsel as a personal job responsibility. These issues are examined through survey research with a national sample of Millennials who are members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) as associate members and/or members of the New Professionals section.

A recent study conducted with a national survey of PRSA members and educators provided evidence that the majority of practitioners and educators believe it is their role to serve as an ethical conscience within their organization and/or for their clients (Neill, 2016a). However, the demographics of the sample were skewed with an average age of 47 and the average years of experience in public relations was 21. In addition, 37% of the practitioners were accredited. For this reason, additional research was warranted to better understand the views and experiences of Millennials regarding ethics. This study builds on these findings from to examine ethical issues impacting younger public relations practitioners. This study also examined the role of mentors, who previously were identified as influential for junior practitioners as they advance into management positions (Pompper & Adams, 2006; Tam, Dozier, Lauzen & Real, 1995).

Literature Review

As a theoretical foundation for this study, previous literature related to social identity theory and socialization through formal and informal mentors, as well as ethics training was examined. Finally, previous research related to public relations' role as an ethical conscience is discussed.

Society Identity Theory & Role of Mentors

Social identity refers to the tendency for people to classify themselves and others into social categories such as members of organizations or religious affiliations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Identification involves a "perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group, involving direct or vicarious experiences of its successes and failures" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 34) Professions can be a source of social identity through membership in professional associations such as PRSA, which promotes values and guiding principles through a code of ethics (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Furthermore, professionals are encouraged to "maintain professional standards of excellence" (Peluchette & Jeanquart, 2000), which can refer to a commitment to continuing education, ethical practices and concern for the public interest.

To build social identity, newcomers to an organization, such as new employees, have to learn about policies, role expectations and behavioral norms through the organizational socialization process (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). One means for socializing newcomers to a profession is mentors, both formal and informal. Formal mentoring relationships tend to be associated with an employer assigning a more experienced person with a lesser experienced one, and informal mentoring relationships are associated with those that develop organically through the consent of the mentor and protégé (Jablin, 2001; Tam et al. 1995). Through a qualitative study, Pompper and Adams (2006) identified several benefits of mentoring in public relations, which are associated with socialization, such as pointing out "image and behavioral detractors that could stunt assimilation or status growth," and opening their professional networks to protégés. Consistent with formal mentoring, Curtin et al. (2011) recommended that employers assign mentors to young employees "to help them work through ethical dilemmas rather than avoid them" (p. 15). In another study, Gallicano (2013) found mentoring in an agency environment was valued by Millennials and associated with intent to stay at the agency. When examining the impact of mentors in the academic environment, Peluchette and Jeanquart (2000) found that professors in their early and mid-career stages who had mentors from multiple sources (e.g., formal internal and informal external) experienced the highest levels of both objective (e.g., research productivity) and subjective success (e.g., work role, interpersonal, financial, life).

Based on the literature, this leads to the following research questions and hypothesis:
- RQ1: What ethical issues are Millennials working in public relations most likely to face in their jobs?
- RQ2: To whom would Millennials likely turn to for ethics advice?
- H1: Millennials who have a mentor will feel more prepared to provide counsel in public relations ethics than those who do not.

Socialization through Ethics Education & Professional Development

Members of a professional association also may be socialized through participation in professional development programs such as conferences and chapter meetings. Professional associations, such as PRSA, provide continuing education and resources focused on ethics including accreditation, a code of ethics, ethical standards advisories, webinars, conferences and blog posts. Previous research found 52% of PRSA members were mostly familiar with the code, 18.6% were extremely familiar, and the majority of PRSA members (52.8%) also agreed that the code was useful for preventing ethical lapses (Lee & Cheng, 2012). However, a survey of Millennial public relations practitioners found that less than half (46.7%) found the PRSA code of

ethics as useful or somewhat useful, but 73.6% did consider ethics education or training to be useful or somewhat useful (Curtin et al. 2011).

Socialization on ethics also may occur in the workplace through ethics training as part of new employee orientation or annually for all employees through online training modules, workshops or guest speakers (Bowen, 2004; Lee & Cheng, 2012; Neill, 2016b). While scholars have advocated for ethics training, Lee and Cheng (2012) found through survey research that more than half (52%) of public relations practitioners reported that their organizations did not provide ethics training, and nearly half of the respondents (45.6%) did not receive ethics instruction in college. Scholars have provided evidence regarding benefits associated with ethics education. Through survey research, Gale and Bunton (2005) found that recent graduates who had taken a media ethics course were more aware of ethical issues and more likely to have discussed ethical concerns with colleagues than those who had not taken an ethics course.

As further evidence in support of the need for ethics training, scholars have found that Millennial public relations practitioners overestimate their readiness to provide ethics counsel (Kim & Johnson, 2009; Todd, 2014). Using a 5-point scale, millennial public relations practitioners gave themselves an average score of 4.28 representing above average for ethical awareness, but their supervisors awarded them an average score ($M =3.05$) (Todd, 2014). Similarly, Kim and Johnson (2009) found that 82.4% of Millennial practitioners ranked themselves as quite competent or completely competent in ethical decision making, but only 34.2% of employers rated their new hires as good or very good in ethical decision-making. These findings support Gallicano's (2013) warning about a blind spot among Millennials, meaning they do not realize what they do not know (p. 224). Based on the literature, this leads to the next research question and hypotheses:

- RQ3: Are Millennials receiving ethics training? If so, from what sources and what types of training?
- H2: Millennials who have taken an ethics course in college will be more likely to say they feel prepared to provide counsel in public relations ethics than those who did not take an ethics course.
- H3: Millennials who have received ethics training at work will be more likely to say they feel prepared to provide counsel in public relations ethics than those who did receive ethics training at work.
- H4: Millennials who participated in ethics training through PRSA/PRSSA will be more likely to say they feel prepared to provide counsel in public relations ethics than those who did not participate in these professional development opportunities.

Public Relations as Ethical Conscience

Public relations scholars and industry leaders have called for practitioners to provide ethical leadership in their organizations for many decades (e.g., Bivins, 1992; Bowen, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 1996; Fitzpatrick & Gauthier 2001; Neill & Drumwright, 2012; Paluszek, 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1983).   This role has been referred to as an ethical or organizational conscience, which is defined as "a professional who raises concerns when his or her organization's actions might bring about potential ethical problems leading to troubling consequences for various parties, who may be individuals, groups, organizations… both within and outside the organization" (Neill & Drumwright, 2012, p. 221). A conscience involves "a lack of impulsiveness, care in mapping

out alternatives and consequences….and awareness of and concern for the effects of one's decision and policies on others" (Goodpaster & Matthews, 1982, p.134).

Scholars have found mixed acceptance among public relations practitioners regarding the role of ethical conscience. Some practitioners have suggested ethics are better left to the legal department, that they lack the access to provide ethics counsel, or they said that the role was beyond their "professional responsibilities, abilities or trainings" (Bowen, 2008, p. 284). In contrast, some public relations practitioners perceived that ethics and reputation management were connected and a natural part of their jobs (Bowen, 2008). Much of the research regarding public relations' role as ethical conscience has been based on qualitative data such as focus groups or interviews. However, recent survey research with more than 400 educators and practitioners found the majority of practitioners (82%) and educators (95.8%) agree to strongly agree that public relations should provide ethics counsel, and they (85.5% practitioners, 92.7% educators) also agreed that ethics counsel is a natural fit with public relations' reputation management role (Neill, 2016a). In contrast, using case studies St. John III and Pearson (2016) rejected the role of ethical conscience claiming it was "problematic" and "of negligible use" in the context of crisis communication (p. 18), and instead recommended that public relations practitioners assume a more modest of role of encouraging ethical deliberation among multiple leaders in a company or organization.

Based on the literature, this leads to the following research question and hypothesis:

- RQ4: Which of the potential barriers to ethical counsel and decision making do Millennials perceive as applicable to them?
- H5: Millennials who are socialized into PRSA (e.g., familiar with ethics resources and likely to use them) are more likely to say that public relations practitioners should provide ethics counsel.
- H6: Millennials who have confidence (e.g. are comfortable discussing ethics concerns with supervisors, mentors, and clients) are more likely to provide ethics counsel.

Method

Consistent with previous research on ethics and Millennials (Auger, 2013; Curtin et al. 2011), this study utilized an online survey. The survey was distributed via an email invitation from PRSA to 844 members of the New Professionals section and Associate Members of PRSA, with any duplicate email addresses being removed, during the month of September 2016 in recognition of ethics month. In addition, 650 PRSA members with less than five years of experience also received an email invitation. A reminder email also was distributed as a means to increase response rates. The survey was conducted through Qualtrics to ensure anonymity. As an incentive for participation, respondents were given the option to contact the primary researcher by email to be entered in a drawing for one of four $100 gift cards. The response was 290 practitioners (19% response rate) and 254 of them were eligible for the study based on their response to the screener question regarding birthdate. In accordance with institutional review board guidelines, respondents could skip questions, so the total N varies from question to question. Only those who completed the majority of the survey (at least 84%) were included in the final sample resulting in 217 respondents (85% completion rate). The sample included 160 women (73.4%) and 23 men (10.6%) and 35 (16%) did not specify gender. The average age of the sample was 25.48.   The average years of experience in public relations was 3.16.

Survey Constructs

Questions addressed issues such as types of ethics training Millennial practitioners have completed, perceptions regarding preparedness to provide counsel related to ethics in public relations, attitudes toward providing ethics counsel, and perceptions regarding the likelihood of facing various ethical issues. In addition, Millennials were asked about the presence of any formal or informal mentors in their lives to assess H1. The questions regarding ethics instruction in college, at work, and through PRSA/PRSSA, and "How prepared do you feel you are to provide counsel on ethical issues related to public relations in your organization?" are related to H2, H3, and H4. Questions regarding familiarity and likelihood to use PRSA's ethics resources along with their degree of agreement with the statement that "Public relations practitioners should provide ethics counsel" are associated with H5. Questions regarding their confidence in discussing ethical concerns with mentors, supervisors and clients along with a statement questioning their likelihood to offer ethics counsel are related to H6.

Questions addressing perceived preparedness to provide ethics counsel, likelihood to provide counsel on ethical issues, attitudes toward providing ethics counsel, and likelihood to face specific ethical issues were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing very unfamiliar/unprepared/unlikely/strongly disagree and 5 representing very familiar/prepared/likely/strongly agree. The items related to attitudes toward providing ethics counsel were based on previous quantitative and qualitative research (Bowen, 2008; Neill, 2016a), and the ethical issues listed were based on multiple studies on public relations and advertising ethics (Bowen, 2013; Drumwright & Murphy, 2009; Gale & Bunton, 2005; Ryan, 1987; Schauster & Neill, In Press). The survey concluded with demographic questions to allow for comparison with the previous survey results.

Findings

Research question one asked what ethical issues Millennials working in public relations are most likely to face in their jobs. The Millennial practitioners only ranked one item among six above neutral, messaging (3.49), indicating their likelihood to face the issue. When asked which issues they personally had faced, 136 (62.4%) chose messaging (e.g. such as how much information to disclose and when), 78 (35.8%) blurring of online and professional speech, 75 (34.4%) lack of access to leadership or information, and 71 (32.6%) transparency in sponsored content.

Research question two asked to whom Millennials would likely turn to for ethics advice. The majority of the participants (68.8%) indicated they have a mentor with whom they could discuss ethical concerns, and 137 (62.8%) indicated they would be comfortable discussing ethical concerns with a mentor outside of their employer. In addition, 136 (62%) indicated they would be comfortable discussing ethical concerns with their immediate supervisor. However, less than 41% ($n = 82$) were familiar to very familiar with the PRSA code of ethics and 47% ($n = 103$) said they were likely to very likely to use the code of ethics.

Research question three asked if Millennials are receiving ethics training and if so, from what sources. The majority of Millennial practitioners have received ethics training in college either as a graduate or undergraduate student or both (74%). However, only 46 (21%) indicated their employer has provided ethics training and only 30 (13.8%) responded that they had participated in ethics training provided by PRSA or PRSSA. The most common ethics training provided at work were in the form of videos ($n = 25$), employee handbooks ($n = 24$), electronic learning modules ($n = 17$) and policies ($n = 17$). The most common form of ethics training

participants had completed through PRSA was chapter meetings (*n* =28), followed by webinars (*n* =15) and the annual international conference (*n* =12).

Research question four asked which potential barriers to ethics counsel and decision making do Millennials perceive as applicable to them. In responses to two questions, Millennials acknowledged their personal limitations in providing ethics counsel: 51% agree to strongly agree that they are not typically in the board room when ethical issues are discussed and 34% indicated that they personally have faced lack of access to leadership and information.

Factors Impacting Perceptions of Preparedness

Overall, Millennial practitioners indicated they did not feel prepared to offer ethics counsel (M=2.54) with only 65 (30%) who agree to strongly agree that they feel prepared to offer ethics counsel. However, significant differences were found based on mentoring, training and socialization.

Mentoring and Preparedness: H1 posited that Millennials who have a mentor will feel more prepared to provide counsel in public relations ethics than those who do not. The two groups were significantly different based on an independent samples t-test. The test revealed that practitioners who have a mentor were significantly more likely to report that they felt prepared to offer ethics counsel ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.129$) compared to those who do not have a mentor ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.119$), $t(181) = 2.512$, $p = .013$. H1 was confirmed.

Ethics Course and Preparedness: H2 posited that Millennials who have taken an ethics course in college will be more likely to say they feel prepared to provide counsel in public relations ethics than those who did not take an ethics course. The two groups were significantly different based on an independent samples t-test. The test revealed that practitioners who completed an ethics course in college were more likely to report that they felt prepared to offer ethics counsel ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.103$) compared to those who did not take an ethics course ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.238$), $t(181) = 2.997$, $p = .003$. H2 was confirmed.

Employer Training and Preparedness: H3 posited that Millennials who have received ethics training at work will be more likely to say they feel prepared to provide counsel in public relations ethics than those who did receive ethics training at work. The two groups were significantly different based on an independent samples t-test. The test revealed that practitioners who completed ethics training at work were more likely to report that they felt prepared to offer ethics counsel ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.199$) compared to those who did not receive ethics training at work ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.096$), $t(179) = 2.392$, $p = .018$. H3 was confirmed.

PRSA/PRSSA Training and Preparedness: H4 posited that Millennials who participated in ethics training through PRSA or PRSSA will be more likely to say they feel prepared to provide counsel in public relations ethics than those who did not participate in these professional development opportunities. The two groups were significantly different based on an independent samples t-test. The test revealed that practitioners who completed ethics training through PRSA or PRSSA were more likely to report that they felt prepared to offer ethics counsel ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.354$) compared to those who did not complete ethics training through PRSA or PRSSA ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.070$), $t(178) = 3.091$, $p = .002$. H4 was confirmed.

Factors Impacting Beliefs about Counsel & Likelihood to Offer Counsel

When asked about their agreement with the statement that "Public relations practitioners should provide ethics counsel," 59.6% (*n* =130) selected agree to strongly agree ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.703$).

In addition, only 25% (n =55) agree to strongly agree that they are likely to provide ethics counsel (M = 2.43, SD = 1.517)

Socialization and Belief: H5 posited that Millennials who are socialized into PRSA (e.g., familiar with ethics resources and likely to use them) are more likely to say that public relations practitioners should provide ethics counsel. Socialization was measured through two questions regarding familiarity and likelihood to use various PRSA ethics resources (M = 2.58, SD = .97), and belief was measured through responses to eight statements regarding whether or not public relations should provide ethics counsel (M = 3.87, SD = .63). A principle components analysis using varimax rotation was used to reduce the data. The analysis yielded a one-factor solution. The eight-item scale was found to be reliable (α = .906). Linear regression analysis was used to determine how much PRSA socialization may influence the belief that PR practitioners should provide ethics counsel. The analysis indicated that PRSA socialization explains 54% of the variance in participant's support of ethics counsel (R^2 = .54, $F_{(1,216)}$ = 255.50, β = .736, p < .001). H5 was confirmed.

Confidence and Likelihood to Offer Ethics Counsel: H6 posited that Millennials who have confidence (e.g. are comfortable discussing ethics concerns with supervisors, mentors, and clients) are more likely to provide ethics counsel. Confidence was measured through responses to seven statements related to their degree of comfort and feelings of intimidation related to discussing ethical concerns (M = 3.55, SD = .60).   A principle components analysis using varimax rotation was used to reduce the data. The analysis yielded a one-factor solution. The seven-item scale was found to be reliable (α = .92). Linear regression analysis was used to determine how much confidence may influence their likelihood to offer ethics counsel. The analysis indicated that confidence explains 11.8% of the variance in participant's likelihood to offer ethics counsel (R^2 = .118, $F_{(1,180)}$ = 24.184, β = .344, p < .001). H6 was confirmed.

Discussion

Consistent with previous research (Gale & Bunton, 2005), this study provided evidence of the benefits of ethics training as a means for improving Millennials' perceptions of readiness to provide ethics counsel. The factors that significantly impacted Millennials' perceptions of readiness included the existence of a mentor, completion of an ethics course in college, ethics training provided by their employer, and participation in PRSA or PRSSA ethics programming. In addition, Millennials who were familiar and likely to use PRSA's ethics resources were more likely to believe that public relations practitioners should provide ethics counsel, demonstrating the value of professional associations for socializing new practitioners regarding ethical practices.

Unfortunately, similar to previous research (Curtin et al. 2011), less than 41% of the Millennial respondents were familiar to very familiar with the PRSA code of ethics and 47% were likely to very likely to consult it. These results are much lower than the general PRSA membership as 52% reported they were mostly familiar with the PRSA code of ethics and 18.6% were extremely familiar (Lee & Cheng, 2012).

While the majority of Millennials in this study reported they had completed an ethics course in college, most are not receiving ethics training at work or through PRSA. As a result, they don't feel prepared to offer ethics counsel and indicated they are unlikely to do so. This is a cause for concern, as public relations professionals at later stages of their careers identify the importance of their role as the ethical conscience of their organization or clients. If Millennial practitioners do not feel equipped to serve this function, they may be misled by their superiors or used as instruments of unethical behavior due to their naiveté. Without additional training or guidance

from mentors, it is unclear how Millennial practitioners will bridge this gap in knowledge other than having to learn through trial and error.

At the same time, it is encouraging to see a more honest assessment of their abilities compared to previous research with Millennials (Kim & Johnson, 2009; Todd, 2014). In contrast, a survey with the general PRSA membership found both accredited and non-accredited members were more likely than Millennials (M=2.54) to feel prepared to offer ethics counsel (M=4.42 APRs, M=3.61 non-APRs) and more likely to offer ethics counsel (M=2.54 Millennials, M=3.96 APRs, M=3.39 non-APRs) (Neill, 2016a). These findings suggest that confidence and preparedness come with more experience in public relations as well as a higher degree of socialization into the industry. This study also provided evidence that confidence does impact Millennials' likelihood to offer ethics counsel, such as comfort in discussing their concerns with mentors, clients, and direct supervisors. In contrast, the combination of lack of confidence and training, and absence of mentors among Millennial practitioners poses a risk that they will make recommendations or take actions without exploring their blind spots. If they don't know what that don't know, how will they know how to counsel their clients and organizations toward ethical practices?

One of the most surprising findings was that Millennials only ranked one item, messaging, above neutral indicating their likelihood to face the ethical issue. However, in a follow-up question, 62% indicated they had faced ethical issues related to messaging and about one-third had experienced ethical issues regarding blurring of online and professional speech, lack of access to leadership or information, and transparency in sponsored content. It is difficult to determine why Millennials don't expect to face ethical issues in the workplace; perhaps they perceive their employers as ethical or have yet to face these issues this early in their careers. In contrast, a study with the general PRSA membership found 276 (90%) had faced ethical issues related to messaging, 201 (66%) related to lack of access to leadership and information, 179 (59%) regarding blurring of personal and professional speech online, and 151 (49.5%) related to personal ethics (Neill, 2016a).

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

This survey was distributed only to PRSA members with less than five years of experience, so the results cannot be generalized among Millennials who are not members of PRSA. Additional research could be conducted with Millennials who are not members of a professional association to determine how and if they are being socialized regarding acceptable industry practices. Future research also should examine Millennials' attitudes regarding their likelihood to face ethical concerns, possibly comparing graduates of programs requiring coursework in ethics and graduates of programs who did not require ethics coursework, especially as they progress in their careers. Qualitative research would provide additional insights into their attitudes and reasons why they do not expect to face ethical challenges.

Conclusion

This study has provided insights into Millennials attitudes toward public relations' responsibility to provide ethics counsel and their perceptions of personal preparedness to do so. While most Millennials received ethics training in college, they do not feel prepared to offer ethics counsel and even appear to be overly optimistic as they do not expect to face ethical dilemmas at work. Millennials should take advantage of ethics training and resources offered through professional associations and seek out mentors who can guide them as they begin to face ethical challenges.

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Exploring the Effects of Media and Information Sources on Individuals' Attitude, Perception, and Behavior Intentions Toward Crisis Responses

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Abstract

This study employs a 2 (media types: Twitter, blog) x 4 (information sources: organization, industry expert, celebrity, and private citizen) experimental design to test two hypotheses and examine a research question. Researchers predicted that (1) attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral intentions, source credibility, message credibility will have a stronger positive relationship with information provided by organizations than those from third-party content creators (industry experts, celebrities, anyone), (2) information published on Twitter will generate positive attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral intentions, and higher perception of source credibility and message credibility than those published on blog. A research question examined the interactive effects of medium and information sources on individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, and behavior intentions, perception of source credibility and message credibility. Previous attitude toward brand and knowledge involvement serve as covariates. Two hundred forty seven college students from a midwestern university participated in this study. Findings suggested that information sources could affect individuals' perception of subject norms and no interaction effect was found. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed along with future research directions.

Introduction

Public relations practitioners are using social media to participate in two-way communication in order to engage a brand and its audience. Social media brings two elements together by creating platforms for an audience to consume professionally created material or it can act as an enthusiastic catalyst to create user-generated content in online communities (Drury, 2008). When a crisis hits, some corporate executives choose to say as little as possible on social media due to liability issues, particularly when the company faces a lawsuit or intense public pressures. This non-communication, however, may create distrust and a lack of support among stakeholders and the public. Limited communication involvement on online media may garner more criticism and generate missed opportunities to provide engagement platforms for loyal members of the public, or faith-holders (Luoma-aho, 2015) to express their support for the company and for third-party content creators to gather information and discuss the situation. Some corporations choose to create a blog to provide information and services for affected customers. Thus, blogging is often used as one-way communication, unless the action actively engages in the blogs' comments and frequently-asked questions sections.

When a crisis involves management misconduct, online content creators with other-than-technical backgrounds might provide analyses that may be incorrect and thereby create negative perceptions toward an organization in crisis. Organizational information released in a timely manner can provide input for third-party content creators, which may even generate support for the organization. The Volkswagen emissions scandal is used as a crisis scenario to test how information from blogs and Twitter accounts published by various sources can affect crisis response effectiveness.

Yet, different information sources posted in different media may yield varying effects on readers' perceptions. Source credibility and content credibility might affect readers' perceptions (i.e., trust, belief) about the messages (Schmierback & Oedorf-Hirsch, 2012). Unlike traditional blogging, Twitter users can post messages consisting of no more than 140 characters, and can include a link to the original information source. Thus, the different features between traditional blogs and Twitter may yield different effects when the message is posted by different content creators. The central question of this study asked the effects of media types and information sources on individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, behavior intentions, perception on source credibility and message credibility.

This study employed concepts in the theory of plan behavior to test two hypotheses and examine a research question, rather than testing the theory. The following section briefly presents background on the Volkswagen crisis case, followed by a review of literature in media types and information sources effects as well as the theory of plan behavior. It then discusses the design of an experimental study, and research findings.

Literature Review

Case background: volkswagen crisis

Volkswagen's emissions scandal hit on September 8, 2015 after the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a notice about the company's Clean Air Act violations. During model years 2009 through 2015, a program was installed in some Volkswagen car models to lower actual nitrogen oxide emissions in order to meet US standards during regulator testing (Ngan, 2015). Consequently, Volkswagen faced two major challenges including (1) lawsuits from multiple governments and private consumers and (2) significant decreases in sales and stock prices. More severe negative impacts included corporate reputation and public

trust toward this German automaker. Volkswagen's CEO apologized for the 'broken trust' of stakeholders (Wattles, 2015). On Twitter, public concerns surrounding this emissions issue were raised followed by the associated #Volkswagen hashtag. Volkswagen did not become actively involved on social media, specifically on Volkswagen Twitter and Facebook accounts. Instead, the company chose to provide information on a designated blog to communicate with the public and consumers during this crisis. As for blogs, not until September 27th did the company launch a blog (http://vwdieselinfo.com) simply to provide more detailed information about affected car models, how the company provides solutions to consumers, and answer stakeholders' questions through a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section in addition to providing direct contact for customer services. The next section discusses the communication effects on Twitter and blogs.

The media: twitter and blogs
        A 2015 Pew Research Center study noted that Twitter, Facebook, and blogs are the most common sources for news, respectively (Barthel, Shearer, Gottfried, & Mitchell, 2015). The percentage of respondents who used Twitter to update a news event was double the percentage of those who used Facebook to update breaking news (Barthel et al.). Due to the popularity of news consumption on Twitter and the online media channels used by Volkswagen, the study chose to examine Volkswagen's Twitter account and blog with an experimental design.
        Twitter: Twitter is gaining momentum for users to obtain timely updates and real-time information, so it may be a useful tool for crisis managers to monitor stakeholders' needs and concerns (Lachlan, Spence, & Lin, 2014). Online media enable consumers to experience news consumption differently from traditional media that offer online experience to be more active, participatory, and interactive (Caler, Malhous, & Schaedel, 2009). Hence, a crisis manager should monitor social media before, during, and after crises occur (Liu, Jin, & Kuch, 2010).
        Citizens also used Twitter's micro-blogging tool as a method to organize and disseminate crisis-related information (Heverin & Zach, 2010). Yet, predicting the effects of Twitter requires considering the perception of source and message credibility. Perceptions of Twitter credibility could be affected by the strong presence and number of followers that celebrities have (Hargittai & Litt, 2011). Schmierback and Oeldorf-Hirsh found that individuals perceived Twitter messages posted by a news organization as less credible than stories posted on the corporation's website, suggesting further study for the effects of third-party Twitter posts. Although some individuals were concerned with blog credibility, individuals perceived blog posts as more important than Twitter posts and might provide more detailed information than Twitter posts.
        Blog. Blogs, conceptualized as personal Web sites, are regularly updated and contain dated, archived entries with multimedia content such as text, photos (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2004). Blogs are an ideal communication platform to build relationships with the public during a crisis (Smuddle, 2005). Jin and Liu (2010) categorized three forms of blogs, including (1) those that serve as content management systems for an organization (official blog) or external blogs created by third parties (i.e., individuals or groups outside the organization), (2) blog-mediated public relations reflecting an organization's communication strategies and tactics to foster relationships with stakeholders by engaging in third-party blogs and/or creating blogs, and (3) blog-mediated crises which are crises that are initiated or escalated through a blog's (or blogs') communication. During a crisis, blog mediated public relations serve as a platform for a company to interact in conversation with the public.
        Media and members of the public who have concerns about a crisis may seek information from the media, corporations and other sources. Corporate tweet and/or blog posts could provide

input for third-party content creators to get information, disseminate, or even analyze, criticize, or support the corporation. Wigley and Fontenot (2010) found that reporters are more likely to use non-official sources (i.e., social media) followed by fact checking than official sources (i.e., statements, news leases) to gather first-hand accounts. This practice enabled reporters to quickly update information from the field. Wu, Hofman, Mason, & Watts (2011) noted that blogs were indicated both an originating and selecting sources as recognizable "brands" themselves, whereas the credibility of Twitter posts require more research as some Twitter posts that are linked to celebrities' posts. Yet, different types of responses on online media may affect stakeholders' attitudes and behaviors toward corporate crisis responses.

Schultz, Utz, and Goritz (2011) found that the medium matters more than the message, and crisis communication via Twitter led to less negative crisis reactions than blogs and newspapers. Kinsky, Drumheller, Gerlich, Brock-Baskin, and Sollosy (2015) suggested that social media has expanded the reach where others (for example, celebrities) can influence perceptions and persuade reactions. Additionally, Sweetzer and Metzgar (2007) noted that readers perceived a lower level of crisis when they read personal and organizational blogs than those who were not exposed to blogs.

Information sources

Information sources could affect individuals' judgment on source and message credibility. Twitter posts were perceived as less credible than newspapers or blogs for their ability to provide various forms of stories (Schmierback & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2012). While social media could enhance public relations practices (Wright & Hinson, 2008), blogs are considered tools for communication as well as a primary information source for certain key publics (Xifra & Huertas, 2008). Sweetser and Metzgar (2007) found that individuals who were exposed to blogs (both personal or organizational) perceived a lower level of crisis or even decreased feelings that an organization is in a crisis than those who did not read blogs. Influential bloggers such as thought leaders or celebrities could cause a difference on brand perception.

Jin and Liu (2010) defined "influential bloggers as any blog that initiates and/or amplifies a crisis for an organization" (p. 434). Jin and Liu categorized two influential involvement types, including issue-involvement and self-involvement. Issue involvement motivates a blogger to talk about the organization whether the blogger has positive or negative, direct or indirect experience related to organizational issues. Self-involvement motivates a blogger to talk about the organization to build up authority and leadership as a need for self-confirmation (Jin & Liu). Chu and Kamal (2008) also found that the higher perceived-blogger trustworthiness is, the greater impact on brand attitudes that a blogger could generate.

Jin and Liu (2010) suggested that issue relevance, information seeking and sharing, and emotional venting and support are three major blog post motivations. Unlike journalists who are bound to professional standards, bloggers could cover crises differently in ways that could be useful sources for journalists. Once blog posts are published on traditional media, bloggers are more motivated to generate even more content related to the crisis (Jin & Liu). Hence, messages from blogs can reach those who read blogs or those do not read blogs but are exposed to news media. They in turn, can affect individuals' attitudes, perceptions, and behavior. In general, bloggers or online content creators can have certain impacts on public perception toward brand or corporate crisis response. Credibility and number of followers as well as personal credibility are among determinants that decide the different impacts of third-party content creators (industry experts, celebrities, and private citizen) on public's perception to a brand.

Source credibility and message credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which individuals perceive information or its sources to be believable, accurate, trustworthy, unbiased, and contain completely sound information (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). Perceived credibility varies depending on the type of information (Flanagin & Metzger). Some studies found that online news sources were rated as more credible than their offline counterparts (i.e., television, newspapers) (Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2008). Although Twitter and blogs are online information sources, some studies on blog credibility found mixed results (Schmierbach & Oeldorf-Hirch, 2012). Mixed findings in information credibility may be to blame for the focus on examining news or political information that excluded the impact of information types or sources (Flanagin & Metzger).

Source credibility. Source credibility comes into question for its quality of information such as accuracy and truthfulness (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). Information sources with credibility judgments could influence people's evaluations of a message, and therefore, affect the effectiveness of corporate crisis response (Budd, 2000). Park and Cameron (2014) argued that the tone of voice in blogs either of human voice or a corporate voice could affect publics' responses to corporate crisis responses. First-person voice from a corporate with personal narratives could increase perceptions of social presence and online interactivity resulting in positive crisis outcomes, such as reputation and behavioral intentions (Park & Cameron).

Message credibility. While blogs could include an originating source (i.e., organization blogs) and a selecting source (i.e., content or links to a specific website, blog, or personal page), Twitter is often used to promote the content that may include a link to information sources. Flanagin & Metzger (2000) argued that some individuals might not make their credibility judgments based on careful consideration of sources and message content. Rather, other cues affect their judgment, such as a Website's multimedia features (Kiousis, 2006) or perceptions of source credibility (Greer, 2003). Thus, message credibility assessment could be affected by the perceived information source as original or selective.

Theory of Planned Behavior

This study used concepts in the theory of planned behavior and did not aim to test the theory. The theory posits that individual intentions to engage in a particular behavior indicate actual behavior in the future (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). Three distinct constructs of behavioral intentions will be evaluated including (1) attitudes – this construct refers to an individual's positive or negative self-performance evaluation for a particular behavior, (2) social norms – refers to an individual's perception of social normative pressures and of particular behaviors, and (3) behavioral intentions – refer to an individual's readiness to perform a given behavior.

Ajzen (1991) argued that when an individual has more favorable attitude and subject norms, he or she tends to have stronger intention to behave in a way that is moderated by perceived behavior control. Although intention does not always mean action, researchers wondered if corporate crisis responses on Twitter and/or blog or blog/tweets published by a third-party content creators would form people's attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavior intention, in terms of intention to engage in online conversations about the crisis with positive attitudes, and consideration of future purchase. A recent study noted that participants with positive attitudes and those affected by social norms are more likely to donate or to buy (Kinsky, Drumheller, Gerlic, Brock-Baskin, & Sollosy, 2015). In other words, attitude was the best predictor of willingness to donate, while social norms best predicted buying intention.

The choice of medium can affect an individual's perception of corporate reputation. Schultz, Utz, and Goritz (2011) found that crisis communication via Twitter and Facebook leads to higher reputation and fewer secondary crisis reactions—such as boycotting the company—than crisis communication in the newspaper. The corporation's online presence provided interaction with stakeholders that helped to regain public trust and corporate reputation. Kinsky, Drumheller, Gerlic, Brock-Baskin, and Sollosy (2015) argued that individuals' attitudes are based on expectations of an organization's response to crises. When a crisis hits, stakeholders tend to attribute blame and expect an organization or an individual to take action and find a solution. Unregulated and unmoderated features on social media allow people to voice their concerns and opinions. Attitudes and social norms expressed through opinions shared on social media affect individual behavior, specifically intention to donate or buy (Kinsky et al). As social media allow interaction with the public, monitoring and communicating on social media provides inputs for organization to quickly and critically respond to public concerns during a crisis. Twitter serves as an ideal platform to provide timely news coverage and commentary on live events (Barthel, Shearer, Gottfried, & Mitchell, 2015), while blogs provide more detailed information and may be in-depth analysis.

When stakeholders attribute higher levels of organizational responsibility to a crisis, intentional crises are more likely to have a negative impact on corporate reputation and secondary crisis reactions (i.e., boycott) than unintentional crises (Utz, Schultz, & Glocka, 2013). Multiple voices on social media exert user attitudes and can potentially influence consumer behavioral intentions (Shaw, Shiu, Hassan, Bekin, & Hogg, 2007).

Individuals' attitudes are tied to expectations toward corporate crisis responses and what individuals feel about the corporation could have a strong influence on future purchasing behaviors (Kinsky et al., 2015). Kinsky et al. also argued that employing the bolstering strategy for crisis communication could remind stakeholders about the corporation's values and mission, but missteps could affect other crisis response options. Attitude and social norms have a positive relationship with behavioral intentions. Crisis responses aim to overcome critical situations and maintain a favorable reputation. An existing study revealed that perceived favorable reputation could yield positive effect on behavioral intention (i.e., purchase, word-of-mouth) (De Matos & Rossi, 2008). Therefore, this study proposes hypotheses as follows:

H1: Individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral intention, source credibility and message credibility will have a stronger positive relationship with information provided by organization than those from third-party content creators (industry experts, celebrities, anyone).
H2: Information published on Twitter will generate positive attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral intentions, higher perception of source credibility and message credibility more than those published on blog.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of crisis communication via blogs and Twitter, the following research question was proposed:
RQ: What are the effects of medium and information sources on individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, behavior intentions, perception of source credibility and message credibility?

Previous attitude toward brand and knowledge involvement as covariates
Previous attitude toward brand. Previous attitude toward brand refers to individual's perception about a brand/company/product before an incident occurs (MacKenzie & Lutz).

Although the effects of previous attitudes on behavior may or may not be mediated or controlled by intentions (Speckart & Bentler, 1982), previous attitude could have some effects on individuals' perception after exposure of messages.

Knowledge Involvement. Knowledge involvement measured individuals' perception of messages about an organization's event (Zaichkowsky, 1986). In this study, the message content includes the crisis communication messages provided by the company posted on Twitter and blog sites. Individuals' perceptions of the rationale of crisis communication messages may affect individual attitudes, and intention to participate on online conversation and customers' future purchasing behaviors (Lloyd & Clancy, 1991). Hence, attitude toward brand and knowledge involvement serve as covariates in this study as individuals may have prior perceptions about Volkswagen's products and the associated scandal.

Method

Experimental design

This study employed a 2 (media types: Twitter, blog) x 4 (information sources: organization, industry expert, celebrity, and private citizen) experimental design. The dependent variables include (a) individuals' attitude to crisis responses, (b) subjective norms, (c) behavior intentions (show/forward message, tell friends about the information, leave message, intention of future purchase or boycott the product, and persuade others to do so), (d) source credibility, and (e) message credibility. Previous attitude toward brand and knowledge involvement served as covariates. Knowledge involvement measured if participants knew about organizational scandal.

Stimulus

To manipulate the media types, participants viewed either a screenshot of a blog post or four Twitter posts from Volkswagen and third-party content creators (namely, an industry expert, a celebrity, and a private citizen).

Twitter and blog. In the blog condition with an organizational post, a Volkswagen blog post was created based on real blog posts with selected paragraphs that represented main content and crisis response messages. Four messages (apologies, information about compensation packages, and efforts to retrieve the public's trust) were chosen from articles published on Volkswagen's website, Volkswagen's Twitter account, and its dedicated blog to communicate about the crisis (vwdieselinfo.com). By giving a short introduction with the name of the content creator, the post was operationalized as if it were published by a different source (an industry expert, a celebrity, and a private citizen). The manipulated messages on Twitter included four tweets that were similar to the four messages in the blog condition. Tweets were downloaded from Volkswagen's Twitter account and operationalized as if they were from different sources.

Information sources. Information sources were manipulated as if they were from different sources, namely organization (official Twitter or blog site managed by a PR practitioner), an industry expert, a celebrity, or a private citizen. Corporate information sources claimed to be official corporate Twitter or blog post publications. An industry expert was operationalized as a technical expert in the car industry who often wrote blogs or tweeted about cars. A celebrity was operationalized as a Canadian famous actor who has a special interest in cars and sometimes wrote blog or tweeted about cars. A private citizen was operationalized as a personal blogger who wrote blogs or tweeted about cars as a hobby and has no connection with the corporation (Park & Cameron, 2014).

Measurements

Source credibility. All measurements were adopted from previous studies with some adaptations to fit the study context. The source credibility scale was adapted from Schmierbach and Oeldorf-Hirsch (2012) to measure participants' evaluation on how credible they found the information source. Source was used as an intentionally ambiguous label, such as Volkswagen, an industry expert, a celebrity, and a private citizen. Two items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *(1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree asked participants to indicate (1) the extent to which they agree that they "trust the source of this information" and "believe this source is credible"* (Cronback's α= .93) (Schmierbach. & Oeldorf-Hirsch, p. 325).

Message credibility. Message credibility was also adapted from Schmierbach & Oeldorf-Hirsch (2012). Two items asked to what extent they agree that they "believe the content of this message is true" and "trust the specific information in this message" (Cronback's α= .86) (Schmierbach & Oeldorf-Hirsch, p. 325).

Attitudes toward the company: After reading the company crisis responses, participants' attitudes toward the company were measured by answering three 7-point semantic differential scales: *very bad – very good, very unfavorable – very unfavorable, and very unpleasant – very pleasant "* (Cronback's α= .96) (MacKenzie & Lutz).

Subjective norms: Subjective norms measurements were adapted from Ajzen and Fishben (1980) and Shaw et al. (2007) with two items on a 7-point scale which ranged from *(1) extremely unlikely* to (7) *extremely likely*. Respondents were asked to answer (1) To what extent do you believe that those who are important to you think you should buy a Volkswagen product regardless of the emissions scandal and (2) To what extent do those who are important to you would approve of this buying behavior? (Cronback's α= .81)

Behavioral intentions: Behavioral intentions were measured on a 7-point Likert scale which ranged from (1) *extremely unlikely* to (7) *extremely likely*. The scale was adopted from Schultz, Utz and Göritz   (2011). Participants were asked to rate their intentions (1) to share the Twitter or blog posts, (2) respond to a comment, and (3) tweet, comment or post a blog about the crisis responses*"* (Cronback's α= .88).

Participants were asked to estimate their future behavioral intentions with the three items on a 7-point Likert-type scale which ranged from (1) *extremely unlikely* to (7) *extremely likely*. The scale was adopted from Lyon and Cameron (2004): *I would purchase Volkswagen products if I have the opportunity in the future; I would invest in Volkswagen if I have the opportunity in the future; and I would recommend Volkswagen products to a friend if I have the opportunity in the future. "* (Cronback's α= .96).

Procedure and sample

An experiment study using an online survey created on the Qualtrics platform and distributed online to potential participants who were college students recruited from a Midwestern university. Instructors gave extra credit to encourage student participation. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the eight experimental conditions. After reading and electronically giving informed consent, participants were asked to self-report their social media use (Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and other online media). The question was measured on a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from 1-*Never* to 5-*Always*.

Then, participants were asked to answer questions about previous attitude toward brand with three items measured on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., very bad vs. very good). Knowledge involvement measured individuals' perception about the organization's emissions scandal with

five items measured on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., It is unimportant vs. It is important, It is of no concern vs. It is of concern) (Zaichkowsky, 1986).

Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of eight experimental conditions. After reading either four Twitter posts or a blog post with messages related to the crisis, participants were asked to identify the name of content creator for the purpose of manipulation check. Also, participants were directed to the questionnaire page and asked to answer questions about their attitudes toward the company's crisis responses strategies, subject norms, behavioral intentions, source credibility, and message credibility.

Data collection was conducted using Qualtrics. Overall, a total of 247 students participated. No case was found with extreme and systematic response patterns. Seven cases had missing values in some very small number of variables. Students who were either mass communication or business majors from a mid-western university participated in this study. There were 42 participants who never spent time on Twitter and 82 participants who never spent time on blogs. Among them, 70.45% (n =174) were female and 29.55% (n= 73) were male. Age ranged from 18-35 with an average of 20.6; 98.8% participants were undergraduate student and 1.2% graduate student.

Results

Manipulation Check. Manipulation checks were conducted to confirm whether participants reported the correct information sources of messages. The differences between information sources were reported significantly ($F(3,24)=65.221$, $p<.001$, $M_{organization}=1.21$, SD=.076; $M_{industryexpert}=1.93$, SD=0.65; $M_{celebrity}=2.52$, SD=.111; $M_{privateblogger}=3.15$, SD=.149) confirming that manipulation was successful.

H1 predicted that individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral intention, source credibility and message credibility will have a stronger positive relationship with information provided by organization than those from third-party content creators (industry experts, celebrities, private citizen). There was a significant effect of information sources on subject norms ($F (3, 233) = 2.72$, $p =0.05$, $\eta^2_p = .035$). No significant effect of information sources on attitude ($F (3, 233) = 1.65$, $p =.180$, $\eta^2_p = .022$), behavioral intention ($F (3, 233) = 2.31$, $p =.77$, $\eta^2_p = .030$), source credibility ($F (3, 233) = 1.33$, $p =.267$, $\eta^2_p = .017$), and message credibility ($F (3, 233) = 1.77$, $p =.154$, $\eta^2_p = .023$). Hence, H1 is partially supported.

H2 predicted that information published on Twitter will generate positive attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral intentions, and higher perception of source credibility and message credibility than those published on blog. There was no significant effect of media types on dependent variables: individuals' attitude (($F (3, 233) = 0.14$, $p =.713$, $\eta^2_p = .001$), subject norms ($F (3, 233) = .202$, $p =.654$, $\eta^2_p = .001$), behavioral intentions ($F (3, 233) = 1.48$, $p =.117$, $\eta^2_p = .011$), source credibility ($F (3, 233) = 2.92$, $p =.589$, $\eta^2_p = .001$), and message credibility ($F (3, 233) = 1.55$, $p =.214$, $\eta^2_p = .007$). Hence, H2 was rejected.

The research question examined the effects of media types and information sources on individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, and behavior intentions. No interaction effect was found different conditions of media types and information sources, including individuals' attitude ($F (3, 233) =1.42$, $p =.221$, $\eta^2_p = .019$), subject norms ($F (3, 233) = 1.14$, $p =.335$, $\eta^2_p = .015$), behavior intentions ($F (3, 233) = 1.59$, $p =.194$, $\eta^2_p = .021$), source credibility ($F (3, 233) = .107$, $p =.956$, $\eta^2_p = .001$), and message credibility ($F (3, 233) = .998$, $p =.394$, $\eta^2_p = .013$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study attempts to examine the effects of media types and information sources on the effects of individuals' perceptions toward crisis messages. Previous studies have tested the effects of Twitter and blogs, information from media and organizations, and information form and source (Liu, Austin, Jin, 2011). Yet, the effects of information sources publish by third-party content creators need to be examined. This study found that information sources could affect individuals' subject norms. In addition, the current study tested the interaction effects of media types and information sources with previous attitude toward brand and knowledge involvement as covariates. There was no interaction effect of media types and information sources on dependent variables. Yet, previous attitude toward brand and knowledge involvement did have significant effects on individuals' attitude, subject norms, and behavior intentions.

This study provides important implications for both academicians and public relations practitioners. First, unlike past research, this study focuses on the role of information sources on online environments. That is, this study attempts to reveal whether blog users who are exposed to crisis response messages from different information sources are more likely to have a positive attitude, social norms, and behavioral intentions, perception of source credibility and message credibility than those who were exposed to crisis response message posted on Twitter. Based on different perceptions toward information sources and media types, practitioners could find a better online platform to disseminate organization messages. For example, if a crisis involves management misconduct, using blogs to provide information about affected brands/products is a better approach to mitigate potential damages to other brands/products. On the other hand, organizations that provide detailed information to the public will serve as input generators for content creators who write about their case. This in turn prevents any misunderstanding or incorrect information from circulating among stakeholders. In other words, if users see information on Twitter or blogs, they are more likely to respond based on the their attitude about and perception of how the organization respond to a given crisis.

Alternate research designs may result in more significant results. Manipulation checks showed that exposure to different tweet series were having the expected effects insofar as operationalization were concerned. Mean differences show that there may indeed be something to the organization/third-party content creators, though the phenomenon may need to be explored through different designs and operationalization's to reach statistical significance. Present research used actual tweets in order to maximize external validity but it might cause confusion when manipulating other information sources (as the researchers keep the same content and only change the name of content creators). Future research should consider more overt operationalization of media types and information sources on Twitter and blogs, especially given the fact that the state of research in this area is very much still emerging. Additionally, studying other age groups, or possibly exclusively student populations, or current Volkswagen users in the U.S. or Germany as well as other crisis types, could undoubtedly contribute to the nascent state of research in this area.

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Community Engagement and Public Health: A Qualitative Study of Strategic Communication of Hispanic Community Organizations

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Abstract

This faculty-practitioner collaborative project examines community engagement and public health management for ethnic organizations. Using 23 in-depth interviews with community health organizations that serve the Hispanic/Latino population in a southern metropolitan area, this study explores how organizations can communicate strategically and engage effectively with community members to increase health awareness.

Introduction

This faculty-practitioner collaborative project examines community engagement and public health management for ethnic community organizations. In particular, this study is focused on the Hispanic community and explores how Hispanic community organizations can communicate strategically and engage effectively with community members to increase their health awareness. Although community engagement has been widely used to promote health awareness, little research has examined the mechanism through which community organizations can better achieve their goals of promoting public health. Below we discuss the current status of community health disparities and the need for this study.

Current Status and Challenges in Hispanic Community Health Issues

The Hispanic population is the largest minority group in the United States, comprising 17.6 % of the population and is expected to grow to 30% by 2050 (US Census Bureau, 2015). In the past years, health care disparities among the Hispanic population have emerged as an alarming public health concern (Carrion, Ghanta, Carrasquillo, & Martin, 2011). Health disparities are associated with substantial annual economic losses. For example, in Texas, the health disparity gap cost families, employers, insurers, and government an estimated $1.7 billion in excess medical care spending and $2.9 billion in lost productivity (Turner, LaVeist, Gaskin, & Munoz-Rumsey, 2016).

A comprehensive literature review (Mitrani, 2009) indicated that Hispanics bear a disproportionate burden of disease and death rates compared to non-Hispanics, and as the population grows, these disparities grow too, particularly when there are no appropriate and effective interventions. For example, Latinos are more likely to have diabetics (56%), suffer from cervical cancer (45%) and obesity (15%), compared with non-Hispanics Whites (Families USA, 2014).

A recent study shows that the cancer death rate has dropped 23% nationwide since 1991 (Siegel, Miller, & Jemal, 2016), yet cancer remains the leading cause of death among Hispanics, followed by heart diseases. Siegel et al. (2016) concluded that the drop in cancer death rate is mostly driven by factors such as a steady reduction in smoking, advances in cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment, but Hispanics seemed to not gain benefits in any of these areas.

Social and economic factors attribute to health disparities too. On average, Hispanics are much more likely to be born into a reinforcing cycle of poorer health, lower educational attainment, fewer employment opportunities, and less financial stability than the non-Hispanic Whites (Turner et al., 2016). These circumstances contribute to the decreased likelihood of Hispanics to receive timely and proper treatment, prevention, and early detection of their diseases.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, it fills the gaps in current public relations literature by building linkages from strategic communication and relationship management to community engagement and empowerment. It also aims to build a typology of stakeholder engagement strategies based on theoretical and empirical evidence specific to this population. Practically speaking, given the current health disparities among ethnic minority communities, this study helps ethnic community organizations design better engagement strategies with community members to enhance health related communication. The practitioner co-author in this project has been working in the Hispanic community for a long

time and sees the critical needs for better guidance on community engagement. In the following section, we review the literature and conceptualize community engagement, strategic communication and relationship management, and community empowerment.

Community Engagement

Stakeholder engagement refers to communicating with, involving, and developing relationships with stakeholders (Greenwood, 2007). Engagement with community can occur at various levels. The most important levels include information, consultation, participation, and empowerment (*the wheel of participation*, Heritage & Dooris, 2009, p. 148; Johnston, 2010; Peel Public Health, 2012; Yang, 2011). *Information* is the foundation of successful community engagement and refers to "effective, appropriate, and timely information provided to community members" (Johnston, 2010, p. 219). It usually involves one-way dissemination of concepts related to a topic or problem to a pre-defined community group (Johnston, 2010).

Consultation refers to "the process used to solicit opinions and views by individuals and interested community members relating to a specific organization defined issue" (Johnston, 2010, p. 219). It is noted that although community members and groups voice opinions and needs, the relevant organization makes ultimate decisions (Bishop & Davis, 2002; Thomas, 1990). Thus, the purpose of community consultation is to capture a diverse range of opinions from interested community members, rather than capturing the views of every community member (Spicker, 2006).

Participation/collaboration depicts an even more active role by community members in that they participate in the creation of meanings and developing solutions to complex social problems or proposed solutions that affect a specific community (Johnston, 2010). Finally, *empowerment* is the most active participation level by community members, referring to a process or outcome of full community engagement.

Stakeholder engagement researchers have suggested that effective stakeholder engagement approaches should match the targeted levels of engagement (e.g., Reed, 2008; Yang 2011). For example, Yang (2011) matched communication techniques and levels of engagement in the following ways: newsletters and fact sheets for *information*; hotline, focus groups, surveys for *consultation*; community champions, community forums/speak out, and meetings for *involvement*; and community infrastructure reference group for *collaboration and empowerment*. These techniques represent embodiments of the communication strategies proposed in the framework of *excellence theory* (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002), as discussed below. This multi-level approach of engagement could therefore be enriched by incorporating the specific dimensions of public relations practices.

Strategic Public Relations Practices

L. Grunig et al.'s (2002) excellence theory proposes that organizations need to engage in *symmetrical* (communication for the bilateral interests that balance both parties' interests through exploring mutual needs), *two-way* (engaging in a dialogue to understand the other party), and *ethical* communication through the *channels* of both mediated and interpersonal communication. Among these four concepts, symmetrical communication has been a focal point of research (e.g., L. Grunig et al., 2002), because it can be challenging to balance the interests of both an organization and its stakeholders, especially during conflicts. In the case of community non-profit organizations, although typically the goals of these organizations are closely tied to serving the community, this does not mean that the organizational interests are never at odds

with those of their community members. It is worth examining how these organizations actually define and use symmetrical communication in the process of engaging with their community.

Integrating these practices with community engagement, we argue that *one-way communication* matches *information* level of engagement, two-way and symmetrical communication match *consultation* and *participation/collaboration* levels of engagement, respectively. In next section, we focus on the highest level of engagement, *empowerment*, and how it relates to communication and relationship management.

Community Empowerment

In the community health context, empowerment of community members can be considered as the ultimately desired outcome of engagement, because it reflects effective outcomes of various kinds: service outcomes, intermediate social outcomes, and health outcomes (Peel Public Health, 2012). Defined as the "process by which relatively powerless people work together to increase control over events that determine their lives and health" (Laverack, 2006, p. 113, as cited in Heritage & Dooris, 2009), community empowerment is receiving growing attention in public health research. For example, in discussing top-down and bottom-up approaches to health promotion programming, Laverick and Labonte (2000) advocated for accommodation of community empowerment into the traditional and top-down health promotion programs. Fawcett et al. (1995) have identified the effective outcomes of empowerment that include enhanced experience, competence, facilitative group structure and capacity, social and environmental barrier removal, and the enhancement of environmental support and resources.

Researchers have proposed various types and dimensions of measurements for community empowerment, depending on the tailored conceptualizations for different groups or contexts. First of all, community empowerment can be conceptualized both as a process and an outcome. The measurement of outcome alone might not take into account the processes involved in community empowerment, such as capacity building, competency development, skill training, and critical awareness (Laverick & Wallerstein, 2001). At the same time, community empowerment may progress from individual action to collective social and political changes. As a process, community empowerment involves personal empowerment, development of small mutual groups, community organizations, partnerships, and social and political action. At an individual level, people may experience an immediate psychological empowerment, such as an increase in self-esteem or confidence that evolved from collective action (Laverick & Labonte, 2000). Measuring community engagement as a process makes it possible to monitor the interactions between capacities, skills, and resources at the individual and organizational levels during the time frame of a program, as well as community-level changes in healthy conditions, policies, and interpersonal structures.

Communication-focused empowerment. This project focuses on examining community empowerment through communication and relationship building at the community level. Research has been conducted on achieving quality organization-public relationships (OPRs) as reflected in higher level of *trust*, *satisfaction*, *commitment*, and *control mutuality* (the degree of agreement about each party's control over the relationship; Hon & Grunig, 1997). Extensive studies have shown that relationship management strategies and effective communication tend to contribute to quality OPRs (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1997, Wang et al., 2014).

Relationship management with organizational publics typically relates to reducing these publics' anxiety and uncertainty (Ni & Wang, 2011; Wang, Ni, & de la Flor, 2014), and enhanced attitudes and behavioral intentions (Ki, 2016). We argue that strategic communication

and relationship management strategies discussed in the previous section of community engagement can make community members less isolated and more empowered as a collective facing public health issues. Based on the conceptualization above, we propose the following research question:

RQ: How do Hispanic community organizations engage with their community members to achieve community empowerment on health issues?

Method

To identify the flow and quality of communication between stakeholders and community members in the Hispanic population in Houston, in-depth interviews were conducted. Following Ritchie, Nicholls, and Ormston's (2013) suggestion, we designed the interviews so that each interaction resembled a natural conversation, with a combination of *structure* and *flexibility*. The interview protocol included four areas of interest: organization-community current communication, organization-community relationships, overall communication effectiveness, and health-related communication. The protocol covered all key features that Ritchie et al. (2013) proposed, including interaction and follow-up questions to probe participants' explanations and meanings.

Sample and Procedure

This sample included healthcare workers in community health organizations that serve the Hispanic/Latino population in a southern metropolitan area. The vast majority of participants were contacted after mapping health care providers from the two major counties, following suggestions from a major area Health Needs Assessments, and taking recommendation of interviewees. The practitioner co-author who has close connections with the community worked with a student RA on recruitment.

A total of 23 interviews were conducted. Initial contacts were made by email. Participants received a communication in which they were informed about the study and the importance of their participation. After signing a consent form, participants indicated their preferred time, location, and mode of interview. Interviews were audio recorded. The duration of interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 80 minutes. On average, the interviews lasted about 43 minutes. For all interviews, 13 were made by phone and 10 in person. Interviewees were 18 females and 5 males. Two were in the age group of 18-24, three 25-34, four 35-44, ten 45-54, three 55-64, and one 65 years and older. Participants' positions included patient navigator, health initiative manager, public information representative, communication staff, and executives.

Results

RQ: How do Hispanic community organizations engage with their community members for community empowerment on health issues?

The interview findings revealed several important themes, which are organized based on the following aspects of engagement: approaches to engagement, processes of engagement, and community empowerment.

Information Dissemination: Appropriate Scopes, Channels, and Amounts

All participants indicated that their organizations engaged in a variety of communication with their communities, ranging from mass media (TV, radio, newspapers), community education and outreach activities such as events, workshops, health fairs with free testing, and

door-to-door outreach, to social media. Participants indicated that these various modes of communication serve different purposes and reach different recipients, as P25 stated, "I think the more channels you use, the more the work gets out. Everybody has different preferences, as far as their media…"

Besides the goal to reach a variety of recipients, the interviewees suggested that appropriateness, affordability, and the capacity of the healthcare facility are key ingredients to balance information dissemination. A predominant theme, "the more people know about us, the better we can serve them" gained most agreement. First of all, spreading the words and dissemination of information seem to be critical for achieving organizational missions. Mass media such as TV and radio are good in reaching a lot of people at the same time (P7). TV is considered to be a top media channel creating an impact for the Hispanic community. Many organizations mentioned major Spanish ethnic TV stations that actively worked with them to get the words out. One participant (P6) considered it as their "biggest branding opportunities" when a major Spanish TV station collaborated with them to understand what they were doing for the community and helped promote their cause.

However, media use is "more for dissemination of the messaging" (P3) with its limitations. Participants repeatedly said TV was expensive. With limited budget, they have to rely on free news reporting, which was "limited because the things that are going on and other news items calling up" (P3). P3 gave an example where they had a major event on a public health issue that could impact a lot of families. The media were invited but only two or three people showed up because a shooting had just happened and the media all went to report that shooting.

Therefore, mass communication is typically supplemented by more in-depth engagement. P3 said that he does "awareness of our programs through the news media and social media" but their multiple programs ensure that they "touch base with the community" through "outreach" to keep a "whole contact with the community."

Finally, an unexpected finding was the need for a balance in information engagement. Contrary to the general theme in this section and to what someone typically thinks, certain organizations do not want to publicize as widely as possible. With limited capacity and budget, if too many people come in to seek help, they cannot accommodate (P4). P25 said, "because we are limited on how many patients we can take at this time, if you get it out in the media, then, you will be flooded on people."

Interpersonal Interactions: Trust and Connections

Having one-way dissemination is helpful for spreading the words, but almost all participants highlighted the critical importance of interpersonal interactions and word of mouth. P15 said, "I think they (mass media) are useful to the extent that we utilize them…" but "face to face is the more useful, presentations to small groups, and social media is useful and email." P4 said that their organization was directly promoted by their patients without any ads. Patients bring their friends, family, relatives, and in that way, they have had a healthy growth. One reason for the emphasis on interpersonal interaction seems to be based on health literacy, as P22 explained:

> The problem is that many Latinos did not know how to read that information. So giving them information is not enough because they cannot understand it. So, the person who is connecting to the patient realizes what's going on and knows how to treat the patient in order to help him/her understand his/her diagnosis.

The other reason was embedded in the cultural values in the Hispanic community, or *personal connections*, to be specific. P13 said, "from what I've learned from the Hispanic population…they take more information word of mouth, and recommendations from friends and people they trust." P6's statement best illustrate this point:

> …As you know with the Latino community…in order for them to come in, they have to trust you. So we actually place staff in our different programs that relate to the community. So I'm going to place somebody Latino with a Latino's constituency…that way you will develop that confidence and trust...

This factor of trust is even more critical for organizations that serve certain at-risk community members who were concerned about immigration status. P6 noted that they had to be "one on one with our Latino community." She said:

> … basically these individuals may not have Social Security numbers (and it's OK, we definitely can bring them in anyways) but they always get very intimidated when you go to ask questions about different things.

This interpersonal connection is even emphasized in the   organizations that depend much on media use to engage community members. P22 stated,

> To connect with each person, it is very important to try to understand, sympathize with them. Understand why they are going through what they are going through and not judge. Find them where they are and help them from there.

> Finally, the trust-based connections are also reflected at the organizational level.

Coalition building was a theme that repeatedly appeared in the findings. All interviewees emphasized the critical importance of having coalitions or partnerships. With the vast amounts of work and diversity of publics, these organizations had to rely on other organizations that pursued similar causes. P17 stated,

> [this organization] has a strong support from youth organizations that are committed to what we do. And that's another way that we get, you know, the fresh ideas from the youth, from the colleges…So we can also not only understand what we're doing, but so we can understand and make sure that we're responding to what the community says they need.

Processes of Engagement

For community-based organizations, having two-way interactions with and genuine care about their community publics were almost a presumption due to the nature of these organizations. Constant and in-depth involvement and collaboration with community members seemed to be natural or even mandated by either law or grant regulations. However, the specific mechanism through which they engage in these interactive, substantial ways varied.

Symmetrical and two-way communication: inherently embedded. Most organizations were founded on community needs, and so their communication with communities was by nature symmetrical and two-way. First of all, organizations heavily *involved* community members through assessing their health needs and challenges. Such health assessments were essential to the operations of most organizations interviewed. Statistics and community needs assessments could influence many organizational issues ranging from what kind of government grants they apply for (P7), whether they would get funding or not (P12), whether they would initiate specific programs, to what kind of target population they would target for in a certain program.

Many do surveys to understand community needs. For example, a survey about whether the Latino community would use cell phones so that an organization can decide how to reach

them better, especially the Millennials (P6).   Organizations also use focus groups to involve community members and discuss issues that range from technical matters such as organizational name and logo, website information, to strategic issues such as planning and maintaining relationships with their providers.

One example given by P3 best illustrated the decision to embed deeply in the community they served. When P3's organization faced challenges with their growth and the lack of personnel to answer public inquiries, the leadership decided against outsourcing, and made it their top priority to recruit local community workers who knew both community members and the providers.

Ethical engagement: cultural sensitivity. All organizations recognized the need to engage in responsible, genuine, and effective manner. To this end, cultural consideration and sensitivity emerged as a key theme, including linguistic appropriateness, messengers, and tailoring of programs to community needs. First of all, many organizations ensured that messages and messengers were bilingual to reach the community with limited English proficiency (P5). It was also widely acknowledged that translating materials goes beyond just translating from English to Spanish but into terms and concepts that the community members could truly understand (P21).

The concept of "promotoras" was also repeatedly mentioned. It referred to a lay person in the Hispanic community who acted as community health workers. Having such liaisons with language and cultural similarities in the community were tremendously helpful to engage community members..

In addition, the programs provided to these community members were comprehensive and went beyond just health screening or treatment. For example, given the complexity of the healthcare system, many community members felt overwhelmed. P5 indicated that effective programs that help community navigate the health system were critical (P5).

Collaboration: key to a sense of community. Collaboration is reflected in building the sense of community. Many organizations mentioned advisory board and open-door policies. P23 indicated that they had open advisory meetings and open board directors meetings where people could come and share information. The goal was to let patients feel they are partners in enhancing community health. Some organizations went door to door to talk with community members, and had gained tremendous trust. These efforts enabled locals to evolve from a patient, a volunteer, to an empowered server in the end (P4). P7 stated,

> I know one particular youth who is in a family where all of his older siblings are in jail and comes from a single parent household and he was able to get into a trade school through the help of our program…And now actually, he assists with talking to other youth about how they are able to turn their life around and be able to do things like go to school or get a job.

This example was not directly related to physical health, but served as an example of helping enhance mental health. This integrated, well-rounded approach to public health works better than only focusing on specific diseases because it represented holistic problem solving. In P23's words, they were a "community owned entity" that was "geared by the community and for the community" and that the community members "are partners in their own health and the health of the community."

"Salvation table" – a reflection of relationship and community building. Like collaboration, a major theme from almost all participants was that they had maintained a good relationship with their communities. Trusting and bonding relationships were key to their perceived empowerment because they felt unwavering reliance. P15 said,

> People see our services as completely valuable and necessary in our community, and…the local hospitals refer very complicated patients to us…because they know that we are really good at taking care of them…we (also) have a good reputation on being financially sound, and that is why people gives to us.

For organizations, they knew they had succeeded in relationship building when they were the "first choice in health" by community members (P15), when members commented that their organization was "like a salvation table that if you take away, you will sink" (P17), and when a lot of people "come out and support us at rallies" (P17).

Community Empowerment

Built on collaboration and relationships, empowerment was reflected in different aspects and across life stages. At a comprehensive level, community members felt less anxious and more confident on their health, life quality, and community issues. The best outcome of their work, according to most participants, would be "healthier outcomes" (P5), or that the community was "empowered to make a right decision…a good decisions about their health" (P3). P4 believed that,

> (Our organization) has made great progress in providing comprehensive holistic health, and not only with medications. Sometimes people just need support, and needs not to feel isolated…This personal connection is what gives them the internal motivation that they make to continue their treatment…

Indeed, health empowerment went beyond receiving treatment. To improve health literacy was one of the goals for several organizations (P12); to do that, nutrition classes and healthy cooking classes were offered (P15). As P12 put it, "we are not just a one trick pony you know. We have to provide all around health care for that individual as they age, and that's a big thing now."

It is worth noting that healthcare work often goes beyond simply health related services, but caters to the well-rounded, comprehensive areas of life to enhance community potential in addressing health issues, both physical and mental. A good example was from P6, whose organization actively helped parenting skills, which included learning to bond with children, identifying and preventing child abuse, assistance with food, obtaining GED, and securing employment.

Moving a step further, empowerment was considered at a collective or systematic level. P17 recalled her background and experiences in health disparities, "it is not necessarily the individual but it's a system a lot of time that is failing the individual to meet those basic needs." One example of this was the change P23 advocated for, from a society where "we put more of our money into health care and well care and the sickest people get most of the money" to "a society towards preventive and public health and making those more as a priority."

Discussion and Conclusions

This study examines how Hispanic community organizations can strategically communicate with and engage more effectively with community members in order to empower and increase these members' health awareness.

Theoretical Implications

Community engagement. Integrating literature from community engagement and public relations, this project moves theory development forward by analyzing different engagement strategies through the lens of different levels of community reach outcomes in the healthcare

context of Hispanic communities.

Findings indicate that directions and channels of communication (one-way vs. two-way as well as mediated vs. interpersonal communication) did matter, and that two-way, interactive, and interpersonal communication appeared to be key to engage Hispanic communities. Symmetrical and ethical communication were foundational for healthcare organizations to engage these communities. This finding adds richness to the theorizing of this sometimes hotly debated dimension of public relations practice (e.g., symmetry is impossible because pursuing organizational effectiveness necessarily excludes genuine ethical treatment of stakeholders, Pieczka, 1996).

In the engagement process, the highlighted dimensions of two-way, interpersonal, symmetrical, and ethical communication merged into engagement strategies with varying levels of involvement of the community members. Findings illustrate that organizations actively involved these members in decision making at multiple levels with a holistic and future-oriented vision

It is reasonable to argue then, that it may be possible to advance the current dimensions of public relations practices (L. Grunig et al., 2002) by linking them to different levels of engagement (Heritage & Dooris, 2009) and form potential integrated clusters: *informational engagement* (capturing one-way and mediated communication), *involvement engagement* (capturing two-way and interpersonal communication), and *collaborative engagement* (capturing two-way, interpersonal, symmetrical/ethical communication).

Community empowerment. Supporting current literature on empowerment (e.g., Laverack, 2006), this project identified different levels of empowerment in community health research. Specifically, *individual empowerment* is reflected in reduced anxiety and uncertainty, enhanced health choices and decisions, enhanced perceptions of health related issues, and all-rounded solutions to life problems not restricted to health. Collectively, building relationships and a sense of community and belonging empowers the community members to feel like a partner in the common cause and to engage in behaviors to give back and to support (i.e., volunteering, helping others solve similar problems). Noted, these outcomes seem to be directly related to how the organizations are engaged with their community members. Most evident, an optimally effective healthcare organization should enact a goal not only to solve its community members' health and life problems, but also to help them navigate through healthcare systems, and most important, to empower them to feel capable of living and helping other community members live a successful life with physical and mental health.

Practical Implications

This study has important implications for *community leaders* in the Hispanic community. First, information dissemination is fundamental and interpersonal bonding is essential. Facts, tips, and information are useful for promoting health awareness, but receiving information differs from ability and willingness to use the information. Community organizations need to develop trust and person-based network with their members. In this process, *two-way* and *symmetrical communication* play a crucial role. The most effective engagement should go through word of mouth and person-centered communication. Developing a trusting relationship with its members should be an organization's long-term goal. Second, community building needs to be *culturally relevant*. Strategies need to be developed that cater to the unique expectations and needs of the community being served. Specific examples from this project include attention to messages, messengers, and programs. Finally, organizations should develop workshops and other

programs that aim at empowering community members to reach their life goals.

At a higher level, *policy makers* therefore could initiate policy changes or implement new policies that incorporate better capacity building at the organizational level, as well as make better efforts at various levels including individuals, government, and affiliate non-profit organizations to facilitate easier navigations of the healthcare system as well as more equitable allocation of resources.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study has several limitations, which point to future directions of studies in this program of research. First, this study did not examine the perspectives from the community members themselves. Future studies can obtain their stories and perceptions and compared against the organizations' perspectives to provide a comprehensive picture of community engagement and empowerment. Second, some interviews were conducted via phone, and the channel could limit the depth of conversations. Future research could also use focus group discussions to include both organizational workers and community members to create conversations between them. This design may induce dyadic sense making and even collaborative and creative meaning making.

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Agenda-Building and Public Official Communication in the Pre-Crisis Stage of the Flint, Michigan Water Contamination Crisis

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Abstract

This study uses first- and second-level agenda-building theory to show a strong relationship between the salience of information subsidies City of Flint and Genesee County, Michigan, officials used to support the move to the Karegnondi Water Authority and the salience of news media coverage during the pre-crisis stage of the Flint water contamination disaster. The study uses a content analysis of information subsides (news releases) and news media coverage in *The Flint Journal* to establish a relationship between the substantive and affective attributes.

Introduction

On October 1, 2015, officials from the state of Michigan were forced to admit what, until then, they had vehemently denied: independent scientific evidence showed elevated lead levels in the drinking water of Flint, Michigan, and, more alarmingly, in the blood samples taken from the city's children.   As important as this day is in the timeline that would become the Flint water contamination crisis it is but one in a series of catastrophic events that congealed into what is, arguably, the worst public drinking water contamination crisis in the modern history of the United States.   Decisions, made over years, sometimes for financial reasons and often for political ones, produced the crisis.   The cries for accountability and recrimination were loud and immediate, and there are many individuals and institutions that bear the brunt of the responsibility for this human-made catastrophe.   One area of inquiry to receive little attention in the academy or in the popular media, however, is the decision-making process of local officials to move the city of Flint from the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) water system on to the Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA), a new public authority to draw and make potable water from Lake Huron and supply it to communities in Genesee, Lapeer, and Salinac counties in Michigan's thumb region.   It is in this decision where the Flint water contamination crisis had its genesis and this study begins.

The decision to move to the KWA was made several years before the Flint water contamination crisis took hold.   It was made by local officials seeking more autonomy over the production and treatment of its potable water.   How did local officials make the case to move to KWA; and, how did the local media report on those efforts?   Agenda-building theory offers a clear lens through which we can examine those questions.   The study will show how local officials operationalized a persuasive argument bounded by agenda-building to influence public deliberation and secure support for the new authority.   Furthermore, this study hypothesizes that local popular media became active participants in the agenda-building efforts of the local officials, who leveraged a deep-seeded public distrust of Detroit water system and a weariness over lack of control of rising water rates that made Flint's water some of the most expensive drinking water in the nation.   Finally, the study will examine whether agenda-building, itself, became a frame from which the Flint water contamination disaster began to grow.

This study seeks to answer three pertinent questions: how did local officials make the case to move to KWA (i.e., issues identified by the officials to persuade the move); how did the local news media report on those efforts (i.e. issues made salient by the news media coverage of the local officials' desire to move to its own water authority); and, how did the public communication efforts of local officials build the agenda of the local news media?   First- and second-level Agenda-building theory provide perspective to understand the role of official communicators and their impact on salience in news media messages (Kiousis, Kim, Kochhar, Lim, Park, & Im, 2016).   Based on agenda-building, this paper examines how local officials utilized public communication efforts to build the agenda reported by the news media (Berkowitz, 1987).   This study hypothesizes a correlation between the coverage of local news media and the salience of issues and attributes in reporting the decision-making process of moving the city of Flint off DWSD and to KWA were reflective of the local government's public communication efforts.   By doing so, the paper examines whether local news media became an active participant in the agenda building efforts of the local officials, who leveraged a deep-seeded public distrust of Detroit water system.

To address these questions, the paper examined the official news releases and public comments of local city of Flint and Genesee County officials between January 1, 2010 and April

30, 2013, a period that incorporated the creation of the KWA, the decision to move from DWSD water, and the ill-fated decision to use Flint River water as an alternative source while the KWA pipeline was completed.   The paper used published print and online content from this period found in the local newspaper, *The Flint Journal*, and its online partner, Mlive.com.   Responsive stories were collected and coded.   Once coded, the news stories were content analyzed and correlated to the hypotheses.

This proposed study contributes to the emerging scholarship about the Flint water contamination disaster by helping to orientate the beginning of this crisis,   it also provides an initial examination of the communication theories that will help other scholars explain and understand what happened in Flint, what went wrong, and why.

Literature Review

Agenda building and public relations

Public relations practitioners and government officials influence the media through information subsidies designed to determine the media agenda (Kiousis, Mitrook, Wu, & Seltzer, 2006).   There is a correlation between the salient attributes in news releases and that of the media coverage (p. 275).   News releases and official handouts are the most common types of information subsidy sources use to influence journalists' coverage of issues.   Turk (1986) found that half of the handouts given to journalists from government officials and information officers made it into news coverage.   Berkowitz and Adams (1990) confirmed this relationship, but they noted only information subsidies that were targeted and focused ended up driving or influencing coverage (p. 730).   "[S]ources vie for a place on a news agenda in which they have a stake" (p. 731). When officials or public relations provide a news release or handout, they are attempting to influence coverage through a subsidization of the available information (Gandy, 1982).   This is a low-cost delivery of information and public relations practitioners use this subsidy to shape coverage.   But that doesn't imply that this salience necessarily carries over to the public (Kiousis et al. 2006, pp. 281-282).   The valence of these efforts is equally important to their success in building an agenda.

Agenda building and the media

The media play a direct role in setting the agenda for political campaigns and the salience of the issues the public deems important (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177).   They found that the media exert "a considerable impact on voters' judgments of what they considered the major issues of the campaign" (p. 180).   Because of a very strong correlation between the issues emphasized by the news media and a salience of the issues, voters paid attention to political news about their preferred candidate (p. 181).   McCombs and Shaw also found voters share the media's definition of what issues are important.   They concluded this suggests an agenda-setting feature of the media (p. 184).

Working in a similar time to McCombs and Shaw, Cobb and Elder (1971) examined the influence of salient issues among democratic citizens and organizations to understand how they are ordered.   This selection is the result of a biased process: Some issues are favored at the expense of others; the scope of issues is restricted, creating conflict (p. 901).   These realities make it extremely difficult to change this bias, or tendency (p. 902).   Cobb and Elder suggest all of this occurs during a "pre-decisional" process that determines which issues are considered in the first place (p. 903).   For this to happen, information must be added to make an issue rise or fall in importance, forming an agenda.   But the natural question remains: "what determines the

agenda…[h]ow is it built?" (p. 905).   Key decision-makers (officials) answer this by determining what makes it on the agenda (p. 907).   By undertaking this process, officials become highly visible to the media and are able to enlist them into to their efforts to build or set an agenda (p. 908).   Weaver and Elliott (1985) also suggest agenda-building occurs as a "pre-stage" to agenda setting, whereby it examines "how the press interacts with other institutions in society to create issues of public concern" (in Berkowitz, 1987, p. 508).   To arrive at this, they compared the topics discussed in community town meetings with local news coverage and noted the correlations.

Berkowitz (1987) suggests another way to examine agenda building is to look at the "channels and sources from which published news stories seem to evolve" (p. 508).   He found when officials were adept in building and maximizing relationships with local journalist they were more successful at the agenda-building process (p. 509).   Berkowitz's study of local news on broadcasts found officials "dominate the agenda-building process in television news" (p. 513).   These officials are "sources" for the journalists and play a key role in building the agenda in television news, helping to shape the salient attributes the media places before the public (p. 513).   Berkowitz and Adams (1990) advance this understanding by suggesting information provided by media sources to journalists is a foundational supplement in the agenda-building process.   Sources shape information to influence agenda-building process by timing information to coincide with media deadlines, make it easy for journalists to cover an issue, and, as a result, journalists view sources as credible and reliable, behavior journalists reward by more readily accepting the information sources provide (p. 724).

The most successful public relations efforts aimed at salience are the ones that are hyper-local and focus on government action (Sachsman, 1976).   Public relations efforts influenced roughly 25% to 50% of the news coverage analyzed in Sachsman's study, and 40% of Bay Area content for environmental stories, originated from public relations practitioners (p. 59). This mirrors, somewhat, Schabacker (1963) who found that between 24-51% of newspaper coverage was predicated on public relations sources (see also: Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1985). Journalists relied on official spokespeople and rarely questioned the information those spokespeople gave them, opting to present both sides of an issue.   "The use of releases from various sources was a safe and easy way of assuring that all sides of an environmental issue were represented" (p. 59).   Officials who believe in the strength of the local newspaper to set the public agenda increase their efforts to influence its content either by including or excluding information. (Kanervo & Kanervo, 1989, p. 309).   "It appears that the stronger the belief of mayors and city managers that a newspaper sets the public agenda, the more likely they are to attempt to get issues onto the newspaper's agenda" (p. 313).   Journalists are often skeptical of information subsidies, especially if they perceive an economic or political benefit to the person or group providing it (Curtin, 1999).   Subsidies for non-profits had a better chance of influencing content in a newspaper (p. 86).   Journalists prefer information they obtain independently or on their own (p. 86).   If information subsidies are well-written and in journalistic style, then their chances of being used by journalists increases (p. 87).

Agenda building and public officials
Denham (2010) found a key component of agenda-building it how public officials generally limit access, which increases conflict and a competition or negotiation to determine pertinent interests.   He identified three types of agenda-building: reciprocal influence independent content (i.e., investigative reporting; exposés), and dependent content (i.e.,

information subsidies) (p. 307).   Agenda-building is "[t]he process by which groups attempt to move issues from their own agendas to those of policymakers" (p. 308).   Gandy (1982) said the information subsidy, usually in the form of a news release or some other type of handout, is how public relations practitioners shape coverage.   This process is designed to create a behavioral response that entices someone to vote a particular way, attend an event, or support a social movement (p. 315-316).   Kiousis, Popescu, and Mitrook (2007) suggest this process is most readily seen in the execution of public relations campaigns by officials.   These campaigns most directly influence media agenda through information subsidies: news releases; news conferences; interviews; and, etc. (pp. 149-150).   Kiousis, Kik, Kochhar, Lim, Park, and Im (2015) suggest these campaigns build agendas on the first- and second-levels, setting what is salient for the media and, ultimately, what is salient for the public (p. 241)

Using Berkowitz (1987) and Kiousis et al. (2015) as a conceptual framework, this study's hypotheses are formerly stated as follows:

H₁: The salience of attributes in information subsidies from Flint and Genesee, Michigan, County officials will be positively related to the salience of attributes in the content of news media's reporting on the necessity and benefits of the City joining the KWA; and,

H₂: The salience of attributes in the content of the news media reporting on the necessity and benefits of the City joining KWA will be positively related to the salience of attributes as to the reasons the move to the KWA was approved by local officials.

Method

This study conducted a content analysis of the official news releases and other official communication (news subsidies) of local elected officials from the City of Flint and Genesee County between January 1, 2010 and April 30, 2013; N=40 (News article n=31; information subsidy n=9).   The analysis explored the types of issues and attributes salient in the public communication efforts.   This timeframe was chosen as it included public discussions about the creation of the KWA, the decision to move from DWSD water, and the ill-fated decision to use Flint River water as an alternative source while the KWA pipeline was completed.   In addition, this study included news articles and from *The Flint Journal*, as published electronically on its online partner, Mlive.com, to examine the news media agenda and whether it was impacted by the public communication efforts of the local government.

The Flint Journal is not catalogued by any known database but its partner site, Mlive.com, offers a limited search feature.   Using this feature, the authors conduced a Boolean search of the news articles during the period for the terms Flint Journal, KWA, water, or rate yielded 31 responsive documents.   Using the Michigan Freedom of Information Act, and a GOOGLE search, 9 responsive news releases or information subsidies were collected from the City of Flint, Genesee County, and the Genesee County Drain Commission.

Defining categories

Substantive attributes were consisted of three types based on observation of the news articles and information subsidies: cost Savings (articles or subsidies that highlighted the cost savings associated with moving to the KWA or mentioned ability to control or contain rising water rate costs), political control (articles or subsidies that mentioned the ability to create local control/governance over the water distribution service, or to leave escape the political influence

of elected leaders from other political subdivisions), and job creation (creating new local jobs from moving to KWA).

Affective attributes were either positive (mentions first the benefits of joining the KWA; positive/affirmative quotes than negative; opposing quotes/viewpoints are downplayed in the story), negative (mentions first the negative attributes of joining the KWA; there are more negative/dismissive quotes than positive; supportive quotes/viewpoints are downplayed), or neutral (no preference to either the positive or negative attributes of joining the KWA; Equal balance between positive and negative viewpoints; The story does not present a positive or negative sentiment but is purely informational).

Intercorder reliability

To ensure coder reliability, the coders first reviewed the same 10 randomly selected items (25% of total items reviewed) to test the efficacy of the coding process (Neurendorf, 2002). The items were coded based on the taxonomy identified in the coding scheme. Coders employed a Krippendorf test for reliability for Substantive Attribute (Krippendorf's $\alpha=1$) and Attributive Attribute ($\alpha=.68$). Coders resolved discrepancies through discussion. If agreement was not possible, the definitions, directions, or taxonomy of the variables were adjusted and restated in the coding scheme.

Results

H_1 stated the salience of attributes in information subsidies would be positively related to the salience of attributes in the content of news media's reporting, and H2. News releases and news coverage from *The Flint Journal*/Mlive.com from January 1, 2010 to April 30, 2013, which was the period local Flint officials debated and, ultimately, decided to join the KWA.

For substantive attributes, Cost Savings was the most prominent choice with 63.4% (N=26) of the first-quoted first source giving it as a reason and 34.1% (N=14) of second-quoted sources mentioning it as the issue. Political Control was the second-most substantive attribute with 22% (N=9) of the first-quoted sources describing it as a reason and 19.5% (N=8) of the second-quoted sources listing as the salient topic. Finally, Job Creation as a substantive attribute was cited 4.9% (N=2) by first-quoted sources and 12.2% (N=5) by second-quoted.

For affective attributes, 68.3% (N=28) of first sources in the article and 31.7% (N=13) of second sources offered Positive statements. Neutral comments were next most prevalent with 26.8% (N=11) of first sources and 22% (N=9) of second sources offering such comments. Finally, 2.4% (N=1) of first-quoted sources; 2.4% (N=1) of second-quoted sources made negative comments.

With respect to the salience of substantive attributes of official news releases reflected in media coverage, the data suggests a strong relationship ($X^2=2.473$, *ns*). H_1, therefore, is supported but not at a statistically significant level. H2 hypothesized that the affective attributes of comments by officials would be salient in news coverage during this period. Here, again, the data suggests a relationship ($X^2=1.506$, *ns*). H2 is supported, though not at a statistically significant level.

Discussion

The results of this study shows an agenda-building effect in the pre-crisis stage of the Flint water contamination. It the first study to examine first- and second-level agenda building by public officials and the media in the months leading up to the beginning of the Flint Water

contamination, and it makes several key advances in the scholarship around this topic.   First, it offers a glimpse into the pre-crisis stage of the Flint water contamination disaster.   Most scholarship and nearly all ephemeral media coverage has, to date, focused on the aftereffects in Flint.   Second, it shows that agenda-building can be a useful tool to risk and crisis communication scholars since information subsidies can also be used to limit the media's attention and focus on only one side of an issue.   Third, this study advances the nascent field of scholarship pertaining to the Flint water contamination crisis.   Fourth, and finally, it is a method that seems complement other risk and crisis communication investigations.

This study offers several new research and scholarship opportunities.   This exploratory study examined news coverage from one local source, *The Flint Journal* and its online site Mlive.com.   Additional scholarship can expand the findings of this study to news coverage after the move to the KWA and while the public was raising concerns about the quality of its drinking water after the switch.   Another area of research suggested by this study is the role information subsidies contributed to failed enacted sensemaking by local and state officials.   Another opportunity for advancing scholarship is the study of how agenda-agenda building limits competing voices.   This is especially relevant to enacted sensemakeing (Weick, 1988) where reduced perspectives blind decision-makers to potential pitfalls thereby exacerbating a crisis. Weick suggests one way sensemakeing fails is when managers and actors rely on strong pronouncements about safety or established procedure to justify not responding to rising risk factors.   Such a study would offer great insights into subjects beyond communication such as organization theory, business and sociology.

This study sought to determine whether information subsidies from Flint and Genesee, Michigan, County officials enlist local media in the agenda-building efforts that impacted the way local news media covered the move, which likely impacted the public formal approval of the City to join the KWA.   Based on the results of content analysis of local news media and information subsidies, the data suggest strong agenda building outcome, where attributes of information subsidies were clearly reflected in the news coverage of the issue.

The result of this study shows an agenda-building effect in the pre-crisis stage of the Flint water contamination, and throughout the literature, offer some practical implications of agenda building for public relations practitioners.   First, good journalistic writing and clear argumentation matter in ensuring that information subsidies impact news content.   Second, an important determiner of success is whether those offering information subsidies have a financial interest in affecting news coverage.   Non-profit and government organizations are most credible in their use of subsidies.   Public relations practitioners, especially those that deal with risk and crisis communication, would do well understand the limits and pitfalls of agenda building. Doing so, this study suggests, would ensure that competing viewpoints about potential government actions are heard and given a full shrift by the media and the public that relies upon it for news and essential information.

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A Delphi Study to Identify Standards for Internal Communication

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Abstract

Researchers from an international task force conducted a two-round Delphi study with a purposive sample of internal communication thought leaders to identify internal communication standards. This paper describes those findings and defines standards that practitioners can use to measure internal communication in a consistent and comparable manner—the goal of standardization.

Effective internal communication has been repeatedly linked to financial outcomes (Dortok, 2006; Ehling, White, & Grunig, 1992; Grossman, n.d.; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Meng & Berger, 2012; Towers Watson, 2013). A 2007-2008 study by Watson Wyatt Worldwide (now Towers Watson), an international business research firm, indicated that high-effective organizations are much more likely to measure and evaluate internal communication compared to low-effective organizations (as cited in Meng & Berger, 2012). Ironically, only about 50 percent of internal communication practitioners have a formal approach to measuring and evaluating their communication initiatives (Meng & Berger). In Meng and Berger's survey and interview research with international public relations practitioners, participants cited barriers to internal communication measurement, including a lack of money and staff, difficulty determining a direct link between communication initiatives and business results, and time constraints.

Not only do some public relations practitioners have difficulty knowing how to measure and evaluate internal communication, some also appear to do so in different ways (Mendez, Casadesus, & Gimenez, 2013; Meng & Pan, 2012; Ruck, 2015; Ruck & Welch, 2012;). The lack of a standardized approach to measuring internal communication ultimately adds to potential inefficiency, because practitioners and their organizational leaders do not have a shared vocabulary to compare and contrast results.

To remedy this problem, the Institute for Public Relations and the Commission on Research, Measurement, and Evaluation created an international 12-member task force comprised of academics and practitioners to promulgate the development of internal communication standards. A standard is defined as a published specification in the public domain that provides a common language for comparison purposes (Oviatt, 2013). The task force identified and tentatively defined possible standards for internal communication measurement in 2015.

The researchers of this study extended the task force's initial work by conducting a Delphi study in 2016 with a purposive sample of internal communication thought leaders to determine if a wider audience of internal communication practitioners agreed with the task force's recommended standards and definitions. This paper describes the findings of the Delphi Study and introduces and defines measurement standards that internal communication practitioners can use to create more effective communication plans and measure the value communication bring to their organizations. The recommendations have potential value for both academics and practitioners in terms of showing how to measure internal communication in a consistent and comparable manner—the ultimate goal of standardization.

Literature Review

Challenges of Measuring Internal Communication

Some public relations practitioners have expressed frustration in knowing how to measure internal communication efforts (Davis, 2015; Meng & Berger, 2012; Meng & Pan, 2012; Richardson, 2015). Scholars have emphasized the importance of measurement and evaluation of internal communication since the 1980s, but have experienced difficulties in choosing appropriate metrics to evaluate all aspects of an organization's internal communication (Meng & Berger). In Ruck and Welch's (2012) review of 12 different internal communication assessment studies, they found an overreliance on management-centric rather than employee-centric assessments. Mendez, Casadesus, and Gimenez (2013) suggested problems in developing a single measurement model that could account for all factors affecting any type of organization.

They also expressed concern about the number of items and excessive time requirements necessary to complete such a model.   Limitations at the individual and organizational level create a range of challenges for internal communication measurement. For example, an employee is often overloaded with information from a wide array of channels throughout the day, making it difficult to ensure critical information is received, processed, understood, and retained in a way that is useful (Davis, 2015; Zwijze-Koning, 2016).

Internal communication measurement and evaluation approaches can include both financial indicators, such as ROI, and non-financial indicators, such as trust, satisfaction and advocacy (Meng & Pan, 2012). Financial indicators tend to be short-term, whereas non-financial indicators are typically long-term (Meng & Pan).   Research conducted with senior corporate communication executives indicated that measurement approaches typically focus on increased awareness and understanding, employee engagement, and increased productivity and job performance (Meng & Berger, 2012). "However, respondents admitted that there is no single route that can be applied to all situations and clients" (Meng & Berger, p. 349)

In a 2011 survey, 42% of public relations practitioners agreed that common terms and definitions for the measurement of public relations in general "do not exist at all" (Michaelson & Stacks, p. 2).   Not only does confusion exists regarding how to measure basic public relations activity in general, there is variability in the proposed measurement and evaluation frameworks. For example, Lindenmann (2003) purported an output, outtakes, and outcomes orientation. Michaelson and Stacks (2011) recommended a communication lifecycle framework consisting of awareness, interest, desire, and action indicators. The International Association for the Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC, 2014) suggested an outputs (public relations activity), outcomes (intermediary effect), and target audience effect approach. Laskin (2016) advocated an output, outreach, outcome, outgrowth, and outperform orientation.

Value of Measurement Standards

In light of the variability of measurement terminology, terms, and models, the Institute for Public Relations has prioritized the development and testing of standards in recent years. Standards are defined as an idea or thing used as a measure, norm, or model in comparative evaluations (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011, p. 4). Through using a common language for measurement, standards are advantageous for management, public relations practitioners, clients, agencies, and researchers. This common language enables comparisons in pre- and post-campaigns; among campaigns spanning brands, business units, and geographies; among communication efforts used both internally and externally to an organization; among approaches used by multiple parties and providers, and among industries. Most important, standards enable "comparison, increase reliability, promote efficiency and bring more credibility to public relations" ("About Public Relations," 2016).

Standards are not synonymous with best practices. Standards define what needs to be measured whereas a best practice indicates how to best meet the objective of the standard (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). A best practice is a "technique, method or practice that is more effective than others in reaching an established goal" (Michaelson & MacLeod, p. 3).

A Vision for Public Relations Standards

In 2012, the Coalition for Research Standards was created to develop a broad platform of standards within the public relations industry. The five charter member organizations were the Council of Public Relations Firms, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication

Management, the Institute for Public Relations, the International Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication (AMEC), and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). The Coalition's promoted its vision as "Excellence in public relations enabled by excellence in research, measurement, and evaluation" ("About Public Relations," 2016). Standards represent a critical piece of that envisioned excellence.

The Coalition for Research Standards supports the standardization process recommended by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Specifically, the Coalition supports the ISO principles that (a) standards are voluntary and based upon a market need; (b) that standards are created by global experts in the marketplace; and (c) that standards are developed via a consensus among a wide range of audiences that include organizations, agencies, research consultants and measurement firms, and academics ("About Public Relations," 2016).

To date, 85 organizations have pledged their support for public relations standards in general ("About Public Relations," 2016). Standards have been developed for traditional media measurement (Eisenmann, O'Neil, & Geddes, 2016), ethics (Bowen & Stacks, 2013), and the communication lifecycle (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011) and have been proposed for social media measurement and return on investment ("About Public Relations," 2016). This paper seeks to fill the gap in internal communication by developing measurement standards for internal communication. To address this gap, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What internal communication standards should be included?
RQ2: How should these communication standards be defined?

Method

The first step of the Internal Communication Standards task force was to review professional and academic literature on internal communication to identify possible standards. Following a thorough literature review of current measurement methods, the task force met multiple times over the course of a year to discuss the literature review and to decide which concepts to include as possible standards.   In 2015 and 2016, leaders of the task force (researchers of this study) presented the potential standards to more than 150 communication practitioners and academics at three international public relations conferences.

Researchers then conducted Round 1 and Round 2 of a Delphi study with a purposive sample of internal communication thought leaders to determine if a wider audience agreed with the task force's recommended standards and definitions. A Delphi study consists of structured questions answered by a panel of experts in at least two rounds working toward the goal of obtaining a group consensus (Wakefield & Watson, 2014). The method is particularly appropriate to use regarding an issue where there is a "lack of agreement or incomplete state of knowledge" (Delbecq, Van de Ven, Gustafson, 1975, p. 5). Round 1 of a Delphi study typically elicits feedback from participants though loosely structured and open-ended questions followed by a summary of findings and structured discussion among experts in subsequent rounds (Watson, 2008). The Delphi method is also advantageous in its ability to obtain feedback from myriad diverse participants without the inherent bias and groupthink that is often present in group interviews and focus groups (Boyton, 2006; Wakefield & Watson).

Participants for this Delphi Study were identified based upon the researchers' professional contacts and snowball sampling. Criterion for participation was a minimum of ten years of experience in the communication industry, including responsibility for internal communication for at least five years. Recruitment emails were sent to 84 participants in both Rounds 1 and 2, although two people declined because they did not feel qualified to participate.

A total of 22 of the 82 people completed the survey in both rounds, for a response rate of 27%. All respondents were from North America. Respondents have many years of professional communication experience; nearly half of respondents have between 20 and 30 years of experience and roughly one quarter of participants have more than 31 years of communication experience. Roughly three quarters of respondents work for an organization with 5,000 or more employees. Respondents work for a wide range of industries including finance/insurance/real estate, healthcare, manufacturing, services/consulting, mining, transporting, among others.

Round 1 asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the recommended academic and practitioner definitions of 21 proposed standards (see Table 1) and to provide edits and feedback. The standards were grouped as (a) outtakes, whether employees received, paid attention to, comprehended or retained particular messages; (b) outcomes, evidence of changes to or reinforcement of opinions, attitudes, or behaviors; and (c) organizational impact, if and how internal communication has influenced organizational performance. The study did not focus on outputs, like some measurement models, such as Lindenmann's (2003) or AMEC's (2014), because the researchers presumed that there would be very little disagreement on basic public relations activity such as number of stories read, number of click-throughs, number of employees in attendance, and so forth. Participants were next asked a series of questions about their use of the standards, whether they recommended additional standards, and which standards they viewed as most important and why.

Following Round 1, the researchers also obtained feedback on the proposed standards list and definitions of the standards from internal communication managers attending a highly regarded public relations conference. Based upon feedback obtained from Round 1 and conference participants, the researchers amended the standard list and definitions. Researchers sent a summary of results and the amended version to all 82 participants in November 2016. For Round 2, participants were instructed to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the amended list of 22 standards and definitions and to offer additional edits on the proposed definitions.

Round One Results

Outtakes

As indicated by Table 1, participants measure currently the majority of the proposed outtake standards of awareness, understanding, knowledge, and retention of information. Respondents averred that although awareness is the easiest and most commonly measured standard, it is the least useful. One respondent described awareness as a superficial measure and "that it doesn't equate to an action - behavior, discussion, inquiry." Respondents further explained the difficulty in measuring the more meaningful standards of understanding, knowledge, and retention of information, consistently citing both a lack of time and resources. In particular, respondents talked about the difficulty in measuring retention of information. One participant explained a lack of knowledge in how to do so. Another said, "There is not support at a leadership level to continue measurement that far into a campaign."

Respondents were then asked if they recommended that other outtake standards be added to the list. One respondent mentioned the importance of measuring "relevance," explaining that if the employee does not understand why the message is relevant to her in her job (or believes it is not relevant), the message dies there.

When asked which outttakes standards are the most important and why, respondents provided many responses. Awareness was mentioned by only two of the 22 participants. Respondents explained that awareness merely represented the "first step" in measurement and

that if employees have sufficient understanding and retention, it can be assumed that awareness was present. Nearly half of participants (*n*=9) said that understanding is the most important outtake standard. A few participants explained that understanding is a precursor to other more important standards, such as support, action, and engagement. A total of 27 percent (*n*=6) of participants cited retention and 23 percent of participants (*n*=5) listed knowledge as most important. Some participants explained how the standards are inextricably linked together and difficult to untangle. One respondent said:

> I believe to truly make an impact in employee beliefs and attitudes and drive action, the program should be understood at a minimum. Ideally employees would have a deeper level of knowledge to help connect the program and concepts to their team and their own performance and ultimately be able to retain and recall the information long past the initial campaign.

Outcomes

More than 50% of participants report measuring five of the proposed outcomes standards: satisfaction, attitude, empowerment, collaboration, and trust (see Table 1). Respondents said that they do not measure some of the outcome standards due to a lack of time and resources. One participant explained that some of these standards simply aren't a priority, and another said "some of these are more intangible and thus much harder to adequately quantify." A handful of participants offered that many of these standards are captured on employee engagement surveys conducted by external third parties. One respondent said that these standards are outside the purview of internal communication.

Respondents recommended adding employee engagement and continuous improvement to the outcome standards. Two participants also recommended that a standard be included that captures the ability of the employees to connect the dots between their performance and the achievement of strategic business goals.

When asked which standards they believed are the most important in measuring outtakes and why, roughly one-third of respondents (*n* = 7) mentioned trust. One respondent explained, "Most individuals need to experience an inherent sense of trust in an organization, its leaders and fellow workers in order to feel confident enough to work well collaboratively and in team settings." After trust, the standards mentioned as most important by 20% of participants were satisfaction and empowerment. Procedural justice, collaboration, and teamwork were all mentioned as most important by only one respondent each. Two people mentioned engagement (which was not included on the list) as the most important outcome standard.

Organizational Impact

Participants reported measuring many of the organizational impact standards; the two measured most frequently are retention of employees and safety (see Table 1). Respondents said they do not measure all of the organizational impact standards due to lack of time and resources and a lack of knowledge about how to do so. One participant said these standards are "outside the scope of the assignment." A few respondents alluded to a lack of support from leadership in taking the time and resources to measure some of the standards. A few participants mentioned the difficulty in specifically measuring productivity. A participant explained, "Productivity is difficult to define in a consistent manner because the group is so diverse in its roles." When asked which concepts do you believe are the most important in measuring outcomes and why, roughly one-third (*n*=7) of participants mentioned productivity, due its connection to business

results.   The other standards most frequently cited as being important included reputation and retention. No one mentioned authenticity as the most important standard to measure.

Other Important Takeaways

After taking into consideration participants feedback and sytematically analyzing the suggested edits and feedback to the proposed definitions of the 21 standards, the researchers made the following major adjustments to the working list: (1) added relevance as an outtakes standard, bringing the total number of standards to 22; (2) more clearly defined the standards of understanding versus knowledge and collaboration versus teamwork for improved differentiation; (3) moved the authenticity standard from organizational impact to the outcomes standards list; and (4) changed the name of the standard procedural justice to fairness. Finally, the researchers amended the standard definitions for clarity (see Table 2).

Round Two Results

In Round 2 of the Delphi study, participants indicated whether they agreed or disagreed with the modified standards and definitions and provided additional feedback for improvement. Participants indicated strong agreement with the modified standards list, with most standards securing more than 90 percent approval (see Table 2).   Participants had the least level of agreement with the discretionary effort standard—only 77 percent agreement. Researchers had originally proposed the definition of discretionary effort as follows: "The amount of effort employees are able to give to an organization, a team, or a project, above and beyond what is required."   Many respondents recommended replacing "able" with "give" in the definition.

Even though participants indicated strong agreement with the proposed standards and their definitions, researchers carefully analyzed each suggestion and comment offered by respondents (see Table 2 for representative feedback). In light of these comments, researchers made further edits to the standard definitions. Respondents offered particularly insightful feedback on two standards: relevance and engagement. In Round 2, respondents were asked whether they believed relevance, defined as "the degree to which employees find the issue or topic in the communication from the organization meaningful and useful," should be added as a standard. Approximately 82% of respondents said yes. One person explained, "I think this is something that many of us work towards and it's important to measure."

Respondents were also asked whether engagement should be added to the internal communication standards, as suggested by a few people in Round 1. A total of 68% of participants said that engagement is embedded in other concepts and should not be added as a stand-alone standard. A total of 32% of respondents said engagement should be added as a standard. One of these participants explained, "Given that CEOs monitor engagement and invest in engagement surveys, it's important to define it and for communicators to incorporate it into their efforts." However, after careful consideration and conversation, the researchers decided not to include engagement as a standard, because it is a function of several other standards, including knowledge, understanding, discretionary effort, trust, and satisfaction.

The final proposed internal communication standards and their conceptual definitions are provided in Table 3.

Conclusions

Based upon this two-year year project that included conversations with hundreds of communication practitioners and academics and two Rounds of a Delphi study with internal communication thought leaders, the researchers have created a list of proposed internal

communication standards and definitions (see Table 3). The research process followed the guidelines of the ISO process that stipulates that global experts from a variety of organizations, agencies, research consultants and measurement firms, and academics create standards through a collaborative process ("About Public Relations," 2016).   The researchers hope that these standards will be adopted and used by internal communication professionals to effectively and efficiently guide measurement and evaluation of communication initiatives.

　　　Next steps include providing suggestions for measuring the standards and testing them with select organizations for validity and reliability. The researchers ultimately plan to provide a tested and effective internal communication guidebook and measurement instructions to enable internal communication practitioners the ability to measure and evaluate and to demonstrate a process for testing reliability.

　　　Despite the study's progress in creating internal communication standards, the research project has limitations. First, even though the Internal Communication Standards task force included communication practitioners from around the world, the Delphi study was conducted with participants from only North America. Therefore, testing the standards with organizations from outside North America is crucial. Second, this research assumes that the standards are discrete measurements. In reality, many of these standards—such as awareness and knowledge, collaboration and teamwork, and trust and satisfaction—are dependent upon or correlated with one another, or in certain instances, perhaps even causal. Additional testing of the standards will map out the relationships among the standards and perhaps even uncover more complex standards than first imagined. Third, the standards presented in this study are those recommended by IC thought leaders, all representative of senior management. Future research might interview employees to learn what standards they believe are most important for understanding their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.

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Table 1

Percentage of Respondents Measuring Proposed Standards in Round 1

Standard	*n*	%*
Outtakes		
Awareness	18	90
Understanding	13	65
Knowledge	10	50
Retention	9	45
Outcomes		
Satisfaction	14	82.35
Attitude	11	64.71
Empowerment	11	64.71
Collaboration	10	58.82
Trust	10	58.82
Advocacy	8	47.06
Teamwork	8	47.06
Discretionary Effort	6	35.29
Transparency	6	35.29
Procedural Justice	4	23.53
Organizational Impact		
Retention of Employees	15	71.43
Safety	15	71.43
Reputation	12	57.14
Productivity	10	47.62
Innovation	9	42.86
Authenticity	7	33.33
Continuous Improvement	7	33.33

* Percentages vary depending on the number of respondents per section.

Table 2

Feedback on Proposed Definitions from Participants in Round 2

Proposed Standard	Proposed Definition	% Agree	% Disagree	Representative Feedback
Outtakes				
Awareness	Whether employees have heard of an organizational message, issue, or topic	91	9	None
Knowledge	Employees' level of comprehension about organizational messages, issues, or topics	91	9	Include other parts of the business, competitors, the marketplace, and customers
Understanding	Employees' ability to think about, relate to and use their knowledge in a way that helps the organization achieve its goals	95	5	Some employees may be able to think about, but not relate to or use their knowledge to achieve goals. I like the idea of a shorter, crisper statement … employees' ability to use this knowledge in a way that helps the organization achieve its goals
Relevance	Degree to which employees find the issue or topic in the communication from the organization meaningful and useful	82	18	I don't want to evaluate my communications broadly based on an assumption that it was relevant to all; don't see it as a standard.
Retention of Information	Degree to which employees can recall key messages or topics when asked	82	18	I just don't see this as a standard for communications on a regular basis. This really is the same as knowledge since neither definition involves a time element
Outcomes				
Attitude	A way of thinking or feeling about an organization, ranging from very positive to very negative	86	14	Attitude can also refer to how someone thinks about a program, initiative, issue, etc.
Advocacy	Employees' discretionary effort and time to promote	95	5	I don't see this as a standard for all employees. How would results be evaluated?

	or defend an organization and its products and services			
Authenticity	Perception that an organization is transparent, honest, and fair, especially regarding the pursuit of its organizational objectives	91	9	I think people can be authentic, not organizations
Empowerment	Employees have the information, rewards, and power to take initiative and make decisions to solve problems and improve performance	86	14	Suggest "incentives" instead of "rewards;" I'd look to streamline this. I would simply say that employees have the power (or maybe ability) to take initiative and make decisions to solve problems and address performance
Collaboration	The process of employees across different divisions and or units coming together to solve a problem and/or create something successfully	82	16	Does this have to be a process? Believe "different divisions and/or units" is too limiting; employees coming together, typically from different functions, divisions or units.; These days, collaboration happens both within and outside the company
Teamwork	The process of employees within the same unit coming together to successfully achieve a common goal or objective under the leadership of an appointed manager	95	5	I'm a little worried about process; does it have to be under the leadership of an appointed manager? It seems teamwork could also be from different divisions - not just the same unit
Discretionary Effort	The amount of effort employees are able to give to an organization, a team, or a project, above and beyond what is required	77	23	Able to give doesn't seem descretionary to me. I view it as a choice, perhaps willing or demonstrated? Suggest adding "are willing and able to give ... "
Trust	A belief in the reliability, truth, and	91	9	Could you just say "I believe in the reliability truth and integrity

	integrity of the organization's leadership, decision-making, and communication			of the organization's leadership." It's incomplete and missing the core element of trust, which is the belief that leadership will do the right thing
Satisfaction	Extent to which employees are happy or content with their job or work	91	9	For the definition to work, the term needs to be "job satisfaction."
Transparency	The willingness of the organization to share complete positive and negative information with employees in a timely fashion	91	9	Not just timely fashion but clear and forthright; Transparency is about sharing information that employees need in order to make informed decisions; What about comprehensive vs. complete?
Fairness	Employee perception that organizational processes that allocate resources and resolve disputes are impartial and just	91	9	None
Organizational Impact				
Productivity	The quality and quantity of work output based on resources	91	9	Every time we combine elements into a definition, we're asking for agreement (or disagreement) on both; Not sure if I understand 'based on resources.' It's about the work output to benefit/support the organization's goals, etc.
Innovation	Thinking differently and experimenting with new approaches, ideas, or behaviors related to the organization	100	0	Or ... to benefit the organization (vs. related to the organization)
Continuous Improvement	The process by which employees offer small or large improvements to improve efficiency, productivity, and quality of a product or	100	0	Three choices again. Can we just say "Employees are able to offer ways to improve their work."

	process in the work environment			
Reputation	Stakeholders'—both internal and external—evaluation of an organization based upon personal and observed experiences with the company and its communication	86	14	I think it should be about the company, its practices and its communication; Needs a bit more related to the actions and behaviors of the organization and the likelihood of its future behavior.
Employee Retention	The number or percentage of employees who remain employed after X period of time	100	0	None
Safety	Employees' freedom from physical and emotional harm, injury or loss	91	9	Employees' expectation of and commitment to a workplace that is free from

Table   3
Final Proposed Standards and Definitions

Standard	Definition
Outtakes	
Awareness	Whether employees have heard of an organizational message, issue, or topic
Knowledge	Employees' level of comprehension about organizational messages, issues, or topics
Understanding	Employees' ability to relate their knowledge to their work in a way that helps the organization achieve its goals
Relevance	Degree to which employees communication from the organization meaningful and useful
Retention of Information	Degree to which employees can recall key messages or topics when asked after an x timeframe
Outcomes	
Attitude	A way of thinking or feeling about a subject (about an organization, topic, or issue) ranging from very positive to very negative
Advocacy	Employees' discretionary effort and time to promote or defend an organization and its products and services
Authenticity	Perception that an organization is transparent, honest, and fair, especially regarding the pursuit of its organizational objectives
Empowerment	Employees have the information, rewards, and power to take initiative and make decisions to solve problems and improve performance
Collaboration	The process of employees across different divisions and or units coming together to solve a problem and/or create something successfully

Teamwork	The process of employees within the same unit coming together to successfully achieve a common goal or objective under the leadership of an appointed manager
Discretionary Effort	The amount of effort employees give to an organization, a team, or a project, above and beyond what is required
Trust	A belief in the reliability, truth, and integrity of the organization's leadership, decision-making, and communication
Satisfaction	Extent to which employees are happy or content with their job or work
Transparency	The willingness of the organization to share positive and negative information with employees in a timely fashion
Fairness	Employee perception that organizational processes that allocate resources and resolve disputes are impartial and just
Organizational Impact	
Productivity	The quality and quantity of work output based on resources
Innovation	Thinking differently and experimenting with new approaches, ideas, or behaviors related to the organization
Continuous Improvement	The process by which employees offer small or large improvements to improve efficiency, productivity, and quality of a product or process in the work environment
Reputation	Stakeholders'—both internal and external—evaluation of an organization based upon personal and observed experiences with the company and its communication
Employee Retention	The number or percentage of employees who remain employed after X period of time
Safety	Employees' freedom from physical and emotional harm, injury or loss

Looking back, looking forward: From spokespersons to employee advocates

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Abstract

Through the role of employees has always been central for public relations and corporate communication, there is certainly a renaissance catalyzed by social media on the importance of employee advocacy. This renaissance is re-defining public relations, as we see a return to the influence of individuals after several decades of focusing on the organizations. The purpose of this conceptual paper is to make a contribution to the public relations theory by providing an overview of literature related to spokespersonship and identifying its evolutionary progress. To form a comprehensive picture of the concept and how it has been developing we employ writings from multiple disciplines, such as classical rhetoric, public relations, corporate communication, organizational communication, marketing and human resources. We identity four major phases of development of spokespersonship: classical, instrumental, persuasive and influential. We compare these phases through the factors of ownership of voice and message content. The article explains the contributions of each phase to present day public relations and helps predict future direction of the profession as we move beyond employee advocacy.

Industry reports name employees the most trustful sources of company related information (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2016), and peer recommendations continue to gain in value over paid, earned and sponsored messages (Oxford Internet Institute, 2013). Though the role of employees has always been critical for outcomes of public relations such as organizational reputation (Kim & Rhee 2011), there is certainly a renaissance emerging on the importance of employee advocacy that challenges fundamental beliefs and practices of public relations and corporate communications.

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to make a contribution to the public relations theory by providing an overview of literature related to spokespersonship and identifying its evolutionary progress. The context is organizational, and we focus on the micro-level by looking at the individual spokespersons and their role in constituting corporate level communication. To form a comprehensive picture of the concept we employ writings from multiple disciplines, such as classical rhetoric, public relations, corporate communications, organizational communications, marketing and human resources.

The paper starts with an overview of the spokesperson concept and its role in public relations. Secondly, we introduce past spokesperson models which have established the foundation for today's employee advocacy. Finally, we create a synthesis of the literature and discuss future development of spokespersonship, and the broadening role of public relations professionals.

Evolution of Spokespersons to Employee Advocates

The tradition of individuals advocating their organizations dates back to history: already ancient Greek and Roman orators were speaking on behalf of their collectives (Elsbach 2003). The organizations have changed a lot since ancient times but they still communicate through individual spokespersons as they "*cannot speak for themselves*" (Pels 2000 p. xiii, Cooren & Taylor 1997). In other words, "*It is the corporate spokesperson who gives the organization a voice within a community*" (Troester 1991 p. 528). We will begin looking at historical roots of organizational spokespersonship with the aim of identifying fundamental attributes of the concept. By exploring the models from the past, we are also able to observe development from a distance, which helps to understand the present and predict the future trends. For this, the ancient orators provide a natural starting point as many of the public relations practices, including some of which today's spokespersons are using, originate from ancient Greece and Rome (Marsh 2013). We will continue with the analysis on organizational rhetors and spokespersons and how the individual employees' voice is seen in organizational context starting from the latter half of twentieth century, when the renewed interest for rhetoric raised (Ihlen 2013). Next we will focus on employees' role as brand endorsers and reputation guards from public relations and marketing point of view. Finally, we will discuss the emerging model of employee advocacy, which is considered to be linked to the use of social media (Men 2014). Men (2014) sees that social networking platforms enable "*the unprecedented increase in employees' power to communicate*" (Men 2014 p. 262).

Our analysis and review yielded four different spokesperson phases that were analyzed with following questions in mind: With whose voice the spokesperson speaks? On whose behalf the spokesperson speaks? How is the ideal spokesperson defined? What is the spokesperson's relationship with audience? Despite its omnipresence, the spokesperson's role or communicative behavior has not been a focal research topic in public relations literature (Kim & Rhee 2011). Below, figure 1 displays the different spokesperson phases and models distinguished.

Literature review				Analysis		
Model	**Context**	**Definition (examples)**	**Source**	**Voice**	**Message**	**Phase**
Orator	Ancient Rhetoric	"A good man speaking well"	Quintilian, c. 95 AD	Personal	Personal	**Classical**
Organizational Rhetor	Modern Rhetoric	"Rhetor is an institutionally authorized speaker who represents the voice of an organization or part thereof"	Huang et al., 2013	Organizational	Organizational	**Instrumental**
Organizational Spokesperson	Organizational Behavior Corporate Communication	"Organizational spokespersons convey or explain symbolic actions to organizational audiences. Spokesperson include anyone who is perceived by audience member as representing the organization"	Elsbach, 2003	Organizational	Organizational	
Brand Endorser, Ambassador	Marketing Public Relations Advertising	"Endorsers enhance advertising readership" "Endorser can induce positive attitude change toward a company and its products." "….the personality characteristics of the endorser can get associated with brand's imaginary"	Batra et al., 1996	Organizational, Personal	Organizational	**Persuasive**
Celebrity Spokesperson	Advertising	"A recognizable person who uses this recognition to promote a consumer good through an advertisement"	Rifon et al., 2013	Organizational, Personal	Organizational	
Employee Advocate	Corporate Reputation, Public Relations	"A behavioral construct, that is, the voluntary promotion or defense of a company, its products, or brands by an employee externally"	Men, 2014	Personal	Organizational, Personal	**Influential**

Renewed importance of personal voice

Figure 1. The evolutionary phases of spokespersonship and ownership of voice and content.
Ancient orators – classical spokespersons forming foundations for advocacy

The origin of the employee advocacy resides in ancient Greece, over 2500 years ago, where the so called "orators" were protecting and managing images, identities and reputations of their collectives (Elsbach 2003). In antiquity, rhetoric was considered to be a civic art of public speaking and an art of persuasion by words. Public oratory in assembly or lawcourt provided a forum where individual speakers attempted to oppose and persuade the mass audience (Ober 2007). The orator's power laid in his speaking ability, which was at least partly a product of specialized education (Ober 2007). Rhetorical theory forms an interesting starting point for the review as it has always had an interest in individuals (Ihlen 2013). A Roman rhetorical theorist Quintilian defined an orator (a speaker) as "a good man speaking well" in his book series *Institutes of Oratory*, (95 AD). Cicero mentioned in his book series *On the Orator* (55 BC) that the ideal orator is trained in rhetoric, philosophy, law and all knowledge, and is morally good and active participant in public life (Kennedy 2009).

In ancient Greece rhetoric was considered a craft (*tekhne*) (Habinek 2005), and its varied forms were introduced in several handbooks written by ancient philosophers. One of the best known being Aristotle's (384-322 BC) *Rhetoric* where he introduced three proofs of persuasion; *logos* (logical arguments), *pathos* (emotional appeal) and *ethos* (ethical appeals or character that strengthen the credibility of the rhetor) (Ihlen 2013). Aristotle argued that ethos – or character – "may almost be called, the most effective means of persuasion", thus ethos is particularly important when discussing reputation (Ihlen 2013). Isocrates saw the individual as a source of values which influence the society at large, and believed that successful orators embodied and exemplified those values (Marsh 2013).

The media in the ancient times was spoken oratory. Isocrates was the first one who wrote a document meant to be read by anyone, which was an innovation in fourth-century Athens (Marsh 2013). By transforming the dominant spokes-oratory medium he gave the audience power to read his writings whenever they desired, even thousands of years later. The ancient orators often planned and wrote their speeches well ahead, sometimes with the help of skillful speechwriters, *logographers* (Carawan 2007). The relationship orientation was strong in the

ancient rhetoric: it acknowledged the social actors and it explored the connections between speaker and speaker, speaker and audience, writer and reader, reader and reader (Habinek 2005). The literature on ancient orators and classical rhetoric sheds light on many fundamental attributes of spokespersonship: spokesperson's individual traits such as argumentation skills, empathy and character, value based communicative behavior, importance of media in guiding the communicative action, and the role of relationships in communication effectiveness. In this classical phase the spokespersons can be seen to convey personal message with their personal voice. The ancient orators, public relations practitioners of the time, established the foundation for spokespersonship, and their heritage lives in contemporary employee advocacy model.

Organizational spokespersons – establishing voicing mechanisms for advocacy

Organizations have changed a lot since ancient times, but individual spokesperson's role has remained central. Organizations still communicate through individuals (Cooren & Taylor 1997) and are dependent on the many voices of their individual speakers (Christensen & Cornelissen 2011). Troester (1991) adds that "it is the spokesperson who gives the organization a voice within a community". In this paper we define *a spokesperson as an individual human being who uses his/her own voice to represent the organization he/she is part of* (Huang, Baptista & Galliers 2013). Hence a spokesperson could be anyone who is perceived by the audience to represent the organization (Elsbach 2013). This paper focuses on internal spokespersons meaning company's employees, including CEOs and members of leadership teams. Ihlen (2013) has listed differences between ancient and modern rhetors i.e. spokespersons, and see that modern spokespersons mainly represent organizations and their interests instead of themselves, communicate through variety of modern medias, and also time and place of the rhetorical encounter is very different from the classical setting.

The biggest change occurring in the 20th century, was the shift of responsibility and ownership of the voice from the individuals to the organizations. Crable (1990) suggests that organizations were the true rhetors of the latter half of the twentieth century. In his opinion spokespeople are actors, agencies and instruments who represent company's organized interests to the audience (Crable 1990). Organizational spokespersons were expected to deliver consistent messages and speak with the same voice and tone (Ihlen 2013) and realize the vision of contemporary corporate communication to manage all communication as one entity (Christensen & Cornelissen 2011).

An organizational spokesperson is often a visible leader or a public relations practicner (Elsbach, 2003; Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander & Laine 2011,) building relationships with media, communicating in a case of crisis and influencing public opinion through issues management (Troester 1991). Especially CEOs' role as an organizational spokesperson has been emphasized by number of researchers (Men 2015; Park & Berger, 2004; Zerfass, Vercic & Wiesenberg 2016). CEOs are considered to personify the organization acting as the highest level corporate spokespersons and set the tone for internal communication practice, and thus influence employee attitudes, trust in leadership and performance (Men, 2015; Park & Berger 2004; Zerfass, 2016). Employees in this era were considered spokespersons, but only in regular interactions with customers and public (Elsbach, 2003).

Employees role as organizational spokespersons has been analyzed also through the concept of employee voice, studied across multiple disciplines e.g. in Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management (Mowbray, Wilkinson & Tse 2015). Employee voice studies focus on mechanism that employees have to express their view on organizational issues,

internally or in recent studies, also externally (Miles & Mangold 2014). The idea of employee voice and its connotation to employee's act of speaking up and expressing opinions goes back more than two centuries to the start of the industrial revolution. Those early writings (e.g. Smith) tell us that employee voice was rarely registered by employer and was ineffective in its influence (Kaufman 2014). Gradually one-on-one individual voice developed into small-scale collective voice which established a ground for labor unions (Kaufman 2014). Recently the concept has been used to describe "employee's attempt to express organizational experiences and issues; or to influence the organization, its members, or other stakeholders through either organizationally sanctioned or unsanctioned media" (Miles & Muuka, 2011). The concept of employee voice provides a parallel perspective on employees' communicative power.

In summary, and until the emergence of social media, the ideal of one unified voice and message was in the center of interest, and human voice was seen mainly as an instrument. Corporate spokespersons were carefully selected and assigned individuals who were trained to encounter media in different situations with well-planned or even pre-scripted messages. In this era, public relations professionals were the voice of the organization. Also employee-centric concepts of voice existed but they were more dominant in the area of human resources and management than communication disciplines. In this instrumental phase the spokespersons convey organizational messages with organizational voice.

Spokespersons as brand endorsers and reputation guards – relational foundations for advocacy

Knox and Bickerton (2003) define a corporate brand as the visual, verbal and behavioral expression of an organization's unique business model. To be a brand spokesperson, a person needs to verbally advocate for it, explain it, bring credibility to it or otherwise deliver brand message that may persuade the receiver of the information so that he or she views the brand favorably (Cohen 2014). Marketing and advertising literature suggests that a spokesperson can humanize a brand by giving a face and a voice to it and thus making it less abstract or less anonymous in the hearts and minds of its consumers (Fleck, Michel & Zeitoun 2014). Employees are considered particularly effective in humanizing brands and they are perceived "real people" with whom ordinary consumers can identify (Fleck et al. 2014). Batra et al. (1996) define an endorser a person who endorses a product and acts a source of information to influence the acceptability of the message, which is the result of his/her perceived credibility or attractiveness. Internal endorsers (CEO or ordinary employee) are often considered more credible compared to external e.g. celebrity endorsers by the public, because they know the company from the inside (Fleck et al. 2014; Rifon, Smreker & Kim, 2013) For the same reason, many crisis management strategies enhance the role of employees as reputation guards (Zoonen & Meer, 2015).

Balmer (2009) has analyzed the development of corporate marketing over the last half century and argues that the focus has moved from corporate image to those an organization's defining traits, corporate identity. The traditional view among the marketing scholars has been that strong reputations and brands can be achieved through portraying corporate identities consistently, visibly and transparently (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004; Ihlen, 2013). For example, integrated marketing communications aim to melt different messages into one voice and provide them strategically designed persona (Cheney, Christensen, Conrad & Lair, 2004). Lately marketing scholars have increasingly emphasized the collaborative nature of brand construction (e.g. Cheney et al., 2009; Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2011). Järventie-Thesleff et al. (2011) argue that brand strategies emerge and are created in organizations through human action by employees from all levels of organization together with the stakeholders outside the company.

One of the drivers for this approach has been the increasing importance of service sector and service mindset in the economy. In service-centric environment the role of employees, their competencies, knowledge, and skills become crucial and respectively the academic focus of marketing scholars has shifted toward intangibles, interactivity, connectivity and ongoing relationships (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In 2007 Ind (p. 17) stated that *"the power of brands lies in giving employees the freedom to use their imaginations within the constraints set by the organization's values"*. Employee-centric approach started to blossom and Mangold and Miles (2007) introduced a concept of employee brand which they defined as the image that organizations present to their customers and other relevant stakeholders through their employees. To conclude, employees were considered important contributors to the company's brand value but often understood as agencies in constructing corporate reputation and organization perceptions through their connectivity, interactivity and relationship building. In this persuasive phase the spokespersons conveyed organizational message with both organizational and personal voice, making integration a central task of public relations professionals.

Employee advocates – renewed importance of individuals

The most recent developments of organizational behavior and communication have been driven by digitalization. Especially social media has changed the way people communicate, both in their professional and private lives (Dreher, 2014). Today, employees can communicate their on-the-job experiences to hundreds or even thousands of people outside the organization by using social networking sites (Miles & Mangold, 2014), increasing the role of employee advocacy in importance (Men & Stacks, 2013). For organizations, the biggest realization was how web 2.0 was not designed for branded products but for people, and to gain cultural resonation, companies needed to embed themselves naturally in web 2.0 conversations through their employees (Fournier & Avery, 2011). At the same time corporate communication is increasingly driven by issues and topics, and reputation management requires presence in multiple virtual issue arenas (Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010). The audiences in these social networks value authenticity, humanity and personality and thus individual employees are perceived neutral and credible (Men & Stacks, 2013), and can create conversations and strengthen brands better than anonymous corporations. It has been argued that individual employees have more communication power and their voice is stronger than ever (Men 2014; Miles & Mangold, 2014).

Employee advocacy can be defined *"as a behavioral construct, that is, the voluntary promotion or defense of a company, its products, or brands by an employee externally"* (Men 2014 p. 262). It builds on the Kim's and Rhee's (2011 p. 246) idea of "megaphoning" which refers to *"employees positive or negative external communication behavior about their organizations"*. Continuing their work, an employee advocate can be defined as a spokesperson who communicates voluntarily and selectively about his or her organization to his own personal networks (Kim & Rhee, 2011; Men, 2014). Employee advocacy parallels to customer advocacy which refers to the promotion or defense of a company or a brand by customer (Walz & Celuch, 2010). Both models of advocacy can be seen as WOM (word-of-mouth) marketing but they differ in engaging stronger relationships (Walz & Celuch, 2010).

The emergence of employee advocacy is changing the organizational voicing dynamics and power structures (Riemer, Stieglitz & Meske, 2015). Communication in the organizational context is changing from univocal to multivocal where the source of voice is not centrally located and legitimized by the management or communications function; instead individuals from different parts of the organization are changing their views. (Huang et al., 2013). Today,

any individual can become a spokesperson depending on their ability to engage in and interact with their audience (Huang at al., 2013) and an employee can be a company's most important communication asset, or if not engaged and treated unfairly an employee can ruin company's reputation very easily (Mangold & Miles, 2014). Thus advocacy and engagement are connected to each other. The empirical evidence shows that employees share positive information about their organization when they experience good organization-employee relationship (Kim & Rhee, 2011). As employees are able and expected to act in the social media and use their communication power they also have responsibilities. Huang et al. (2015) introduced a concept of stewardship which refers to the sense of self-ownership, service orientation and self-regulation.

From the individual employee point of view, social media has increased the importance of personal branding which encourages employees to consciously construct their social media presence (Huotari, Ulkuniemi, Saraniemi & Mäläskä, 2015). According to Altimeter 2016 report, the most important motivator for employees to act as an advocate is the potential to strengthen their professional brand. The challenge, based on the report, is still that many companies do not have social culture and employees are not used to mixing personal and professional messages in their social circles.

Social media has enabled employees to become powerful advocates who shape the company's reputation with everything they say or do online (Dreher, 2014). Social networking sites provide a public sphere in which individual employees can create and exchange content regardless of communications strategies, defined brand voices or other regulations (Agresta & Bonin, 2011). Employee advocacy transforms employees into influential communicators conveying both organizational and personal messages with their personal voice. The ongoing change requires new management practices, working practices and increased awareness of the effects on both corporations and public but also on individual employees. For public relations professionals, several types of skills are now required that range from monitoring to internal consulting and from public speaking to fostering an online community. Public relations professionals become facilitators and their boundary spanning function is emphasized. According to Grunig (2009) the most challenging task for communication practitioners in the era of social media is to balance control and autonomy in a way that employees feel empowered to act as trusted advocates in the social sphere. Scholars have emphasized the role of shared values and strong culture in orchestrating the multivocal organizations (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011).

Discussion

The objective of this paper has been to explain the evolution of spokesperson concept by creating a synthesis of the existing literature. By looking at past spokesperson models and contemporary employee advocacy model we have found some attributes, ownership of voice and message content, that seem to vary in each evolutionary phase. The first classical phase embodies personal ownership of both voice and message. The instrumental phase of organizational spokespersonship is characterized with mainly organizational ownership of voice and message. Persuasive phase considering employees as brand endorsers and reputation guards allowed personal voice (and character) to influence the brand message. The most recent influential phase with its employee advocacy model functions mainly through personal ownership of the voice. We acknowledge that these attributes are generalizations based on literature from multiple disciplines, and in the practice there are cases where these generalizations do not apply. We also acknowledge that this view could be broadened with

inclusion of other attributes e.g. media and audience. We also recognize that the evolutionary phases are interlaced and partly overlapping in time.

Based on our analysis of the literature, the current development toward personal representation through employee advocacy can been seen as an evolution back to the roots of spokespersonship, to the classical phase and ancient orator. Both models share the common elements of individual's central role, values guiding communicative behavior and citizenship mindset. It has been argued that social media communication, being relational, interactive, communal and personal, mimics traditional face-to-face interpersonal communication (Men, 2015). In this light, it can be said that the rhetoric techniques matter in the new social sphere more than many of us might realize. Although similarities in practices and techniques, we need to acknowledge that the technical advances that have been made over the past years enable a form of virtual content sharing that is fundamentally different from the earlier models. For public relations professionals, this is beneficial, as the communication processes are becoming more measurable than before, making the value of public relations easier to prove. From the organization point view the development towards employee advocacy has changed the corporate communications being managerial project into shared responsibility with many different actors, and allowed organizations to speak with many different voices simultaneously (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011). Huang et al. (2013) suggests that nurturing symmetrical communications culture and institutional norms that encourage employees use of social media, organizations can gradually eliminate trade-offs inherent in traditional (rhetorical) practices in organizations that are based on central control.   The use of social media allows for i)multiple voices as well as targeted communication ii) simultaneous wider reach and richness, and iii) combined consumption and production of rhetorical content (Huang et al. 2013). This represents a major shift from traditional communication management paradigm in organizations and simultaneously opens up a new possibility for public relations professionals to prove their value for organizations and even society at large.

There are several elements found from the evolutionary progress of the spokesperson concept that could benefit from more detailed analysis in moving to the further stages of employee advocacy. First one of them is the empowerment of employees to act as advocates, especially from the leaders and public relations practiioners's point of view (Men & Stacks 2013; Schulze Horn et al. 2015). This refers to enabling employees to act as company's advocates e.g. through leadership. The second topic that would need more attention from scholars and practioners is the education of employees to use social media so that it benefits themselves, their companies and community in general (Schulze Horn et al. 2015), third, in the era of employee advocacy employees cannot anymore hide behind the anonymous corporations, when communicating with the public and they need to have strong sense of self-ownership, service orientation and self-regulation. The stewardship (Huang et al. 2015) would offer an interesting area for future research.

The spokespersonship and its related concepts will continue to evolve, advanced by the new technology. We predict that the personal voice will become even more powerful which will require individual employees to develop their role as spokespersons and companies to reinvent their management strategies and practices. However, as the credibility of online reports is challenged through unidentified players such as fake reviews and news, we predict that in the future public relations professionals will need to become also advocacy verificators: only those sources verified as authentic will be of value for corporate communication and public relations. For public relations professionals, this move will require new facilitation, monitoring and

verification skills, and put to test their previous roles as mentors and coaches. Such verification will benefit not only the organizations public relations professionals work for, but also the society at large through increasing trust and through it even democracy, a central value of the ancient orators. Public relations professionals are well equipped for this task through their extensive understanding of the new media logic and the diverse needs of the different organizational stakeholders.

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No Media Relations, No Public Relations?
The Role of Relationships in the "New" Media Relations Landscape

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Abstract

This study seeks to analyze how the top companies in the United States utilize social media theories or features for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Specifically, it focuses on how the top 25 Fortune companies use social media features to inform, communicate, and engage stakeholders in CSR initiatives and messages.

Introduction

Today's public relations environment consists of multiple platforms for message distribution and consumption, but practitioners are still largely dependent on the media for publicity.   As evidenced by the history of PR practice, how practitioners interact with and relate to the media is constantly changing.

It may be that a different theoretical viewpoint helps to understand relationship building and maintenance between practitioners and the press. This work proposes introducing concepts from speech communication, primarily relational dialectics as defined by Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery (1996) to aid looking at media relations through a nuanced lens. It is a more interpersonal approach, and adds to the body of relationship management literature by emphasizing the "relationship" concept rather than the "management" of relationships. It will also incorporate concepts from Kent & Taylor's dialogic theory (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002, 2014) into a particular view of relationship and engagement.

Through a series of interviews with PR professionals who practice media relations, this work examines the state of media relations practice today from a relational perspective from which to view this ever-evolving relationship.

Literature review

The PR Practitioner/Journalist Relationship

The root of the journalist-PR practitioner exchange is the relationship between these two groups (Sallot & Johnson, 2006). Since the 1960s, more than 150 studies have examined some aspect of the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists (Cameron, Sallot & Curtin, 1997). This number has certainly grown since the publication of Cameron, et al.'s article. Much of the literature portrays the relationship between journalists and practitioners as adversarial (Sallot & Johnson, 2006).

Dialogue in the Public Relations Literature

The term "dialogue" has appeared in the public relations literature for more than three decades (Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). According to Taylor et al. (2001), the concept of dialogue may now best capture the process and product of relationship building, given public relations' shift to a more relational approach. Dialogue seems to be taking a front-and-center role in the new global age of public relations.

In light of the growing emphasis on relationships in public relations, dialogue becomes a central focus in the creation of those relationships.   These relationships may not always develop symmetrically, as dominant PR theory suggests it should (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992). As Botan (1997) suggests, "dialogue manifests itself more as a stance, orientation, or bearing in communication rather than a specific method, technique or format" (p. 202).

To further define and offer understanding of the components of dialogic communication, Kent and Taylor (2002) created five tenets of a dialogic orientation: mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment.

A Relational Dialectics Approach

In relational dialectics, speech communication scholars Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery propose that a dialogic relationship tends to center around four key concepts: contradiction, or the "dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (Baxter & Montgomery,

1996: p. 8); change, which is the clash of opposing tendencies in a relationship; praxis, which is the function of people as proactive actors who make communicative choices in how to function in their social world; and totality, which is a way to think about the world as a process of relations or interdependencies (1998).

Baxter and Montgomery also ground their concept of relational dialectics in tension. In relational dialectics, dialogue is a flow of meaning between people. Much of the literature in public relations grounds dialogue in interaction itself, but does not fully address the concept of tension implicit in the practitioner/reporter relationship. By addressing the tension inherent in the relationship, we can begin to see the importance of conflict as creating opportunities for dialogue.

Research Questions

The literature to date leads us to two research questions:

RQ1:   How, if at all, has the relationship changed between public relations practitioners and journalists, following advances in technology and changes in the journalism industry?

RQ2:   How do current public relations practitioners view the journalist/PR practitioner exchange?

Method

Fifteen interviews were conducted with public relations practitioners at both agencies and corporations to learn how they are currently forming and managing relationships with members of the press. The method of selection for the professionals was purposive in nature, and interviewees were either personal contacts of the researcher, the co-author, or were referred to the researcher in the first round of interviews. Fifteen was chosen as the target for interviews as it is considered to be an acceptable number for reaching saturation in qualitative interview research (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Indeed, after only 10 interviews, common themes began to emerge.

Interviews were conducted via Skype or by telephone, at the preference of the interviewee. Five professionals worked for worldwide agencies or local agencies with at least 20 employees. Two interviewees worked for agencies with between five and 15 employees, and one interviewee had just started a firm with 20 years of corporate experience. All held the title of account executive or higher. The seven corporate interviewees represented major worldwide corporations, hospitals, cable and broadcast networks, and major airlines. Titles ranged from manager of public relations or public affairs to vice president of public relations. Years of experience of the interviewees ranged from 2.5 to 25 ($M = 13.23$). The interviews were conducted between October 21, 2012 and February 26, 2013.

The interview protocol consisted of 14 questions. Questions explored the professionals' thoughts about dialogue with the press, and how it has evolved over the past several years. The questions were designed to address concepts from dialogic theory and relational dialectics as they related to current practice. Questions were written so that the professionals could give an initial answer, and then prompts were given to delve deeper into their thoughts. The interviewees were also encouraged to contact the researcher if they thought of anything else that might add value to this study.

Findings

The results of the interviews of professionals provided valuable insight into RQs 1 and 2: *How, if at all, has the relationship changed between public relations practitioners and journalists, given advances in technology and changes in the journalism industry? How do current public relations practitioners view the journalist/PR practitioner exchange?*

As additional demographic information to that provided in the methods section, two interviewees had extensive (9-10 years) of experience as a reporter. Time spent on media relations by the interviewees ranged from 20% to 90% of their workweek. This included time spent in planning and preparing for dealing with reporters.

All of the interviewees indicated that they dealt with a variety of media. All mentioned print, broadcast and radio outlets, two said that they dealt regularly with international media, 12 worked with bloggers, and 10 indicated that they regularly pitched stories to trade publication reporters.

Among the 15 professionals interviewed, all agreed that the media relations landscape has changed quite a bit in the last five years. All 15 practitioners stated that they are now using e-mail as their primary means of initiating contact with a journalist, as opposed to a telephone call. This was true particularly when the practitioner was contacting a journalist for the first time. Some variation existed, however, based on the length and nature of the relationship between the practitioner and the journalist being contacted. For more established relationships, practitioners were more likely to use the telephone to pitch a story.

Changes in Journalism

The professionals interviewed also agreed that changes in journalism have affected how they conduct media relations. A practitioner who worked for a local, one-office agency stated, "The dynamic has changed. It's so much of a transient nature where people are moving from place to place and it's hard to keep up with them" (personal interview, 10/2012). Another agency professional said, "You have no ability to control or monitor or put boundaries on where the message is going to. There is so much convergence" (telephone interview, 9/2012). Another noted that newspapers are shrinking and more stories are coming from wire services, which makes it more difficult to get stories into print. One corporate PR practitioner recalled a conversation from 2010 with a writer for and advertising trade magazine. While he was talking to the reporter, the reporter said, "I have just come from a meeting where a third of our staff got laid off. This time yesterday I was covering two beats, now I am covering five" (Skype interview, 11/2012).

Changes in Technology

Technology has also had an impact on how practitioners conduct media relations. All 15 professionals agreed that social media applications have changed the way they conduct media relations in some way. Said one practitioner, "My Facebook friends are media. If you are making comments about different things, they can see it. You could be making fun of a reporter and they could be a Facebook friend or a friend of a Facebook friend" (Skype interview, 11/2012).

Younger professionals tended to use Facebook and Twitter more than those with more experience, with the exception of one small agency owner who stated that he had many reporters with whom he interacted on Facebook. "E-mail over the past few years has become so ubiquitous. You want to get through to them with instant messaging or other services if you can"

(Skype interview, 8/2012). Another of the younger professionals interviewed said, "I have begun following journalists on Twitter. You can see what they are reporting on, or even communicate with them that way" (telephone interview, 10/2012). Seven other professionals agreed that following reporters on Twitter was a way to learn more about the stories the reporters were working on, but that they would not use Twitter to initially pitch a story. A seasoned practitioner said that Twitter is "good when there is a close relationship" and that she might reach out to some bloggers to pitch stories, but "I wouldn't do that for most people. I don't do it very often" (telephone interview, 11/2012).

Most respondents were vague when they were asked to recount how many times per day or week they used different types of communication tools, (Table 5.1), but all of the respondents did use various means of communication to interact with and initiate contact with journalists. E-mail was the overwhelming choice for attempting to engage a journalist with whom the practitioner had never dealt before. Telephone was a close second. E-mail and telephone were still the primary means of contact when the journalist was attempting to engage a reporter. Twitter, texting, Facebook, and Google+ were all mentioned as ways for a practitioner to engage a journalist with whom the practitioner had an existing relationship. "Texting, unless you have a very close relationship with someone, seems too personal for me," said one interviewee. Five others agreed with her about the personal boundary texting may cross. Table 5.1 also illustrates the difference in method of media contact between agency professionals, who may be engaging new journalists more often, versus corporate professionals, who may have more established relationships with certain reporters.

Table 5.1: Contact Methods, Agency vs. Corporate

Method of Contact	Agency (N=7)	Corporate (N=8)
E-mail	6 primary, 1 secondary (75% of the time, 30-40 e-mail pitches a day)	6, (4-5 e-mail pitches a day) 2 secondary
Telephone	1 primary 4 secondary 1hr/day 10/day	2 primary, 4 secondary 2/week 3-5 week
Text	3 no 3 rarely 1 yes	1xweek 5 no 2 occasionally
Facebook	2 yes 1 no 1 often (along with Skype, Google+)	5 yes 3 no
Instant Message	2 yes 5 no	6 yes 1 no

Twitter	3 monitor	3 monitor
	3 pitch	2 pitch
	1 no	3 no
HARO/Profnet	3 yes (1 without success)	8 no
	2 no	
	2 rarely	
Surface mail	6 no	5 yes (product for review, 1 1xwk)
	1 yes (product for consideration)	3 no

Only one agency professional said that they use surface mail, and that was for sending products to reporters for gift guides or special sections. Two of the corporate professionals used surface mail to send out material for review by critics because they requested the material that way.   Agency professionals tended to use Help a Reporter Out or ProfNet more than their corporate counterparts, but most met with limited success.

The "Blogosphere"

Bloggers are becoming increasingly important to practitioners. "You are seeing younger people more on the blog side, writing less formally. You are getting from them a little more give and get. They are usually a little more appreciative" (telephone interview, 1/2013). All but one agency professional said that they regularly pitch bloggers, but she did engage them occasionally on behalf of a client. It was the same with corporate professionals, with only one responding that they did not pitch bloggers, but that was due to a small staff and was something they were planning on doing in the near future.

Blogs were especially of importance to practitioners when reaching out to special interest groups. "I think of them as journalists and treat them as such," said one corporate respondent. "We have some mommy bloggers who we work with regularly who I might just pick up the phone and call, but generally, I rely on e-mail" (telephone interview, 2/2013).

There were differing opinions, however, on blogs and bloggers themselves. "Media databases say that you deal with a blogger the same way you do a journalist. Maybe they think they are journalists, and some of them are, but blogs were made to express opinion. That is great as long as we recognize it. They don't reach a huge audience, unless specialized" (Skype interview, 12/2012). The same interviewee expressed frustration over contacting bloggers. "They don't always list their contact information. Many of my blog contacts come from other bloggers. I guess that's how the blogosphere has developed. It is almost as if they don't want to be contacted" (Skype interview, 1/2013).

Journalists Contacting PR Professionals

It seems that the one-way street that has characterized the PR/journalist relationship continues. All but two of the respondents indicated that reporters rarely reached out to them for information, unless there was a major announcement or an established relationship. The professionals who stated that they got at least 40-50 e-mails a day from journalists worked for major corporations. For all but four respondents, it was an "it depends" scenario. One respondent recalled an instance with a reporter who was working on a trend story who knew the practitioner

represented a major golf manufacturer, so he e-mailed and requested high-resolution images of the company's product. Another respondent mentioned a crisis situation in which they got more calls than they could handle. The two who stated that journalists "almost never" contacted them were with small independent firms. The seven corporate practitioners indicated that they received more calls than did the eight agency professionals interviewed. Of the corporate respondents, five said that journalists reached out to them primarily by e-mail, two indicated that they usually received phone calls.

The practitioners interviewed were also making themselves more "findable" via the web, including establishing online newsrooms and making sure that contact info was attached to all materials distributed via the web.

Technology Affecting Relationships?

All of the professionals interviewed said that relationships were central to their media relations practice. In fact, the concept of relationships was a central theme throughout the interviews. Five of the seven agency professionals and all but one of the corporate professionals agreed that new technologies have had an impact on their relationships with reporters.

One corporate PR professional said that he was "much closer to a smaller group of journalists because we all commiserate on what is going on… Most of them really want to do a great job, but they are buried. The few times you can get on the phone or see these people, over a drink or something in New York, people start pouring their guts out" (Skype interview, 11/2012).

When asked if new technologies like Facebook and Twitter have made relationship building easier or more difficult, the responses were mixed. Three agency professionals said that new ways of interacting with journalists had improved their ability to form and maintain relationships, while six of the seven corporate professionals said that it was more difficult to form and maintain relationships than before.

Overview of Findings

Coming back to the original research questions these interviews were designed to answer, media relations is being practiced differently now that more social media tools are available and the pool of "traditional" journalists has gotten smaller. Public relations professionals are blurring the lines somewhat in terms of professional and personal relationships, which can be argued is a good thing. Certainly, dialogue is central to the relationship.

Changes in technology, particularly social media, has provided valuable contact points for PR professionals, particularly those newer to the industry or for professionals reaching out to a journalist they've never dealt with before. Still, direct contact via e-mail and telephone is preferred.

Interdependence was certainly an apparent theme in the interviews with PR professionals. Journalists and PR professionals need each other to do their jobs, and to do them well. Mutual understanding of each party's role in the exchange is important, as is mutual respect.

The interviews with professionals also revealed that they are using concepts from relational dialectics. While practitioners and journalists are certainly not giving up the "self" of their professions, during the interaction with each other they are certainly occupying the same time and space (Baxter, 2004). This goes hand in hand with the lessening of the adversarial nature of the relationship that has occupied both practice and folklore since PR's inception as a profession. Each party has a job to do, but as technology and lack of time and resources are

becoming increasingly important issues, perhaps both parties are learning that they need each other more than they once thought.

Discussion

What emerged from the professional interviews in response to the two research questions contained several different themes relating to current practice and instruction. Supporting the work of Sallot and Johnson (2006), the foundation of the journalist/PR practitioner exchange is indeed the *relationship* between these two groups. While professionals agreed that relationships and dialogue are still the central currency of their profession, technology has required them to become more "careful" in how and where they share and post information. This is not because of a lack of transparency, it is simply because lines are becoming blurred between professional and personal relationships. It makes a difference in how reporters can access information that may lead to some kind of story idea.

A Less Adversarial Relationship

As the media landscape is changing with fewer reporters covering more beats, it may be that the "adversarial" nature of the relationship between reporters and public relations professionals as discussed by Fedler & DeLorme (2002) may be giving way to a more dialogic approach to newsgathering as reporters truly need to rely on public relations practitioners more as increased demands are placed on reporters' time. Instead of adversarial, the relationship today may better be described as two groups of people doing different jobs with different agendas, but working together through dialogue to get those jobs done.

Changes in technology, particularly social media, has provided valuable contact points for PR professionals, particularly those newer to the industry or for professionals reaching out to a journalist they've never dealt with before. Still, direct contact via e-mail and telephone is preferred, giving even more support to the importance of dialogue in the relationship between practitioners and journalists.

Revisiting the definition of public relations that was adopted by PRSA in 2012, the interviews with professionals support the notion that "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (Corbett, 2012). The interviews with professionals also lend support to the idea of *interpersonal* relationship management rather than relationship management as defined by Ledingham (2006). This is not to suggest that PR should not be a management function – it should certainly occupy a seat at the top levels of management in organizations. However, with regards to relationships with various publics, and in this case the media, meaningful, thoughtful and "smart" dialogue with the press might better serve to meet the needs of both parties in the relationship.

Interdependence

The interviews with professionals revealed that they are using concepts from relational dialectics. While practitioners and journalists are certainly not giving up the "self" of their professions, during the interaction with each other they are certainly occupying the same time and space (Baxter, 2004). This goes hand in hand with the lessening of the adversarial nature of the relationship that has occupied both practice and folklore since PR's inception as a profession. Each party has a job to do, but as technology and lack of time and resources are becoming increasingly important issues, perhaps both parties are learning that they need each other more than they once thought.

Interviews with professionals also may suggest that concepts from Kent and Taylor's (2002) dialogic theory may fit well within the notion of the idea of interpersonal relationship management. The orientation of public relations professionals and journalists show indications of mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment in their interactions with journalists. Additionally, the conversations revealed that Tomlinson's (2000) proposal of comfort with relational dialectics in the reporter/PR practitioner exchange may be becoming reality. There are boundaries to be maintained, particularly with so many channels of message distribution and consumption, but the "delicate balance" (2000: p. 89) that Tomlinson proposed may play a part in maintaining the equilibrium between self and other in the practice of media relations.

Key Assumptions of Relational Dialectics and Media Relations

The literature review of this work linked concepts of dialogic theory to concepts of relational dialectics.

1. *Contradiction*. According to the interviews with PR professionals, it is still true that journalists and PR practitioners view things from different perspectives. This is reflected in Baxter and Montgomery's (1998) proposition that dialogic relationships are grounded in contradiction. What the interviews also reflected was the ongoing flow of meaning that occurs between journalists and practitioners. From the practitioner's view, each party is working within the tension of the relationship to create shared meaning from different situations. Relational dialectics works for media relations and media relationships in that both parties in the journalist/PR relationship are constantly "shifting" their views on particular issues over time as dialogue occurs. The end state is certainly not a completely changed viewpoint by either party. Rather, the statement-counterstatement process of media relations results in benefits to both parties *over time*. While "mutually beneficial outcomes" may be the case in certain situations, "mutually beneficial relationships" are certainly front and center in the mind of many practitioners.

2. *Change.* Media relations is an ongoing process, as the interviews with professionals revealed. While dialogic exchanges may begin and end, the ongoing dialogue of a relationship is never really finished. As one interviewee said, an exchange about a completely random event resulted in a solid relationship between herself and a prominent reporter. This provides an excellent example of taking an isolated instance and using it to build a relationship through dialogue. Change also involves Kent and Taylor's (2002) tenets of empathy and risk.

3. *Praxis and Dialectical Flux.* As the media environment changes and practitioner and journalists are learning new and better ways to function in relation to each other, each party must "fuse their perspectives to some extent while sustaining the uniqueness of their individual perspectives" (Baxter, 2004: p. 7). While both parties may know that they have a job to do, the dialogue between them fluctuates based on particular situations. This is helpful in understanding how discursive opposites such as separation and integration can complete, enhance, and enable journalists and public relations professionals while at the same time they may constrain each party (Baxter, 2004).

4. *Totality*. By now, it is clear that public relations practitioners and journalists rely on one another. Study upon study has made that abundantly clear. While other forces act on each party's time and resources, there is a "coming together" that is necessary for PR practitioners to get their stories out and for journalists to cover what they need to cover.

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Looking Back: Exploring the Moral Development of Public Relations Professionals

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Abstract

This study applied Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development to understand how moral growth of PR employees takes place. It fills the dearth of knowledge regarding how PR practitioners evolve as moral individuals and how organizations cultivate moral development. Participants described their moral development as cultivated via ethical decision making, exposure to industry ethical standards, ethical industry mentors.

More than 70% of public relations professionals are unprepared to confront ethical decisions in the workplace, often due to a lack of ethics education or training (Bowen, 2007). Compounding the findings that organizations rarely provide ethics training (Bowen, 2006; Lee & Cheng, 2012; Neill, 2016), research suggests that ethics training, if offered, provides little foundation for practitioners' own moral / ethical belief systems (Bowen, 2004b) and that practitioners likely gain knowledge of morals and ethics from external personal, family, or religious sources (Lee & Cheng, 2012; Wright, 1989). Despite the lack of training and diverse moral influences, public relations professionals still exhibit generally high levels of moral reasoning (Coleman & Wilkins, 2009; Lieber, 2008; Plaisance, 2014) and tend to increase in moral reasoning as they gain tenure on the job (Lieber, 2008). But how?

Additional research is necessary to understand how public relations practitioners acquire moral / ethical knowledge and how it contributes to their moral development and professional growth. This exploratory qualitative study answers multiple calls for additional qualitative and nuanced moral development research (Lieber, 2008) that may provide insights for how we might foster more ethical public relations workplaces (Neill, 2016). Specifically, this study applied Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (e.g. Kohlberg 1978, 1981; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977) to understand how public relations professionals interpret their own moral development. It fills the dearth of knowledge regarding how public relations practitioners evolve as moral individuals, how organizations cultivate moral development, and which values are important to this process.

Literature Review

Morals and Ethics

Regardless of their prescribed identities as ethical conscience (Bowen, 2008; Neill & Drumwright, 2012), principled or responsible advocate (Baker, 2008; Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001) ethical activist (Holtzhausen, 2002), public relations professionals must be knowledgeable of both ethics and moral philosophy (Bowen, 2004a) in order to effectively and respectfully manage communication on behalf of an organization. Morals involve the principles or standards of right and wrong behavior, whereas ethics involve the "systematic examination of moral agents and their actions" by evaluating and prescribing particular traits (St. John & Pearson, 2016, p. 20). Whereas ethical approaches may differ, similar moral values and moral development stages exist among all individuals and cultures worldwide (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 14).

Moral Development Theory

Moral development, originally conceptualized by Piaget (1932), involves the evolution of one's structure of moral thought, particularly in regard to how an individual interprets right from wrong, makes moral judgements, or acquires moral meaning from experiences (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 54; Rest & Narvaez, 1994, p. 2). Kohlberg (e.g. 1971, 1973, 1981) built upon Piaget's work to theorize how individual's moral cognition evolves over the course of six stages within three levels (Rest & Narvaez, 1994). Each stage represents a unique system of moral thought that an individual must acquire before moving on the next stage (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977; Kohlberg, 1981). Stages are never skipped and individuals may never evolve through all six stages of moral development in a lifetime.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development (e.g. 1971; 1973, 1981; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977) holds that individuals first engage in moral thinking at the "Preconventional Level" in which they recognize and respond to cultural rules of good and bad behavior or punishment and reward (Kohlberg, 1981; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). At this level, individuals may progress from

Stage 1 described as the "punishment-and-obedience orientation" to Stage 2 described as the "instrumental-relativist orientation" in which individuals begin to consider the needs of others (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, pp. 54-55). Individuals may then progress to the second or "Conventional Level" of development where their moral judgements consider family, group, or societal expectations of good behavior (Kohlberg, 1981; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). At this level, individuals progress through Stage 3, described as the "interpersonal concordance orientation" in which moral behavior is understood as that which helps others (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 55). Then, one arrives at Stage 4 or the "law and order orientation" in which moral behavior is interpreted as following rules and maintaining order (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 55). Lastly, Kohlberg theorized that individuals may finally reach the "Postconventional Level" of moral development when their moral thinking considers the value and validity of moral principles in their own right. In this level, one enters Stage 5, in which moral behavior is interpreted as adhering to societal principles of right and wrong and may achieve Stage 6, "the universal-ethical-principle orientation" in which individuals self-choose and embody principles of justice, respect, and equality of all individuals (Kohlberg, 1971; 1981; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 55).

Scholarship regarding Moral Development Theory has highlighted various implications. Particularly important is Kohlberg's assertion that moral judgment does not correlate to moral action (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). In other words, one may understand what is moral, yet still behave in a manner which is immoral. Higher levels of moral development are, however, associated with better sense making and decision-making abilities (Rest & Narvaez, 1977, p. 16). Individuals who continually develop in moral judgement have been found to enjoy learning, take on challenges and risks, thrive in intellectual environments, be reflective, and accept responsibility for themselves (Rest, 1986, p. 57, as cited in Rest & Narvaez, 1994, p. 15). Research regarding children's moral development indicates that individuals often prefer and assimilate ideas that represent the stage directly above one's current level of moral development. Stages below or two or more stages above one's current level are less preferred or more difficult to understand (Rest, Turiel, Kohlberg, 1969).

Moral Development and Public Relations

The past decade has witnessed an emergence of scholarship applying moral development theory to public relations. Moral psychology and moral development research insights have been touted as particularly helpful for shedding light on how public relations practitioners reason through moral decisions (Cabot, 2006, p. 321). Applying moral development theory to public relations students, Cabot (2006) found that students displayed low levels of moral reasoning, whereas Auger and Gee (2015) found that media ethics coursework may advance students' moral reasoning capabilities. Applications of moral development theory to public relations professionals have typically involved administration of the Defining Issues Test (DIT) or DIT 2 (e.g. Rest, 1974; Rest, Narvaez & Babeau, 1999) to gauge moral cognition and moral judgement. Lieber (2008) for example, surveyed 113 public relations professionals using the DIT to find that moral development of public relations professionals differed by organizational setting and that ethical reasoning improves with tenure on the job. Solo practitioners and public relations academics exhibited higher levels of moral reasoning compared to their agency and corporate counterparts. More recent surveys have found that public relations professionals display high levels of moral reasoning compared to the general adult population (Coleman & Wilkins, 2009; Plaisance, 2014) with public relations exemplars scoring exceedingly high (Plaisance, 2014). In their study, Coleman and Wilkins (2009) found that public relations professionals working in

larger organizations scored higher on the DIT and that the values of honesty, truth, and respect were of particular importance. Interestingly, the authors also found that use of external support tools, such as codes of ethics or employer guidelines, did not affect practitioners' ethical reasoning. Most recently, Plaisance's (2014) survey of public relations exemplars suggests that personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness play a role in practitioners' moral reasoning. He found that public relations exemplars also demonstrated higher levels of moral reasoning and post-conventional level reasoning emphasizing moral principles and rejecting ethical relativism (p. 317, 321). In one of the only qualitative applications of Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory, Place (2015) found that public relations professionals tend to evaluate ethical decisions in alignment with various stages of moral development, with particular emphasis on organizational rules or codes and on societal values of truth, fairness, and respect for equality.

Factors Affecting Moral / Ethical Behavior in Public Relations

Myriad factors, such as one's personality, religious or personal values, workplace culture, skills, and moral development level may affect individuals' motives and moral abilities (Plaisance, 2011). Much scholarship has explored ways in which organizational culture, management styles, or training efforts have served to support the moral / ethical development and decision-making of public relations professionals. In regard to organizational culture, Bowen (2004b) found that a culture encouraging professionals to "do the right thing" supported good moral judgment and empowerment (p. 321). Kang (2010) found that the lack of a boss' ethicality decreased practitioners' sense of ethical empowerment. She suggested that organizations fostering open communication would better support practitioners, especially when it was vital to influence members of the dominant coalition (Kang, p. 154).

Recent scholarship has paid particular focus on the value of training in cultivating practitioners' moral growth and fostering a more ethical workplace. Surprisingly, Bowen, 2006, Lee and Cheng (2012) and Neill (2016) have found that public relations professionals receive little ethics training.   Despite a lack of training opportunities, practitioners do perceive value in such training (Lee & Cheng, 2012; Neill, 2016). Neill (2016), for example, found that practitioners who underwent ethics training felt more prepared and more likely to provide ethics counsel on behalf of their organizations. Common forms of training cited by Neill's respondents included accreditation programs, online training modules, employee handbooks or policy manuals, webinars, videos, or featured speakers.   Lee and Cheng (2012), similarly, cited the value of courses and seminars, codes of ethics, conferences and workshops, staff meetings, case studies as effective means of teaching ethics. The authors also suggest that organizations cultivate values-based and ethics mentoring programs, to complement more popular standardized, rules-based instructional programs.

Research regarding moral development theory and public relations is still emergent, yet has found that public relations professionals apply generally high levels of moral reasoning. The majority of moral development research so forth, however, has been quantitative and focused solely on data from the DIT 1 and 2. There is still so much to be learned regarding how public relations professionals have achieved high levels of moral reasoning and how they make meaning of moral reasoning and judgement from their own unique standpoints. Therefore, from literature regarding moral development and public relations ethics, two research questions guided this descriptive, qualitative study of public relations practitioners' own meaning making of moral development:

RQ1: How do public relations practitioners make meaning of their moral development?
RQ2: How do organizations support the moral development of public relations practitioners?

Method

A qualitative method was chosen for this study, because it enables the researcher to "enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 16). Through the collection of rich, descriptive detail of a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) qualitative research is particularly valuable for understanding how social experiences occur and acquire meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Sampling and Recruitment

Public relations professionals representing various levels of experience, geographic locations, areas of expertise, and organizational types were recruited for this IRB-approved study via purposive and snowball sampling methods. Initially, the researcher purposively sent an e-mail recruitment letter to practitioners representing diverse professional backgrounds and levels of expertise. Next, a snowball sampling method was applied, as initial interviewees recommended additional public relations practitioners to participate in the study.

The resulting sample of participants included 28 public relations professionals from the Midwest (7), East Coast (20), and West Coast (1) regions of the United States, representing agency (9), not-for-profit (7), corporate (6), higher education (4), and government (2) work environments. Twenty-one males and seven females participated in the study, 21 of whom identified as White, three of whom identified as Black / African American, two of whom identified as Hispanic / Latina, one of whom identified as Asian, and two of whom who chose not to identify by race. The majority of participants represented senior-level principle, vice president, director or agency owner roles, whereas the remainder represented account management or media relations roles.

Procedure

The researcher incorporated semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by a 14-question interview protocol featuring rapport-building, broad, and open-ended questions of a pre-determined order, as well as probes and follow-ups (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 13). Interview questions were derived from extant literature regarding as well as moral development theory and public relations (e.g. Coleman & Wilkins, 2009; Kohlberg, 1981; Plaisance, 2014; Place, 2015). Rapport-building questions, such as "What do you like best about working at [organization name]?" acquainted the participant to the researcher and the interview process. Open-ended questions, such as "Look back upon your career. Tell me about a particular experience that you feel impacted your moral / ethical identity," "What particular moral / ethical values have played a role in your public relations work?" and "How does your organization support moral / ethical development?" addressed issues pertaining to moral / ethical growth and organizational support for such growth. Probes and follow-up questions, such as "Why?" "How?" or "Can you please give me an example of…" were used to encourage participants to offer additional detail or explanation. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via telephone (when differing geographic location or practitioner's busy schedule dictated such) and ranged from 45 to 100 minutes.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed fully and analyzed for patterns and themes using a thematic analysis approach (Boyatzis, 1998). Under this method of analysis, the researcher read and re-read transcripts line-by-line to identify themes and patterns. A list of codes was created to represent each emerging theme or pattern. Next, themes were then assigned corresponding codes applying to the research question. During the entire analysis and coding process, the researcher remained reflexively aware of personal biases and effect on the interpretation and analysis of the data.

Limitations

Although this study is not generalizable to the public relations industry at large, it strove to maintain rigorous design and analysis standards. Limitations of this study, however, included inconsistent interview settings and lengths and lack of geographic diversity of participants. Use of phone interviews may also have affected how participants disclosed information or the interviewer's ability to interpret participants' nonverbal cues.

Findings

This exploratory study examined how public relations professionals make meaning of moral development and how organizations cultivate on-the-job moral development from the perspective of 30 public relations professionals.   Research Question 1 asked how public relations practitioners make meaning of their moral development. The following themes emerged in regard to practitioners meaning making of such development: Practitioners perceive that moral development in public relations a) draws upon one's personal upbringing, b) progresses over time stemming from one's education and on-the-job experience, and c) occurs as practitioners address "moral gray areas."

One's personal upbringing – Study participants were interviewed in regard to their on-the-job moral development as public relations professionals; however, many participants could not help but reference ways in which their personal upbringing emphasizing morals still affected their moral trajectories as public relations professionals – especially in terms of career choices or changes. Looking back on her career, one agency principal, for example, cited her personal upbringing as a factor for many of her decisions: "I've always had just like a really strong moral compass and I don't know if it's something that my parents taught me.   Like I, you know, really the thing I've always said since the very beginning is I will only work on things that I would feel proud to share with my family…" Similarly, a not-for-profit public relations director noted that she progressed through her career until she chose not-for-profit public relations because it best aligned with her upbringing that focused on service to others.   She said, "And for me it's like I've had parents who were like all about service. My dad was a fireman and my mom was a nurse and …I discovered that I'm more of a writer and I kind of wanted to use that writing skill and kind of use that kind of philanthropy I was brought up with. And kind of pair the two."

Moral development progresses with age and experience – Participants were in consensus that moral development began early, but progressed with age, experience, or tenure on the job. Over time, one corporate public relations professional noted, one's sense of right and wrong become more sophisticated or nuanced. He explained,

> "General old experience.   Because I think that you don't know what you don't know… I think that as I had a couple other internships, and just seeing different areas of where, what potential traps could be.   And then as I have just become a

> little more seasoned in my career here in the corporate environment…You start to see similar situations and so it's very interesting because every situation is always going to be unique…But the situations present themselves or the opportunities present themselves a little bit more.

In regard to his moral and professional growth, another corporate practitioner concurred, stating, "Well, you know, it's a learning process… And again, this all comes in time and it's not something a lot of people grasp overnight." Participants often shared multiple examples to illustrate the moral learning or development process. One agency professional, for example, shared some of her trials, which ultimately inspired her to promote the value of kindness in her work. Additionally, such trails give professionals a better sense of detected when morals are not in alignment with their own:

> For whatever reason you might be, you know, you might be working a job or promoting something and you're like I don't really agree with that decision, but you don't have the freedom to speak up because maybe you're early in your career. Or maybe you're worried that like, you know, for example, a really simple example, is a client who isn't very kind. And then your job as a publicist is to turnaround and to promote that person.   And if you, if they're not really walking the walk and you can see that because you're getting privileged information maybe. It's hard to represent somebody who's not very nice.

> *Addressing the moral gray areas* – Further elaboration on the moral development experiences or trials public relations professional go through led to a theme related to participants' use of their own term, "moral gray area." Moral gray areas served as trials one must experience in order develop a stronger sense of moral right and wrong in the public relations industry. One corporate professional explained such a process as, "Sometimes you get caught in, especially in PR - PR tends to be a very gray area. You always have to take step back and make sure that you're doing the right thing, making sure that it feels right. If it doesn't feel right, you got to raise your hand."   The participant continued to explain an instance in which a professional may need to address a moral gray area:

> A customer is asking you to contribute to that particular fund and you have to ask yourself, okay, yeah it's a non-profit, but is it something I want to be a part of? What's the damage that can be done to customer relationship and that can be a very gray area because you could very easily do the wrong thing to, in your heart, appease the customer?

Similarly, another corporate public relations professional shared how moral gray areas can offer moments of moral growth:

> I think there's a gray area of ethics that you always have to think about… I would say one moment for me would be a pushback I received for one project on translating our campaign slogan.   The campaign slogan was originally in English, and we thought about our broader customer base who has an international impact, and it's like, you know, we really... we really should be reaching out to them as well and including them, and people kind of pushed back and said no, people speak English, and this is an English speaking company.   I think that can serve as a really good moment to say, well how open and transparent are we?   And are we thinking about our broader customer base and doing right by them?

The second research question addressed how organizations support the moral development of public relations professionals.   Themes emerged from the data analysis suggesting that organizations cultivate moral development via instilling a "culture of ethics," addressing morals in the training and even recruitment process, in fostering open dialogue with supervisors, and via utilization of negative or challenging case study examples.

Culture of ethics – Participants frequently references how an organization's culture must instill a sense of moral right and wrong among its employees and strategic communications counsel alike. A phrase most commonly associated with this concepts was a "culture of ethics." One corporate professional described such a culture as, "I think our company is - it all falls down to or falls back to - making sure that you do the right thing. We never compromise our ethics or morals just to make a quick deal. That is not, not what we are about. I think that's part of what the culture of this company breeds. Quite similarly, another corporate public relations professional shared a similar supportive culture. She added how she felt senior leadership and her communications office played a large role in the fostering of the culture:

"The way our CEO and the way our corporation was founded and built, the way they think - it trickles down throughout the organization.   So, we have a large part and role in continuing that culture of transparency…Any external items that we release, that's the way we continue that culture of ethics in our organization.

What does a culture of ethics entail? One non-profit director of marketing and public relations explained that it centers on her organization's mission of inclusion and respect for all individuals. She explained, "That's kind of what our mission is. I mean it's all about inclusion, and acceptance, and respect for people. Even though you're different, you have a different job, you have different challenges, you have different strengths… Because we are all different, but yet we all bring something really valuable to the table"

Training and recruitment – Addressing moral behavior via formal organizational training – and even during the recruitment or interviewing process – served as a popular means by which organizations supported moral development of practitioners. One agency principle shared that she begins the moral development coaching from the interview process onward, stating, "…this is what I interview for.   I'm looking for people who have like really strong morals - like a really strong moral compass that have really strong values. That they have so much integrity that you can trust them always." Similarly, a corporate public relations professional shared how her organization fosters moral growth early on:

When you first enter the organization, you go through a series of training, including ethics training and training of values for our company. That's day one. That's even really in recruitment. They tell you about the values of the company. It's in recruitment, through the website, they send you right to the website for ethics.   The first day, they talk about the culture of the ethics and transparency in day one orientation.

Another corporate practitioner lauded the mandatory ethics training for bringing difficult moral concepts to life. He explained,

We have to complete mandatory ethics training, typically are four modules that range anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour. And they are on a host of different topics, anything from careful communications to antitrust and bribery… Good corporate strategic communications is bringing that to life so instead of that mundane policy 37, thou shalt not do this.

Open dialogue – In addition to a culture of ethics and training, participants explained that open channels of communication about moral / ethical issues was paramount to their own moral growth. One agency professional shared, for example, how members of her team hold Monday open discussion sessions with each other:

> We have open discussions about [ethics] all the time. We talk about conflicts that we're facing and we share how we navigated it. How we're planning to navigate it. We have a really like I guess openly supportive team here, and there's a lot of trust intact… And what I learned out of that experience is how when you are supported…you know that everybody wants you to win, you really perform for everyone instead just for yourself.

Similarly, a corporate public relations professional referenced daily and weekly face-to-face meetings which fostered open communication about ethics: "Then we do have a host of face to face - I would say not trainings, but they're more staff meetings/all hands meetings - where we are dedicating five minutes. And that's all. At the end of the day, that's all it takes, five minutes to constantly keep [ethics] at the forefront and just tell people be aware at all times.

Challenging case studies – In contrast to modeling and open discussion of what constitutes moral behavior among public relations professionals, participants also highlighted the need for use of case studies to explain how moral / ethical issues occurred and how they were addressed appropriately. This was cited as especially critical for young or new entrants to the public relations profession who may not yet have sufficient experience on which to draw. Therefore, the case studies helped practitioners advance in their understandings of moral behavior. One corporate public relations practitioner cited the value of case studies and growth:

> If we find a good case study, I always share it with my team through email or in our staff meeting so that we can really talk about it and a) raise awareness but b) put yourself in that situation. If I were managing, if we were having, if we had a similar situation, how would we manage that? How would we leverage that? Or avoid the mistakes that brand XYZ made? …That's my biggest takeaway, is constantly finding the time learn and take those case studies.

Similarly, a corporate public relations associate mirrored this saying, "I think we can keep sharing some of those ethical gray areas. We can keep sharing best practices and keep sharing some of those small ah-ha moments that really pivoted some communications professionals to say that this is something that we should be looking into. Just ethical dilemmas and what we can do better and how we would react."

Discussion and Conclusion

This exploratory study of 30 public relations professionals and their meaning making of moral development and how organizations support such development fulfilled the need for additional research regarding how public relations professionals experience moral / ethical growth during their careers. Whereas professionals cited drawing upon some moral foundations established during their childhood or upbringing that they carry out as public relations professionals, most participants described their on-the-job moral development as a factor of facing moral challenges or "gray areas" through on-the-job experiences over time. In turn, professionals gained a more sensitive and sophisticated sense of right and wrong in the context of public relations work.

Complementing previous research regarding Moral Development Theory, this study described, qualitatively, how public relations professionals perceive a progression in their ability

to recognize or address moral / ethical issues over time. Several participant comments referenced how they held a simplistic understanding of public relations work and moral / professional practice, but through their engagement with moral gray areas, open dialogue, training sessions, or other forms of support, they were able to understand more sophisticated moral concepts. Statements from participants describing "you really perform for everyone instead just for yourself" and "I think that can serve as a really good moment to say, well how open and transparent are we? And are we thinking about our broader customer base and doing right by them?" illustrate, for example, public relations professionals' potential advancement from preconventional to more postconventional forms of moral awareness.

Research regarding the moral development of public relations professionals is necessary in order to best provide moral / ethical training, support, or dialogue among public relations professionals in a variety of organizational contexts. Future research must continue to explore, both quantitatively and qualitatively, how professionals experience moral growth and how organizations may adjust culture, policies, and practices to promote ethical and inclusive modes of thinking and action.

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Putting Out Fires:
How Communication Professionals Understand and Practice Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

Do communication professionals fill the role of negotiators and conflict resolvers within their organizations? In this study practitioners experienced most conflict within teams and other internal audiences, practiced conflict avoidance rather than conflict engagement, understood individual level factors as major contributors to conflict, and avoided digital channels in conflict resolution.

"Putting out fires." One of the participants used this metaphor to describe what she did every day as a communication professional. Her metaphor expressed not only unrelenting problem solving, but intense job demands that burned with conflict. This research study began by exploring one activity that has been claimed for public relations professionals—the role of negotiator. It expanded into a broader study of how public relations/communication practitioners understand conflict and what roles in managing organizational conflict these professionals can legitimately claim.

Statement of the Problem

The exact roles public relations practitioners should enact within organizations continue to be hotly debated in the discipline (Botan & Hazelton, 2006; Holtzhausen, 2007; Neil & Drumwright, 2012). Goffman (1959) defined a role, including a job or profession, as the rights and duties that are attached to a given social status. Scholars of public relations widely agree that practitioners *manage* communication to achieve mutually beneficial *relationships* with organizational stakeholders (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1985; Heath (2001). Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman, and Toth (2007) added leadership to the management and relationship-building roles. In sum, the public relations discipline claims communication management, relationship management, and leadership in communication as primary organizational roles.

This study proposed to study negotiation because that role has not achieved primary status in our profession. Researchers first systematically claimed the negotiation role for public relations in 1985 (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995). Since then, very little evidence has surfaced that public relations practitioners routinely negotiate for their organizations or groups. Research studies claim *negotiation* as a public relations activity, often without definition or empirical evidence (Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Plowman, 1998, 2007). Vasquez (1996) called for further categorization of that role in our discipline, starting with distinctions between formal and informal negotiation—a distinction also proposed by Gelfand and McCusker (2002). Still, little work has been done on exactly how the negotiation role actually functions in our profession.

Goals of the Research Study

This study has two goals: one academic and one in practice. First, our discipline needs evidence to fill in research gaps about how practitioners engage in negotiation, what that negotiation entails, and what understandings of negotiation or other conflict management roles apply in public relations practice. Second, we hope the participants' insights and recommendations can reach a wide audience of communication professionals, add to their understanding of practice, and perhapsimprove their work lives.

Research questions. The following research questions guided this inquiry:

RQ1: How do public relations/communication practitioners with at least 5 years of experience describe their job activities and roles in the context of conflict management?

RQ2: How do public relations/communication professionals understand conflict management and negotiation as roles in their practice?

Literature Review

Defining Negotiation

Negotiation is an activity that falls within the broader category of conflict management in rganizations where communication practitioners work and in public relations roles that involve

resolving conflict with stakeholders (Posthuma, 2012; Rahim, 2011; Verčič et al., 2012). Conflict has been defined as "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims, and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals" (Putnam & Poole, 1987, p. 552). Conflict has been widely viewed as an inevitable part of organizations. Consequently, conflict has to be managed and styles of conflict management have been studied both in personal life and in the workplace (Rahim, 2011). Montes, Rodriguez, & Serrano, (2012) defined conflict management styles "as a general and consistent orientation toward the other party and the conflict issues" (p. 7). Within this study, negotiation finds its place as an activity within the communication/public relations workplace and its demands for conflict management and resolution.

Arguments for Conflict Management as a Public Relations Role

Three areas of research provide theoretical support for conflict management as a wide-spread role for communication professionals: crisis communication, strategic communication, and public relations activism.

Public relations practitioners play a visible role when organizations experience negative public scrutiny (Johansen, Aggerholm, & Frandsen, 2012; Palenchar, 2007; Veil , Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). These crises often require negotiation with publics and stakeholders—a communication activity that Pruitt (2001) perceived to be growing out of a broader conflict situation.

Second, strategic communication has been claimed as a public relations role requiring managerial and decision-making power that generates conflict (Grunig & Repper, 1992; Neale, Tenbrunsel, Galvin, & Bazerman, 2006). One conflict management role identified by Hallahan et al. (2007) includes actively changing organizational culture and values.

Finally, *negotiation of meaning* to achieve organizational consensus has been claimed as a public relations role by activist scholars (Cammaerts, 2008; Zoch, Collins, Sisco, & Supa, 2008). These communication efforts often require transforming employee attitudes and emotions until a mutual understanding of the goals of an organization and its motives has been reached (Jameson, Bodtker, Porch, & Jordon, 2009). Taken together, research and theory on crisis communication, strategic communication, and activist public relations give credence to the claim that conflict management is a vital public relations role.

Perspectives on Conflict from the Excellence Model

Within the excellence model and the conflict resolution model of public relations (Plowman, 2007), *mediator* is the only specific role for public relations practitioners. Grunig and Grunig (1992) defined a mediator as a "neutral third party" who "enters the process of negotiation" and takes a neutral role and assists in negotiation like lawyers and counselors (p. 316). Plowman (2007) developed a more nuanced typology of mediator roles for practitioners including internal peer mediation to solve organizational problems and affiliated third party mediation in which a highly trained practitioner can resolve conflicts even when perceived as aligned with one party. Certainly, practitioners take other conflict resolution roles. The activist literature in public relations suggests the role of conflict creator (Holtzhausen, 2007), but to date we do not have an extensive list of roles in negotiation.

Robustness and Gaps in Public Relations Research on Negotiation

In their recent overview of leadership styles Shin et al. (2011) claimed that public relations scholars seek "to understand roles that practitioners play on behalf of organizations" (p. 167). Within this excellence model, this goal of establishing a specific number and type of public relations roles was examined by Broom and Dozier (1986) and Dozier (1992). However, Shin et al. (2011) contended that after decades of research, "the body of scholarly literature provides little explication of what specific behavioral characteristics and functions public relations professionals enact or are expected to enact" (p. 183). This statement implies that significant gaps exist in the current literature on public relations practice and conflict resolution roles.

The excellence model placed conflict resolution and negotiation at the center of public relations research and practice (Dozier et al., 1995; Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Scholars like Plowman (1998) and Huang (1997) have robustly adapted integrative bargaining and negotiation tactics developed by scholars in social psychology (Pruitt, 1981), business (Fisher et al., 2011), and other disciplines (Rahim, 2011). More specifically, the conflict resolution model of public relations (Plowman, 2007) and the value of public relations model (Huang, 2001) have woven integrative bargaining and tactics into core elements of the excellence paradigm: dimensions of public relations (Grunig, 2006), strategic communication, and relationship building (Brunig, Dials, & Shirka, 2008). Also, scholars have made convincing connections between various incarnations of the symmetry model and conflict resolution (Huang, 2007).

The literature covered in this study has effectively conceptualized the role of mediation in public relations. Grunig and Grunig (1992) and Plowman (2007) recommend the mediation role as part of public relations practice. However, a study by Kelleher (2003) sheds doubt on whether a public relations practitioner will be accepted as a mediator in a formal negotiation. Kelleher's (2003) study documented the overt rejection of public relations practitioners as mediators in a labor dispute. We do not know how widely public relations practitioners are used as mediators between organizations and publics.

Method

To meet the goals of this study, we applied qualitative research as a way to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 1).

Data were collected through 31 in-depth interviews and follow-up questions, as well as printed materials provided by the participants, and information from websites linked to the participants' organizations or professional activities. To create more substantial results and enhanced verification, these three types of data enabled *triangulatio*n or multiple lines of sight bearing on conflict in public relations practice (Berg, 2007).

Moreover, multiple techniques for qualitative research data were collection and analysis to enrich the material and deepen my findings. Data were analyzed in several stages: (1) through notes recorded during the in-depth interviews; (2) through reflective notes written immediately after the interviews (Faÿ & Riot, 2007; Finlay, 2002); (3) through qualitative content analysis, involving constant comparison of interview transcripts to generate study-specific categories and themes; and (4) through qualitative content analysis of interview

transcripts, applying concepts and themes derived from previous research studies (Gelo et al., 2008).

Importantly, this study differed from grounded theory because the literature review was done first, but we did follow the nine strategies that Charmaz (2014, p. 15) listed as standards for conducting grounded theory. These strategies listed below and documented in the Results and Discussion sections of this article: (1) iterative data collection and analysis; (2) analysis of actions and processes; (3) comparative methods of analysis; (4) development of new conceptual categories using narratives and descriptions; (5) inductive analytic categories; (6) theory construction; (7) theoretical sampling; (8) variation in the studied categories or process; and (9) category development rather than coverage of an empirical topic s).

Results

This section systematically covers results from each research question and sub-questions. It reports details and themes that developed during the data analysis process described in Methods.

RQ1: How do public relations/communication practitioners with at least 5 years of experience describe their job activities and roles in the context of conflict management?

RQ1.1: Please tell me what you do on your job every day? How much of your job is working on projects and how much is management?

According to my interviewees, work in a job labeled as *communication* or *public relations* involves a welter of activities that were not logically linked to the job titles of the interviewees. High-level professionals in large international communication firms reported writing press releases and conducting environmental scanning just like professionals at the beginning of their careers in small organizations. Others—a very few—conducted formal negotiations or directly lobbied elected officials to change features of legislative bills. The categories of job functions—defined as routine tasks or activities performed by interviewees—reveal significant overlap. For example, member communication might well involve significant relationship building. However, this research question asked participants to identify their job activities using their own language, not categories that were prompted by the interviewer or a survey.

Six job functions surfaced as common to sizeable numbers of the participants. In particular, two job functions (i.e., routine tasks or activities performed by the interviewee) were identified most often as tasks the participants completed frequently: *media relations* (23/31 or 74.19%) and *client or member communication* (23/31 or 74.19%). Next, participants reported engaging in *strategic planning* (16/31 or 51.61%) and in *promotion and marketing* (16/31 or 51.61%). The third largest job function categories were *relationship building* (14/31 or 45.16%) and *general management* (14/31 or 45.16%). One other function stood out as fairly common: *crisis communication* (10/31 or 32.26%).

Further analysis showed that participants clustered their roles or job functions into three main categories: direct practice, management, and training/mentoring. These major roles give additional clues into where conflict management activities can occur in everyday practice.

RQ1.2: Can you describe some of the audiences you want to reach through your job activities?

Some conclusions emerged from the extensive data on audiences that participants indicated they wanted to reach in their communication work.

1. Regardless of the type of organization they worked for, participants identified a broad spectrum of domestic and global audiences.

    2. The main audience was the clients or customers of the organization.

    3. Government communicators in this study reported internal audiences more frequently than employees in other types of organizations.

    4. Corporate, government agency, and NGO communicators identified media as audiences more often than did PR agencies and arts/education organizations.

    5. Few interviewees cited top management as one of their audiences.

RQ1.3: What is the most challenging project you have worked on lately? Probe: What was so challenging about these projects?

The data analysis revealed two general areas where participants experienced challenging projects. The first type of projects involved communication difficulties within the internal hierarchy of their organizations. Difficult external relations characterized the second type of projects that were challenging. Only about a third of participants answered this question after it was asked, but many others gave examples of challenging projects in response to other queries. More challenging projects involved internal audiences than external.

The participants' type of organization—for-profit versus non-profit—played a significant role in themes that surfaced in answer to this first RQ about how experienced professionals described their job activities and roles in the context of problem solving and conflict resolution. A second important factor connected to claims made for the negotiation role of public relations professionals (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Plowman, 1995): very few of the participants reported formal negotiation as a role in their job activities and these individuals worked for labor organizations or for employers.

Job functions, roles, or activities clustered into three areas: direct communication or public relations practice, management, and training or mentoring. Within these clusters, six specific functions surfaced: media relations, client or member communication, strategic planning, promotion and marketing, relationship building, and general management. Crisis communication ranked somewhat below these six functions. Interestingly, these job functions were reported by participants in both for-profits and non-profits regardless of their formal job titles in the organization.

RQ2: How do public relations/communication professionals understand conflict management and negotiation as roles in their practice?

RQ2.1: What activities in your public relations or communication work have involved solving problems or resolving disagreements INSIDE the organization?

    Conflict within the organizational structure. A majority of participants reported conflicts arising from the rigid or loose hierarchical structures within their organizations. While data analysis revealed mixed opinions on sources of conflicts in the different types of structures, the few participants who worked in mixed hierarchical and bottom-up decision-making structures reported the highest degree of conflict.

    Conflict around the function of public relations. Public relations professionals in this study experienced internal conflict around the reputation of public relations as a profession, the viability of communication strategic plans, the perception of public relations within the organization, and disputes with other departments over work responsibilities. Taken together, these themes created conflict by challenging the credibility of public relations practice.

RQ2.2: How much of your current job do you think is dedicated to resolving conflicts or working through disagreements about how to solve problems?

    Estimates of percentages of daily job time spent in dealing with conflict involving internal audiences ranged from 10% to 100%. About equal numbers reported that conflict

required less than 45% of their time as participants who reported percentages above 50%. The divide between fairly low and fairly high percentages of conflict resolution was strikingly bimodal. The highest number of participants either estimated 10% of their workday or 60-70% of that time as devoted to conflict resolution.

Distribution of time spent in conflict resolution with external audiences. Fewer participants (about half the number) estimated percentage of time spent on conflicts with external audiences. Further, these percentages clustered more obviously into bimodal estimates. About half estimated between 10% and 20% while the other half indicated 75% to 100%. Job roles with low levels of external conflict resolution included media specialist, communication specialist to the military, communicator in corporate research and development, and CEO of a public relations and marketing firm. Participants who reported higher percentages of external conflict resolution held jobs as director of marketing, communication manager and negotiator for an employer consortium, information officer at a county health agency, and senior vice president for communication at a health insurance company.

Discussion

Qualitative research informs our understanding of practices in communication and should improve those practices (Merriam, 2009). These principles represent the two broad aims of this study. In response to in-depth interview questions (Appendix A), 31 communication practitioners with an average of 18.32 years of experience in regional, national, and global organizations explored their roles and their understanding of how to manage conflict in their respective workplaces. Because public relations research emphasizes segmentation of audience it is not surprising that   internal and external collaborators represent a main source of conflict.

Organizational Structure and Culture Model Overview

Participants' understandings helped to establish links between the organizational structures in the workplace and the roles they fill as communication practitioners in conflict management.

Because this study explores roles in communication practice, *organizational structures* in this model are defined as "the relationships among people who assume the roles of the organization and to the organizational groups or units to which they belong (e.g., departments, divisions")" (Hatch, 2012, p. 101).

Aula and Siira (2010) claimed that communication was the bedrock of conflict management, but described how communication could both bolster the meaning-making structures in organizations and break down these structures to bring about change. These researchers labeled this the *dual-function* of communication in conflict management. This model contributes to our understanding by suggesting that communication practitioners fill a special role in transforming organizational-level conflict rather than resolving, avoiding, or eliminating it.

Plowman (2007) reviewed three approaches to the role of *mediator* in public relations: the public relations manager as *peer mediator* who meets with parties in conflict to find possible solutions, as *inside facilitator* who helps parties   prevent formal conflict resolution, and as *provider* of information and insight in   conflict resolution efforts by virtue of his/her professional experience. The outcomes   that the mediators seek involve win-win or no deal, altruistic, and principled concepts linked to the Harvard Negotiation Project (Fisher et al., 2011) and dual-concerns conflict management styles (Pruitt & Carnavale, 1999). My participants   preferred informal processes with less defined outcomes in dealing with internal   conflicts.

According to Plowman (2007), we usually think of mediators as disinterested or neutral third parties who offer support to reach a solution in disputes. In the context of conflict transformation, mediation has also been defined as "the degree of willingness to entertain change for the benefit of others" (Shin, Jin, Cheng, & Cameron, 2003, p. 9). The literature on external mediation in public relations is sparse. In a study summarized in the literature review, Huang (2001) found that public relations conflict management strategies— distributive, collaborative, and non-confrontational/avoidance—applied by communication practitioners with members of the Taiwanese legislature had no direct effect on the resolution of the conflict. Instead, relationship factors similar to those used in conflict transformation (e.g., increasing trust, relational commitment, and face gifts) did affect use of cooperative tactics.

Summary of Major Findings

Primary finding. This study's main research question asked what role public relations and communication practitioners should play in dealing with conflict in their everyday work lives. The main finding was that practitioners experienced most conflict within work teams and in relation to other departments. These internal conflicts could prevent professionals from achieving their goals of strategic communication with an external constituency.

This main finding is somewhat paradoxical. In their classification of six kinds of strategic communication—defined as "the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission" (p. 3)—Hallahan et al. (2007) isolated the role of public relations practitioners as "establishing and building relationships with key constituencies" (p. 4). These are mostly external audiences such as customers, consumers, investors, donors, politicians, community leaders, and the media. My participants, however, did not understand the preponderance of conflict in their work lives to be with these external constituencies. Only a smattering of participants in tax-supported organizations and the health industry faced hostile audiences. Instead, their conflict partners were close co-workers.

Given this primary finding, the study shifts away from formal conflict resolution and direct engagement with external audiences during crises (Coombs, 2006) toward the transformation of conflict dynamics (Botes, 2003) in work place relationships. Transformation of conflicts involves modifying emotional responses, sharpening perceptions of the conflict situation, and de-escalation of relationship conflict (Pluut & Curseu, 2013).

Negotiation as a role for public relations practitioners. Should negotiation be a major function that public relations practitioners discharge for their organizations? This study's descriptive findings on negotiation in practice partly fills a research gap on this function that was identified by Vasquez (1996). With the exception of practitioners who worked in organizations where formal negotiations were held with stakeholders (e.g., labor unions and employers), negotiation was not described or understood as a major role among the communication practitioners in this study. This does not devalue the models for negotiation in public relations practice developed by Grunig and Repper (1992), Huang (2001), and Plowman (2007). It simply means that the majority of practitioners may not be asked to fill the negotiation role. It leaves open the question of what role practitioners should play in dealing with conflict inside and outside their organizations.

Participants described various conflict management and resolution roles and analyzed their processes. Communication practice itself involves significant conflict. Vasquez's (1996) distinction between formal and informal negotiation applies somewhat to this study, but more recent research in cognitive and emotional factors in conflict management (Balliet & Van

Lange, 2013; Bell, 2007; Jameson et al., 2009; Posthuma, 2012) emphasizes transformation of the perceptions of the parties rather than overt agreement on the issues in dispute. For example, after conducting an experimental study on how task conflict influenced trust among group members, Chen and Ayoko (2012) advised managers that they could increase trust by stimulating task conflict among employees. According to *affective events theory* this strategy increases levels of perceived trust by arousing the positive emotions of "enthusiasm and excitement" (p. 19). This focus on transforming the affective perceptions of people in conflict situations opens up a positive role for practitioners that already emerges in the experience of communication professionals as shown in some meta-themes from my interviews. That role is reflected in the transformation model of conflict in public relations practice proposed by this study.

Relationship building and maintenance as roles for practitioners in conflict management. Many participants identified relationship building as a strategy to reduce and avoid conflict. One public affairs officer used "building a necklace" as a metaphor for the process of adding community people into her network to resolve conflicts. This insight reflected Toth's (2000) concept of relationships as "reservoirs of credibility and trust" (p. 217) that can be drawn upon when conflict arises. Gallicano (2013) expressed a similar concept in her theory of *insulation*—or viewing relationships as an investment that insulates the practitioner when disgruntled communication partners make heavy withdrawals on the relationship (p. 383).

In general, participants' understanding of relationship building and maintenance paralleled conclusions found in communication theory, research, and professional publications (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Scott, 2007). Although the findings did not add to our knowledge of relationships, the participants did show familiarity with relationship building and maintenance as   a major role for our profession. They confirmed the dialogic communication model developed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) and extended to the Internet by Kent and Taylor (2002). Many critical incidents and other narratives in these interviews described building or failing to build relationships in conflict situations with journalists, coworkers across generations, employees in marketing and design departments, and other engaged parties.

Finally, these participants confirmed the need for dialogue in resolving conflicts by showing strong preferences for the most immediate channels for contact: face-to-face and telephone.

Implications for practice. The findings suggest that communication practitioners are already engaged in managing conflict within their teams and across departments. However, my participants reported the need for training in conflict management strategies and had fairly superficial interpretations of how to transform employee emotions and perceptions to create real long-term change in team relationships.

Further, communication practitioners need to assess whether they have a special role to play in transforming or detoxifying conflicts within their organizations. The implication for practice revolves around this question: Do public relations professionals have special communication skills that would make them exceptionally valuable in transforming and detoxifying conflict situations in their workplaces? Does their training in relationship building and maintenance equip these professionals to deal more effectively than others with intragroup conflict?

Certainly, my participants did not claim the role of conflict transformation even when their critical incidents showed that they transformed   disputes among internal publics. As the findings showed, the participants   attributed skillful conflict management to individual-level

factors like positive emotions, personality, generational attributes, and preferences for communication channels. They did not claim that training and experience in communication practice made them especially adept at transforming or resolving conflicts.

The results did not support the claim that communication practitioners played a negotiation role in their organizations. Instead, practitioners might claim a special function as conflict transformers or detoxifiers in their organizations with increased understanding of that role and given adequate training or mentoring.

Future Directions for Research

Future research will need to investigate the role that public relations practitioners can claim in transforming internal conflict. The tendency toward conflict avoidance among practitioners is one intriguing area. The specialized skill set that communication practitioners bring to conflict management is another. Also, quantitative methods (e.g., distributing a survey) could be used to measure the time communication practitioners devote to conflict resolution and their assessments of its importance in the profession.

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Navy Public Affairs and the Aircraft Carrier Fleet: Toward a Predictive Model of Success inSocial Media and External Media Efforts

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Abstract

The United States Navy is mandated by Congress to maintain a fleet of 11 aircraft carriers.   They are the flagship of the Navy and around the world, these multi-billion-dollar military platforms do more than just deter aggression and maintain the safe and open navigation of the seas. Aircraft carriers have a massive social, economic, and environmental impact on the communities where they are home ported and in hundreds of coastal cities around the world. The ships and their crews serve as goodwill ambassadors representing not just the Navy, but the United States of America as a whole. For these reasons, the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) assigned to each aircraft carrier is a key player among its leadership, tasked with shaping public perception, dealing with the media, and coordinating all internal and external communications in compliance with the Department of Defense Principles of Information.

Prior to arriving aboard the ship, however, PAO's receive no direct, specific guidance from their Public Affairs higher headquarters or aircraft carrier specific training on how to strategically conduct social media and external media efforts. Two of the researchers previously held positions as carrier PAOs and have been in charge of training for carrier PAOs. In that experience, available training has been limited to the generic, tactical level of operations. As a result, PAOs tend to fall back on prior experience to chart their own course through the open waters and occasional rough seas of external communication.

This study is currently tracking the social media and external media communications efforts of four separate aircraft carriers located around the globe. Two aircraft carriers, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and USS Ronald Reagan are currently forward deployed on missions outside the United States while USS George H.W. Bush and USS Carl Vinson are preparing for their 2017 deployments.

Over the course of six months, the research team will evaluate the social media and external media efforts of each ship using a casual modeling approach to identify and understand the relationship between the factors that make up the success or failure of the ship's engagement with key stakeholders. The study will involve depth interviews with each of the ship's PAOs to help identify commonalities and differences among their strategies.

Excellence theory pioneered by Grunig (1985) identified how public relations made organizations more effective when practitioners built programs based on establishing long term, trusting relationships with their publics. This theory will be the backbone of our research, not only helping to determine how effective each ship's integrated social media and external communications programs are, but also how beneficial each public affairs department is to the overall public perception of the United States Navy.

Introduction

Shortly after World War I, the United States Navy converted the bulk cargo ship USS Jupiter (AC-3) into the first American aircraft carrier, USS Langley (CV-1). By World War II, the aircraft carrier had replaced the Battleship as the primary striking arm of American naval power.   Since the Langley, the United States has built a total of 78 aircraft carriers and nearly 100 years after the first plane launched off her flight deck, the aircraft carrier remains the backbone of the fleet.

The Navy is mandated by Congress to maintain a fleet of 11 aircraft carriers. On the home front and around the world, these multi-billion-dollar military platforms do more than just deter aggression and maintain the safe and open navigation of the seas. Aircraft carriers have a massive social, economic, and environmental impact on communities no matter where they drop anchor. A single port visit can be worth nearly $2 million dollars to local businesses while her crew of nearly 5,000 Sailors serve as goodwill ambassadors representing the Navy and United States. For these reasons, the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) assigned to each aircraft carrier is a key player among its leadership, tasked with shaping public perception, dealing with the media, and coordinating all internal and external communications in compliance with the Department of Defense Principles of Information.

PAO's come from a variety of backgrounds. The majority begin their naval carriers as aviators, surface warfare officers and submariners who transitioned into Public Affairs. Others are recent college graduates who are selected from an application process which brings them directly into the military on active duty. And then there's PAOs who serve in the reserve, many of whom have civilian careers working in public relations, marketing and journalism. Public Affairs is the Navy's smallest community with approximately 250 active duty PAOs.

A two-year tour of duty serving as an aircraft carrier PAO is considered a milestone assignment and the gateway to promotion which becomes highly competitive from Lieutenant Commander (O4) to Commander (O5). Currently, however, there are few prerequisites for Officers to be assigned as a carrier PAO, a position which is key in communicating the Navy's efforts in times of crisis such as the 2010 earthquake and tsunami in Japan (USS George Washington/USS Ronald Reagan) or the 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden (USS Carl Vinson). While the Navy's Chief of Information (CHINFO) has the final say in who fulfills these coveted positions, the only current requirements is that the incoming carrier PAO must be a Lieutenant Commander and have completed the Public Affairs Qualification Course (PAQC) at the Defense Information School (DINFOS).

In 1985, the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) funded a study to identify the best practices in the field of Public Relations. That study was headed by James Grunig and served as the basis for his Excellence theory. In short, Excellence theory "specifies how public relations makes organizations more effective, how it is organized and managed, and how the monetary value of public relations can be determined."

Intentional or not, in the mid 2000's the Navy put Excellence theory into practice when it made PAOs one of the 15 Department Heads aboard all its aircraft carrier. Recognizing the importance of media relations, public relations, internal and crisis communications and social media, PAOs no longer worked under the Administrative Officer and were given a seat at the ship's leadership table.

No study has been done, however, to determine which PAOs are the most effective in this position and if their level of experience has any impact on the success of their internal, external and social media output generated by their Sailors.

Over a six-month period, this study examines the products produced by four aircraft carriers Public Affairs (Media) Departments and the responses those products generated from their publics. The output of each ship was then compared to the resume of the ship's PAO and a list of potential professional career experiences.

With Excellence theory as a basis for this study, the overall question our team set out to answer is, what makes an aircraft carrier's communications efforts, 'excellent'?

Literature Review

Excellence Theory

Grunig and Hunt (1984) first introduced Excellence Theory in 1984. Normative in nature, it prescribes how to practice public relations in an ideal situation (Pompper, 2004). In 1985, the International Association of Business Communicators provided funding for an expansive investigation into "how, why, and to what extent communication affects the achievement of organizational objectives" (Grunig & Dozier 2002). Over the next 15 years, scholars led by James and Larissa Grunig, and David Dozier, continued to study excellence in communication.

In the final product of this 15-year program of research, Grunig and Dozier (2002) demonstrated that the value of public relations comes from the relationships that communicators develop and maintain with publics. They also showed that public relations can affect management decisions and behavior only if the communications manager is empowered to play an essential role in the strategic management of the organization. They also showed that communicators cannot be successful unless they are a part of the top-management team that develops an organization's structure.

Public Relations Leadership

The concept of leadership is understood today, after much debate and a recent outburst of both scholarly and practitioner publications, as central to determining the success or failure of an organization (cf. Lennick & Kiel, 2005; Maxwell, 2006; Price, 2006; Sadler, 2003, Northouse, 2007). The term leadership is occasionally applied to an attribute of a person, but according to Sadler (2003), it is "more usefully employed to refer to a social process involving influence and persuasion" (p. 15). Because influence and persuasion are in the province of public relations, leadership stands to have a direct impact on a practitioner's effectiveness within an organization. We use Northouse's (2007) definition of leadership here: "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 3).

In a huge study of 30 years of Fortune 500 companies (1965 to 1995), Collins (2001) found that one of the drivers to lasting transformation of performance critical to success was something he called 'level 5 leadership.' Level 5 leaders, says Collins, "are characterized by a seemingly paradoxical combination of humility and shyness on the one hand (Ying) and willfulness and fearlessness on the other (Yang)" (as cited in Sadler, 2003, p. 155).

This new kind of leader is best exemplified through Kanter's (1992) model. Kanter (as cited in Sadler, 2003) notes that these new leaders need to develop the following knowledge, skills, and abilities: a) The ability to operate without the might of the hierarchy behind them; b) the knowledge to compete so as to enhance cooperation; c) the ability to operate with high ethical standards; d) the humility that accepts there is always more to learn; e) the awareness of the importance of process as distinct from substance or content; and f) the ability to derive satisfaction from achievement of results.

Binney & Williams (1995) describe the effective leader of tomorrow as one who both leads and learns. Identified for the purposes of this study as the Leader/Learner, Binney & Williams see this kind of leader as one who approaches leadership from a confident 'knowing' position, but being willing at the same time to remain open to challenges and new ideas. Leader/Learners exhibit four characteristics:

a) Operational credibility, which is a function of having a deep understanding of the business, its products and the issues to do with it;
b) Being 'connected to their organization – being in close touch with employees and customers;
c) Leading by example: If leaders practice 'Do as I say' rather than 'Do as I do,' they will fail to be effective;
d) Consistency under pressure: For example, in being willing to communicate bad news as well as good news. (as cited in Sadler, 2003, p. 159)

Public Relations Education

For the better part of the evolution of public relations as a career field, education received only scant attention. From the late 1970's to early 1990's, this began to change. In her landmark study on power in public relations, Larisa Grunig noted that the ability to make valid decisions in public relations depended in part on "the knowledge of communication theory and research methods that comes with a university education in the field…" (L. Grunig, 1990).

In the research run-up to the 2009 Commission on Public Relations Education report on undergraduate education, DiStaso, Stacks & Botan (2009) concluded that "public relations is fast becoming a highly educated field." They also noted that "Public relations has become more strategic over the last two decades with public relations managers moving into high advising or decision making roles in both the public and private sector." This, in turn, leads to greater demand in the public relations curriculum for strategic planning. (DiStaso, Stacks & Botan, 2009) Indeed, the high-growth patterns of public relations over the last two-and-a-half decades are reflected in high-growth in public relations education. "Both nationally and internationally, public relations education is being called on more and more to provide strategic, international, ethical and research methods training and leadership." (DiStaso, Stacks & Botan, 2009)

Dr. Clark Kerr, former chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, states in his book *The Uses of the University,* that a "profession gains its identity by making the university the port of entry." (Kerr, 1995) In the introduction to its 1999 report, the Commission on Public Relations Education noted that the once primary cohort for public relations talent of former journalists, continue to offer valuable skills to the field, "but perhaps, limited conceptual understanding of the scope of public relations." (PRSA, 1999) In the 2006 updated report, the Commission on Public Relations Education made it a point to recognize how quickly public relations is maturing "from a set of technical skills into a much more strategic, professional and management-focused endeavor. (PRSA, 2006)

Military Public Relations Training

In the armed forces, public relations education is provided via one of the 32 courses offered by the Defense Information School (DINFOS, 2017), located at Fort Mead, Maryland. A component of the Depart of Defense's Defense Media Activity, its primary purpose is to train members of all branches of the United States military in the fields of broadcasting, journalism, public affairs, and visual information. It is accredited by the Council on Occupational Education

(COE), which is an agency of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). It's mission is "to grow and sustain a corps of professional organizational communicators who fulfill the communication needs of the military and government leaders and audiences. DINFOS has a long-standing mission of producing outstanding Public Affairs and Visual Information personnel for the U.S. Department of Defense." (DINFOS, 2017)

The duties and responsibilities of the Navy Public Affairs Officer (PAO) are outlined in the "Department of Navy Public Affairs Policy and Regulations (SECNAV Instruction 5720.44C). It is the PAO's bible little "b" and provides policy and regulation on everything from release of information to regulations on websites and communication products. The very first mandate provided by this document is that "Accurate, truthful and timely information will be made available to the public, the Congress and the news media to help in the analysis and understanding of defense strategy and national security issues." (SECNAV 5720.44C, 2012) Public Affairs principles include "accountability to the public, full disclosure and expeditious release of information, alignment and professional ethics" and the DoD Principles of Information are enumerated fully in this document. (SECNAV 5720.44C, 2012) This document also vests the authority for professional development in the OI-8 division of CHINFO.

Methodology

The first step in the research project was an overnight visit to a US Naval aircraft carrier. The team was escorted to the carrier on a Grumman C2 Greyhound and did an arrested landing on board the carrier. Throughout the duration of the visit on board the carrier, the team met with Commanding Officers, Executive Officers, the Captain, the crew and staff as well as other personnel. The team also toured the carrier visiting many departments including the flight control room, the infirmary, the flight deck, the media department and several other departments. An in-depth interview was conducted the morning of the second day with the PAO of that carrier as well as the crew of the entire media department. The team was able to ask about external media habits, support from superiors in communication efforts, internal media habits and any hindrances that the department faced in their daily work. The trip was concluded with a meeting with the Captain of the carrier and a briefing of what would be taking place during the research project. From there, the team once again boarded the Grumman C2 Greyhound, also known as a C.O.D., and completed a catapult launch off of the carrier.

Each team member was assigned a specific carrier and was placed in charge of analyzing both its internal and external communication efforts. The PAOs of each carrier sent the team member in charge of that ship a weekly report of the carrier's communication activities. The reports include both internal and external efforts. The internal report included video production, internal publications, CO/XO and Support Group activities, graphics and photos released. The external aspect of the report looked at photos, videos, graphics and stories that were released either through social media, military websites, and other media outlets. The team set up Google alerts using keywords related to each specific carrier so the frequency and type of stories could be monitored. Additionally, the team received e-mail updates from military.com and Media Monitoring Suite to track external media production regarding the carriers.

Each member was responsible for contacting the PAO of their carrier either by phone or email and conducting and in-depth interview. Prior to the interviews, the team met and created a list of questions so the interviews would cover the same material in hopes of receiving easily comparable responses. Questions covered daily activities, involvement of leadership, prior qualifications of the PAO and any hindrances felt by the media department. PAO's were allowed

and encouraged to expand their response to questions and ask follow up questions to help clarify the meaning of questions. The interviews were transcribed and compared in an effort to better understand the background of the PAO's.

The state of the art social media monitoring tool, NUVI, offers real-time data visualizations of social media platforms. Any keyword, phrase, hashtag, URL or combination of search terms can be tracked in order to find the most relevant posts across top channels. Throughout the research project, NUVI was used to monitor all four carriers for the duration of the project. For each carrier the specific search terms included the name of the respective carrier, the Twitter and Facebook handles as well as the corresponding hashtag used by the carrier's internal public affairs crew.

Results

Carrier A was not consistent with their internal production of magazines. The amount would decrease and increase dramatically from week to week and for an extended period of time, there was no internal print production. The period of time where there was little activity coincided with the time frame when the PAO was not on board the carrier and was off conducting business elsewhere. There was also a time frame of low internal production that can be attributed to equipment issues with print production and internet access. Internal production of graphics and photos was also inconsistent and when the numbers were compared with other carriers, they were on average lower. When looking at the number of stories released internally versus external, it was concluded that the internal production of stories was on average higher than the output of stories. The daily reports received from the PAO did not show Facebook analytics or the type of content going out and was more quantitative than qualitative in reporting both external and internal content.

After an in-depth interview and survey, it was discovered that the PAO in charge of Carrier A had few prior qualifications for the role and was lacking support from the leadership on board the carrier in conducting external media outreach. The media department crew encountered semi-frequent resistance form leadership when it came to the output of stories and content to external sources. In regards to qualifications, the PAO had only checked yes to having attended defense information school. The PAO did not have a degree in journalism or public relations, had not attended a tour of duty at the Pentagon, had not completed a tour of duty on a carrier as deputy PAO, and had no prior experiences as a mass communication specialist.

Carrier B was very consistent with their internal production. The production ranged from daily newspapers to internal ship broadcasts. Production would obviously decrease while in workups, but production remained consistent to everyday while deployed. As for external production, content differed depending if Carrier B was on deployment or if it was in workups. While deployed, content was consistently being generated for social media. The majority of posts consisted of photos being posted to facebook followed by stories posted by sites such as navy.mil. Facebook was definitely the main way of external communication. The content of the posts seemed to emphasize quantity over quality as well. Carrier B gained a lot of publicity while in port due to many news stations on board as well as news of their arrival. It appeared that the carrier utilized their work-ups as a time to build up their stock images and content so that it could be used when they were deployed and free time became limited. The only software that the PAO and media department are currently using to track engagement and pull analytics is Facebook analytics. Compared to the other ships being observed, Carrier B ranked average in all categories

except for video creation where it ranked at the top. On Carrier B, the PAO is given complete creative freedom from the Captain and XO when it comes to creating content and sending it out.

The PAO stated that although there was no form of training for the position, due to past experiences, jobs and mentors, she felt qualified and prepared for the role. An in-depth interview with the PAO onboard Carrier B revealed that the officer was more qualified than the PAO on Carrier A. The PAO answered yes to having completed defense information school and having done a tour of duty at the Pentagon. The PAO did not have a journalism or PR degree, did not complete a tour of duty on a carrier as deputy PAO and had no prior enlisted experience as a mass communication specialist.

Carrier C was inconsistent with their external media. The amount of content posted on social media varied greatly day to day, and it was not uncommon for the ship to go over a week with no posts on any platforms. Carrier C was deployed for nearly the entire time the research was being conducted; the limited connection and access carriers have to the internet while deployed attributed to the inconsistencies in external media output. Carrier C excelled, when compared to other carriers, in internal media output. Their internal media production, both print and photos, were relatively higher than the other carriers studied. Another internal media platform used was broadcast, where training videos and presentations were featured and played for the crew of Carrier C.

Prior to PAO carrier assignment, the PAO of Carrier C had only received specific training four years prior to his current assignment. The in-depth interview and survey revealed the Carrier C's PAO had more prior qualifications than the PAO's of Carriers A and B. Carrier C's PAO had attended defense information school, completed a tour of duty on a carrier as deputy PAO and had prior enlisted experience as a mass communication specialist. The PAO did not a journalism or PR degree and had not completed a tour of duty at the Pentagon.

Carrier D was consistent with their output of stories through external media channels both digital and print. This same consistency was seen on Carrier D's social media channels both Facebook and Twitter. Carrier D also took extra efforts on social media outlets to incorporate a personal touch from leadership in responding to family members of onboard sailors. Out of all the four carriers, Carrier D had the most stories released weekly on average. This increased during peak times before deployment and when highlighting sailors on board for hometown stories. One major difficulty seen with this carrier was the lack of information on the weekly reports that were sent to the responsible team member. The majority of internal production was for monthly awareness campaigns and printing production rather than for internal publications for sailors. Most of the tracking of this carrier's communication practices were tracked through social media and external media outlets or the carrier's website. There was little emphasis on internal communication practices that were being executed onboard the carrier and internal print was one category that the carrier did not excel in. However, there were photos, graphics and videos that were released and distributed on board the carrier.

The PAO on board Carrier D had the most prior qualifications of all the four PAO's that were interviewed and surveyed. The PAO had attended defense information school, completed a tour of duty on a carrier as a deputy PAO, had prior enlisted experience as a mass communication specialist and also had a degree in Journalism or PR. All of these experiences proved to be beneficial to the PAO in conducting communication and Public Affairs practices while on board Carrier D. This was reflected in the overall success and consistency of Carrier D's practices and communication efforts.

Each carrier was monitored on NUVI based on the amount of mentions they received on social media in the given period, the sentiment of the mentions, the reach and spread as well as the key influencers. Through this monitoring it became clear which carrier was "winning" the social media category. As referenced in the graphic below, the carrier with the most mentions on social media ended up being Carrier D followed by Carrier B, Carrier C and Carrier A. This information was incredibly insightful in the results of the research conducted. It became even more impactful when the correlation was made that Carrier D's PAO had a journalism background. This showed how important a journalism background is when running the public affairs of an aircraft carrier and especially its positive effects when it comes to social media.
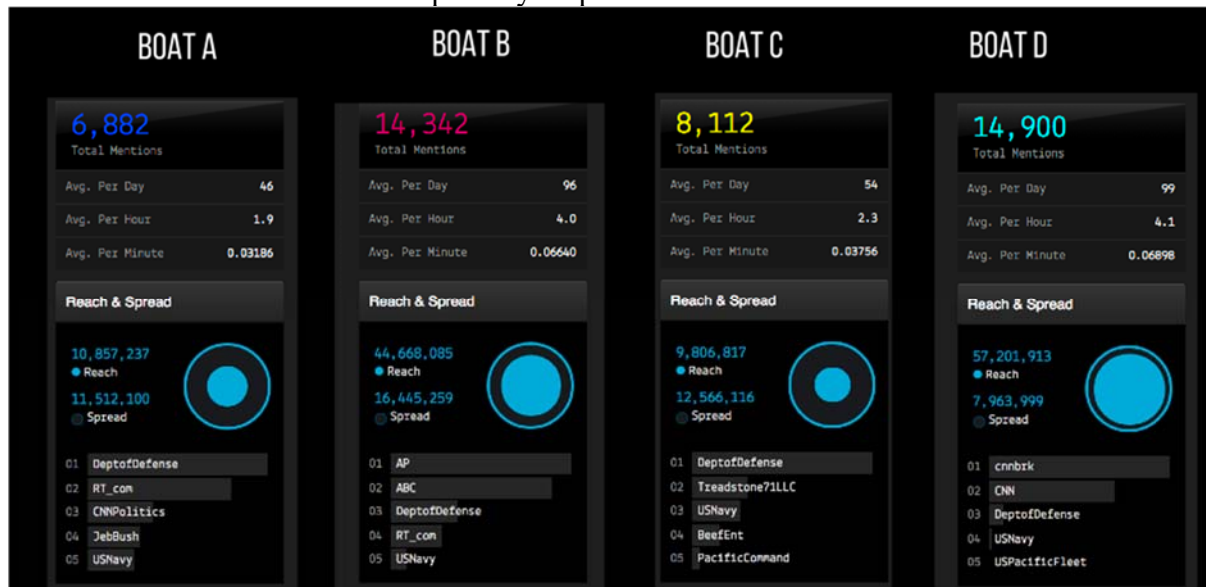
(Fig. 1 - Mentions)

Overall, the monitoring of each aircraft carrier on NUVI provided a top-level view as to how the performance of external and internal affairs were going. The team was able to correlate the total amount of mentions discovered through NUVI back to their daily/weekly reports given to them by their respective PAO. Many times what was recorded on the weekly report for a certain carrier would reveal why a certain carrier was not getting much engagement with the public. Whatever the reason was on these reports as to why content was not being published on social media, it showed on NUVI how the public would respond. If there was little content the public did not respond well but when there was an abundance of content being pushed out via social media, typically the public responded well, then resulting in more mentions.

During our research, the team established five categories that were defined using in depth interviews with PAOs to establish what qualifications they had upon accepting the position of PAO of an aircraft carrier. The categories established were; did the PAO have a degree in journalism or public relations, did he/she attended defense information school (DINFOS), did he/she attended tour of duty at public affairs headquarters at the Pentagon (CHINFO), did he/she complete a tour of duty on a carrier as deputy PAO (CVN DIVO Tour), and did he/she have any prior enlisted experience as a mass communication specialist (writing stories/ taking photos/ creating videos).

It was discovered that Carrier A was the least qualified PAO who only was able to answer yes to having attended defense information school (DINFOS) and answered no to the other four categories. On the other end of the spectrum, the PAO aboard Carrier D answered yes to every one of the five categories of prior qualifications. Carrier D was also the most successful

carrier across the five categories of media analysis in the conclusion of our research. This carrier had the most mentions on social media and also had the most external media coverage out of all the four carriers. However, the lack of prior qualifications for Carrier A's PAO was reflected in the conclusion of our media analysis. Carrier A did not place first in any of the media categories and placed last in social media mentions, internal video production and internal photo production. These findings lead us to make the connection that the PAO with more prior experience was also the most qualified for the role and lead to a greater success for the carrier in terms of external and internal communication efforts.

Discussion and Recommendations

Moving forward from this research, the team discovered there were a few common elements across all four carriers that if changed or implemented differently could improve the communication efforts of all US Navy aircraft carriers. The first best practices recommendation that was realized upon beginning the research was the lack of consistency in the daily or weekly reports. Carrier A was providing both daily and weekly reports while the other carriers only supplemented weekly reports to our research. It was also discovered early on that the format of the reports differed depending on the coast that the carrier was stationed on. The two carriers on the east coast had the same formating and the two carriers on the west coast had the same formating. However, the difference in formating between the two coasts at first hindered the process of analyzing the report's content. To prevent these issues later, it would be beneficial to have a standardized format for weekly reports that all carriers can use and populate with their correlating data. Streamlining the frequency and content that is being analyzed will benefit the PAO's in accurately tracking the success of their media team's efforts.

In continuing best practices, another recommendation is that weekly reports should have a section that includes engagement analysis of social media efforts. One of the carriers included in their weekly reports the Facebook analytics reports they were able to view. This was helpful in our research to be able to see not only the quantity of the carrier's posts, but also the quality and effectiveness of those posts to reach the target audience. While this was only done for Facebook, it would be beneficial to do the same type of analysis with all social media platforms of a carrier. It is recommended that the weekly reports for all aircraft carriers should include an engagement analysis of Facebook and Twitter so that effectiveness of posts can be tracked and compared across all carriers. It may even be in the interest of the PAOs to utilize NUVI going forward to receive more data than is provided in Facebook analytics.

The next recommendation for best practices is the PAOs should be able to repurpose content so that it can be transferred from one social media platform to another easily and effectively. The research showed a disconnect in the tone and framing of posts between social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Some carriers would post content on Facebook that would never be transferred over to Twitter, which reduced the reach of the posts. It is recommended that media teams aboard carriers have the knowledge of how to reword a post or reformat content so that it is effective across all social media platforms instead of just one.

The last best practices recommendation is that there should be personal engagement with the PAOs from their leadership. The supervisors and individuals that are over the PAOs should provide insight into the kind of image and tone that the US Navy is wanting to present to the public so that the PAOs are able to consistently present the same brand across all platforms and all carriers, all over the world. This will help guide the PAO's in their effort to present an unified image of the Navy to the public. Prior to joining the carrier, it would be beneficial for PAO's to

meet the Chief of Information for the US Navy at the Pentagon and have a meeting with all the leaders so they can discuss the overarching image they want to convey, which will prevent confusion when the PAO does join the carrier. This proactive measure will benefit the PAO, the carrier, the supervisor and the Navy as a whole.

The research has shown that by implementing a structured PAO program and standardized production process will result in positive improvements in the communication efforts of aircraft carriers. Explicit instructions and formal training are some of the tools that if implemented will help prepare the PAOs for the work they will be doing while on board the carrier. Proper preparation with support from leadership will make the job of a PAO easier. Moving forward with the research, it would be interesting to consider how the location and type of mission that a carrier is engaged in while it is deployed affects the quality of the content being put out as well as how that affects audience engagement and reaction.

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What Makes the Grapevine so Effective?

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Abstract

This study recognizes existing relationship management theory research to encompass the establishment of organizational-employee relationships and aims to advance research to include peer-to-peer relationships in the internal communication function through the dimensions of interpersonal relationships. It expands the theory of organizational-peer relationships to include peer-to-peer relationships offers broader study to a rich and powerful communication tool, the grapevine, an informal peer-to-peer communication network.

Introduction

Internal communication teams can send their carefully crafted messages to global audiences with the click of a button, however the informal system of communication, commonly known as the grapevine, remains a thriving competitor to formal communication systems. Teams of communicators work around the clock assessing, massaging and managing corporate messaging, but despite careful planning, employees often tune into the grapevine as their preferred channel. The relationships held by people within an organization determine the type of communication that is utilized. While formal relationships will lead to the use of formal channels of communication, informal communication flourishes with social relationships (Davis & O'Connor, 1977). As formal channels of communication do not carry all of the information that employees need, informal channels play a significant role in the day-to-day life of organizational members (Davis & O'Connor, 1977). As illustrated by Keith Davis (1967), informal communication "is a powerful influence upon productivity and job satisfaction. Both formal and informal systems are necessary for group activity, just as two blades are essential to make a pair of scissors workable" (p. 212).

Important theoretical scholarship, seen through the relationship management lens, positions internal communication as a public relations management function aimed at creating and maintaining high-quality, communicative, cross functional employee relationships. This study recognizes existing relationship management theory research (Bruning, 2002; Grunig & Huang, 2000) to encompass the establishment of organizational-employee relationships and aims to advance research to include peer-to-peer relationships in the internal communication function. While current scholarship is concerned with organizational-peer relationships, expanding the theory to include peer-to-peer relationships offers broader study to a rich and powerful communication tool, the grapevine, an informal peer-to-peer communication network (Heath, 2013; Erden, 2013).

The dynamics of relationship management theory justifies the unique constitution of the grapevine as an effective and efficient internal communication vehicle. Relationship management theory is heavily concerned with relationship influencers and points to a multitude of conditional, or "when" and "where" influencers such as relationship timing and availability to the person or persons within the relationship. The theory further addresses contextual or "what" influencers, such as the structure of the relationship as well as the content shared within the relationship. Finally, conceptual or "why" influencers are outlined, including the intrinsic influencers of relationships, such as intrinsic realization or gratification.

Through the lens of relationship management theory, the purpose of this study is to explore the informal and formal communication taking place within a multinational medical device maker headquartered in the United States and examine how an organization can capitalize on the grapevine both as a communication tool and as a relationship opportunity. Previous literature has provided useful information regarding the grapevine's speed, accuracy, probable content, different communicators involved, and how the information flows (Davis, 1971; Sutton & Porter, 1968; Davis & O'Connor, 1977). It has also addressed organizations' perceptions of the value and influence of the grapevine (Newstrom, Monczka, & Reif, 1974). The findings of this study will add to the growing body of knowledge in the public relations field through the scope of relationship management and will add prescience to the grapevine as an effective means of internal communication. The practical implications of this study are that its results could shed light on how to increase an organization's level of awareness and control of the information that is being communicated through the grapevine.

Literature Review

What is the Grapevine?

Employee-driven communication is an informal, naturally occurring interaction that reduces the inherent communication loss that takes place in formal organizational communication (Nicoll, 1994). Often referred to as "the grapevine," employee-driven communication features distinct and unique characteristics that contrast formal communication networks. Regardless of how well an organization formally communicates to its employees, human's socialization needs will always lead employees to engage in informal conversations (Erden, 2013). While formal communication is structured and not open to rapid changes (Mishra, 2005), the information shared in the grapevine has the potential to spread in a faster manner (Harris & Hartman, 2001). It is inherently non-restrictive and efficient. No public statement needs to be written or approved (Davis & O'Connor, 1977). Although today's technologically driven environment has led to important changes in the way people communicate, the grapevine still largely thrives as a face-to-face and word-of-mouth platform (Davis, 1962; Davis & O'Connor, 1977).

Informal communication tends to emerge when formal channels are perceived as being too rigid, when employees perceive that management is withholding critical information, and under conditions of organizational change in which the future of the employees is uncertain (Newstrom, Monzka, & Reif, 1974). At the same time, communicating informally is part of human nature. In an organizational environment, informal communication helps build relationships and bonds among peers (Crampton, Hodge, & Mishra, 1998). While a dynamic grapevine reveals employees' desire of sharing ideas about their place of work, an environment in which workers are not conversing about what is going on in their organizational lives highlights a lack of interest (Erden, 2013). In other words, an organization's spirit can be unveiled by observing its informal communication networks (Davis, 1973). While the grapevine will generally have some elements of truth to it, ambiguity, deletions, and embellishments, may distort the original message (Newstrom et al., 1974). Studies have found that between 75% and 90% of the information that is disseminated through the grapevine is correct (Davis, 1973). While this may seem like a high percentage, it still means that between 10% and 25% of the information is incorrect. Rumors carrying incorrect information can create anxiety, fear, misunderstandings and a wide range of conflicts in the organization (Erden, 2013).

Three titles are usually given to employees participating in the grapevine: liaison, isolates, and dead-enders (Davis & O'Connor, 1977). Liaisons are those who actively participate in the grapevine by contributing to the flow of information (Jacobson & Seashore, 1951). The term was further defined to those who will share with more than one individual the information they have at hand (Davis, 1953: Sutton & Porter, 1968). On the other hand, a study conducted by Sutton and Porter defined isolates as those who did not hear the information half of the time, and dead-enders as those that passed on the information they received less than one-third of the time (Sutton & Porter, 1968). Regardless of the term used to describe the individuals participating in the transmission of information, the grapevine "is more of a product of the occasion and situation than it is of the person. This explains why the grapevine is more active at some times than at others, and also why one might be classified as a liaison in one grapevine transmission and as an isolate or dead-ender in another" (Davis & O'Connor, 1977).

Relationship Management Theory and Organization-Public Relationships

Since Ferguson (1984) first suggested that relationships should be the unifying concept of public relations, the efforts placed by academics and practitioners in understanding organization-public relationships have increased considerably. By managing organization-public relationships, the relationship management perspective contends that the public relations discipline balances the interests of organizations and publics (Ledingham, 2003). Within this framework, public relations have been defined as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994, p. 2). Similarly, in 2012, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) conducted a crowdsourcing campaign and public vote that defined public relations as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (PRSA, 2017, About PRSA section, para. 4).

L. A. Grunig, J. E. Grunig, and Ehling (1992) suggested that the dimensions of reciprocity, trust, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction, and mutual understanding determine the relationship state. Some years later, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) proposed the following five dimensions: trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. The next year, Hon and J. E. Grunig (1999) offered strategies for maintaining organization-public relationships such as access, positiveness, openness, assurance, networking, and sharing of tasks. They also suggested the following four outcomes as indicators of the quality of successful organization-public relationships: trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality.

Trust is defined as "one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 19). Commitment is defined by Hon and J. E. Grunig (1999) as the extent to which the public feels it is worth maintaining a relationship with the organization. Satisfaction, which involves affection and emotion (J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000), measures "the extent to which one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced" (Hon & J. E. Grunig, 1999, p. 20). Finally, control mutuality indicates "the degree to which parties agree on who has rightful power to influence one another" (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 19). After reviewing literature in interpersonal communication and psychology, Hon and Grunig (1999) developed scales for measuring these four dimensions. These scales helped provide the basis for the semi-structured interviews conducted in the current study.

RQ – How can organizations utilize the grapevine as an effective communications tool and as a relationship opportunity?

P – Peer-to-peer relationships meet human a) conditional, b) contextual and c) conceptual needs more effectively than organizational-employee relationships.

Methodology

Methodologically inspired by operational and theoretical elements of relationship management theory (Grunig & Hon, 1999), this study utilizes 18, in-depth, semi-structured interviews completed in-person and by phone with employees at the U.S. headquarters of a large multinational, medical-device manufacturing organization to establish theoretical and practical consistency. To obtain subject saturation (Creswell, 2012), and adequate representation of job functions, participants were purposively-sampled. A constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 28-52) on when, where, what, and why communication occurred between the organization and employees as well as between peers, facilitated data analysis, and the identification of key themes. An open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61) enabled

deeper examination, and conceptual categorization of participants' experiences and the grapevine phenomenon.

Themes

Conditional Influencers: When and where communication happens
Employee-Organization Communication

Much of the important communication being transmitted from the organization to employees takes place in monthly meetings to which all employees are invited. "Most of the information I get from the organization comes from the monthly employee meetings" (R3). While these meetings are perceived to be useful and a good way for the organization to communicate new developments and what lies ahead organizationally, they are not seen by the employees as opportunities to engage in two-way communication.   "These types of conversations with the organization will take place in an auditorium with a large number of people, so many employees will not want to talk. They will not feel comfortable talking unless a base relationship is established" (R8).   Similarly, another employee stated that these company meetings served as an opportunity "for the organization to talk to me" (R1), and not the other way around. Employees stated that they also receive organizational information through emails as well as the company´s internal TV channel.

While hallway chats with organizational leaders occur, when employees need to engage in a more individualized fashion with the organization they will usually schedule these kinds of meetings. Instead of just dropping by a leader's office when something needs to be communicated, many employees suggest that "there is a heavier bias toward actually scheduling meetings" (R5). The reason that employees choose to communicate this way is mainly based on not wanting to disturb the organization´s leaders: "You don´t want to waste their time" (R10).

A general perception among a wide range of employees was that the amount of trust and two-way communication between workers and the organization increases when proximity and time spent with leaders increases. An organizational member that was living the experience of having one of the vice presidents of the company sit in their department for some time emphasized how positive the experience was: "Now that we have a vice president just down the hall, and checking in on us during the day, it helps build trust and makes you feel that they are more involved on a day-to-day basis. It transmits availability" (R7). Similarly, an employee from another department stated that having organizational leaders work near them and spend more time with them would "help tremendously. When you get to see what people are doing and going through, it changes your perceptions. Learning about others helps to increases your empathy and changes your way of thinking" (R14). On the same subject, another employee stated: "Spending time with people of different areas only helps them become better leaders, because they could see some of those details and fully understand all the bits and pieces that go into it (R10).

Peer-To-Peer Communication

Unlike the more structured organization-employee communication, peer-to-peer communication occurs in a much wider range of circumstances and locations: "It happens in the hallways, in the conference rooms, and over lunch. It happens wherever it happens. They are around all the time and are more approachable just because they are there" (R6). The approachability increases the amount of communication that is being transmitted and shared: "There is a lot of interaction. If I have questions, I will go to their desks. If we are not face-to-face I will email or text them. There is a close and constant contact" (R18).

Employees also choose to communicate more with certain peers than with others. "I have an inner circle with four or five guys, in which we will talk about everything" (R4). Similarly, another interviewee stated that he tends to communicate a lot with his "text group" (R17).

Contextual Influencers: What is communicated
Employee-Organization Communication

Employees agree that the organization openly shares with them the most important developments occurring in the company: "They share their findings with the whole company in employee meetings" (R2). Similarly, another interviewee stated: "Leadership makes an effort to communicate and be transparent" (R13). Employees also sated that most of their conversations with the organization, are "strictly professional" (R8). At the same time, they recognize that the medical device manufacturer has an open-door policy and feel that they can address organizational issues with them: "I feel pretty good about being able to speak to the organization about different processes and things that affect the future of our organization" (R5). On the same issue, another employee stated: "I´m able to say what´s on my mind. I don´t have to be fearful that what I say is going to be used against me in some way" (R11). Although all employees agreed that the organization has an open-door policy, not everyone felt the same level of comfort in speaking with organizational leaders: "If I had to talk about something related with my position, I would consider it scary and intimidating" (R13). On a similar note, another employee stated: "You have to learn your boundaries about what you can an cannot say. It is not quite as casual as it is with peers. It is probably just because it involves people I do not work with on a daily basis" (R4).

The organization will also reach out to individuals and ask them about their perceptions of issues related to the company: "They will sometimes call me and ask what I think about certain issues" (R2). Whenever this occurs, whether it is the organization or the employee that has made the initial contact, employees overwhelmingly agree that what they will say will be previously studied and prepared: "Speaking to the organization requires more preparation. I would want to make sure I have all of the fact, so that when I went in, I was on point and able to answer the questions" (R14). The lower the level of permanent contact employees have with organizational leaders, the lower the likelihood they will share their insights, concerns, or thoughts about issues: "I can´t be down to earth with the organization. Spending more time with them would certainly make me feel more comfortable with the organization. (…) I don´t feel it now because I don´t see them very often (R16).

Peer-To-Peer Communication

Employees widely agreed that communication with peers is more casual and there is less concern about the consequences of what is said: "When you communicate with peers, you don't have to backup statements. When you communicate with the organization, you want it to logically make sense" (R5). Similarly, another employee stated: "There is a feeling of less judgment among your peers. With the organization, there is more thought put into what you are going to say" (R7). The fact that the communication is more casual leads to a greater amount of personal information being shared: "There is more conversation, more information being exchanged at a personal level with peers than with the organization" (R9). In addition to discussing personal matters, employees will also talk to their peers when they feel like they need to vent about organizational matters that disturb them: "There´s a lot of venting, and then once it´s out, we move on to business as usual" (R17).

Interviewees also mentioned that they go to their peers when they need to catch up with organizational information they have missed. Peers also serve as a way to get informed about what is going on in other departments: "There are particular departments that usually know what is up, and because we share peers and friends the information usually tends to flow freely between those groups" (R10).

Conceptual Influencers: Why communication occurs
Employee-Organization Communication

One of the main reasons that employees have for communicating with the organization is to influence or at least raise awareness on a certain issue: "I see them as opportunities to influence" (R5). Another interviewee shared this perspective and stated: "Conversations with the organization will eventually have more of an impact than speaking with peers (R6). Among those interested in raising awareness, one interviewee stated: "Typically, my goal when I discuss things up to that level, is not to necessarily change their minds, but to present them with some additional information that they may not be aware of, so that they can weigh it in while making the ultimate decision" (R10). Employees want to feel valued and respected while communicating with the organization: "They listen and value my opinion. (…) It makes me feel good that someone can put that level of trust in me" (R2).

Peer-To-Peer Communication

Regarding the reasons employees have for communicating among peers, one of the employees simply stated the following words: "they listen" (R2). Whether they are sharing their personal lives or their or their experiences at work, people enjoy sharing with those that listen to them. Similarly, another employee stated: "Peers will probably listen to you and take your opinion into account a bit more than higher-ups. It is easier to influence a peer than someone above you" (R6). Others stated that they communicated with their peers because they feel comfortable doing it: "Among peers, you are much more comfortable probably because of an increased level of interaction. There is a sense of camaraderie" (R7). Employees also feel that it is easier to communicate with peers because they share experiences and are often in the same stages of life: "A lot of my peers are in the same place as I am in life. We all have kids and a similar age. We all have interests and expertise in similar areas that we share with one another. I think that allows a natural and deeper connection" (R10).

Trust
Employee-Organization Communication

Reliability and consistency were two important concepts referred to by employees that described how the organization inspires trust with employees: "It´s a track record that has led me to know that I can take these people on their word. I am able to trust what they say because historically they have been truthful" (R8).   While having the organization communicate transparently to them is certainly important, trust will only be built if the organization keep their word and prove that they have the ability to fulfill their promises: "When something is communicated one way and either retracted or communicated differently later, I begin to question what that´s about. Actions and words have to be aligned" (R7). Similarly, another employee stated: "When they tell me they´re going to do something, it happens" (R15). Employees do not expect the organization to be perfect. They know that there will sometimes be problems and difficulties. However, they do expect the organization to show an interest and

capacity to address the issues: "When you see that the organization addresses a problem, it gives me confidence that they are interested in us" (R5).

Being treated fairly was another important aspect for employees: "The organization prides itself on treating everyone well. They do their best to treat their people as well as they can" (R8). At the same time, trust toward the organization increases when employees feel that the organization trusts them: "The organization does not come over and question us about our work. I value that. They let us do our thing. They trust our capabilities" (R4). Similarly, another employee gave a specific example of the organization showing trust toward him: "When I had kids I could work from home on certain mornings to help with my wife´s schedule. They have given me trust, and given me the freedom to make my life work while at the same time accomplishing the goals of the company" (R10).

Peer-To-Peer Communication

Several employees shared the view that it is easier to trust your peers than the organization because you spent a larger amount of time with them, which allows you to make a more informed decision regarding their trustworthiness: "I think there is a huge component to proximity, availability, and personality in term of who you can trust, and who you feel comfortable talking to" (R17). Following through with your promises is another important aspect: "At the beginning of a relationship, eye contact, engagement, and affirmation help build trust. Later on, following through, no matter how small or large the commitment, builds trust" (R7). Sharing ideas and collaborating is another aspect that builds trust among peers: "Openly sharing ideas, collaborating, and showing a willingness to sacrifice for the team builds trust" (R12). Employees also emphasized that trust is built when there is a sense of safety: "I know that they will not throw me under the bus, or tell me a lie, because they know I will not do it to them. This is just something that happens over time" (R15).

Satisfaction
Employee-Organization Communication

While job security and benefits are certainly valued by employees, a large number of the interviewees stated that what truly satisfies them is feeling that their work has a positive impact on society: "I think that I am helping society by making this a better place to live. By helping to move forward the technology of healthcare, people in the United States and around the world are being benefitted" (R3).

Peer-To-Peer Communication

Forming personal relationships with peers creates a sense of satisfaction among workers: "Peers give me personal satisfaction. By spending a lot of time with them, I have more fun. And the more we see each other, the more we develop our relationship" (R17). Similarly, another employee stated: "With peers, even when you are just getting something off your chest, you get a good feeling from sharing a personal thing. I cannot share as much or get that feeling with the organization" (R18). Being able to form true connections and feeling that peers are interested in your wellbeing has a positive impact on employees´ satisfaction: "Among peers, we take care of each other, and we all benefit from this" (R16).

Commitment
Employee-Organization Communication

While commitment is shown on a day-to-day basis, specific actions in decisive moments can have an impact that may last for years. In this particular organization, a large number of interviewees remembered how the organization remained committed to them during the recession that was caused by the financial crisis of 2008: "The organization´s decision of not laying anybody off during the recession, spoke volumes about their compassion and care for employees" (R12). Similarly, another employee stated: "They did not fire anyone when we went through all those low periods. All they did was move people around. They did a great job to work through it" (R4).

At the same time, some employees stated that their perception of the organization´s commitment toward them would increase if they were more interested in the individual rather than the employee: "I think that if I heard more from them about me, I might feel like that. But they don´t want to know me, they just want me to do my job. My friends show a long term-interest in me by asking about my wife, my kids, and my life" (R1).

Peer-To-Peer Communication

Mutual listening, devoting time, and being willing to help, were perceived to be important factors when determining how committed peers are: "They listen, and they seek me out to listen to them, or just to talk to them about stuff they need advice on" (R1). Similarly, another interviewee stated: "It is interdependent and reciprocal. If those guys are having a hard time they know that I am there for them" (R10). When peers show an interest in an individual both inside and outside of work, it helps creates a sense of commitment: "They take an interest in me, not just about work, but outside of work. For instance, if I take off a half-day or am out sick, they make an extra effort to help me when I am gone. It makes you feel that they missed you as a person" (R14).

Control Mutuality
Employee-Organization Communication

Most of the interviewees felt listened by the organization: " I feel that my position is invited. If I needed to talk to them about something in particular, I feel like I could do it" (R13). While they do not anticipate that the organization will act upon every comment or suggestion they make, they do expect to be respected and considered: "I think that opinions are respected and heard, even if they are not taken" (R17). Similarly, another employee stated: "I may feel comfortable saying things, but I am not sure that they will be acted upon. There are times that there is a bigger picture involved. It is not just about me. There are decisions that have to be made, and that is understandable." (R9).

Peer-To-Peer Communication

One of the things that employee value most about their peers is that they listen: "My peers listen, they engage with me, and they actually want to know my opinion, seriously and sincerely" (R16). Employees feel that the advice they give to peers will make a difference: "They seek out my opinion and my counsel as far as what needs to be done" (R8).

Discussion

Important theoretical scholarship through the relationship management lens positions internal communication as a public relations management function aimed at creating and maintaining high-quality, communicative, cross functional employee relationships. This study

recognizes existing relationship management theory research (Bruning, 2002; Grunig & Huang, 2000) to encompass the establishment of organizational-employee relationships and aims to advance research to include peer-to-peer relationships in the internal communication function.

Noting the "powerful influence upon productivity and job satisfaction" (Davis, 1967), this research appreciates both formal, and informal communication for their role in establishing organizational life, highlighting the inherent differences between the two as unique opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of organizational communication as a whole. Exploring factors such as communication timing, content, and how communication events and interactions take place, this research adds to existing relationship management literature and contributes significant practical implications to the organizational communication field.

This research suggests that perceived nature of these characteristics in informal communication relationships as equally conceivable in formal communication relationships. More specifically, this research suggests that employees trust the information they receive from the organization is accurate. Secondly, the clear majority of employees stated they would be interested in more frequent, and informal communication relationships with their leaders, and that this exchange would increase their level of trust and willingness to engage leadership in conversations typically reserved for peers. Perhaps most significantly, employees indicated they would enjoy having closer proximity to the leaders of the organization, i.e., open-environment seating. Employees explained closer physical proximity to leaders as a catalyst to increased mutual understanding of day-to-day work functions, challenges, and competence, resulting organically in increased reciprocity and willingness to engage and communicate with leaders.

Conclusion

On balance, the grapevine is an expansive and powerful means of communication that if understood, and managed organizationally, could create dramatic and impactful effects on formal communication and organizational life. Establishing the power of peer-to-peer communication in an organizational context this study provides the theoretical, conceptual, and descriptive framework for understanding the conditional, contextual, and conceptual factors that contribute to organizational entry into the employee-driven communication phenomenon known as the grapevine.

Suggestions for Future Research & Current Study Limitations

This research employed the well-established measures of relationship management theory (Grunig & Hon, 1999) to investigate organizational and peer-to-peer communication, and perceptions of conditional, contextual, and conceptual factors in both organizational and peer communication. It is suggested both as a potential limitation and suggestion for future research that the data collected from this study might benefit from a more expansive sample population. Further, while the indications of this study were established qualitatively to provide rich descriptions of the experience associated with the phenomenon, a quantitative methodological approach would not only help universalize the findings, but would further serve to indicate the predictability of the implications.

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The Sorry State of Social Media: Analyzing Public Apologies

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Abstract

Social media has become an important communication tool for organizations and public figures, particularly in times of crisis. Public figures are frequently advised to use social media platforms to apologize to audiences, and their apologies are often posted by news outlets or the public. However, evidence suggests social media functions on an interpersonal level, yet traditional image repair strategies are based on a mass media model. Using image repair strategies based in theoretical frameworks from both mass mediated and interpersonal communication research, this study examined the verbal and nonverbal behaviors public figures use to apologize to audiences on social media platforms, and the relationship these behaviors had to audience perceptions of sincerity and forgiveness as expressed via social media comments. The study found verbal behaviors reflected the use of components from both frameworks. Combinations of the image repair strategies–reducing offensiveness, denial and evasion of responsibility–were associated with audience perceptions of insincerity, as were negative comments regarding the offender's character. Audiences were non-forgiving if the apology was perceived as insincere, but forgiving if they perceived the apology as sincere. Ramifications for these results in relation to the practice of public relations are discussed.

As far back as 2006, the Commission on Public Relations recognized the impact of social media on crisis management and stated in its report, "The contemporary practice of public relations requires practitioners to immediately respond to … crisis situations via Web sites, blogs and other new media" (VanSlyke Turk, 2006). Although study results vary and there is no consensus among scholars on the effectiveness of apology for image repair and crisis management (Brown, Billings, & Devlin, 2016; Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Walsh & McAllister-Spooner, 2011), apology continues to be a broadly accepted practice in public relations strategy, and an ethical mandate if the offender is truly at fault (Coombs & Holladay, 2008; Hearit, 2006). Public figures are frequently advised to use social media platforms to apologize to audiences, particularly when the offense originated on social media (Baer & Naslund, 2011). Even if public figures don't initially post their apologies on social media, the public and news outlets often record and post apologies on social media.

In this dynamic media environment, the challenge for public relations (PR) practitioners and their clients is not just the broadened exposure or the rapid response expectation related to apologies. PR practitioners and scholars must also consider the points of incongruence between traditional image repair strategies that use a mass media framework and social media's ability to function on an interpersonal level (Caplan, 2001; Kelleher, 2009; O'Sullivan & Carr, 2017; Ott & Theunissen, 2015; Schultz, Utz, & Göritz, 2011; Walther et al., 2010). This is an important distinction because research on effective interpersonal apologies differs significantly from image repair strategies recommended by PR scholars (Gracyalny & Mongeau, 2010; Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Förster, & Montada, 2004). Emotions, typically seen as the purview of interpersonal scholars, do impact crisis management, yet PR professionals have just begun to scratch the surface of their role in crisis communication (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2010; Roschk & Kaiser, 2013).

Using image repair strategies based in theoretical frameworks from both mass mediated and interpersonal communication research, this study examined the verbal and nonverbal behaviors public figures use to apologize to audiences on social media platforms, and the relationship these behaviors may have on perceptions of sincerity and forgiveness. This insight could help public relations professionals more effectively counsel clients in today's dynamic media environment when a public apology is, or may be, a strategy for image repair or crisis management. It also offers scholars and educators an additional lens through which to critique image repair strategies.

Literature Review

Apology research has interested public relations scholars and practitioners, particularly as part of image repair strategies and in times of crisis management. However, there are three main areas that have converged to add a sense of urgency in providing a deeper understanding of online apologies for the public relations profession: the increased accessibility and use of social media; the ability social media has to enable publics to directly communicate with each other; and interdisciplinary research that posits that social media communications may be perceived as interpersonal, rather than simply mass media, communication. To be able to more clearly understand how a shift to a more interpersonal approach might impact the framework of apologies in the practice of public relations, it is helpful to understand one of PR's most influential guiding theories related to apologies–Benoit's image restoration discourse (1995).

Benoit's Image Restoration/Repair Discourse as a Starting Point

      Benoit's seminal work on the theory of image restoration discourse (1995, 1997, 2000) has guided and shaped the work of public relations scholars and practitioners, especially in the area of crisis management response. Benoit described it as a theory to be "used by practitioners to help design messages during crises and by critics or educators to critically evaluate messages produced during crises" (1997, p. 177). Although it has been criticized for its descriptive nature and speculative conclusions, Benoit's critics also admit that the theory and research supporting it merit critical commentary because of its depth and breadth (Burns & Bruner, 2000; Coombs, 2007; Coombs, Frandsen, Holladay, & Johansen, 2010).

      Benoit's theory focuses on message options for organizations and individuals who are experiencing a crisis, and identifies five typologies of image repair strategies. The five broad strategies are: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the act, corrective action, and mortification. Both in Benoit's work and in the critique and experimentation of his work, there is attention given to the key role of the perception of the audience (albeit in various degrees of emphases) (Benoit, 1997, 2000; Burns & Bruner, 2000; Haigh & Brubaker, 2010; Hearit, 2006). It is in the area of audience perception in an internet connected media environment that this study brings into greater focus.

      The advent and increased use of social media is one of the most significant changes in the image repair landscape since Benoit first undertook his research. Some scholars argue that online connectivity should be viewed simply as a new medium (Procopio & Procopio, 2007), while others view it as a convergence of media (Walther et al., 2010), and still others view it as a new phenomenon (Caplan, 2001; Cathcart & Gumpert, 1983; O'Sullivan & Carr, 2017). Regardless of the view, more exploration is warranted into how audiences perceive apologies in today's online environment.

Increased Accessibility and Use of Social Media

      Today, 50% of the world population has internet access with the largest percentage of penetration (89%) in North America (internetworldstats.com). Pew (Perrin, 2015) reports that 73% of Americans go online every day, with 42% reporting that they are online several times a day and 21% reporting being online almost constantly. In the last quarter of 2016, 73% of the adult population in the United States accessed a social media platform through a smartphone, and spent 22% of their total media time on social media (*Nielson Social Media Report*, 2016). The increased use of social media via smartphones is of particular note when undertaking image repair strategies and crisis management because audiences seek out social media during crises for unfiltered and up-to-date communication (Procopio & Procopio, 2007).

The Convergence of Mass and Interpersonal Communication

      Scholars have grappled with how to categorize and study social media communication behaviors, particularly how to accommodate the fluidity of the boundaries between mass and interpersonal communication forged by technology (Caplan, 2001; Cathcart & Gumpert, 1983; O'Sullivan & Carr, 2017; Procopio & Procopio, 2007; Reardon & Rogers, 1988; Walther et al., 2010). Terms such as *masspersonal* (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2017) or *hyperpersonal* (Caplan, 2001) have been proposed to help us bridge the dichotomy between the two functions. It is an evolving conversation, and an important one for those studying and practicing image repair and crisis management strategies.

For public relations practitioners and scholars, this conversation relating the convergence of mass and interpersonal communication is a call to re-examine guiding theories in all practices. This paper serves as an entry into the conversation by considering two dominant image repair theories–one from mass communication and one from interpersonal communication–to better understand how this convergence might impact strategies for effective apologies on social media. Benoit's theory is familiar to many public relations practitioners and scholars, and his basic typologies are discussed earlier in this paper. The interpersonal theory, drawn from the work of Schlenker & Darby (1981), differs in that it includes an emphasis on relational content, as well as the nonverbal behaviors used by offenders to express emotion following the transgression, particularly the emotion of remorse. The five components of an effective interpersonal apology, according to Schlenker & Darby (1981), are: admit fault, admit damage, express remorse, ask for forgiveness and offer compensation. Thus, this study investigated the following questions:

RQ1: What nonverbal behaviors do public figures use to apologize to audiences on social media platforms?

RQ2: What verbal behaviors do public figures use to apologize to audiences on social media platforms?

RQ3: How do the verbal and nonverbal behaviors used by public figures to apologize on social media relate to receivers' perceptions of sincerity and forgiveness?

Study I: Methods

Sample

In order to be included in the study, apologies had to meet the following criteria: a) made by a highly visible public figure – as determined by coverage of the apology on either the top Nielson-rated broadcast news channel (NBC) or cable news channel (FOXNEWS) for that year; b) made between 2009-2014, and c) posted on YouTube as a video. Because political communication is influenced by partisanship, politicians were excluded from the study. To obtain the sample of public figure apologies, two search engines were used: Google and Waybackmachine.org. First, Google was searched using the terms "celebrity," "sports," "corporate," "entertainment," "artists," "company," or "public figure;" followed by the word "apology," and then the year (ex. 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, or 2014). From the initial list of available apologies, Waybackmachine.org was used to determine whether the apology appeared on either of the top-rated broadcast news or cable news networks. Of these apologies, only the videos that were posted on YouTube were selected for inclusion. This resulted in a final sample of 32 video apologies.

Measures

Apologies were coded for nonverbal and verbal behaviors. Ekman and Friesen's (1978) typology of universal facial expression of emotion was used to identify the following nonverbal displays of negative emotion: sadness, anger, contempt, disgust, fear, and surprise. All other nonverbal emotional/non-emotional content was coded as "no negative emotion." Verbal content of the apologies was also coded according to both mass and interpersonal communication frameworks. To examine verbal apology behaviors from a public relations standpoint, Benoit's (1995, 1997) typology of image restoration/repair strategies was used. Schlenker and Darby's (1981) five components of an effective interpersonal apology were used to code the interpersonal apology strategies in each video. Finally, in addition to verbal and nonverbal behaviors, the sex and type of public figure were also coded.

Procedure

 Apology videos were coded by two trained independent raters; nonverbal behaviors were examined separately from the verbal content. To code nonverbal content, each video was unitized into 15-second segments and analyzed without audio. Each segment was coded according to the one dominant emotion expressed during that segment. In coding the verbal content, all verbal strategies present during each segment were identified and recorded. For example, if one 15-second segment contained a statement of "I'm sorry, please forgive me," it would be coded as both an expression of remorse and asking for forgiveness (according to Schlenker & Darby's classification, or two instances of mortification according to Benoit). The 32 apology videos yielded a total of 335 segments for analysis; coding for approximately 20% of the segments was compared, with the average inter-coder agreement at .82 (.83 at the halfway mark).

Results

 Of the 32 YouTube apologies examined, 11 (34%) were made by entertainment figures, 10 (29%) made by for-profit CEOs, and 11 (34%) by sports figures. Twenty-nine (91%) of the figures were male; 3 (9%) were female. Regarding research question one, the vast majority of apologies included some form of nonverbal expression of negative emotion; only two apologies (6%) did not. Nonverbal sadness was seen in the greatest number of apologies (21 videos, 66%), followed by fear (15 videos, 47%), then anger (11 videos, 34%), contempt (8 videos, 25%), and surprise (4 videos, 13%). None of the apologies included an expression of disgust (see Table 1 for the average amount of each emotion expressed in the apologies; Table 2 displays the frequencies and percentages of each emotion).

 The second research question asked about the verbal behaviors used by public figures to apologize on social media. Results indicate that public figures use a variety of behaviors reflecting both image repair and interpersonal apology strategies.

Image Repair Strategies

 Of the 32 apologies, 5 (15.6%) included statements of denial, 12 (37.5%) included a form of evasion, 21 (65.5%) had statements reducing offensiveness, 21 (65.5%) used corrective action, and nearly all of the apologies (30, 93.8%) included attempts at mortification. The frequencies of each image repair strategy are displayed in Table 2.

Interpersonal Apology Components

 The apologies also contained the elements of an effective interpersonal apology. Twenty-nine apologies (90.6%) included statements admitting fault, 18 (56.3%) admitted damage, 21 (65.5%) included expressions of remorse, 6 asked for forgiveness (18.8%), and 18 (56.3%) offered compensation. Table 2 also displays the frequencies of each interpersonal apology component.

Relationships between Verbal and Nonverbal Behaviors

 Several behaviors classified as image repair strategies by Benoit, and components of effective interpersonal apologies by Schlenker and Darby, related to nonverbal expressions of emotion. Regarding image repair, results of correlation analyses indicated that denial ($r = .525$, $p = .002$) and reducing offensiveness ($r = .441$, $p = .012$) associated positively with the public figure's anger expression, whereas mortification related negatively to expressing anger ($r = -.465$, $p = .007$), and positively to expressing sadness ($r = .502$, $p = .003$). Similarly, Schlenker

and Darby's statements of remorse positively related to expressing nonverbal sadness ($r = .762$, $p < .001$) and negatively related to expressing no emotion ($r = -.485$, $p = .005$). Making an offer of compensation associated positively with expressing no emotion ($r = .464$, $p = .007$).

Study 2: Methods

Sample

The sample for Study 2 consisted of public comments posted to 28 of the original 32 YouTube videos analyzed in the first study. Three of the videos coded in Study 1 had public comments disabled, thus, those videos were not included in Study 2. The final sample consisted of 1,971 comments posted to 28 YouTube apology videos.

Procedure

Three coders analyzed the public comments posted to the apologies in several steps. In the first step, coders independently sorted responses into conceptual units (words or phrases representing a comment topic). In the second step, coders generated categories and examples following Strauss & Corbin's (1990) open coding system. Coders grouped similar comments into the same category and created new categories for different comments. Coding for approximately 20% of the responses was compared, with the average inter-coder agreement .84 using the pooled kappa score (De Vries, Elliott, Kanouse, & Teleki, 2008).

Results

Content analysis of the YouTube comments identified 3,542 total conceptual units grouped into 5 main categories. The categories included comments about: a) the nonverbal content of the apology, b) verbal content of the apology, c) public figure's persona/character, d) perceptions of apology sincerity/insincerity, and e) decisions about forgiveness/no forgiveness. In addition, comments were coded according to whether the intended audience for the comment was the public figure who apologized or if it was directed to other commenters on the site (general public). Table 3 displays the frequencies of comments for each category.

To answer RQ3, nonverbal and verbal apology behaviors from study one were examined in relation to the public comments regarding sincerity and forgiveness posted on YouTube in response to the apologies. Regarding nonverbal behaviors, there were no significant relationships among any of the nonverbal expressions of emotion and the commenters' perceptions of the public figure's sincerity/insincerity or forgiveness/no forgiveness.

There were, however, significant associations among verbal strategies and perceptions of sincerity and forgiveness. With respect to Benoit's typology, the single strategy of reducing offensiveness positively related to perceptions of insincerity ($r = .499$, $p = .008$). In addition, combining the strategies of reducing offensiveness and denial also positively related to perceptions of insincerity ($r = .427$, $p = .023$), as did combining reducing offensiveness and evasion ($r = .417$, $p = .027$). No other single strategy or combinations of Benoit's strategies significantly related to perceptions of sincerity/insincerity or forgiveness/no forgiveness. Schlenker and Darby's interpersonal apology components were unrelated (either individually or in various combinations) to perceptions of sincerity or forgiveness.

Public Figure's Persona/Character and Perceptions of Sincerity and Forgiveness

A majority of the comments posted in response to the videos related to people's thoughts about the public figure's character, both positive (e.g., "I've always loved her style") and

negative (e.g., "he's a complete jerk"). In fact, 62% of all conceptual units referred to commenters' beliefs about the public figure's character (See Table 4). Not surprisingly, these beliefs also related to commenters' perceptions of sincerity/insincerity. There was a significant correlation between making positive comments about the public figure's character and perceptions of apology sincerity ($r = .53$, $p = .004$). Moreover, making negative comments about the public figure's character was related to perceptions of apology insincerity ($r = .375$, $p = .050$). These associations are important to note, considering that perceptions of apology sincerity were related strongly to forgiveness ($r = .761$, $p < .001$), whereas perceptions of insincerity related to commenters withholding forgiveness (i.e., "no forgiveness", $r = .383$, $p = .040$).

Comment Audience: Public Figure or Other Commenters

The final analysis examined the intended audience of YouTube commenters. Of the total 1,565 audience units coded, the large majority of statements ($n = 1,045$, 66.8%) were directed to the general public or other commenters, while significantly fewer ($n = 333$; 21.2%) were to the public figure who apologized in the video. The intended audience was unclear in approximately 12% of the statements ($n = 118$).

Table 1.
Percentages of Nonverbal Emotions Expressed in YouTube Apologies

	Min %	Max %	*M*	*SD*
Sadness	.00	100.00	34.05	36.22
Anger	.00	50.00	11.30	17.51
Contempt	.00	64.71	11.58	16.21
Disgust	.00	.00	.00	.00
Fear	.00	100.00	11.79	20.52
Surprise	.00	60.00	4.28	13.64
No emotion	.00	100.00	26.98	30.43

Note: N = 32

Table 2.
Nonverbal and Verbal Behaviors in Public Figure Apologies

Behaviors	*n*	*%*
Nonverbal Expression		
Sadness	114	34
Anger	47	14
Contempt	43	13
Disgust	0	0
Fear	27	8
Surprise	13	4
No negative emotion	91	27
Total Nonverbal Codes	*335*	
Benoit's Image Repair Strategies		
Denial	16	4

Evasion	29	8
Reduce Offensiveness	77	21
Corrective Action	54	15
Mortification	189	52
Total Image Repair Codes	*365*	
Schlenker & Darby's Interpersonal Apology		
Admit fault	90	36
Admit damage	33	13
Express remorse	59	24
Ask for forgiveness	7	3
Offer compensation	60	24
Total Interpersonal Apology Codes	*249*	

Table 3.

Frequencies of YouTube Comments Relating to Verbal/Nonverbal Apology Content and Public Figures' Character

Comment Topic	*n*	*%*
Verbal content of apology		
Positive	59	3
Negative	154	8
Total Verbal Content Codes	*213*	
Nonverbal content of apology		
Positive	46	2
Negative	*65*	3
Total Nonverbal Content Codes	*111*	
Public figure's character		
Positive	493	25
Negative	725	37
Total Character Codes	*1218*	

Table 4.

Percentages of YouTube Comments Regarding Sincerity of Public Figure and Forgiveness

	Min %	Max %	*M*	*SD*
Apology Insincere	.00	31.0	10.20	9.0
Apology Sincere	.00	33.0	5.10	8.5
No Forgiveness	.00	38.0	3.68	9.3
Forgiveness	.00	30.0	4.40	8.3

Discussion

Two of the results are notable in that they point to how social media converges mass and interpersonal communication, enabling online public interaction about the apology. The majority of the comments (67%) were directed at the online audience and not the offender; and the majority of the comments (62%) related to the offender's character, with 37% of those comments being negative. Previous studies indicate that that people exposed to uncivil blog comments, even if they do not actively participate in the comments themselves, make judgments about the issue based on their own pre-existing values or an individual's level of support of that entity rather than on the information at hand (Alfonso & Suzanne, 2008; Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos, & Ladwig, 2014). Therefore, the negativity of the comments may be superseded by the previous relationship and familiarity that a person had with the public figure before the apology, and this pre-existing attitude may outweigh the effect of the apology. Public relations professionals can use this information to reiterate the importance to clients of pre-crisis involvement with publics in ways that could humanize them and create more positive perceptions of their character. Working with clients prior to a crisis in this way could be as important as the post-crisis response.

Reconsider Reducing Offensiveness

Strategies aimed at reducing offensiveness (alone and combined with denial or evasion) were associated to insincerity.   Offenders and their counselors need to re-consider the use of these strategies in light of their association with audience perception of insincerity.

Nonverbal Codes of Anger

There was a positive association between denial and reducing offensiveness and the nonverbal expression of anger. Yet mortification and statements of remorse were positively associated with sadness. In other words, when public figures were apologizing and expressing remorse, they looked sad – an anticipated emotion of an offender. However, fear, anger and contempt were all expressed in 25% or more of the apologies. Public relations practitioners should consider a comprehensive approach to media training to help clients better understand the connection between their verbal and nonverbal strategies.

Limitations

This study was limited because of the small number of apologies that met the criteria. Since more people are getting their news from online sources, the criteria that the apology be reported on both the top broadcast and top cable stations may have unfairly limited the number of apologies. Being able to code the nonverbal behaviors required video and, until recently, YouTube was one of the only social media platforms to support video. Today, there are other social media platforms that support video, including Facebook and Twitter.

There were very few women in the sample, which could speak to the larger societal issues of fewer women in positions of power.

Benoit's strategy "reduce offensiveness" was associated with audience perceptions of insincerity, but it also had the most sub-categories (6) within the strategy (bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attack accuser and compensation), which could have had some bearing on its significance.

There was no attempt to assess the guilt of the offenders, which could play a role in audience response (Coombs, Holladay, & Claeys, 2016).

Conclusion and Future Research

In considering his image repair theory, Benoit admitted, "... perceptions are more important than reality" (1997, p. 178) and "we must be aware of the salience of the negative act for the audience" (1995, p. 164). For an online audience, public comments are typically posted by a certain segment of the audience (e.g., those with knowledge of the public figure/organization/offense who are motivated to post online). In this study, there was no way to assess characteristics of the audience to examine its role in perception of sincerity and forgiveness. To build on this study, we plan to develop a study that will survey and collect information on audience members, and examine the relationships between the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of the public figure apologies, audience characteristics (demographic information/familiarity with figure/organization), and perceptions of sincerity and forgiveness.

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Looking Back, Looking Forward: 20 Years and More of Gender Theory for Public Relations Practice

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Abstract

A review essay, the paper presents the history, evolution, current movements and practical orientation in United States public relations gender research, 1985 to the present. Theoretical perspectives include human capital theory, organizational and social norms theory, and feminist theory. The authors recommend next gender research studies and propose professional and policy changes.

It was the dramatic influx of women entering the U.S. field of public relations in the 1980s that called attention to gender and made it an issue in public relations research. According to occupational sociologists Reskin and Roos (1990), public relations was one of the occupations in the 1970s to show a "disproportionate" increase in female workers, "during a decade in which their advancement into most male occupations was modest at best" (p. 6). Current estimates of the percentage of women practicing public relations in the United States range between 70 to 80 percent (Vardeman-Winter, 2013; Khazan, 2014). Other U.S. occupations that were made up predominantly of women had been branded stereotypically as "women's work" and salaries decreased in these fields, for example in teaching and nursing.

The gender imbalance and its impact on salary and professionalism sparked a move toward gender research by scholars in public relations who began by auditing the status and perceptions of white women and men working in public relations. From those early benchmark surveys a movement was born, one that challenged its own founding scholarship and changed the face of public relations research and practice.

This paper presents the history and current movements in U.S. public relations gender research, 1985 to the present. Gender research in the past has included reports on salary disparities, bias in advancement opportunities, encroachment, power, job satisfaction, sexual harassment, retention, and a glass ceiling. Theoretical work explained the transition from a majority male to a female intensive occupation and included human capital theory, gender segregation theory, and social norms theory. Current movements include post-feminist thought on gender and power, with 21st century scholars calling for intersectionality rather than binary concepts, recognizing individuals in terms of race, age, sexuality, religion, socio-economic status, and ability. Due to space limitations, this paper cannot comprehensively describe all the gender research published over the last three decades, but instead, we highlight key studies and moments in the progression of gender research that represent the time periods and the progress of work. The paper concludes by looking to public relations practice and how it can apply gender theory to organizational and public policy and professional initiatives that center participation, equity and social justice in the workplace.

Gender Defined

Dow and Wood (2006) differentiate between sex and gender referring to biological characteristics for the former and "culturally constructed meanings, expectations, constraints and prerogatives to the latter (p. xiii). Pompper and Jung (2013) defined gender as "a set of norms reproduced by social processes and replicated through communication" (p. 498). Gender studies incorporate understandings of LGBT (lesbian, gay, by-sexual, and transgender) identities, critique of feminine and masculine, and analysis of roles ascribed to males as well as females.

Gender is constituted via communication, and thus becomes a core element in public relations practice and identity as public relations professional. Rakow (1989) wrote about gender as praxis: "Gender is not something we are but something we do and believe. Our gendered identities are taken up and sustained through our interactions with others" (p. 289). Golombisky (2015) reinforced this position by defining gender as "performative," referring to "the mechanisms that enjoin people to live as women or men" (p. 391). She argued also that we should recognize the multiple intersectional identities that define gender, such as from the standpoint of race, class, and sexuality.

Gender becomes an issue in human endeavors when society ascribes specific traits on the basis of male/female that over time become fixed, such as "here is women's work and there is

men's work—and men's is better" (Bryant, 1984, p. 47). Organizations adopt these fixed meanings and subsequently define constraining gendered roles for workers. Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2000) asserted: "Not all women exhibit female characteristics or are feminine. Not all men act 'masculine,' and not all traits considered masculine are antithetical to feminism" (p. 54). We perform gender in a much more complex way than the socially learned categories proscribed.

Gender Analysis in Public Relations

Gender analysis in public relations historically derived from three theoretical traditions stemming from sociology and economics to help explain the disparities that were discovered in salary, job role, and hiring (Aldoory & Toth, 2002). Early researchers turned to premises based in human capital, gender segregation and social norms theories.

Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory suggests that capital, such as education, years of experience and professional development, allows individuals to perform and succeed in occupational settings. Gender differences in occupational success occurred because women followed less fruitful investments in education by choosing less valued undergraduate majors and professional experiences. Human capital theory helped explain the salary disparity that has plagued the public relations industry for most of its existence. The public relations field has a well-documented 30-year history of empirical findings showing that women make less than men (Dozier, Sha & Shen, 2012). In public relations in 2010, women earned 78 cents on the dollar earned by men (Sha & Dozier, 2011). When income was statistically adjusted for professional experience, the gendered pay gap was still 86 cents on the dollar. When income was further adjusted for enactment of manager and technician roles, women in public relations still earned only 87 cents on the dollar earned by men (Sha & Dozier, 2011). A few critics argued it was just a matter of time before women gained the necessary professional experience to achieve parity with men's salaries. However, over 30 years of research finds that the gender gap persists.

Salary has been an indicator in the past of an occupation's status. The higher the earnings in an occupation the higher its status in society. Early theory suggested that as women entered an occupation in significant numbers, they would drive down salary and status. However, research findings have not found that public relations men's' salaries have not been reduced to match their female counterparts. Instead, researchers Dozier, Sha, and Shen (2012) have found that women have lesser salaries because they are working in lower-paying specializations, and they have fewer years of professional experience because they more likely have career interruptions. Women may also receive lower salaries because they are prevented from gaining professional experience on the job. Workplace structures require sacrificing careers for family. Ultimately, though, authors stated that "women earn less simply because of their gender" (Dozier, Sha, & Shen, 2012).

Sex Segregation

Sex segregation explained that gender differences between women and men appeared when people entered occupations in different rates instead of entering all occupations at the same rates; thus, providing an oversupply of women in some fields and driving men to move on to other occupations with higher status and salaries. With men leaving certain occupations because of threats to salary and status, they opened more space for women to entering these occupations (Reskin & Roos, 1990). Previous demographers have theorized that women will continue to pour

into some occupations rather than all occupations in equal proportions. When women enter an occupation in increasing numbers, the field become rife with descriptions that reinforce gender disparity. Terms such as "pink collar" ghetto and "emotional labor" has defined public relations for decades now (Khazan, 2014). Khazan (2014) reported that female public relations specialists earn on average $55,705, even though their male counterparts made $71,449. The overall U.S. salary average for full-time female workers was $37,232, as reported by Khazan.

Social Norms

Organizational communication scholars have examined the organization as a site of gender division. Gender then is seen as an organizing principle of occupational identity, 'which in turn is a vital means of reproducing the division and hierarchy of labor (Ashcraft, 2006, p. 111). Early organizational communication research on gender differences at work considered leadership differences and dilemmas and barriers faced by women, such as glass ceilings and double-binds, also found in public relations gender scholarship. Ashcroft's (2006) summary shifted gender theorizing on organizations to the institutionalized nature of gender through communication or a meta-communication that reinforces and supplies preferred narratives about gender, power, and work relations (p. 103). Both men and women are complicit in reinforcing social norms in the workplace through communications that seeks to discipline those who do not perform expected social roles. For example, women will prefer to work for men; and they call out women as "Queen Bees" who are suspected of enacting a role to protect their power. In sum, workplaces are not gender free but reflect socially accepted gender identities and gender relations.

Organizational expectations mirrored social expectations in that women are assigned roles in organizations that reflected gender stereotypes, such as supporting roles as secretaries or administrative assistants, and thus were given fewer opportunities to advance to "stereotypically considered" male roles such as supervisors or managers. Women are also faced with balancing work and a continued, disproportionate share of responsibilities for housework, childcare, and eldercare so that they appear to be less committed to their work or are resented for their inability to be at the workplace within traditional workplace hours and locations.

Gender Theory in Public Relations

Looking Back to the Foundational Studies

Early authors on gender and public relations sought to counter fears of loss of salary and status by conducting studies, underwritten by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). This body of research provided the benchmark data for public relations practitioners to consider, and for the first time created a critical mass of knowledge about how gender was a discriminating force in the public relations profession. The most publicized studies that found evidence for gender differences in professional practice included *The Velvet Ghetto* (Cline et al, 1986), *Beyond the Velvet Ghetto* (Toth & Cline, 1989); a special issue of *Public Relations Review* (Grunig, 1988) on women in public relations; and *Under the Glass Ceiling* (Wright, Grunig, Springston, & Toth, 1991). There were several follow up surveys of Public Relations Society of America members on gender issues, which paved the way for future examinations of a set of professional variables, that of salary, job satisfaction, role assignment and promotion to management positions (Serini, Toth, Wright, & Emig, 1987; Serini, Toth, Wright, & Emig, 1998a; Serini, Toth, Wright, & Emig, 1998b; Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig, 1998).

Evolution of Gender Research
Professional Issues of Concern

Much of the earlier work on gender continued into the 1990s and early 2000s by the same scholars as well as others who focused on the professional issues of salary, glass ceiling, and job satisfaction. In general, research continued to define gender by sex and findings supported earlier results delineating sexism and disparities. For example, Werder and Holtzhausen (2011) conducted a study of the influence of communication management practices and organizational structures on public relations practitioners by gender. They found that female practitioners were more likely to use group decision-making than male practitioners. Male practitioners were more likely to use risk acceptance decision-making than female practitioners (p. 134). Authors concluded that women were more suited to achieving consensus than men (p. 139). Aldoory, Reber, Berger and Toth (2008) examined how public relations practitioners talked about their efforts to influence organizational decisions. Authors identified gender differences in use of influence tactics and perceptions of constraints (p. 735). For example, males were more likely than females to confront, combat and challenge management, while females were more likely to present, suggest or share alternative solutions (p. 744).

One notable publication during this time was a book devoted to gender in public relations, which summarized the work in the field up to that point. *Women in Public Relations: How Gender Influences Practice* by Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001) described a range of topics, including salary disparities, bias in advancement to managerial positions, encroachment, power, job satisfaction, sexual harassment, retention, and role limitations. Authors introduced feminist liberal, socialist/Marxist, and radical feminist theories by which to consider solutions.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theories began to be developed by junior scholars who wished to critique the power relations of not only the profession of public relations but also the norms in scholarship that have guided gender research itself. This group of articles analyzed everyday practices of both men and women in the field, and argued for a deconstruction of the binaries set up by earlier scholars of male/female, masculine/feminine. It also introduced discourse on race, ethnicity and class to broaden debates about what defined gender in public relations (Aldoory, 2009, pp. 112-3).

One of the founding feminist articles in the field was Hon's (1995) article that described streams of feminist theory that inform public relations scholarship. Hon described liberal and radical feminist theory and what each looks like in public relations. Liberal feminism theory sought to examine how gender issues can be acknowledged and addressed within institutional workplaces. Liberal feminist strategies identified by Hon reflected buying in and working the system. Much of the research on gender and public relations continues to be liberal as seen in the publication of research showing gender disparities in salary, advancement bias and examining work place issues such as work-life integration for the purposes of achieving gender equality. Radical feminist theory exposed issues of gender oppression for the purpose of changing institutions. In her research, Hon found radical feminist strategies prescribing changes in society, organizations, and public relations. Participants in her study suggested changes in public relations by putting public relations education into business schools.

Another representative article was Grunig's (2006), which sought to express gender and public relations as phases in feminist research, based on analysis of published literature in the field. The phases were male scholarship; compensatory; bifocal, (the most frequent approach

comparing women and men); feminist; and multi-focal. The male scholarship phase included research lacking any discussion of gender, but assuming that the male experience was universal. The compensatory phase included research attempting to compensate for the lack of women and included descriptions of women's success stories or outstanding women. Bifocal research conceptualized men and women as separate but equal. These have been comparative studies that suggest that women and men have different ways of knowing and doing. Grunig's feminist phase conceptualized women's experiences as being valued for themselves. Feminist research provided a non-comparative approach. Finally, the multifocal phase represented a reconceptualization of the human experience as a continuum rather than only between the two masculine and the feminine categories.

Feminist research in public relations countered former gender research by asking readers to consider how public relations practitioners themselves reinforced gendered beliefs in the workplace. Rakow and Nastasia (2008), for example, focused concerns on "public relations in the lives of women." They argued that research should focus on the consequences of institutional discourses, including public relations, on women and other outsiders created by public relations practitioners, many of whom are women. Rakow and Nastasia asked the question about whether women in public relations are reinforcing or in some ways modifying the entrenched gender meanings of society (p. 272). Aldoory (2009) also called attention to how organizational practices created gendered norms that affect how men and women public relations practitioners produce the products of public relations. She asked whether organizational stereotypes of gendered roles and beliefs might be reinforced in the communication vehicles and messages created and distributed by men and women public relations practitioners.

Race, Class and Power

During this time, a handful of scholars critiqued the white status quo within gender theory and argued for race theory and diversity to become centralized in gender discourse for the field. For example, in Aldoory's (2005) essay on power and gender, she centered diversity and inclusiveness as necessary in research in the field and called attention to the empirical research that reinforced gender as 'female' and white. Pompper (2005) introduced critical race theory (CRT) to gender studies as a means of revealing "harmful fictions" that mask institutions' subversion of race equality, ensure White privilege, and normalize or naturalize racism in American society" (Pompper, 2005, p. 144). Pompper (2005, 2007, 2012) has examined experiences of minority women in public relations and their perceptions of workplace forces that challenge their employment.

Looking Forward: Current Movements in Gender Theory

The research on gender has grown and evolved in public relations. Place and Vardeman-Winter (2015) found 70 academic and trade articles in public relations and strategic communication published between 2005 and 2015 that focused on the state of women practitioners in public relations. As part of their comprehensive literature review conducted for the Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver Center for the Advancement of Women in Communication, they found that: women comprise about two-thirds of the practitioners in the field; women make less than men, particularly when holding upper management positions; women have less years of experience on average than men, illustrating parental leave still affects women's careers more than it does men's; women occupy about 20% of senior leadership positions; and women of color and LGBT practitioners are still essentially ignored in the research and trade literature and

data on their experiences is limited. Trends in the research they found included life work balance, structural and discursive power, diversity, and global feminization. Other areas of research in recent years have called for examinations of multiple genders and intersectionality. Some of this work is highlighted below.

Multiple Genders

Research in public relations has only recently begun to expand conceptualizations of gender that go beyond the feminine/woman. Today's gender research has included theorizing about gender-variant identities, LGBT practitioners, and cisgender, heterosexual male experiences. For example, Pompper and Jung (2013) studied male perceptions in their study and found that males who perceived a feminized field agreed with the statement that "PR is becoming an 'old girls club' and indicated that they modified their behavior in response to the gender trend (p. 502). Males expressed attacks on their masculinity such as "exclusion, avoidance, lack of confidence/trust and gender stereotypes asserted by women."

Particularly groundbreaking is Tindall and Waters' (2012) edited volume of work relating experiences of LGBT practitioners. Using queer theory, research is presented that presents the challenges faced by the LGBT professional and the impact of campaigns and other public relations subsidies on LGBT communities. Editor Tindall wrote in the preface, "This volume is our conversation starter, and our intent is to push the discussion of LGBT issues in strategic communication—at the practitioner, publics, and campaigns development levels—out of the margin and into the center" (p. 3).

Intersectionality

While the literature in the early 2000s began to understand gender as diverse, racialized and politicized, it wasn't until recently that feminist researchers expressly applied intersectionality in ways that the public relations practice could find useful. Golombisky (2015) identified the dearth of scholarship to define women through intersectionality or complex standpoints made up of more than gender. Race, class, education, "or smaller social spaces," bring gender theory to the point beyond "the paradoxes of binary difference" (p. 389).

Scholars who study gender and public relations now often acknowledge the white and heterosexual women's bias in their research. Gallicano, Curtin and Matthews (2012), in their study of millennials in the public relations workplace, found that ethnic minorities in public relations, significantly more so than their Caucasian colleagues, sense that their employers are not committed to them. These practitioners perceived their employers to not want to foster relationships with them and not form appropriate bonds with them, compared to white peers (pp. 230-231).

Global Social Justice

Non-U.S. researchers find evidence of feminization and the need for gender theory in practice in places like Germany, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Russia (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2015). Australian authors Daymon and Demetrious (2014) framed gender and public relations within critical theory for their edited volume, *Gender and Public Relations: Critical Perspectives on Voice, Image and Identity*. Their book sought to "give voice to the communicative activities and campaigns, often by marginal groups, around gendered issues that are transforming people's lives" (p. 12). More recently, other researchers from Australia similarly used a critical-feminist perspective to examine what they labeled as "provocations, transgressions and resistance" in the

public relations field (Fitch, James, & Motion, 2016, p. 279). Golombisky (2015) pushed for a commitment to feminist public relations theory that pursues social justice goals. She called for different agendas: those for transnational feminism, marginalized peoples, and womanist tactics. Studies of women practitioners in Eastern, Middle-Eastern and third world countries are arriving in public relations literature. She called for a transnational feminism that critiques "neoliberal endorsement of globalized capitalism, free markets, and individual choice as the means for all people to achieve wealth, health and happiness to the extent that failure to do so is the fault of individuals not systemic injustice or exploitation" (p. 405). She instructed "third space feminism" to reveal marginalized groups such as mixed-race women in borderlands, migrants, and diasporic gaps in describing the human experience. Womanist tactics are coalition building to "get things done" (p. 407), such as "self-care, harmonizing and coordinating, dialogue, mutual aid, self-help, African models of mothering as love and leadership, and physical and spiritual healing" (p. 407).

Application to Research and Practice

In summary, scholars who have studied gender and public relations over the last three decades have provided a lens for the practice to reveal inequities based on gender identity and social constructions that surround males and females. Gender and power are reinforced through communication and direct organizational and individual behavior. Post-feminist and critical researchers today have sought to examine, critique and deconstruct norms, theories and human experience in order to define the public relations workplace as much more complex, fragmented and culturally nuanced. Suggestions can be made for future research and practice that benefit from the body of knowledge in gender theory in public relations.

Research

1. Benchmarking studies that measure inequities in order to dispel the myth that equity now exists and that there are no longer gender problems in the profession. Continually examining what jobs and roles women and men want and have, what job satisfaction looks like, and what salary levels have come to are important for purposes of trends analysis and comparisons over decades of time.

2. Other factors to measure in future research that have up to this point been virtually ignored in gender research include: client perceptions of male/female public relations practitioners and relationships; networking dynamics by gender and the role of interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2015).

3. Case studies that reveal structures, policies and barriers to gender equity and gender plurality. Multiple case studies would benefit the field by comparing different types of public relations practice, different organizations, and different genders enacting professional roles. Global, comparative case studies of gender would offer perspective on cultural, political and national factors.

4. Participatory action methodology that engages public relations workers in the studies and that centralizes their voice in the design, implementation and analysis of the research. By separating researcher from practitioner, the findings from research often go unnoticed in the profession. Instead, researchers can create avenues of engagement for each public relations practitioners.

Professional and Policy Change

1. Creating an online "toolshed" that offers resources – data, surveys and measures, literature, techniques for building inclusive work space, understanding implicit bias, and negotiation tactics

2. Mentoring by males in leadership positions to junior practitioners on their best negotiation tactics, professional development advice

3. Professional associations in public relations taking the lead in gender justice policy development and support. Topics to address through white papers, workshops and webinars include: paternity and maternity leave, salary equity and transparent negotiation procedures, use of gender pronouns, and sexual misconduct.

Public relations as an organizational practice to build relationships to achieve organizational goals received first gender examinations because of the influx of women into an occupation and threatening its status and salaries. But, gender researchers have rightly identified the responsibilities of organizations and their public relations practitioners to go beyond a view of the occupation and its organizational functions to how and in what ways their enactment of gendered roles contributes, or not, to social justice in a global society.

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Revisiting the Best Practices in Risk and Crisis Communication: A Multicase Analysis

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Abstract
This study extends the research on best practices in risk and crisis communication by synthesizing the contributions from research thus far and assessing the applicability of the best practices framework in a multi-case analysis. Specifically, we summarize the research on best practices in risk and crisis communication over the last decade and analyze five environmental contamination crises through government documents, media accounts, and in-depth interviews to identify communication challenges and ethical imperatives that necessitate modifications to the original list and descriptions. We conclude with an updated framework of best practices in risk and crisis communication.

In 2006, the *Journal of Applied Communication Research* published a special issue on *Best Practices in Risk and Crisis Communication.* Based on an extensive synthesis of literature, a theoretical framework of best practices in risk and crisis communication was proposed, followed by in-depth discussions of organizational crisis planning and response. Respected scholars contributed their perspectives to the conversation about theories on effective strategies for risk and crisis communication. Seeger (2006) proposed the ten practices list while other risk and crisis communication scholars (Heath, 2006; Reynolds, 2006; Ropeik, 2006; Sandman, 2006) provided critiques of Seeger's summary. To date, Seeger's (2006) article is the most read article in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research* and the second most cited article ever in the journal (Taylor & Francis, 2016).

Additional research studies (Janoske, Liu, & Madden, 2013; Sellnow, Ulmer, Seeger, & Littlefield, 2009; Sellnow & Vidoloff, 2009; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007; Veil & Husted, 2012; Veil & Sellnow, 2008; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011) have since applied, analyzed, validated, and expanded the best practices in a variety of crisis contexts. This study extends the research on best practices in risk and crisis communication by synthesizing the contributions from research thus far and assessing the applicability of the best practices framework in a multi-case analysis. Specifically, we summarize the research on best practices in risk and crisis communication over the last decade and analyze five environmental contamination crises through government documents, media accounts, and in-depth interviews to identify communication challenges and ethical imperatives that necessitate modifications to the original list. We conclude with an updated framework of best practices in risk and crisis communication.

Best Practices in Risk and Crisis Communication

Although delineated risk and crisis communication recommendations may at first glance "appear to be common-sense," in reality "best practices are often counter-intuitive…when the pressure to present accurate, timely information is high, tendencies to guard information, over-reassure the public, and deny responsibility often increase" (Venette, 2006, p. 230). Thus, following the best practices framework requires strong, ethical organizational leadership. Paramount for an effective organizational response are trust and credibility (Reynolds, 2006); "not only must organizations communicate openly and honestly, they must also do it speedily enough to satisfy a population savvy in gathering information but apt to respond emotionally in crisis decision making" (p. 251). The best practices "are designed to assist organizations and agencies in developing crisis communication plans for responding" to risk and crisis events (Sellnow & Vidoloff, 2009, p. 40). The best practices also have been successful in uncovering particular mishaps that may have occurred over time. Comparing the strategies an organization actually used with the defined best practices during a post-crisis analysis can help managers and understand problematic areas in existing crisis communication strategies and plans.

The best practices framework (Seeger, 2006) most closely follows the three-stage model of crisis (pre-crisis, crisis, post-crisis) by serving as a guide to plan ahead for crisis, communicate responsibly in the acute phase of the crisis, and minimize harm in facilitating post-crisis response. Nine of the best practices fit within this pre-crisis, crisis, post-crisis model; however, according to Seeger (2006), the practice of evaluating and updating crisis plans should be ongoing throughout the crisis cycle. In 2009, Sellnow and Vidoloff proposed an eleventh best practice that should also be ongoing throughout the crisis cycle: acknowledge and account for cultural differences.

Continuously evaluate and update crisis plans

Seeger (2006) highlights this ongoing practice as process approaches and policy development from pre-crisis planning and public education through communicating lessons learned and rebuilding relationships post-crisis. He argues "communication should not merely be involved in communicating decisions about risk and crisis after they have been made. Rather, risk and crisis communication is most effective when it is part of the decision process itself" (p. 236). Veil et al. (2011) agree "effective policy is ongoing" (p. 111). Communication should not be viewed as the proverbial band aide for after a crisis, nor should a crisis communication plan simply sit on a shelf collecting dust. Janoske et al. (2013) contend that risk and crisis communication should be sold as an everyday practice and must address time and budget constraints. They suggest that incorporating redundancies and taking an "all hazards" approach is essential for adapting to complex situations.

Plan ahead for a prompt response

Crises are complex and often present unpredictable communication exigencies. In the pre-event planning stage, agencies and organizations must assess potential risks and harms first to the public (Coombs, 2007) and then to the organization. Early planning for potential crises allows organizations to identify specific risk areas. The plan can serve as a constant reminder to the organization of the potential for risk; trigger points within the plan should alert staff to specific warning signs in the hope of preventing a crisis (Seeger, 2006). Ultimately, crisis communication planning enables a prompt response should a crisis actually occur. This is important as timely, detailed, and relevant information is helpful in reducing stakeholder anxiety and uncertainty (Seeger, 2006). Specifically, a crisis plan should include "the who, what, where, and when of the response" (Veil & Husted, 2012, p. 3), outlining specific guidelines for organizational members to follow. Finally, a crisis plan should take a multi-disciplinary approach and consider the various stakeholders that might be affected (Heath, 2006).

Establish a crisis communication network with credible sources

Due to the complex nature of contemporary crises, organizations cannot always tackle these problems alone (Reynolds, 2006) but must engage key media outlets, stakeholders, and members of the public prior to an actual crisis in order that, in the event of a crisis, trust and collaboration already exists across the network. Strong ties and established communication lines with regulatory agencies and the media will facilitate the dissemination of crisis-relevant information quickly to the public (Sellnow & Vidoloff, 2009). While initial interactions between key partners can be accomplished during the pre-event planning stage, it is important to invest time and energy in maintaining and fostering these relationships (Seeger, 2006). Both case studies and the expert panel's experience validated the proposition that establishing these strategic relationships prior to a crisis is important for carrying out effective response messages (Seeger, 2006). Strategic networks should include internal members *at all levels* of the organization(s) involved as well as partnering agencies and the media (Veil & Husted, 2012). This extensive network will serve as engaged and reliable resources in the wake of a crisis.

Accept uncertainty and ambiguity

Crisis will likely yield some amount of ambiguity and uncertainty (Seeger, 2006; Ulmer, et al., 2007). In response, individuals will seek information to reduce their uncertainty. Waiting until all information has been gathered and reported can put stakeholders and affected

organizations in danger as other, potentially less reliable, sources fill the information void (Veil et al., 2011). However, a falsely reassuring statement is also problematic as it can negatively impact stakeholders by minimizing concern or vigilance; additionally, it can result in organizations losing credibility and public trust. Open communication that describes the situation and its lack of clarity is not only acceptable, but also recommended. Accepting uncertainty and ambiguity encourages the release of small, cautiously stated, and truthful statements. Communicating first, even if all information is not yet known, will keep stakeholders returning for updated information. Not communicating allows others to become the primary information source. Researchers contend organizations should share with the public "what the organization knows, admit what they do not know, and explain what they are doing to gather additional information" (Sellnow & Vidoloff, 2009, p. 41).

Form partnerships with the public
During crises, organizations need strong partnerships with the public and other key organizations (Nathan & Mitroff, 1991); the most successful of these partnerships are often formed prior to the crisis (Seeger 2006). In fact, in most cases, an organization has the responsibility to share information with the public not just during, but also before and after a crisis. Organizations not fulfilling this obligation may encounter an untrusting and uncooperative public during an actual crisis event. According to Heath (2006), failing to engage the public tarnishes relationships and the image of the organization. Seeger (2006) suggests that the public can "serve as a resource, rather than a burden, in risk and crisis management" (p. 238). Thanks to social media and mobile technology, people in the geographic space of a disaster can serve as eyewitnesses and, therefore, prove to be valuable sources of information about crisis events (Veil et al., 2011). Janoske et al. (2013) contend "Engaging with local community leaders facilitates building trust with target populations" (p. 232).

Listen to the public's concerns and understand the audience
Covello and Allen's (1988) *Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication* suggest there is a difference between partnering with the public and listening to public concerns. In forming public partnerships, organizations recognize the inclusion of the public in the decision making process, but organizations must also acknowledge the public's concerns, seriously consider their apprehensions, and communicate accordingly. Listening to the concerns of the public helps organizations to embrace the public partnership (Seeger, 2006) and may help to frame future actions. As noted by Seeger (2006), "Whether accurate or not, the public's perception is its reality. If the public believes a risk exists, it can be expected to act according to that belief. If the public believes that a crisis is severe, it is also important to acknowledge this belief and respond accordingly" (p. 239). Thus, organizations must legitimate public concern (Sellnow & Vidoloff, 2009). This will help to build the credibility and trustworthiness of the organization, which is important during a crisis (Reynolds, 2006). Moreover, organizations should acknowledge the role of both hazard (true danger of the crisis) and outrage (concern of the public) among the populace in order to design communication strategies that will diminish further chaos (Sandman, 1993; Sandman, 2006). Sandman (1993) claims that unfortunately, "the public often misperceives the hazard. The experts often misperceive the outrage. But the overarching problem is that the public cares too little about the hazard and the experts care too little about the outrage" (p. 8). Consistent monitoring of public outrage and public perceptions of extant risks, as well as on-going scrutiny of actual hazards, is crucial to effective crisis communication.

Communicate with honesty, candor, and openness

Honesty is an important best practice, although competing views exist in regards to how much or how little candor should be used in crisis management. Sellnow and Vidoloff (2009) advise against, "responding with answers such as 'no comment' or avoiding any interaction with the public or press" because such behavior "reveals a cavalier attitude and implies guilt" (p. 41). Crisis scholars argue that honest communication helps to foster trust and create credibility for the organization during a crisis (Seeger, 2006). However, crisis communicators may not always know all of the details of the case initially and may have to communicate ambiguous information out of necessity (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). As organizational leaders become more intimately familiar with the details of the crisis, ambiguity is no longer recommended because equivocality is of little use to stakeholders (Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997). Openness about particular risks may offer mutual responsibility in managing the risk. In addition, organizations should use candor, in expressing the entire truth, even if the information reflects negative information about the organization. Being dishonest with stakeholders is likely to eventually backfire. Therefore, organizations should embrace these three approaches (honesty, candor, openness) in building relationships with the public.

Meet the needs of the media and remain accessible

Media accessibility is crucial and refusal to cooperate with the media ultimately harms both the organization and the public. Members of the public will eventually hear about the crisis through a media outlet (Veil & Husted, 2012). Crisis communication scholars argue that organizations should view the media as partners not as adversaries (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007; Veil & Ojeda, 2010) and include the media in pre-event planning and relationship building (Janoske et al., 2013). Organizations must be accessible to the media and work together before, during and after the crisis (Heath, 2006). Providing information to the media will decrease the likelihood of less credible information being shared (Veil & Ojeda, 2010). Heath (2006) actually advocates for an additional best practices related to both being accessible to the media and communicating with candor. He suggests organizations must be "committed and able to deliver on the promise to be the first and best source of information" and organizations cannot "give reporters an extra incentive to doubt your version and seek a better version of the truth elsewhere" (p. 247).

Communicate with compassion, concern, and empathy

Leaders of affected organizations should convey empathy to the general public for any anguish or anxiety caused by the crisis (Sellnow & Vidoloff, 2009). Although crisis communicators should take great care to ensure that they are not overly reassuring, communicators should strive to convey sincere empathy. An expert panel found that members of the public react positively to organizations that communicate concern (Seeger, 2006). Though communicating emotion may be an instinctual response for many, there are still facets of government and business communities where conveying emotion is not an immediate reaction (Heath, 2006). When organizations recognize stakeholder emotions and respond empathetically, there will be less emotional harm to stakeholders and reputational harm to the organization (Veil & Husted, 2012).

Provide suggestions for self-protection

Organizations should create messages that offer specific information on how people can reduce harm to themselves during a crisis (Seeger, 2006). Messages for self-protection should provide stakeholders with information and clear directions for protecting themselves and loved ones from inherent dangers in a crisis (Sellnow, Sellnow, Lane, & Littlefield, 2012). Recommendations include specific characteristics, such as checklists of what actions to take. These messages function to reduce feelings of helplessness and guide the public to safe action. In crisis situations, stakeholder groups seek and respond differently to information than they would during a non-crisis event (Reynolds, 2006). When audiences believe they have insufficient information about a topic, they tend to move towards a heuristic, or emotion-based, method of processing (Averbeck, Jones, & Robertson, 2011). Therefore, messages must be very clear and carefully constructed to avoid further confusion. In their panel interview research on the best practices, Janoske et al. (2013) found that experts suggested an emphasis on fear is needed to "overcome public's apathy about risk/crisis perception" (p. 233). Heath (2006) argues that "in the face of fear, people respond better if they have self-efficacy and believe in the potentially offending organization's efficacy to turn fear into dread" (p. 247).

Acknowledge and incorporate cultural differences

Scholars have highlighted that different stakeholders need different messages (Spence, Lachlan, & Griffin, 2007; Veil & Husted, 2012), and individuals from varying cultural backgrounds will seek information differently (Spence et al., 2007). McComas (2010) suggests that the message source should be representative of the target population and from communities or organizations that already have the population's trust and support. Furthermore, the presence of technology differs among stakeholder groups and needs to be accounted for in crisis planning (Veil et al., 2011). Messages must be sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences and should be broadcast on channels that are easily accessible (Sellnow & Vidoloff, 2009). Finally, organizational members need to recognize that how they communicate within the organization is not the same as how the public communicates. The technical language used by organizations must be adapted for risk messages in order to reach the affected public.

The best practices were developed to serve as guidelines for risk and crisis communication planning and response. Covello and Allen's (1988) original Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication were expanded to eleven best practices (Seeger, 2006; Sellnow & Vidoloff, 2009) to separate plan development and ongoing plan evaluation and updating into two different recommendations and add guidelines for accepting uncertainty, providing messages for self-protection, and acknowledging and accounting for cultural differences. However, best practices can also be used as an assessment tool to determine what strategies worked and what areas need improvement following a crisis event. In the following sections, five individual cases are analyzed according to the best practices to determine lessons learned. But, first, the methodological procedures used to collect and analyze data in the cases are outlined.

Case Study Methodology

The purpose of case study research is to investigate a "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2002, p. 13). It is "an explication of the problem, a thorough description of the context or setting and the processes observed, a discussion of important elements, and finally, 'lessons to be learned'" (Creswell, 1998, p. 221). Case study research analyzes a decision or set of decisions, including why and how strategies were implemented and with what result

(Schramm, 1971). Case study research examines a broad range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues (Yin, 2003) and should be conducted in a comprehensive applied manner with the intent of translating the work into practical recommendations (Yin, 2002).

A case study may focus on a single case or multiple cases (Arneson & Query, 2001) to explore a "bounded system" (Stake, 1994, p. 236) through "detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in content" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Through a process of triangulation, case studies use multiple data points or evidence to develop converging lines of inquiry to answer questions within an interdependent system (Yin, 2003). In this study, media coverage of each of the five contamination events was first examined to identify the primary communicators of official information. Additional data points included government reports, agency and advocate websites and press releases, and, when possible, interviews with subject matter experts involved in the communication decisions before, during, and after the contamination event. Each case was examined for adherence to the best practices in risk and crisis communication to determine lessons learned from the success or failure of the strategies enacted by the primary communicators in the contamination events.

Case Descriptions

Canadian Pacific Railway derailment. On January 18, 2002 a Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) train derailed in Minot, North Dakota, releasing an estimated 290,000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia (Nicholson, 2003), killing one person, injuring hundreds more, and displacing thousands of evacuated residents (AP Canadian, 2002; Leiser, 2003). A glitch in the Emergency Alert System and an unattended emergency broadcast station resulted in no official alert to the public for several hours (Nicholson, 2003).

Post Katrina travel trailers. After Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of the Mississippi and Louisiana coastlines in late August 2005, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provided temporary housing to thousands of displaced residents, with approximately 143,600 households provided travel trailers (Sobel & Leeson, 2006). In April 2006 the Sierra Club conducted air quality tests of FEMA trailers and found elevated formaldehyde levels (Brunker, 2006). The Center for Disease Control and Preventions (CDC)'s tests, released in 2008, revealed that the "mean formaldehyde levels are four (4) to 10 times that of traditional homes" and recommended FEMA remove residents from the trailers (Chadwick, 2008, p. 3). In February 2012 the final FEMA trailer was removed from the gulf coast (Muskal, 2012).

Tar Creek Superfund Site. In 1979, mine water containing concentrated metals began to discharge to the surface, flooding the Tar Creek, Okla. area with lead, zinc and cadmium (Parker, 2011; Neuberger et al., 2009). In 1983, Tar Creek was added to the Superfund National Priorities List and the Environmental Protection Agency began monitoring the area. In 1993 a study indicated that 35% of children tested in the area had elevated blood lead levels (ATSDR, 2004). The EPA began cleanup of approximately 1,700 residential yards and plugged 83 toxic wells (EPA, 2007a, 2007b). The LEAD Agency continues to partner with a local hospital and Harvard University to study the effects of lead on local children (Jim, 2013).

BP oil spill. On April 20, 2010, an explosion occurred on BP's Deep Water Horizon rig in the Gulf of Mexico that resulted 11 deaths, 17 serious injuries, and one of the worst environmental disasters in the history of the United States. An estimated 184 million barrels of oil leaked into the Gulf before BP was able to cap the well permanently on September 19, 2010 (BBC, 2010b). The final report indicated that while Halliburton and Transocean contributed to the disaster, BP was ultimately responsible (BOEMRE, 2011). In 2015, BP agreed to an

additional $18.7 billion in environmental fines and damages on top of the original $43.8 billion set aside for criminal and civil charges (Wade & Hays, 2015).

   TVA Coal Ash Spill. On December 22, 2008, an earthen dike, which contained five decades of coal fly ash, failed at the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Kingston Fossil Plant in Roane County, Tennessee. The spill released 5.4 million cubic yards of sludge into the Emory River and onto nearly 300 acres of surrounding property (Fausset, 2008). There were no physical injuries but the spill destroyed three homes, damaged 42 other properties, ruptured a major gas line, knocked down power lines, blocked roads, and displaced several families. (CBS News, 2008). An October, 2008, inspection of the dike found faulty walls, though the report was not finalized until February, 2009, two months after the spill (Marcum, 2011).

Analysis

   Veil and Husted (2012) suggest that the value in case studies are in the lessons learned. All of the best practices previously outlined by Seeger (2006) and Sellnow and Vidoloff (2009) were identified in the study. The lessons learned in the analysis suggest modifications to the best practices list and descriptions of specific practices.

   First, and foremost, this study found that the safety and wellbeing of the people affected must be the primary concern. All five of the cases examined were environmental contamination cases. However, the health, safety, and/or livelihoods of local community members were also in jeopardy in all five cases. And, while we agree that a complete and accurate account of an environmental contamination cleanup is important, protecting the wellbeing of the community affected is an ethical imperative. Responsible communicators should consider how stakeholders are being negatively affected and craft statements and plans to limit the negative effects. In most cases statements of concern for those harmed or displaced along with plans to help or compensate those affected were not provided for weeks, months, or even years after statements about the size, scope, and cost to clean up the contamination were delivered.

   For example, in the case of the FEMA travel trailers, tests showed as early as 2006 that the trailers had elevated formaldehyde levels. However, FEMA waited until CDC tests confirmed the results and determined the maximum amount of formaldehyde considered safe before removing residents from the trailers – exposing individuals to chemical fumes that caused chronic respiratory illness for an additional two years. What should be seen as an ethical imperative – to *prioritize the safety and wellbeing of the public* – clearly needs to be spelled out for organizations trying to protect their reputations, budgets, and/or bottom lines.

   Even more, we argue that an organization or entity that has access to information that could protect the health and wellbeing of a public, regardless of responsibility for causing the hazard, is ethically bound to communicate that information along with instructions for self-protection through media accessible to those affected. FEMA did not build the formaldehyde-infested trailers. But, FEMA had access to evidence that the public's health and wellbeing were being harmed. And yet, the agency hesitated in communicating that information because they determined that health risk warnings were not within their realm of authority. We maintain that any organization that has knowledge of a harmful hazard has both the authority and the ethical obligation to communicate warnings to protect the public. Collaborating with credible sources from the organization's network will bolster the protective messages.

   Second, this study adds to the explanation of the best practice to *communicate with compassion* the recognition that when vulnerable publics, particularly children, are affected, expectations intensify for increased concern and expedient action. The EPA listed Tar Creek to

its National Priorities List in 1983 but did not prioritize the cleanup of the site until ten years later when area children were found to have elevated blood-lead levels. The anger and volume of accusations leveled at the EPA and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) were intensified by the emotional response to the finding that local children would have life-long learning disabilities caused by continued exposure to lead contaminants. This study suggests that when risks and crises affect children, the outrage over the hazard increases exponentially.

Third, this study provides evidence that conceptually the best practices should be separated from the three-phase crisis model. In Seeger's (2006) original essay, he stressed the importance of ongoing process approaches. However, the alignment of the best practices with the three-phase model to outline strategic planning, proactive strategies, and strategic response in subsequent studies oversimplified the responsibilities of risk and crisis communicators. Each best practice must be continuously applied throughout the crisis cycle. For example, the best practice to provide instructions for self-protection (messages of self-efficacy) should be ongoing and not just part of a strategic response.

The analysis of the CPR train derailment provides a unique insight because of the nearly total communication breakdown that occurred immediately after the spill. A technical failure and poor coordination prevented instructions on how to limit exposure to the anhydrous ammonia cloud (such as going inside, turning off the furnace, blocking windows and doors, and turning on water faucets to dissipate the gas) from reaching residents in time to reduce harm. We suggest that those instructional messages could also have been provided before the crisis. The Local Emergency Planning Committee in collaboration with the City of Minot, Ward County, and CPR should have conducted a commodity study and communicated that information, along with instructions for self-protection if a spill were to occur in the community. Keep in mind, conducting a study and posting guidelines to a website is not the same as communicating. A thorough communication plan regarding localized risks and strategies for responding to those risks must be continuous and incorporate the other best practices of partnering with the public, being open and honest, listening to public concern and understanding the audience, incorporating cultural differences, collaborating with credible sources, and meeting the needs of the media.

An implication of this lesson is that organizations that house hazardous materials should be communicating with area residents how to recognize a hazardous situation (such as a rotten egg smell in the event of a gas leak), how to respond to the situation (such as shelter in place instructions or evacuation procedures), and what the organization is doing to protect the public (such as working with local emergency responders to exercise and test emergency response plans). We suggest this forthright communication with the local community and planning with emergency responders, in addition to potentially saving lives, demonstrates care for the community and will increase trust in the organization adding to the reservoir of goodwill the organization will need in case an incident does occur.

A fourth lesson from this multi-case analysis is that, in the throes of crisis, organizations should refrain from communicating exact figures. Rather than adding this as an additional best practice, we suggest that this lesson falls under *accepting uncertainty and ambiguity*. Both BP and TVA fell into the trap of providing very specific estimates of the extent of their respective contaminations. In both cases they were wrong, which hurt their credibility and made it seem like they were purposefully trying to mislead the public. Instead, we suggest that organizations should communicate that the figures in question are unknown rather than offering a potentially inaccurate figure. This is not a recommendation for suppressing information, but rather to

communicate only what is definitively known and to explain how additional information will be gathered. We suggest a modification to the best practice: *accept uncertainty; do not speculate.*

A fifth and final lesson derived from this study that adds to the best practices framework is that organizations should *complete and communicate recovery efforts.* In the TVA coal ash spill, the media continued to question the commitment of the company to recovery efforts. The general manager indicated in a personal interview that while TVA worked to rebuild relationships and rebuild the land, she did not feel that was something about which you should write press releases (personal communication, April 25, 2012). Unfortunately, TVA's decision to not publicize many of their response efforts resulted in continued distrust of the company in the broader community. In BP's case, lack of follow-through after previous crises at a Texas City, Texas, refinery and Prudhoe Bay pipeline in Alaska (AP, 2007) created pattern of misdeeds that threatened the reputation and the legitimacy of the company. We suggest that organizations should work tirelessly to complete and communicate crisis recovery efforts not only for the benefit of the organization and affected community but also so that, in the event of another crisis, evidence exists that the organization can and will address challenges.

Conclusion

This study concludes with an updated framework of the best practices in risk and crisis communication. We concur with Reynolds' (2006) assertion that following the best practices requires strong, ethical organizational leadership. Indeed, we argue that one of the additions to the list is an ethical imperative rather than a suggested strategy. We propose these best practices not as a checklist to complete or a model to flow through but rather as continuous guidelines for organizations and agencies that affect the health and wellbeing of the publics on whom their continued success or failure rests.

The Best Practices in Risk and Crisis Communication:
- Prioritize the safety and wellbeing of the public
- Continuously evaluate and update crisis plans
- Plan ahead for a prompt response
- Establish a crisis communication network with credible sources
- Accept uncertainty; do not speculate
- Form partnerships with the public
- Listen to the public's concerns and understand the audience
- Communicate with honesty, candor, and openness
- Meet the needs of the media and remain accessible
- Communicate with compassion, concern, and empathy – particularly when vulnerable populations are affected
- Provide suggestions for self-protection through channels accessible to affected publics
- Acknowledge and incorporate cultural differences
- Complete and communicate recovery efforts

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Situational Theory of Publics, Social Networking, and Opportunities:
A Case Study of Leveraging PR Alumni through Facebook

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Abstract
Since its inception, the situational theory of publics has helped predict motivations of publics. The theory posits that if people recognize a problem, are involved with it, and feel little or no constraint against doing something about it, they will likely activate to force change. The theory is useful in helping entities recognize such concerns in advance and to either negate the problem or be prepared to engage with publics who do get upset. However, the theory seems adversarial; it assumes publics will act only after seeing a problem. This paper recasts the theory by testing how a public can form when an opportunity is presented. The case examined in this paper involves a university professor who reached out to alumni by creating a Facebook Group, after having received notification from PRSA that outreach was inadequate. The results of the alumni outreach far exceeded expectations. Nearly 400 alumni joined the group, and the results included alumni finding new jobs, an alumni mentoring day in October, and other activities. In addition, this paper uses network analysis as a new method to examine the structure of the alumni group. Network Analysis showed how the group had formed strong enough connections to sustain the interactions even if the professor was removed from the group. It therefore successfully recasts the situational theory of publics from one where publics activate in response to problems to one where publics may form in response to a compelling opportunity.

Introduction

This article discusses how the authors reconceptualized a long-standing theory in public relations, *the situational theory of publics* (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) to include opportunities organizations thrust upon their publics instead of just the normal problem-based way of looking at the theory. By thus recasting the theory, it was found that both organizations and their publics can achieve mutual benefits, an important aim of public relations. A case study of a university public relations program reaching out to its alumni to create a productive Facebook network helped to test this reconceptualization, and network analysis was then used to closely examine and confirm the utility of this network and its activity.

In 2015, a Public Relations Society of America certification team told the School of Communications at Brigham Young University that while their public relations program was exemplary, their alumni outreach was inadequate. The faculty had wanted to organize their alumni, believing that doing so could help alumni better recognize and act on opportunities to give back to their former school, and in turn enhancing the public relations program. As Hori (2013) said, "Alumni provide perspective. They are willing to share what they have seen and experienced. In addition, they can speak to the power of … the school" (p. 1).

The PRSA certification report offered the incentive to initiate BYU's long-needed effort to connect with alumni. Past outreach efforts had followed the typical old-fashioned modes: go to the university's alumni office each year and ask for a list of communications alumni, only to find that two-thirds of the list is already out of date. This time something new was needed, and social media seemed the likely answer to the problem. Knowing that, one of the BYU professors, who also is one of the authors of this paper, set out in the summer of 2016 to connect with as many of his former capstone students as possible over Facebook.[16] In eleven years at BYU the professor had taught 405 students in this class—just a fraction of the total alumni out there, but a good start toward the ultimate connections needed. The goal, then, was to connect with at least 250 of those 405 possible alumni, create a Facebook group page, and thus build a system to better leverage the alumni for student mentoring, in-class presentations, internships across the nation, and other initiatives.

In addition to the obvious practical elements, the outreach carried with it the opportunity for important research. With this project, we, the authors, sought to examine how social media might leverage publics to help a university program achieve its goals. We specifically wanted to know whether social media are effective in motivating the alumni to assist with their *alma mater*, and whether a social media network would become dependent on the professor to survive or whether the alumni could begin carrying it without involvement of the professor (an important factor for potential stability and endurance of the network). To answer the questions, we combined two tracks of academic activity: (1) the aforementioned reexamination of the situational theory, and (2) a network analysis— conducted by the other author of the paper who is a graduate of the BYU program and now working toward a PhD at Purdue University—of how groups can interact toward positive outcomes which, in turn, could extend the usefulness of this said theory. This theory and method are described in more detail in the pages below.

Literature Review

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[16] A capstone is the final course which students in a given major take before graduating and heading out into their respective careers; generally with no more than 20 students in such a course, it would be the one course where students and professor would come to share their greatest bond—one which generally can last for many years.

Public relations, which incorporates much of today's social media realm, has existed in practice for thousands of years. As an academic discipline, though, public relations has just in the past thirty years contributed meaningful theories to the broader communication and sociological fields. Scholars still have great opportunity to rethink certain long-standing theories when necessary to bring greater or more accurate understanding of the current public relations practices. This is particularly true when one examines the influences of social media on these theories.

The Situational Theory of Publics

The theory under examination here, *the situational theory of publics* (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), has been positioned since its inception to predict scenarios founded on a problem of some kind. The theory helps to identify publics and predict their motivations to act on the given problem or problems. For example, if people recognize a problem, are involved with it, and feel little or no constraints in doing something about it, they will form into a group and activate to force change. Entities that understand these motivations can anticipate such concerns and either avoid problems by fixing their sources or be prepared to engage with publics who do get upset. However, as Grunig (1997) argued in explaining the situational theory, organizations do not choose publics; publics choose organizations. If true, such a stance seems to set up organizations only to react to these choices and therefore positions the situational theory as somewhat adversarial by nature.

But what if a public recognizes an opportunity instead of a problem? And what if the organization can guide that public into seeing this opportunity? If such strategies are possible, this optimistic worldview could represent day-to-day activities of the typical public relations professional much more than does crisis anticipation and resolution. Anticipating this environment, we attempted to show the value of reframing the situational theory to include opportunities. The variables were slightly modified from those of the current situational theory. Instead of problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition, the variables in the opportunity realm would include *opportunity recognition*, *level of involvement*, and *opportunity cost* (opportunity exists but is it worth the effort to pursue it).   By seeing the theory in this way, it would be less reactionary for organizations and more a means to initiate a positive outcome. We viewed the creation of an opportunity as a way for an organization to enact better communication with a critical public over the socially connected world of Facebook, where *engagement* and not *reaction* becomes a critical component of communication.

Facebook Engagement

Since beginning this project, the question has often come up: Why Facebook? Would not LinkedIn, for example, make for a better network of individuals now in the professional realm? In answer, we believed Facebook was the best option.

For one thing, BYU is still somewhat unique in terms of its student and alumni population. Even before admittance, most BYU students already participate in an extended "family-centered" church network located in their parents' neighborhoods through BYU's sponsor, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. At BYU they get into similarly strong communities, and then these are again re-established after they leave BYU and move to various parts of the world. Many of these local church communities link informally into a loose but strong global network of church members through Facebook, and so the BYU graduates are already used to this mechanism. In addition, a not insignificant percentage of the female

students, particularly, work for a few years and then leave their careers once they get married and start a family. They tend to spend much more time on Facebook than on LinkedIn, if they go to LinkedIn at all, and so Facebook seemed the logical platform where they would be found. Also, we wanted the network to be not just for the professional realm but where family and faith could also be freely discussed. For all these reasons, Facebook seemed the most reasonable fit for the alumni network.

Perhaps most important for building a network, however, is the mere fact that Facebook is still the largest online social network. As of December 2016, Facebook had 1.23 billion daily active users and 1.86 billion monthly active users (http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/). To provide context, Facebook has more than three times the number of people logging on to it than who live in the United States, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, which sets the nation's population at about 324 million as of January 2017 (https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest.html). Although Facebook is not where all business is conducted or where all connections are made, it still represents a significant view into how society is constructed and where conversations take place.

Of course, the ultimate reason for building this alumni network was to create an ongoing community of support for the public relations sequence at BYU for years to come. Donations are always needed in the university environment, and these donations tend to come most naturally from those who are most vested in the program—former students. We also realized those bonds back to the program have to be sustained—and this is done not only in helping alumni to continue to be aware of and to discuss what is happening in the program but also to retain desires to offer internships and employment, speak in classrooms either in person or through Internet connection, mentor students, and other means of support. All of these are strengthened through continual networking, and in today's social media environment it seems like an unfortunate waste of an already captive and willing asset if such a readily accessible network is not built.

The Actual Project

With all of these things in mind, in August of 2016, we began to build the network. At BYU, like with most or all universities nowadays, a professor can go online and retrieve class rolls of every course she or he has ever taught—complete with photos of all of the students in the class at the time. Using these rolls, we started with the first capstone course the professor taught in 2008 and moved through every class roll and then went into Facebook to seek out each person, one by one. This was not an easy task; many of the females had since gotten married and changed their last name. Some kept their maiden names along with their new last name; other maiden names used in the class had disappeared entirely. In that case, we examined the individual's Facebook friends to find at least a few who had also been in the same class. Once found, the person was sent a "friend request" in hope that a response and acceptance would come soon. This tedious process continued for a few weeks until every graduate had been investigated.

As mentioned earlier, this alumni outreach carried strong theoretical implications as well as the obvious practical possibilities. For one, it seemed a natural possibility to reframe the situational theory of publics to serve as foundation for this project (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). While it seemed logical to get the alumni public motivated to act—a basic foundation of the theory— what we really wanted to investigate was not so much activity to *resolve a problem* but to *realize an opportunity* to give back to the BYU public relations program. This project also was meant to turn on its face Grunig's (1992) declaration that publics form on their own and choose the organization they want to battle, as it were. In this case we felt the organization, i.e. the BYU

public relations sequence, could initiate the organization of its alumni public rather than waiting for the group to form on its own. These two significant adjustments in the situational theory, if successful, could then serve as a model for subsequent attempts by organizations to motivate important publics via opportunities rather than react to publics that perceive the targeted organization needs to fix something.

With this project, we, the authors, sought to examine how social media might leverage publics to help a university program achieve its goals. We specifically wanted to know: (1) to what extent alumni could be guided through social media to want to assist with their *alma mater*, and (2) whether the resulting connections would become centered between the professor and alumni or among the alumni themselves without involvement of the professor (an important factor for assessing the potential stability and endurance of the connections).

Results of the Project

The results of the project far exceeded our expectations. In just 16 days, 382 of the 405 possible targeted alumni had been found, and a private Facebook group (BYU PR Alumni Wakefield) was started with 361 members—111 more than our goal. A month later, 263 of these alumni, or 73 percent, had participated in some way. There were 162 comments (3.5 per post) and 1,030 total likes--22.4 likes per post and 60 likes per day. Also, 39 percent of the alumni had communicated with the professor via private messaging, offering to help with the program in any way possible. As of April 28, 2017, there are 393 members. The group has led directly to alumni seeking and finding new jobs, an alumni mentoring day in October 2016, student internships, alumni helping interview applicants to the PR sequence, and other activities.

We also have tracked the interactions on the Facebook group since January 2017, to assess whether the volume has kept apace with its early days. Such continuing activity generally would not be expected; a newfound networking idea would most likely get everyone excited at the beginning, but if there is no real growth in numbers (a purposeful decision in this case) then the activity would likely taper off somewhat as time goes on. Nevertheless, we wanted to examine what is actually happening in relation to the volume of activity.

January 1 to April 28, 2017, includes 118 days. During this time, there were 51 new posts (one post every 2.3 days), 13 of which were initiated by the professor (so three-fourths of the posts were from the alumni). Those posts have generated 357 total likes (seven likes per post) and 117 comments (2.3 comments per post). Of these, 38 likes and 32 comments came from the professor—only 11 percent of the total likes and 27 percent, or one-fourth, of the total comments.) Aside from the professor's posts, the large majority of the posts were either from alumni seeking a new job or alumni who posted available jobs—and therefore this purpose of alumni interaction seems to be supported (to our knowledge, two actual jobs placements came out of this process in the four-month period, and there may be others in process).

In addition to all of this activity, alumni are sharing posts on the regular Facebook newsfeed. They also are finding each other and sharing information and requests over Instagram and LinkedIn. All of this combined connection and discussion highlights the importance of incorporating social networking into the alumni outreach process to create a high volume of connections and interactions.

One of the more fascinating aspects of the project is that as of May 1, 2017, the professor has carried on private conversations with 271 of the 405 capstone alumni originally sought—exactly two-thirds of the total number.   At least half of those alumni have communicated with the professor on multiple occasions, sharing thoughts and topics such as possible employment,

wanting to visit in person, number of children now in the family, divorce, and even one student who wrote quite liberally about infertility issues. In some ways, this activity represents the real heart of the alumni outreach; it should be apparent that an alumnus or alumna who is willing to unload highly personal burdens would also be interested in maintaining that bond back to the professor and the university.

While this bonding is interesting, it also unearths important questions that we set out to answer through our theory and network analysis. First with the theory, did this outreach effort achieve its goal of creating an opportunity—an active, vibrant network of alumni willing to give back to their *alma mater*? It seems the answer to this questions is a resounding yes, and therefore recasting the situational theory of publics to include the elements of opportunity and organizational creation is most likely a critical adjustment.

The second question is perhaps even more important. Once a network has been initiated, it seems particularly important that it be sustained through the years; otherwise, what was the purpose of creating it in the first place? Sustainability is correlated with the research question we asked about the role of the professor in the process: Does the network revolve just around the tight and sensitive bonds between the professor and his students, or can the network continue without him as an embodiment of the alumni bond with the public relations program? If the professor could be completely pulled out of the network, what would be shown as to its sustainable strength? This is where we set out to examine the process through network analysis.
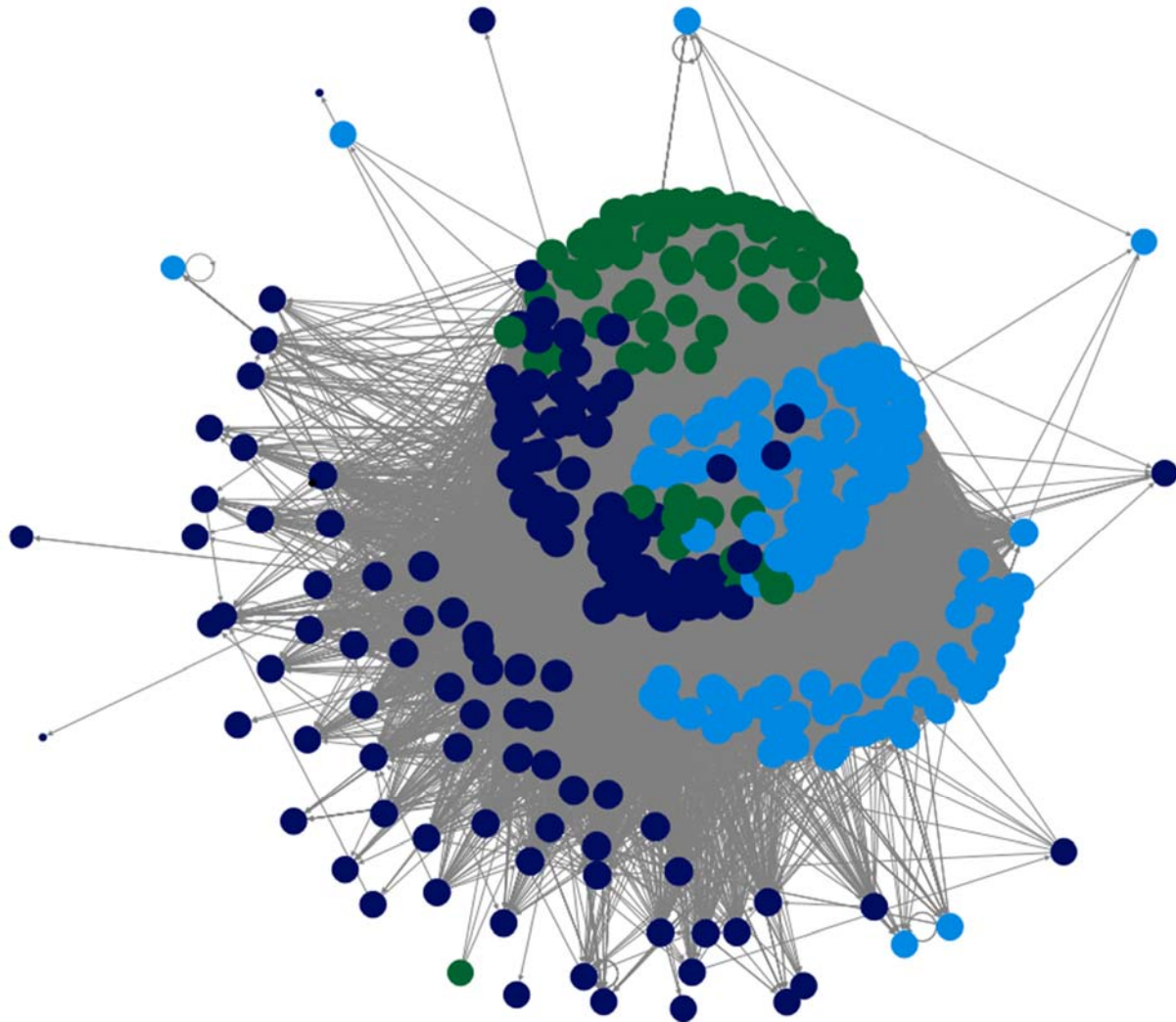
The Network Analysis

To this point, the study has incorporated basic statistics to look for the numbers and patterns involved in creation and activity of the network. From here, the method used switches to network analysis. Network Analysis is the study of how society is connected through relationships. In Communications, networks are "the patterns of contact that are created by the flow of messages among communicators through time and space," (Monge & Noshir, 2003, p. 3). Network analysis has been used to conduct many types of studies. Scott (1988) described some applications "as those in kinship and community studies [that] have [also] been followed by investigations of social mobility, class structure, perceptions of class, corporate power, international trade exchanges, contacts within deviant groups, welfare support, science citations, migration patterns and reactions to disasters" (p. 116).

Yet in public relations, network analysis is still a newer method. Kent et. al (2016) explored the power that network analysis offers public relations and how it can be manipulative and unethical if it is used to separate and control the flow of information between people.   Yang and Bentley (2017) used network analysis to support an argument that public relations practitioners should move away from conceptualizing the organizational apology as a dyadic relationship between the organization and the stakeholder. Instead, Yang and Bentley (2017) developed a model with testable propositions that takes into account the broader stakeholder network. Although these studies demonstrate the possibilities of using network analysis in public relations research, they do not examine the foundational, theoretical concept of a public in public relations scholarship. We sought to use network analysis to examine the structural ties of the alumni network as a way to understand how the public had formed around the opportunity presented to the alumni.

We extracted the alumni group data from Facebook into NodeXL, which then allowed us to look at the patterns of relationships among group members and their posts, comments, and reactions. NodeXL is a free and open network software from the Social Media Research

Foundation (Smith, Ceni, Milic-Frayling, Shneiderman, Mendes, Leskovec, Dunne (2010). The data was anonymized to protect the privacy of the group members. To construct the network, we defined the nodes in the network as the members of the group and the edges as the relationships. The relationship included reactions, shares, comments, even within the same post. Thus, if the edge (or line) between a node included more than one reaction or comment, the edge was given more weight and appeared darker in the data visualization.


Created with NodeXL Pro (http://nodexl.codeplex.com) from the Social Media Research Foundation (http://www.smrfoundation.org)

Figure 1: The Clustering of a Communications Alumni Network on Facebook

The results (when this network analysis was completed) demonstrated a network involving 361 original members of the alumni group with 22,996 unique edges. In other words, these 361 alumni had commented, reacted or shared each the group's posts 22,996 times. Granted, these metrics could have been retrieved in some other way than through network analysis. Even without network analysis, the researchers analyzed the frequency of engagement to the posts by looking at averages, or means. They found that 93.8 percent of all the posts in the group were reacted to in some way. To drill down further, they identified that 84.5 percent of posts were reacted to on Facebook and 79.07 percent of the posts were commented upon.

Although useful metrics, these statistics do not uncover the nature of how the public formed and the relationship among the public. Figure 1 illustrates the network and how it is clustered by groups that interact with each other more frequently.

As can be seen in the network analysis graph (Figure 1), the alumni group largely consisted of three sub-groups. To understand these groups better, we   clustered the sub-groups and calculated the density of the three subgroups (See Figure 2).
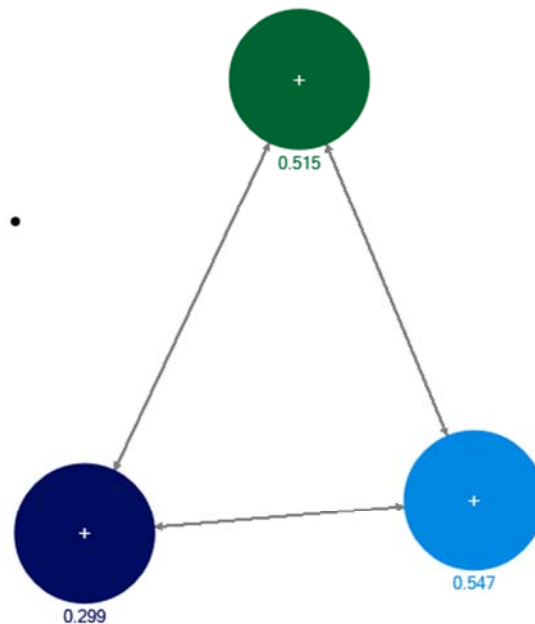
Figure 2:   Density rates of the sub-groups in the network

The results show that the light blue group had a higher density rate than the green or dark blue group. In network analysis, density represents how interconnected the network members are in the group. Density can be calculated by dividing the total number of edges (relationship measures) by the maximum number of possible edges. In this case, it is interesting to see that the light blue group has more density than the other two groups, given it has less members who are part of its sub-group.

This is interesting because the light blue group had less members than the largest sub-group (130) and more members than the smallest sub-group (68). The light blue group consisted of 109 members, and yet its density rate came in at 0.547 compared to the average density rate of the network at 0.343. This finding suggests that other factors are at play in determining the reason the sub-groups are or are not tightly connected than just how many members are part of the sub-group.

Another affordance of network analysis is the opportunity to examine how critical a particular person is to holding the network together. In this study, the alumni network had

originally gathered because a single professor had reached out one by one to former students to invite them to join the group. As such, the assumption is that the network is dependent on the professor. In network analysis, the researchers use the term, "betweenness centrality" to calculate the degree to which an individual is a bridge between to groups. Another way to think of it is to consider whether the group would become disconnected if a particular person was removed from the network.

In the alumni case, the professor clearly had the largest betweenness centrality figure with 4,497. (See Figure 3) This number means that the professor had 4, 497 connections coming directly to him through the form of Facebook reactions, comments and shares.

Created with NodeXL Pro (http://nodexl.codeplex.com) from the Social Media Research Foundation (http://www.smrfoundation.org)
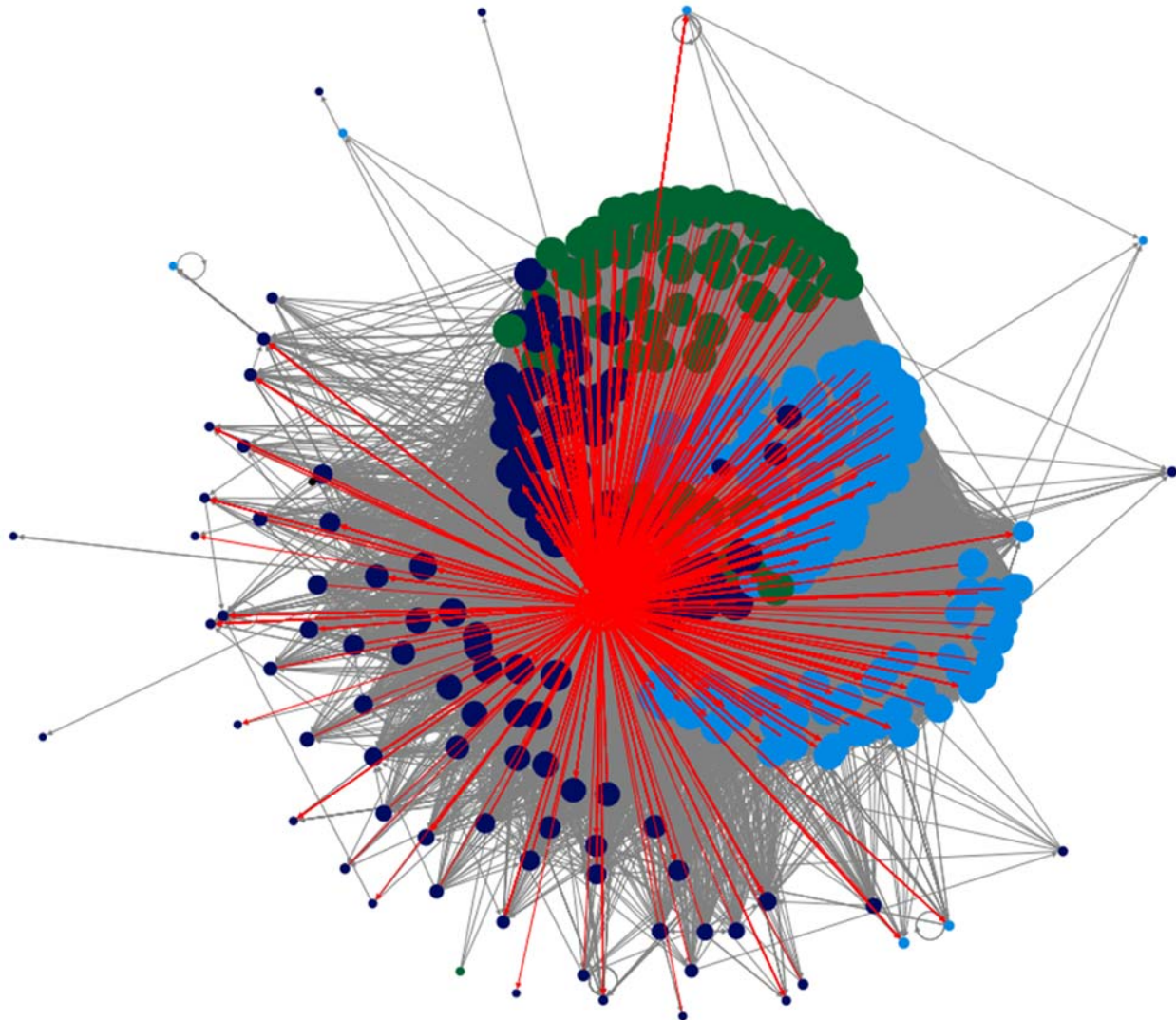
Figure 3: The Professor's influence in the Alumni Network

However, the larger question at play is whether the network is so dependent on the professor that it would completely fall apart without him. To answer this question, we removed the professor from NodeXL and recalculated the graph (see Figure 4).
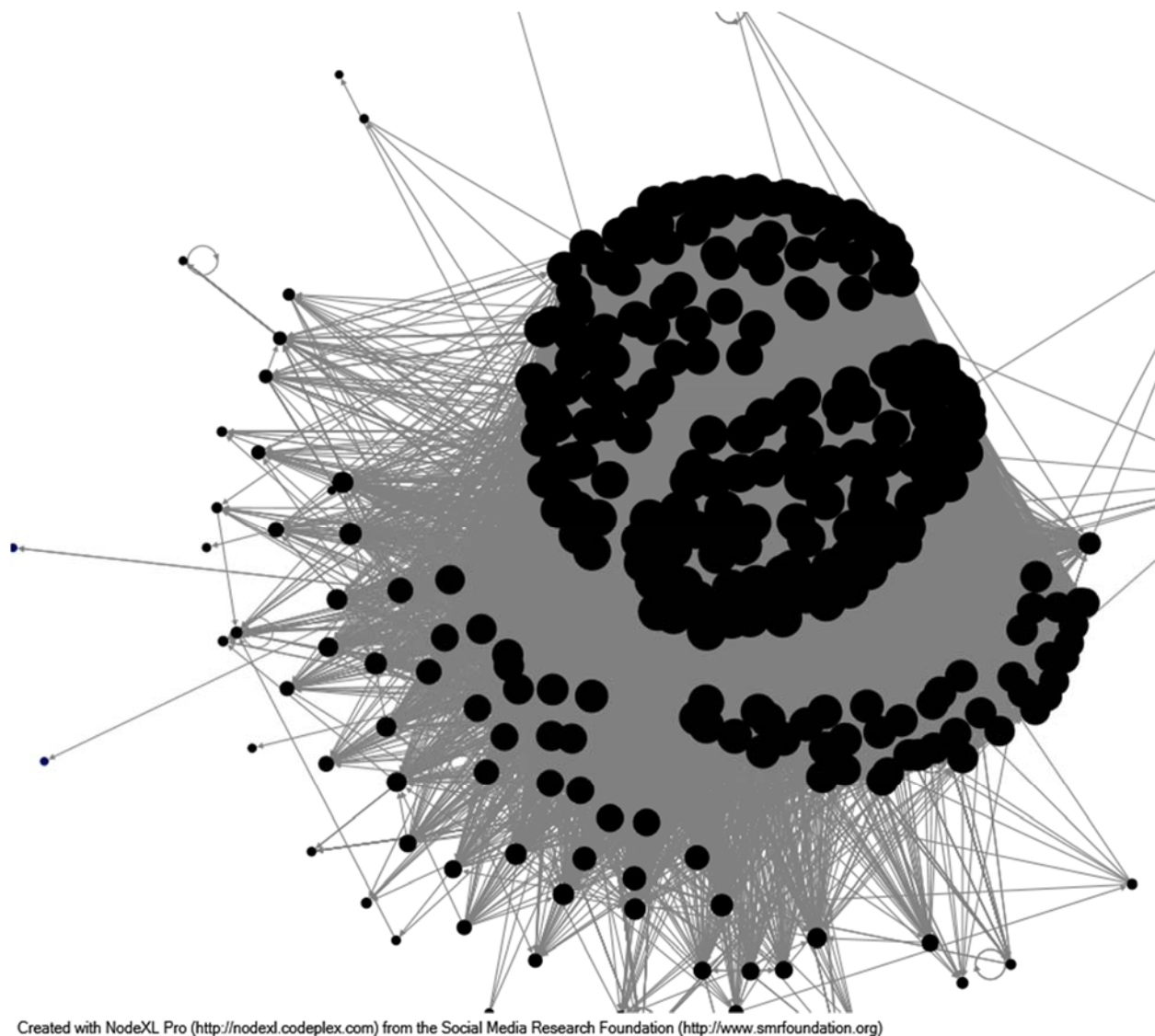
Figure 4: The alumni network with the professor removed from the visualization

Upon first glance, one may think that the three sub-groups (or clusters) were not connected anymore once the professor was removed. However, the sheer mass of gray lines combining into a solid shad of gray indicates the connections between the alumni kept going. To illustrate this point further, the researcher clicked on one of the alumni members and highlighted his connections to the rest of the group (See Figure 5):
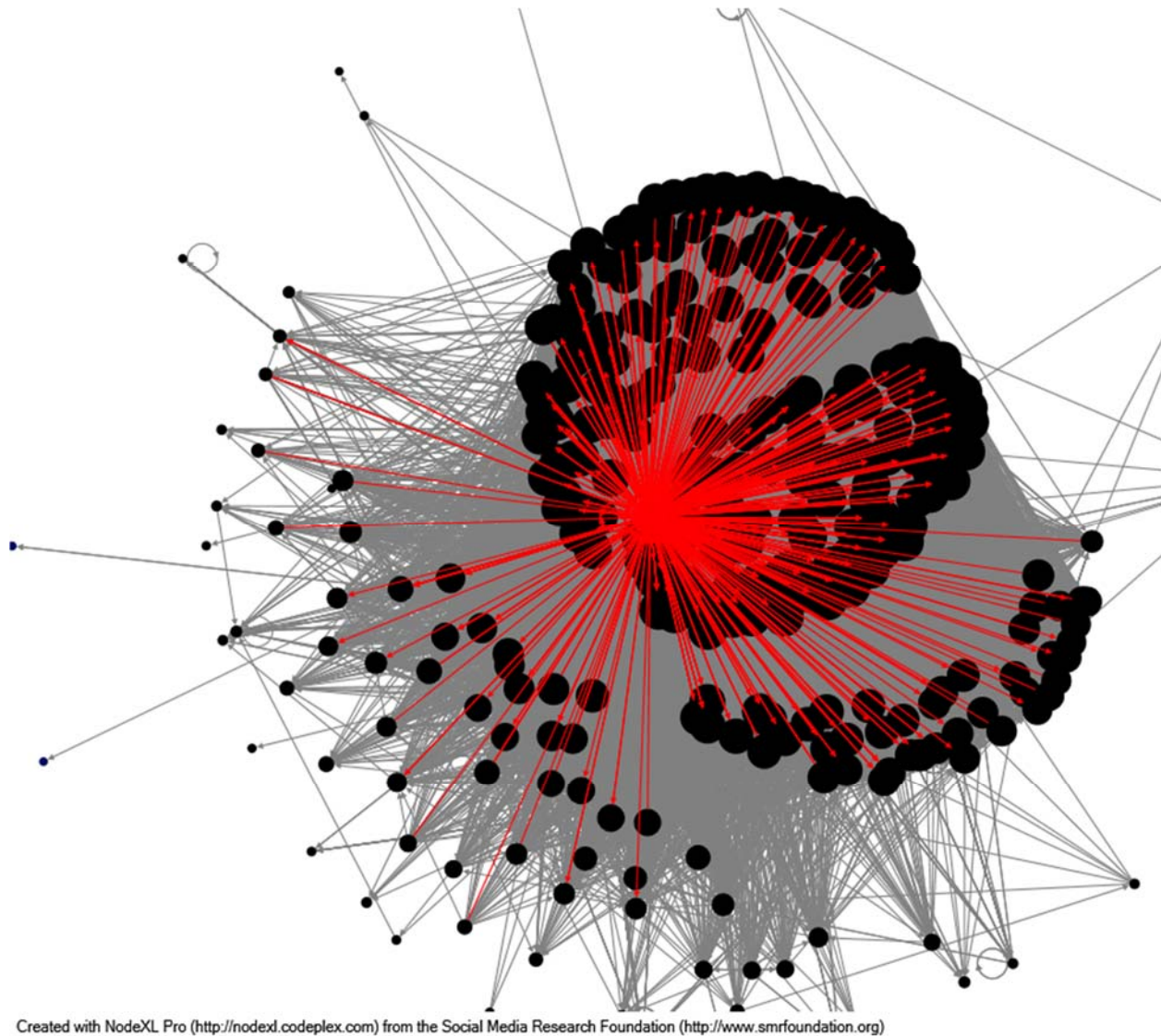
Figure 5: Alumni member network without the professor

This finding suggests that the alumni group did not rely only on the professor to keep the group connected. Instead, the public continued to interact and organize for other purposes. As we looked at the frequency of words in the posts, we saw a pattern. The total words used in the alumni network consisted of 361,633. Second only to "public relations," the most used word was "work." Indeed, many of the postings from members to each other consisted of job announcements and job opportunities. Also, NodeXL calculated the number of positive to negative words; and through the software, and it demonstrated that the number of positive words superseded the negative words by a factor of 400 percent (19,169 positive words, 4,679 negative words). These two findings suggest that the network indeed got together to positively help each other advance their careers. Also, although the professor was the top publisher in the group, particularly at the beginning of its formation, it turned out the network appears to be able to survive with our without his input.

Discussion and Conclusions

It seems that the project was successful in accomplishing it practical goal (at least it is off to a highly positive start), as well as in recasting the situational theory of publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) into one that allows organizations to seek out an important public to create mutual gain, instead of waiting to react to a problem identified by an upset public. We believe that with these two goals achieved, the study can be useful as a model for other university public relations programs to seek out and motivate their alumni toward a large variety of meaningful ends. We also found that network analysis is a beneficial tool for examining how these social media networks function. We would endorse this tool for future studies.

Despite these successes, we would suggest a word or two of caution. First, in retrospect it seems almost miraculous that we were able to find and get responses from such a large percentage of our alumni so quickly. When the project first began, the professor was not any kind of expert on Facebook (he has since changed his ways). At the time, he had fewer than 30 Facebook friends among his graduates. So, first, this was a Herculean task to go back into class rolls and find so many of these alumni (fortunately it was summer and the professor was not teaching then). Second, when he would find a graduate, he would send them a private message asking them to accept his friend request and join the group. Now, with much more knowledge of how Facebook makes it very difficult to get a response on a private message from someone who is not already a friend, it seems almost ludicrous that this method was attempted. And yet, for some strange reason, it seemed to work quite well on that occasion.   We are not convinced we would try that approach again to get the network underway.

Now that the group is formed and active, there are two additional actions needed to strengthen the group and its outcomes. For one, as mentioned earlier, the members of this group so far were all students in one professor's capstone class. Virtually any give semester three different professors are teaching this course. In addition, the professor involved in this project started teaching a capstone course in 2008. There were dozens of such courses taught since the BYU public relations sequence was formed back in the 1970s. Therefore, this number of alumni represents no more than about one-fifth of the total alumni out there somewhere and still alive. The group needs to be expanded significantly to function to its fullest capacity. It also is certain that our alumni know their peers from the other capstone classes when they went through the program much better than they would know someone from the same professor's classes three years earlier or three years later. Therefore, as we build the network (which we plan to do this coming summer), we will send out a notice on the page asking each current member to invite their peers into it. This approach should help build the network quite quickly.

Aside from these couple of cautions, however, we believe the study provides a great addition to the literature of public relations – both from a practical and theoretical standpoint.

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How do Organizations Use Social Media to Build Dialogic Relationships? A Comparison between Nonprofit and For-profit Organizations

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Abstract

Grounded in the dialogic theory, this study examined how 100 nonprofit and for-profit organizations used Twitter to establish relationships with publics through a content analysis of 6,678 organizational tweets. It found how these organizations employed dialogic principles, their different usage patterns, and the interactions between Twitter followers and organizational tweets.

Since their inception, social media have been playing a significant role throughout the world in all aspects of life. In particular, many organizations have been using social media increasingly to engage in dialogues and develop relationships with the public (Mersham, Theunissen, & Peart, 2009). One of the most frequently used social media platforms is Twitter, which provides many communication tools for users, such as retweeting and hyperlinks.

The dialogic potential of online communication technologies for building relationships with publics has drawn much attention (i.e., Esrock & Leichty, 1999; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007). Recently social media use in building dialogic relationships has been explored by a couple of studies (i.e., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Park & Reber, 2008; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). For example, Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) studied how *Fortune* 500 companies used Twitter to facilitate dialogic communication with stakeholders and found that organizations with a dialogic orientation to Twitter use were more likely to employ the dialogic principle of conservation of visitors than organizations with a non-dialogic orientation to Twitter.

Dialogue can be used as an important framework as public relations have moved towards a relational approach (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). From the perspective of relational approach, relationship building was considered as the central public relations activity (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997). And the concept of "dialogue" may best capture the process and product of relationship building (Taylor et al., 2001). However, only a handful studies have focused on how to apply the traditional dialogic scale to the social media context (i.e., Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). Furthermore, few of them compared the usage behaviors of nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

The purpose of this study was to examine how nonprofit and for-profit organizations used social media to establish dialogic relationships with their publics and compared the usage patterns of the two types of organizations. It conducted a content analysis of the Twitter sites of these organizations under the framework of dialogic theory. More specifically, it studied how *Nonprofit Time* 100 organizations and *Fortune* 500 companies employed dialogic principles on their Twitter sites. In addition, it examined the targeted stakeholders of organizations and incorporated the dialogic principle scales and the interactions with Twitter followers. This study could advance the literature on public relations and communication technology through providing empirical evidence of social media use of various organizations. It applied the traditional dialogic principles to the social media context.

Literature Review

Dialogic Theory and Dialogic Relationship

According to Pearson (1989), public relations can be conceptualized as the management of interpersonal dialectic. Dialogue is defined as "any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions" (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325). Dialogic theory posits that organizations should be willing to interact with publics in honest and ethical ways in order to create effective organization-public communication channels (Kent et al., 2003). Public relations researchers have proposed a dialogic approach in which interaction between the organization and its publics are mutual (Reitz, 2012).

Kent and Taylor (1998) proposed five dialogic principles which could guide organizations to establish mediated, two-way, and dialogic relationships with publics. These principles involved offering 1) dialogic loops, 2) ease of interface, 3) conservation of visitors, 4) generation of return visits, and 5) providing information relevant to a variety of publics. According to Kent and Taylor (2002), dialogue can be incorporated into daily public relations

practices in three ways, building the interpersonal, mediated, and organizational relationships with publics.

Public relations researchers have examined how various organizations build dialogic relationships with publics through websites (Esrock & Leichty, 1999; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Taylor et al., 2001), weblogs (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007) and social media such as Facebook (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008) and Twitter (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). For instance, Esrock and Leichty (1999) studied the dialogic capacity of organizational Web sites and found that only a minority of Fortune 500 organizations employed Kent and Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles. Another study examined how environmental advocacy organizations employed dialogic strategies on their Facebook profiles and found that using dialogic strategies led to greater dialogic engagement between organizations and visitors (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009).

Social Media and Organizations

The development of new media has significantly strengthened organizations' abilities to communicate with clients, stakeholders, media, and the general public (e.g., Waters, 2007). According to Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), websites have become both the "public face" of the organization and the vehicle through which meaningful public interactions can take place. Organizations seem to employ new media for at least two primary purposes: information-sharing and dialogic relationship-building.

Social media such as Twitter can provide opportunities for organizations to interact directly with the public (Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013). Organizations can utilize social media to promote dialogue and two-way conversations with the public (Mersham et al., 2009). Organizations can use social media to involve their stakeholders and to build a community under their mission and values (Lo & Waters, 2012).

Researchers have examined the social media use of diverse organizations, including community colleges (McAllister & Taylor, 2007), for-profit corporations (Park & Reber, 2008), and nonprofit organizations (Kent et al., 2003). In particular, nonprofit organizations' Twitter use has received the most scrutiny. The functions that social media served for nonprofits included three major types: information sources, community builders, and promoters and mobilizers (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Briones, Kuch, Liu, and Jin's (2011) study showed support for the relationship-building potential of Facebook and Twitter via interviewing 40 employees from the American Red Cross and found that they developed two-way dialogues with younger constituents, the media, and the community.

Social Media Use for Public Relations

Relationship establishment through new communication technologies, especially social media, has begun to receive attention from public relations scholars (i.e., Briones et al., 2011; Saffer, et al., 2013). Kent and Taylor (1998) provided strategies for communication professionals to use the Internet to develop relationships between organizations and the public. More recently, Briones et al. (2011) explored the role of social media in an organization's public relations strategy. Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxton (2012) suggested that Twitter's potentially contingent interactive messages, such as replies and mentions, can assist organizations in communicating with other users. Wang and Zhou (2015) examined how sports organizations used social media as a communication tool to build relationships with fans and found that they preferred to build professional relationship through sharing information and promoting.

In particular, the public relations practices of specific types of organizations (i.e., non-profit and for-profit organizations) have been examined by a few studies (i.e., Coombs, 1998; Ryan, 2003; Taylor et al., 2001). According to Schneider (1985), organization type and organization environment together could partially explain public relations behavior. Ha and Pratt (2000) claimed that organizational type might be used to predict certain organization's public relations practices. Coombs (1998) focused on a particular type of non-profit organization, the activist group, and suggested that they could use the web to increase the effectiveness of their communications and to establish relationships with their publics. Ryan (2003) studied the attitudes of professionals toward public relations and the web and found that practitioners in non-profit and profit-making organizations hold different views on dialogic links and ease of site use. Thus organization types may influence the public relations practices of various organizations, especially their use of communication technologies.

Social media can afford various organizations a new venue to cultivate relationships with their target consumers because of the potential use in relationship management. In order to examine how organizations used social media in this process, this study utilized dialogic theory as the theoretical framework to map them out. Kent and Taylor (1998) proposed five dialogic principles that could guide organizations to establish dialogic relationships with publics. Though dialogic relationship principles have been widely used in various organizations especially for-profits (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010), fewer studies have focused on the organizational use of Twitter from the perspective of dialogic relationships. Furthermore, few studies focused on the comparison of the Twitter usage patterns of nonprofit and for-profit organizations. Thus, this issue was examined through the following research questions:

RQ1: How do organizations employ dialogic principles on their Twitter sites?

RQ2: Is there a difference in the use of dialogic principles on Twitter sites between nonprofit and for-profit organizations?

Communication Tools Provided by Twitter

There are several types of communication tools provided by Twitter, such as retweeting, hashtags, and hyperlinks. Retweeting is a function of Twitter that allows one user to repost a tweet from another user by adding an "RT@[username]" to the beginning of the tweet (Lovejoy et al., 2012). Several studies considered retweeting as a reliable indicator of the popularity and influence of Twitter messages (Boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010). Organizations could increase their visibility and credibility by retweeting.

Hyperlinks can allow organizational users to get more out of the 140 characters and they can give greater credence to the tweets from publicly known sources of information (Mamic & Almaraz, 2013). Hyperlinks directed to photos and videos could potentially generate fan involvement and interaction in a different way from other communication tools (Mehdizadeh, 2010). According to Mamic and Almaraz (2013), the most commonly used services for shortening links were bit.ly and Twitter's own application, http://t.co.

While some studies examined how nonprofit organizations (Lovejoy et al., 2012) and corporations (Mamic & Almaraz, 2013) utilized communication tools available on Twitter, few studies focused on the degree to which organizational tweets receive followers' retweets and favorites. Though the dialogic relationship (Kent et al., 2003) and communication tools (Lovejoy et al., 2012) of various organizations have been studied separately, there seemed to be no prior studies incorporating these two techniques and analyzing Twitter users interactions with organizational tweets employing the dialogic principles. Some organizational tweets for certain

dialogic principles might be more popular than other principles. Thus the following research question addressed this issue:

RQ3: How do Twitter users interact with organizational tweets employing the dialogic principles?

Method

Sampling

A content analysis of the official Twitter sites maintained by *Fortune* 500 companies and *Nonprofit Time* 100 organizations was conducted. The first step was to obtain a list of 500 companies from the *Fortune* 500 2014 published in July 2014 via http://fortune.com/fortune500 and a list of 100 nonprofit organizations from the 2014 *Nonprofit Times* Top 100 published in November 2014 via http://www.thenonprofittimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/11-1-14_Top100.pdf. Then the researchers looked up these organizations through the Twitter search engine and found that 370 organizations owned an official Twitter account which had been marked as a verified account by Twitter. The Twitter site of each organization had to have at least 20 posts and the latest post had to be within a month of when the sample was drawn to be included in the population of Twitter sites. 211 *Fortune* 500 companies were identified as having an active Twitter account; from these, a sample of 50 companies was drawn through systematic random sampling. 70 *Nonprofit Time* 100 organizations were found to own an active Twitter site and a random sample of 50 organizations was drawn. The Twitter sites were all accessed from the same computer at approximately the same time. The first author followed the official Twitter sites of all the organizations in the sample with his own Twitter account, and therefore the tweets on those sites could be collected through a professional tool, Twitter Tunnel.

The research period was one constructed week (seven days) in the fiscal year between October 1, 2013 and September 30, 2014. This method was chosen because constructed week sampling has been demonstrated to be the most efficient sampling approach for content analysis of online news (Hester & Dougall, 2007), which is similar to Twitter posts of organizations. The amount of Tweets for one constructed week was reasonable for this study based on Hester and Dougall's (2007) standards. Taking the calendar as the sampling frame, the researchers first identified all the 52 Mondays during this period and randomly selected one Monday as the first day of the week. Then the procedure was repeated to select the remaining Tuesday, Wednesday and so on to "construct" a week, ensuring that each source of cyclic variation was represented equally and therefore controlling for systematic variation (Song & Chang, 2012). Finally, the researchers made the constructed week through selecting February 2, 2014 (Sunday), January 6, 2014 (Monday), November 12, 2013 (Tuesday), December 18, 2013 (Wednesday), October 22, 2014 (Thursday), August 15, 2014 (Friday), and June 21, 2014 (Saturday). The final sample consisted of 6,678 tweets on the official Twitter sites of each organization during this research period. All Twitter sites and tweets in the sample were coded. Thus, two units of analysis were used: a) the organizations' Twitter sites and b) the tweets on each site.

Measurement

A coding scheme was developed based on Kent and Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles and Rybalko and Seltzer's (2010) scale on dialogic use of Twitter. Ease of interface was omitted from the analysis, because features of Twitter's interface are essentially the same across profiles. The remaining dialogic principles were operationalized as followed.

Usefulness of information. This study considered the following components as being useful to the media, investors, and the general public: links to news releases, media room, annual

reports, and policies as well as pictures, videos or audios, and announcements posted by organizations. Additionally, the presence of other useful information on the organizations' Twitter profile was also considered as indicators of usefulness of information, such as a description of the organization, organizational logo, a link to the organizations' website, and information on the administrators of Twitter site. The rationale for including those elements was that users visiting the organization's profile might find it useful to obtain some information on what organization the profile belongs to (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Conservation of return visits. Taylor et al. (2001) argued that organizations should attempt to encourage visitors to stay on their website rather than explore other organizations' websites. Other social networking sites could be considered as part of an organization's extended social networking presence. Therefore links to organization's other social networking sites (i.e., Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube) should be identified as part of conservation of visitors. Additionally, linking to a page featuring a description of an organization's products or services as well as linking to webpages other than media rooms were also indicators of conservation of visitors (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Generation of return visits. Taylor et al. (2001) indicated that it takes time and repeated encounters to establish a relationship. The following elements were identified as encouraging visitors to return: providing links to discussion forums and FAQs on an organization's website and regularly updated information (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010).

Dialogic loop. The current study operationalized the dialogic loop principle as whether an organization engages in conversations with publics by posing a question on Twitter to stimulate dialogues or by engaging in a dialogic opportunity through responding directly to a tweet posted by other users (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). In addition to coding for the presence of a dialogic loop, previous research has also considered it important to assess actual organizational responsiveness (Taylor et al., 2001). This study evaluated responsiveness based on the content available in the posts. A responsiveness variable was operationalized based on the items composing the dialogic loop principle, responding to a tweet, and posing a question. Those two variables were dichotomously coded as 0 (absent) and 1 (present).

After examining the dialogic principles used by each organization, this study compared the extent to which dialogic principles were employed on Twitter sites between for-profit and non-profit organizations. Specifically, it examined whether there was a difference in each item in the operational definitions of each principle between for-profit and non-profit organizations.

The third research question explored how Twitter users interacted with organizational tweets employing the dialogic principles. This study examined the relationship between the frequency of each dialogic principle category and the number of retweets and favorites received by each category. The researchers recorded the frequency of retweets and favorites received by each organizational tweet, which were shown in the summary of each tweet.

Coding Procedures and Intercoder Reliability

Two coders participated in a training session where the coding protocol and code sheet are outlined and discussed. The coding was based on the codebook including descriptions and examples (see Table 1). In cases where a tweet seemed to have multiple feeds, code was assigned according to what is considered the tweet's primary purpose and targeted public. Discrepancies on coding were discussed and the coding schemes were revised until 100% agreement was reached.

A 20% subsample of the data set was randomly selected and coded by each coder. According to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2008), an overlap of 10-20% data is acceptable for the testing intercoder reliability. The intercoder agreement and Cohen's Kappa score for some key variables were calculated and recorded. The Cohen's Kappa scores for each variable were displayed in Table 1. After the intercoder reliability was established, the two coders were provided with a copy of the whole data set and the remaining 80% tweets in the set were randomly distributed to each coder.

Table 1. Frequencies and Cohen's Kappa Scores of Dialogic Principle Indices

Dialogic Principle Indices	Nonprofit Organization Frequency (%)	For-Profit Organization Frequency (%)	Total Frequency (%)	Cohen's Kappa Score
Usefulness of Information				
News Link	450 (57.3%)	732 (12.5%)	1182 (17.7%)	.89
Picture	317 (41.2%)	971 (16.4%)	1288 (19.3%)	.98
Video or Audio	32 (4.1%)	81 (1.4%)	113 (1.7%)	.99
Announcement	12 (1.5%)	15 (0.3%)	27 (0.4%)	.90
Organizational Description	*35 (70%)*	25 (50%)	60 (60%)	
Logo	*48 (96%)*	49 (98%)	97 (97%)	.98
Organizational Website Link	*49 (98%)*	49 (98%)	98 (98%)	
Administrator	*3 (6%)*	*11 (22%)*	14 (14%)	.97
Conservation of Visitors				
Website Link	*225 (28.6%)*	553 (9.5%)	808 (12.1%)	.97
Encouraging to Follow	*22 (2.8%)*	105 (1.8%)	127 (1.9%)	.96
Generation of Return Visits				
				.96
				.89
Link to Discussion Forums	58 (7.6%)	222 (3.8%)	280 (4.2%)	.97
Regular Information				
Dialogic Loop	78 (10.4%)	196 (3.2%)	274 (4.1%)	.92
Posing a Question				
Responding to a tweet				
	80 (10.2%)	200 (3.4%)	280 (4.2%)	.95
	175 (22.6%)	4787 (81.1%)	4962 (74.3%)	.96

Results

A total of 6,678 tweets were posted by the sampled organizations during the constructed week. The number of total tweets posted by each organization during the research period ranged from 1 to 1,257 ($M = 66.7$, $SD = 32.9$). On average, each organization posted 9.5 tweets per day ($SD = 5.8$), which varied from 0.1 to 179.6 tweets. A chi-squared test revealed that the number of

tweets generated by each sampled club was not evenly distributed, χ^2 (99, $N = 6678$) = 1065.8, p < .001. The 50 for-profit organizations posted 5841 tweets (87.5%), while the 50 nonprofit organizations posted 837 tweets (12.5%).

The first research question focused on how organizations employed dialogic principles on their Twitter sites and the difference between nonprofit and for-profit organizations. In terms of the *usefulness of information* principle, the most frequently posted information type was pictures ($n = 1288$, 19.3%), and news link ($n = 1182$, 17.7%). In comparison, organizations posted fewer videos or audios ($n = 113$, 1.7%) and announcements ($n = 27$, 0.4%). It suggested that organizations preferred to use Twitter as a medium to post pictures and links. On the organizations' Twitter profiles, about 60% of the organizations provided a description of the organization ($n = 60$), 97% of them provided an organizational logo ($n = 97$), 98% of them showed the link to their website, and only 14% indicated the administrators of their Twitter site ($n = 14$). This documented that most organizations paid attention to promoting their logo and official website through the Twitter platform. Moreover, a Chi-square test showed that there were significant differences in news link ($p < .001$), pictures ($p < .001$), videos or audios ($p < .001$), and announcements ($p = .001$) between nonprofit and for-profit organizations. More specifically, as shown in Table 1, nonprofit organizations posted significantly more tweets including news links (57.3%, $n = 440$), pictures (41.2%, $n = 317$), videos or audios (4.1%, $n = 32$), and announcements (1.5%, $n = 12$) than for-profit organizations.

For the *conservation of visitors* principle, only 12.1% of all the organizations' tweets contained links to their websites ($n = 808$), such as social networking sites and homepages. Few organizational tweets ($n = 127$, 1.9%) focused on encouraging visitors to follow their Twitter sites. Furthermore, a Chi-square test indicated that nonprofit and for-profit organizations posted significantly different numbers of links to websites related with organizations, χ^2 (99, $N = 6678$) = 144.7, $p < .001$. Nonprofit organizations posted significantly more tweets with such links (28.6%, $n = 225$) than for-profit organizations did (9.5%, $n = 553$).

The *generation of return visits* principle was also employed by these organizations on Twitter. In particular, only 4.2% of the organizational tweets contained links to discussion forums ($n = 280$), and 4.1% of them provided regularly updated information ($n = 274$). A Chi-square test suggested that there were significant differences in the tweets including links to discussion forums ($p < .001$) and regularly updated information ($p < .001$) between nonprofit and for-profit organizations. More specifically, nonprofit organizations generated significantly more tweets including links to forums (7.6%, $n = 58$) and regularly updated information (9.5%, $n = 553$) in comparison to for-profit organizations (10.4%, $n = 78$).

In terms of the *dialogic loop* principle, 74.3% of the organizational tweets were responses to other tweets ($n = 4962$) while only 4.2% of them were questions posed by an organization ($n = 280$). A Chi-square test showed that there were significant differences in the tweets posing a question ($p < .001$) and responding to other tweets ($p < .001$) between nonprofit and for-profit organizations. More specifically, nonprofit organizations posted significantly more tweets posing a question (10.2%, $n = 80$), while for-profit organizations posted more tweets responding to other tweets (81.1%, $n = 4787$). It documented that for-profit organization focused primarily on responding to their stakeholders' tweets and interacting with stakeholders.

The second research question focused on how Twitter users interacted with organizational tweets employing the dialogic principles. A one-way ANOVA showed that there were significant relationships between dimensions of relationships and the number of retweets, F (9, 6677) = 19.523, $p < .001$, and favorites, F (9, 6677) = 18.261, $p < .001$. On average, tweets

on regularly updated information received the most retweets (M = 130.9, SD = 234.5) and favorites (M = 55.3, SD = 97.2), while tweets responding to other tweets received the fewest retweets (M = 1.7, SD = 10.7) and favorites (M = 2.7, SD = 21.9). These results reflected that regularly updated information might be the most popular issue which organizational Twitter followers would like to retweet and favorite. Tweets responding to specific messages were relatively less attractive among followers, receiving fewer retweets and favorites.

Discussion

Social media have provided a platform for organizations to establish dialogic relationships with their publics. This study examined how nonprofit and for-profit organizations employed the dialogic principles on their Twitter sites and compared the usage patterns of the two types of organizations. This study might be one of the first attempts to incorporate dialogic principles with Twitter users' interactions.

One major finding was that organizations paid most attention on the *usefulness of information* principle by posting many pictures and news links on their Twitter sites, which might be the key dialogic principle for organizations. This finding was consistent with previous studies on nonprofit organizations (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), which also found that information served as the major function of nonprofit organizations' Twitter use. The information organizations released on Twitter included news, products or services, events, announcements, and the content from other sources via retweeting. Though social media has been widely considered a two-way communication medium (Abeza et al., 2013), interactive conversations might not be the key form of organizations' social media use. According to Lovejoy and Saxton (2012), nonprofit organizations relied on informational communication rather than interactive communication on their social media accounts. Our findings added to the previous literature by documenting for-profit organizations also focused on sharing useful information on Twitter. On the other hand, obtaining organizational information might be also the primary purposes of stakeholders following organizational Twitter accounts.

Another important dialogic principle employed by organizations was *dialogic loop*. In particular, for-profit organizations paid sufficient attention to responding to stakeholders' questions or comments on their Twitter site. It was evident that organizations made efforts to utilize the dialogic features provided by Twitter to build relationships with their stakeholders (Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010). Organizations took the personal interests, thoughts, suggestions, and feelings of their followers into consideration and actively interacted with them on Twitter. It reflected the principle that consumers always come first, especially for for-profit organizations. Ordinary stakeholders might feel recognized and cared about by organizations and generate a sense of belonging when their Twitter accounts or tweets were retweeted to other followers of those organizations (Wang & Zhou, 2015).

A comprehensive comparison between nonprofit and for-profit organizations indicated that nonprofit organizations focused more on the principles of *usefulness of information, conservation of visitors,* and *generation of return visits,* while for-profit organizations paid more attention to the *dialogic loop* principle. One possible explanation was that Twitter was a free promotional platform, which might be especially helpful for nonprofit organizations. Twitter operation demands relatively much smaller expenses compared with other promotional approaches (O'Neil & Schieffer, 2014) such as advertising and public relations campaigns on national media. Nonprofit organizations might need to allocate their limited resources reasonably (O'Neil & Schieffer, 2014) by employing the dialogic features of Twitter.

Another important finding was that there were significant relationships between dialogic principles used by organizations on Twitter and their followers' interactions. The retweets and favorites are considered as effective indicators that determined the attractiveness of each tweet (Wang & Zhou, 2015). The reasonable use of the dialogic features of social media can potentially help organizations to establish relationships with the public. For example, if organizations aimed to draw attention from their Twitter followers, they could post more tweets on regularly updated information.

This study could advance the growing body of literature on organizations' social media use of in relationship building (i.e., Waters et al., 2010). It applied traditional dialogic principles (Kent & Taylor, 1998) to the social media context, which might contribute to the dialogic theory. Additionally, the interactions between dialogic principles and Twitter users' interactions might provide a new direction for research on public relations and social media. Drawing from previous usage patterns, organizations could utilize the dialogic principles on social media more effectively.

In practice, this research also has some implications for public relations professionals. The findings on Twitter users' interactions with dialogic principles could encourage public relations practitioners to facilitate two-way conversations and to utilize social media reasonably. Nonprofit and for-profit organizations need to learn from each other and explore the most effective ways to operate their Twitter sites.

Limitations

It is important to note some limitations of this study. First, the research period was only one constructed week due to the extremely large quantities of tweets ($n = 6678$) generated by the organizations in the sample. Second, only large organizations (*Fortune* 500 companies and *Nonprofit Time* 100 organizations) were included in our sample, which might generate bias.

Future Research

Future research could examine how medium or small organizations employed dialogic principles on Twitter. They may also study the dialogic principles used on other platforms, such as Facebook and mobile websites. In addition, researchers could conduct surveys or experiments to examine the relationship between the motivations of organizations and their social media usage behaviors through the uses and gratifications approach.

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"We're Just Better at It": How Activists Use the Internet to Challenge Corporations

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Abstract

Guided by a theoretical framework of issues management, this paper explains how activist organizations use the Internet, particularly social media sites, to challenge the practices and policies of corporations. Data collected from interviews with activists shows these individuals use the medium to identify issues and target firms, direct messages at specific audiences, sustain interests in their campaigns, generate widespread discussion about their concerns, and organize online and offline actions.

Increasingly, corporations and other organizations are challenged by individuals and organized coalitions who perceive the agency or industry's practices as irresponsible (Soule, 2009). Within the past year, companies such as FedEx, Hertz, L.L. Bean, PepsiCo, SeaWorld, Target, and Walmart have all been the objects of activist campaigns. Through activism, "groups of people exert pressure on organizations or other institutions to change policies, practices, or conditions the activists find problematic" (Smith, 2005, p. 5). In order to ignite social change and address these issues, activist organizations often challenge corporations (Manheim, 2001) using a variety of communication strategies and tactics.

Nearly twenty years ago, public relations scholars (Heath, 1998; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001) contended the Internet yielded opportunities for activists. Coombs (1998) argued that the Internet's ability to alter "the activist-organization power dynamic should not be ignored" (p. 300). Despite its prevalence in practice, research on activism within academia has progressed slowly (Jaques, 2013), particularly within the public relations domain, which tends to favor corporate perspectives (Coombs & Holladay, 2014). As a result, "role of activists in public relations is still unclear and evolving" (Smith & Ferguson, 2010, p. 396). This study seeks to build on existing knowledge about how activists use the Internet, specifically focusing on social media, in their pursuit to alter both corporate practices.

Scant research examines how activists use this new technology; this study contributes to bridging that gap. Drawing from interviews with activist practitioners, this paper shows how activists use the Internet to educate publics, generate attention, and challenge corporations. By being able to target audiences, elicit simple actions from publics, easily spread information, and use visual forms of communication, the Internet is a valuable resource. However, activists also face challenges in generating interest and measuring results. After a review of the literature on anti-corporate activism, issues management, and legitimacy, I describe the communication strategies and tactics used by activist organizations to identify and analyze issues, implement a program of action, and evaluate results in an online environment.

Activism, Issues Management, and the Importance of the Internet

Public efforts directed at corporations are more common as activists seek to hold corporations to higher standards of social performance (Coombs, 1998; Soule, 2009). Anti-corporate activism aims to attack a firm's reputation and bottom line using a variety of strategies and tactics in an effort "to cause so much pain and disruption that management is forced to yield to their will" (Manheim, 2001, p. xiii). Activist organizations seek to attract the attention of corporate executives, be perceived as a threat by these executives, and thereby alter corporate behavior (King, 2008). To do so, activists aim to generate attention about their cause(s), often relying on media attention and invoking unorthodox tactics to achieve their goals (Grunig, 1992).

Activists and corporations have a "symbiotic but tense relationship" as activists' efforts can push corporations to fortify communication efforts (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 291). Corporate practitioners often resist interacting with these groups, perceiving activists as threats because of their potential to disrupt activities and incite reputational damage (King, 2008). Thus, activists and corporations often spar as each attempts to "define and claim the moral high ground" (Manheim, 2001, p. xiv). In an effort to claim this "moral high ground," activists rely on resources, including money, volunteers, and publicity to remain visible, ensuring their issues gain salience (Sommerfeldt, Kent, & Taylor, 2012). Thus, activists rely on issues management strategies to achieve their goals (Coombs, 1998; Health & Palenchar, 2009).

The Role of Issues Management and Legitimacy

In the 1960s, individuals expressed increased outrage over corporate practices and demanded these institutions use their power and resources for the betterment of society (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Issues management grew out of recognition that corporate management must be proactive in shaping these issues, which arise when publics label a situation or 'problem' as significant (Crable & Vibbert, 1985), rather than reacting to them (Jones & Chase, 1979). Jones and Chase (1979) created a model of issues management, outlining the five stages: scanning the environment and identifying relevant issues (issue identification), researching the issue (issue analysis), choosing a response (issue change strategy), implementing the plan (issue action program), and evaluating the results.

Although issues management was conceptualized from a corporate perspective (Jones & Chase, 1979), all organizations must adapt to changes in their environment and require issues management (Heath & Palenchar, 2009), including activist organizations (Jaques, 2013). Activist organizations have proven highly adept at using issues management to promote their cause(s) (Coombs, 1998). In their catalytic model, Crable and Vibbert (1985) posit issues progress through a lifecycle. Activists aim to elevate issues to current or critical status by communicating it to a wide array of stakeholders, pressuring management to take action. Issues, however, are never fully resolved "in the sense of a final answer" but rather through "situations in which relief but not total solution is found" (p. 5).

Central to issues management is the concept of legitimacy, which derives from public perception that an organization's policies and actions align with societal expectations, leading to public acceptance of these activities (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). Without legitimacy, activists are "simply annoying latent stakeholders who never find a wider audience for their concerns" (Coombs, 1998, p. 300) and will likely be unable to achieve their goals of altering corporate behavior (Coombs, 1992). Thus, activists aim to generate legitimacy for their issue and issue stance while challenging the organization's legitimacy to create a legitimacy gap (Heath & Waymer, 2009). Activists and organizations frequently engage in a 'legitimacy dance' by questioning the other's issue stance, motives, and right to operate. The Internet has proven to be a particularly valuable tool in helping activist organizations secure generate power through securing resources and gaining support (Heath, 1998; Sommerfeldt et al., 2012).

The Internet as an Activist Tool

Activists are often perceived as wielding significant less power than the corporations they challenge, as these firms can usually draw from a coffer of financial and legal resources (Soule, 2009). The power of activist organizations derives from supporters, and the Internet "affords activists greater access to and use of power resources" to promote their issues (Coombs, 1998, p. 295). Through the Internet, activist organizations can publicly challenge corporations in front of stakeholders and publics, bypassing traditional gatekeepers to directly communicate with their own publics (Coombs, 1998). Activist organizations utilize a variety of Internet capabilities to communicate with publics and challenge targets including websites, email, and social media.

Websites and email. Much of the literature on activist use of the Internet examines the use of websites (e.g., Heath, 1998; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Reber & Berger, 2005; Sommerfeldt, 2011b; Sommerfeldt et al., 2012), which are particularly vital for small organizations with limited resources (Taylor et al., 2001). Websites help activist organizations disseminate information to publics (Kent et al., 2003). Research has examined how organizations frame the public relations messages posed on their websites (Reber & Berger, 2005; Zoch et al.,

2008). Zoch et al. (2008) reported these groups often failed to frame the issues to their own benefit, by not telling stories in compelling ways to attract and motivate others to become involved. Research also demonstrates how these tools aid activist organizations with mobilization efforts (Sommerfeldt, 2011b; Sommerfeldt et al., 2012) and potentially establish dialogue (Heath, 1998), though dialogic capabilities are often under-utilized (Taylor et al., 2001). Sommerfeldt (2011a) examined the use of action alerts, emails which call for the receiver to take action on an issue. He reported these organizations often frame these calls using antithesis, whereby the activist organization identifies an enemy and outlines a response to challenge this enemy. Thus, this framing mechanism implores supporters to act on the basis of their objection to an issue rather than based on their identification with the activist organization.

Social media. Activists rely on social media to generate attention for their issue stances (Adi, 2015; Ciszek, 2016; Kang, 2012; Veil, Reno, Freihaut, & Oldham, 2015). Like websites, social media sites permit activist organizations to frame messages and disseminate information to the media and other stakeholders while also offering opportunities to garner resources (Adi, 2015). In addition to introducing new forms of activism, such as social media hijacking, activists have many traditional strategies, such as boycotting, for social media (Veil et al., 2015). Social media sites also offer the ability for organizations to engage publics in dialogue. Veil et al. (2015) recommend corporate practitioners would do well to "embrace online tools as a direct line for discussing consumer concerns" rather than being reactive or ignoring activists altogether. Social media sites can also facilitate the exchange of opinions among users. Ciszek (2016) found Chick-fil-A's stance on gay marriage ignited debates and dialogue among supporters and critics. Thus, these sites can become "counter-public spaces where activists challenge dominant discourses and provide a platform for multiple competing, and often conflicting, perspectives to emerge" (p. 315). In the process, social media sites can enable practitioners and management to better understand the values, beliefs, and attitudes of their publics.

Additional research is needed to better understand how activists gain visibility and legitimize their actions via new communication technologies, previous research demonstrates the Internet is a helpful tool for activists to use in mobilizing, dialoguing, and pressuring targets (e.g., Coombs, 1998; Heath, 1998; Sommerfeldt, 2011a, 2011b; Veil et al., 2015). This study seeks to expand on our knowledge by asking: How do activist organizations use the Internet to challenge the practices and policies of corporations?

Methods

Given the general dearth of research examining how activist organizations harness the power of the Internet to incite corporate change, and their reasons for doing so, this study employed a qualitative approach (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Data were collected using in-depth respondent interviews with activist practitioners. Interviews can "inform the researcher about key features and processes" as the researcher defines the purposes for the interviews and identifies individuals who can contribute to these goals (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 176).

Participants

Interviews were conducted with 17 individuals, each representing a different activist organization. Organizations were identified based on their involvement in a current or recent corporate campaigns (within the previous year). Participants were identified using the activist organization's website or the media contact listing in press releases. If a list of staff members was not available, requests for interviews are sent to the email address or online form for press

inquiries. To participate in the study, participants had to be involved in the design and implementation of the organization's communication strategies. Participants worked for activist organizations addressing issues such as human and labor rights, environmental concerns, LGBTQ rights, animal rights, gun reform, food safety, or a combination of the above.

Procedure

After giving verbal consent to participate in the study, interviews were conducted with participants over the phone. Interviews ranged in length from 21 minutes to 78 minutes, depending on participant availability. Interviews were guided by a semi-structured protocol which included questions about the role of the Internet and social media as a part of the organization's communication strategy. These questions were designed to better understand how activist organizations prepare for and engage in corporate campaigns. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes.

Analysis

Analysis follows the methods outlined by Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) and Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Thematic analysis guided the interpretation of the data through "identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data" (Guest et al., 2012, p. 49). During the process, the researcher becomes immersed in the data, permitting themes and categories to emerge rather than placing data within preconceived categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Data were read through thoroughly and notes were compiled to generate codes based on key concepts in the text. Codes were then "sorted into categories based on how different codes are related and linked" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279).

Findings

Participants from every activist organization represented in the study claimed their organization used the Internet to challenge corporations. While individuals discussed the use of the Internet to research, incorporation of email to send petitions (or other actions) and keep individuals informed of activities, most participants focused on social media. Many of these activist practitioners echoed sentiments voiced in earlier research, including the ability to reach corporations directly in a cost-effective manner, but also expanded on the Internet's role. The following section outlines how activists use the Internet to identify and analyze issues, plan and implement anti-corporate campaigns, and evaluate their results.

Identifying and Analyzing Issues and Target Corporations

Several participants described the role of the Internet in monitoring relevant issues and corporations' activities. Gun reform activists identify corporate targets using social media as gun advocates posted photos of openly carrying in stores and restaurants or visiting the National Rifle Association's website to identify corporate partners. Supporters who are invested in an issue also frequently identify campaigns. When SeaWorld announced the implementation of its marketing campaign Ask SeaWorld, activists monitoring the company's web presence identified it as an opportunity to criticize SeaWorld. Another group used Tumblr to create a page where members could submit stories, leading to a campaign against the American Girl Doll company after it announced the discontinuation of its only historical Asian-American doll. Once an issue and target firm have been identified, the Internet is also useful for analyzing issues and the company, including executives to determine if "we felt they would be aligned with us."

Implementing a Program of Action

Simple steps. One affordance of the Internet is the ability to "offer [audiences] simple engagement tools that make them feel invested in a movement that are simple, they can do from home, but also have a high yield." For instance, animal rights activists submitted photos of themselves sitting in bathtubs or small wading pools with signs reading "Would you like to live in a bathtub?" with a link to more information. The action was not only "fun" but "makes them feel like they're having an impact outside of the typical letter writing campaign." A gun reform group implemented Skip Starbucks Saturdays, encouraging supporters to post photos of themselves drinking coffee at home on Saturdays with captions such as "I'll take my coffee with Splenda, low-fat milk, and gun safety." These actions were "a non-threatening but very powerful way to show the power of our volunteers to use our wallets to pressure a company for change."

The ripple effect. These simple steps allow supporters to "amplify stories" issued by activist organizations. Additionally, actions can be made public. One practitioner explained that "One powerful thing about having an activist share something on social media is that all of their entire network receives it...it automatically expands the audience and makes the act of advocacy a public thing." Through social media, information can quickly spread throughout individuals' networks. In addition to asking participants to share posts, organizations may tag individuals in photos or videos so that their followers see it. For many practitioners, "the goal is not only to share the message with people who need to hear it but also to inspire other activists to do some other work." Some activist organizations noted they share information from other groups, linking to those groups' social media pages to build coalitions online. However, to sustain this 'ripple effect,' organizations must continually stimulate interest. Having waged battle against SeaWorld for years, animal rights activists immediately identified #AskSeaWorld as an actionable opportunity and hijacked the hashtag. The activist explained, "we had energized the base to being really invested in this campaign and when you do that…sometimes the campaign just sort of carries itself" as individuals identify and respond to opportunities.

Repetition and framing. To keep the campaign "fresh," practitioners often find new ways to engage supporters through different tactics or trying new messaging. One participant noted his/her organization varied the format of the posts from asking questions to posting funny photos. Websites, email, and social media all aid organizations in sharing information about the issue, the targeted corporation, or the activist group. Given activists often tackle complex issues, consistency and repetition are key to ensuring clarity about the organization's goals and issue stance. Many practitioners cross-post content with altered messages so it is consistently but distinctively conveyed across channels. One individual voiced caution not to "oversaturate your social media feed with a barrage of animal rights stuff" or you may "turn people off." Message framing is also crucial as "a compelling message" increases issue awareness. When beginning a campaign to stop construction of a dam, one organization had to explain how the project fit its mission. Using social media, the group featured the campaigners "telling their story down in the Amazon, giving a human face to the work." Other activists noted positive messages tend to be more effective because they inspire rather than discourage supporters.

Direct delivery. One benefit of the Internet, particularly social media, is the ability to target audiences. Activist practitioners note certain demographics (e.g., "older white folks") are more likely to sign petitions. Audiences' interests often vary by platform; one activist claimed Facebook users are more likely to click links and sign petitions than Twitter users. Similarly, social media channel use varies by age (e.g., high school students versus college students). Social media also permits targeted posting and advertising. One environmental organization used

Facebook ads to target a city block where the decision makers lived. While also important for larger activist organizations, this ability is "extremely important for smaller organizations seeking to make a big impact" who have fewer financial resources. These groups may not be able to fund a multi-thousand dollar advertising campaign but can "spend a few hundred on Facebook ads targeted directly at the building where you know the decision makers work" which will "amplify your reach." Another organization invoked the same strategy when pressuring Google scale back its involvement in the Republican National Convention by purchasing Facebook ads targeted at users who listed Google as their employer. The practitioner explained, "We made sure 300 employees saw that video so we're pretty confident that it was a topic of conversation at Google…that's something we couldn't do with email. They would delete it." Email does remain useful for these organizations as "obviously not everyone is on Facebook."

Media relations 2.0. Many of the participants discussed how social media "can feed into traditional strategies," generating more "mainstream media" coverage. Representatives from different organizations note Twitter is a particularly effective media relations tool as "All of the really influential reporters are on Twitter…if I want the leading energy editor to know about us and hear about us, I need to be engaging with them on Twitter." Another claimed, "I get emails from journalists who say, 'I saw on Twitter you're doing this campaign. Can you tell me about it?'"

Visual power. One benefit of the Internet is the ability to deliver richer content, such as incorporating a video with a press release. Several individuals emphasized this visual aspect, noting that social media posts of "images or videos obviously do better than just solely text" in eliciting likes and shares, thereby generating more attention. A gun reform group showed Starbucks images posted to social media by customers carrying guns into the coffee chops and asked, "Starbucks, is this really the image that you want your company to have?" The organization later used the same strategy for Chipotle. Both companies would eventually ask customers to leave their guns at home. This visual appeal also aids in gaining media coverage. Following the 2014 Duke Energy coal ash spill in North Carolina, one environmental group took photos of the environmental impact to Facebook, elevating the story to national news. The interviewee explained, "Those photos were shared everywhere and then the news was calling us. And that's how things got moving on a spill that really was slow to get attention…for things like that, [social media] has been not just helpful, but necessary."

The conversation component. Several activists emphasized the participatory nature of social media, which they perceive as a direct advantage over email. One participant highlighted the ability to comment on posts, "what I'm excited about that for is that it gets people excited about things…if we just send out an email, you don't get that feedback." Through social media, activists can share ideas about actions. According to one activist, the key to social media is engaging supporters in the campaign as "you want people to feel like they can be part of the discussion." In some cases, online conversations are more effective at spreading information than traditional media relations tactics. One group ignited "thoughtful debates" online about the importance of casting an Asian-American as the lead for Netflix's upcoming *Iron Fist*. When it was announced the show "cast a white guy, the entire Internet was outraged…" By "being able to leverage those organic conversations" and generate widespread attention, the controversy gained media attention without the organization sending a single press release.

In addition to engaging issue supporters and sending information to the target firm, activist groups also try to engage the firm. Citing the American Girl Doll campaign example, the practitioner explained, "[American Girl] sort of sent us a really weak response and so then the

idea was like we could engage in our members in offering some different ideas to the company." Activists also perceive themselves to be more 'genuine' than their corporate adversaries on social media. One practitioner explained activists "actually mean" the things they say whereas corporations often provide "a bottom-line, sort of like trying to save face response." According to another participant, corporations have only "started to realize that they can't just use social media as a tool to brand things; it is kind of a two-way street."

The anonymity aspect. According to one respondent, the ability to "be anonymous or more or less anonymous" on social media is a perk for activists. For instance, a group posed as Gap, Inc. using a fake website and Twitter account, announcing the firm would be altering its practices. The act made the company "do the embarrassing thing and walk it back, explaining why they weren't doing the ethical thing." Anonymity provides "opportunities to activists who are doing work who are taking larger risks than others" and reduces the costs associated with "high risks actions" while still being able to "push a corporation's buttons."

Organizing opportunities. Social media also lends itself to helping activists organize online and offline. Activist organizations can directly challenge corporations online, through petitions or leaving comments on Abercrombie & Fitch's social media pages. Activists favor social media because "that's one of the outlets where they're trying to communicate about their brands with their consumers as well." Consumers are then likely to see the activity, which may impact their decisions to support the firm. If the target firm uses a hashtag, activists are likely to incorporate it into their campaigns "to create broader visibility" and "stick the message right into their world," essentially using the firm's own marketing efforts against them. By doing so, activists are able to stage virtual protests and sit-ins. While many practitioners noted they use online petitions, one respondent claimed the "decision makers" can "sort of see through it" because it is so commonly used. The public nature of social media is a huge advantage; according to some activists, this approach is often "more likely to elicit a response from people."

Social media also aids activists in coordinating offline activities through reaching "the masses" quickly. One practitioner explained, "Facebook is a really good tool for activism for organizing and connecting people within the network; it's one of the best tools that we have." The organization created a secret Facebook group for supporters to discuss ideas and alert people to upcoming events. Some groups use social media in place of email to streamline the process, which can help them become more flexible with their actions if situations change ("…everyone knows that if you need the most current information about that event, to go to that event page").

Evaluation Efforts

Activist practitioners attribute many of their successes in challenging corporations to the Internet. However, measuring the actual impact of these efforts is difficult for some practitioners. When describing the impact of videos, one activist claimed these messages "I think have been successful, but I can't prove it…we don't have the metrics yet to be able to demonstrate that." Another practitioner voiced concern about engagement with content:

> We'll get a post that gets 20,000 likes and over a 100,000 views and 500 shares and then we look at the actual – it'll link to a blog post, for instance – our own blog post and then we'll look at how many people actually went to that page. And it's like 1,000 people that actually click through. So 20,000 people liked something that they didn't even open, much less read. And then of those 1,000 people who actually opened it, how many of them was it just a tab that sat open for a few hours, without them actually getting to it before they closed it down? So it's really tough to know how much of that is effective.

This difficulty, combined with the ever-changing landscape of social media, challenges practitioners who are already strapped for resources. One participant described his role as "less pure advocacy and more and more like working in a laboratory."

Discussion and Implications

This study illustrates how the activists employ issues management and Internet to advance their agendas, expanding upon knowledge of how these organizations harness the channel to publicly critique corporations (e.g., Ciszek, 2016; Kang, 2012; Veil et al., 2015). While websites and email are still commonplace forms of delivering information, many activists emphasize the role of social media when describing how their organization uses the Internet to challenge corporations. One individual explained, "where social media used to be sort of a bonus or an afterthought, now it's an integral part of an organization's outreach strategy."

The Internet helps stimulate widespread interest in their corporate campaigns. For one organization, "engagement online is really the kind of first step for us" by helping activists determine what issue(s) concern their audiences, build interest in the campaigns, and provide general information about the issue. Activist organizations have not completely reinvented the wheel when it comes to their online activities, but rely on traditional strategies revamped for an online environment (Kang, 2012; Veil et al., 2015), such as establishing relationships with media personnel using Twitter rather than pitching over the phone or through email.

To generate interest and support for issues online, making it harder for corporations to ignore activists, a few key practices stand out. First, simplicity is key. Online initiatives can have a high yield because they can be easy. This convenience element encourages more individuals to join the process anyone "can do it when they have some free time or they're bored or just feeling really wild about something." As a result, individuals who may not typically become involved in campaigns may be enticed to join. Second, creativity is crucial to gaining attention and sustaining campaigns. Visuals, such as videos, photos, and memes, tend to be more popular in an online environment. Through this 'mass appeal,' messages can spread more quickly, generating more discussion, and thereby more attention for the issue.

Third, while the ability to directly challenge the corporation by hijacking their Facebook page or hashtag is a useful tool, activists can also start a conversation about the practices and by emerging the support base, the campaign remains viable. With the ability to easily share information and generate discussion, activists find they can use social media channels to attract mainstream media attention (and corporate attention) when traditional tactics, such as press releases, may fail. Fourth, in addition to making it easier to challenge corporations online, the Internet provides an avenue through which activist organizations can collaborate and plan offline events, including protests. Fifth, the Internet aids activists, who are often stripped for resources including money and human support, in targeting their efforts. As part of a campaign, activists can identify audience segments and direct messages at them, generating a higher return on their investment. Finally, variety is the spice of activism. Rarely do activists rely on single tactic to achieve their goals (Grunig, 1992). The Internet increases their capabilities, allowing them to easily and quickly escalate campaigns or redirect efforts when necessary.

Although the agility of activists in adopting new forms of communication more quickly than their corporate targets is often helpful (Coombs & Holladay, 2014), many groups struggle with how to measure the impact of these efforts. Further, activists must still frame their message in a way that it is compelling to supporters and threatening to the corporation (Reber & Berger, 2005; Zoch et al., 2008). Activists "have to hit [the firm] where it hurts" as some firms may be

more concerned with their reputation rather than the bottom line, or vice versa. In addition to testing messages, activists must continue to experiment with various approaches as "decision makers, whether in governments or corporations, sort of see through [petition organizing]." Thus, after a time, certain efforts may become less successful than others, forcing activists to continually identify and try new approaches. A respondent stated, "experimentation and change are the only constants…being able to outsmart the big corporations is a perpetual challenge. The best messaging in the world still needs the right vehicle of conveyance to be impactful."

This study also highlights differences between public relations practitioners and activists. First, several participants noted they perceive their group as being 'more engaging' than their corporate targets. However, the extent to which activists are using dialogue is largely unclear from these interviews and requires further research. Second, in an effort to generate corporate change, one activist mentioned the ability to act anonymously, permitting these activists to taker greater risks in their efforts to "push a corporation's buttons." In doing so, these individuals may venture into ethically gray areas whereby they pose as a company, making statements (as the company) about changes to practices, forcing Gap, Inc. retract the statement and explain why it was not altering its labor practices in southeast Asia. Thus, some activists may play by a different rule book whereby the 'ends justify the means.' Again, further research is necessary to better understand the implications and prevalence of this practice.

Conclusion

The Internet is a powerful tool for activist organizations that are often strapped for resources, including time and money, because of its potential for engagement and message amplification. All activist practitioners highlighted the importance of social media, and despite noting the limitations and challenges associated with using these sites, felt more adept at using it to challenge corporations. As one participant stated, "we're just better at [using the Internet]" than firms, who activists perceive as being insincere when they respond to critics online and largely use it as a branding strategy rather than an opportunity for two-way communication. The goal for both online and offline activism is "to just be very annoying and non-violently confrontational so that it's not an issue that they can ignore." Thus, the Internet has not replaced other strategies, but serves as a tool for amplifying campaign messages by harnessing an additional channel to reach new audiences and heighten attention.

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